

Syllabus for PLSC 1-001
American Politics: Principles, Processes and Powers
Fall 2019
MWF 9:05 - 9:55 am, Olmsted E-338

Professor: Dr. Daniel J. Mallinson

Office:	Olmsted W-160K
Office Hours:	MW 10 - 11 am; Th 4 - 6 pm
Email:	mallinson@psu.edu
Twitter:	@djmallinson
Class hashtag	#plsc1
Course Webpage	https://sites.psu.edu/djmallinson/plsc-1

Course Description

This course examines the American democracy by looking at the dynamic interaction between the founding ideals of the United States government, the institutions established by the Constitution, and the ongoing contest for power within and through those institutions. Students will learn how Congress, the Presidency and the Supreme Court shape law and public policy; how the electoral process influences the decisions of voters and political parties; and how the media, interest groups, political action committees, and public opinion impact political outcomes. Through these topics the course takes up questions such as, Who has a voice in American politics and why are some political actors more influential than others? Do the electoral and policy making processes uphold democratic values? How responsive is the United States government to public wants? How does the media influence citizens' political preferences and behavior? The course both provides a foundation for further study of politics and equips students with the capacity to act politically on their own behalf and in concert with their communities. Students are empowered to interpret and pursue their interests, rights, and opportunities within the US political system in relation to the values of democratic equality and liberty the system was organized to secure, and to influence the process through which policies that shape their lives in critical ways are made.

Learning Goals and Objectives

- Goal 1: Students will gain a basic understanding of American political institutions and behavior
 - Objective 1a: Students will be able to identify the basic structure and purpose of Congress, the Presidency, and the Supreme Court

- Objective 1b: Students will understand American federalism
- Objective 1c: Students will understand the role of political parties and interest groups in American politics
- Goal 2: Students will develop greater civic agency
 - Objective 2a: Students will learn how to contact their elected officials
 - Objective 2b: Students will learn how to vote
 - Objective 2c: Students will learn how to write an op-ed
- Goal 3: Students will develop critical thinking skills
 - Objective 3a: Students will reason through how gerrymander affects political representation
 - Objective 3b: Students will be able to identify how political institutions shape political behavior

Methods for Learning and Teaching: This course will contain a mix of lecture, class discussion, and practical assignments. It is vital for your own comprehension of the course material that you come to class prepared to discuss the readings and any relevant happenings in the news.

Reaching Our Goals

Nearpod: We will be using Nearpod in each class throughout the semester. It will be the means for delivering slides and facilitating participation in the course. Each day I will take attendance through Nearpod and there will be interactive activities in most classes. Nearpod can be used on any device connected to the Internet (laptop, smartphone, iPad). Please let me know right away if you are unable to access the Nearpod [website](#) or app ([Apple](#), [Google Play](#)).

Nearpod Research Study: I am currently leading a project evaluating whether Nearpod has an effect on student learning and engagement. You will learn more about this early in the course. Participation is not required. Your grade will neither be impacted positively nor negatively by participating or not participating in the study.

Attendance: Your attendance in class is always expected. Attending class will allow you to keep up with the course and provide for meaningful discussion as a class. I will be taking attendance in order to grade participation, but also as a way to get to know you. Please contact me via [e-mail](#) if you are unable to attend class. I will follow the University's attendance policy when it comes to excused absences. See <https://handbook.psu.edu/content/class-attendance>.

Preparation and Participation: I expect you to read the assigned material before class and be able to discuss what you read. Contributing to class discussion will make the course more interesting and will enhance your understanding of the material. Furthermore, it is helpful to keep up with current policy debates in the news, since they will be useful for reinforcing the concepts discussed in class.

Do Not Suffer in Silence: Please do not suffer in silence throughout the course if you are struggling. Instead, let me know — as soon as possible — what things are not making sense and we can work it out. If you are having a problem of any kind in the course, please talk to me about it as soon as possible.

Be Flexible: While the syllabus represents an agreement between us, I reserve the right to revise and modify it throughout the course, if it is necessary to achieve our goals. Situations beyond either of our control can also emerge that require changes to the course. I will notify you right away when any changes are made.

Current Events: Politics happens in real time and the material we cover in class relates to these events. This is a great opportunity to become informed about national, state, and local policy developments. We will regularly discuss current events that are related to the class. I will regularly tweet news stories relevant to our class using the hashtag #plsc1. If you don't know where to start in finding news, just ask me.

E-mail Policy: I will work to respond to e-mails by the next business day. This means that e-mails sent on the weekends will be responded to by Monday.

Readings

The following book is required for the course:

Krutz, Glen. 2019. *American Government 2e*. Houston, TX: OpenStax. ([Link for downloading from OpenStax](#))

Additional required readings that are not from the textbook will be made available on Canvas.

Lecture Slides

I will be using lecture slides throughout the course. These will be uploaded to the course website (<https://sites.psu.edu/djmallinson/plsc1>) and Canvas after each class period.

Assessing Your Progress Towards Our Goals

The following types of assessment will be used to track your progress towards meeting our course goals: quizzes, voting assignment, official contact assignment, op-ed assignment, gerrymandering assignment, and participation.

Each component represents the following percentage of your final grade:

Syllabus Quiz	5%
Quizzes	30%
Voting Assignment	10%
Official Contact Assignment	10%
Op-Ed Assignment	10%
Gerrymandering Assignment	20%
Participation	15%

We will use the following grade scale:

Letter	Percent
A	94 to 100
A-	90 to 93
B+	87 to 89
B	84 to 86
B-	80 to 83
C+	77 to 79
C	70 to 76
D	60 to 69
F	Below 60

Syllabus Quiz: We will not have much time to go through the syllabus on Day 1 of class, so it is imperative that you read through the syllabus to know what to expect in the class. To encourage this, you will be required to take a short quiz on the syllabus by Friday August 30. The quiz will be open-note and available on Canvas after the first class meeting.

Content Quizzes: Part of this course is learning the basic elements and functions of American Government. Thus, there will be four quizzes throughout the course that will assess your basic civics knowledge. These are broken up so that they are not as high stakes as a typical mid-term and final. They will be open note and completed on Canvas.

Voting Assignment: This assignment will require you to figure out how to register to vote in Pennsylvania or your home state. You will then need to report on the process of

registration, how frequently elections are scheduled, and the process for actually casting a ballot. More specific instructions can be found in Appendix [B](#).

Official Contact Assignment: This assignment will help get you comfortable with knowing who to reach out to when you have a concern and how to contact them. More specific instructions can be found in Appendix [A](#).

Op-Ed Assignment: While you may not regularly read a newspaper, many Americans do and the principals of good editorial writing translate to online environments like blogs and message boards. This assignment will help you learn principals of effective argumentation in the short space of an op-ed. More specific instructions can be found in Appendix [C](#).

Gerrymandering Assignment: As you will learn in class, the drawing of district lines has a profound impact on political representation and the functioning of our government. For this assignment, you will think about your own personal values regarding representation and will draw a new Congressional map for Pennsylvania accordingly using web-based software from [Draw the Lines PA](#). More specific instructions can be found in Appendix [D](#).

Participation: Attending and engaging in class is incredibly important. It not only enriches the learning experience for yourself and your classmates, but also prepares you for succeeding in the working world. Thus participation will represent 15 percent of your final score. Your attendance is one component of your final participation score, as is your participation in daily class activities.

Students also have an obligation to notify me within the first three weeks of the semester if they will miss any class session due to a religious observance. I am pleased to do this, but will need notification in order to plan make-up work.

Make-Up Grades: You are allowed to make-up academic work only in the case of excused absences. These absences may include missing class for a [University-sanctioned activity \(with proper documentation\)](#), [illness](#), [religious observance](#), or [family responsibilities](#). If you know in advance that you are going to miss class, please contact me before the absence to make arrangements for completing the work. If you are absent for an unexpected reason, please check in with me as soon as possible. You will have one week from the day of your return to class to make up a missed assignment.

Extra Credit: I will extend 2 percentage points of extra credit (on your final grade) for attending certain events throughout the semester (one point for each event). I will announce to the class when these events occur and when a related extra credit assignment is due. You must submit a 2-3 page discussion of the event and how it applies to what we are learning in class to a dropbox on Canvas.

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty is not limited to simply cheating on an exam or assignment. The following is quoted directly from the *PSU Faculty Senate Policies for Students* regarding academic integrity and academic dishonesty: “Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity free from fraud and deception and is an educational objective of this institution. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating of information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students.”

All University and Penn State Harrisburg policies regarding academic integrity/academic dishonesty apply to this course and the students enrolled in this course. Refer to the following URL for further details on the academic integrity policy of Penn State Harrisburg: <http://harrisburg.psu.edu/academics/academic-guidelines-and-policies>. Each student in this course is expected to work entirely on her/his own while taking any exam, to complete assignments on her/his own effort without the assistance of others unless directed otherwise by the instructor, and to abide by University and Penn State Harrisburg policies about academic integrity and academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty can result in an assignment of “F” or “XF” as the final grade for the student.

Disability Access

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University’s educational programs. Every Penn State campus has a Student DisAbility Resources office. Student DisAbility Resources at Penn State Harrisburg is located in SEC 205. The Disability Services Coordinator, Alan Babcock, can be reached via email at aub15@psu.edu or phone 717-948-6025.

To receive consideration for accommodations, you must contact Student DisAbility Resources (SDR), participate in an intake interview, provide documentation of your disability, and complete a Self-Assessment. Additional information is available on the Disability Services website (<http://harrisburg.psu.edu/disability-services>). If the documentation supports requests for reasonable accommodations, SDR will provide you with an accommodations letter, which you will give to your professors. You will receive accommodations after you give your accommodations letters to your professors. You should share your accommodations letters with your professors as early in the semester as possible. Professors do not provide accommodations retroactively.

Counseling Services

Students may face a variety of concerns over the course of their time at PSH- depressed mood, anxiety, stress, family concerns, body image, substance use, sexuality and many others- that

may interfere with their ability to focus on their studies. Counseling Services provides FREE mental health and social support for all currently enrolled students. Staff follow strict legal and ethical guidelines concerning the confidentiality of counseling. Counseling services is located in SEC 205 and can be reached by phone at (717) 948-6025. You can find more information at the Counseling Services webpage, <http://harrisburg.psu.edu/counseling-services>.

Educational Equity

Penn State takes great pride to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Acts of intolerance, discrimination, harassment, and/or incivility due to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender, national origin, race, religious belief, sexual orientation, or veteran status are not tolerated and can be reported through Educational Equity at the Report Bias site: <http://equity.psu.edu/reportbias/statement>. Direct all inquiries regarding the nondiscrimination policy to our Penn State Harrisburg Office of Student Affairs at the following link <https://harrisburg.psu.edu/webform/office-student-conduct-incident-report-form>.

Mandated Reporting As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. I also have a mandatory reporting responsibility related to my role as an educator. It is my goal that you feel able to share information related to your life experiences in classroom discussions, in your written work, and in our one-on-one meetings. I will seek to keep information you share private to the greatest extent possible. However, per University policy AD85 (<https://policy.psu.edu/policies/ad85>), I am required to share information regarding sexual misconduct or information about a crime with the University including incidents of sex-based discrimination and harassment (discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, dating violence, domestic violence, stalking, and retaliation). While faculty are ethically bound to report any information as it relates to University policy, we are also a resource and want to be sure you are aware of the services available to you.

The first resource that should you should contact is Felicia Brown-Haywood at the Penn State Harrisburg Title IX Office (E131 Olmsted Building): 717-948-6180.

Other resources that are available include:

- Penn State Harrisburg Counseling and Psychological Services, E131 Olmsted Building: 717-948-6025
- Department of Safety & Police
 - Campus Police: 717-979-7976
 - Local Police: 717-543-2200 or 911

- YWCA Confidential Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault Services: 1-800-654-1221 (available 24/7)
- Contact Helpline: 800-932-4616 (24-hour community crisis hotline)
- Pinnacle Health Harrisburg: 717-782-3131
- Penn State Harrisburg Student Health Services, 220 Capital Union Building: 717-948-61015
- Penn State Hotline: 800-560-1637 (Anonymous reporting)

Basic Needs Statement

Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Office of Student Affairs (syw10@psu.edu, 717-948-6180) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable him to provide any resources that he may possess.

Writing Tutoring and Other Academic Support

The [Russell E. Horn Sr. Learning Center](#) provides tutoring for writing assignments as well as for other aspects of the academic experience. You can make an appointment in one of the four ways listed below. An appointment is recommended, though not required.

Website	Online Scheduler	Phone	In Person
harrisburg.psu.edu/learning-center	psuh.mywconline.com	717-948-6475	SEC 201

Writing

The Learning Center provides tutoring support for writing assignments in this class. Do you need help developing your thesis and ideas? Do you need objective feedback when you're drafting or revising your papers? Do you have questions about MLA, APA, or Chicago styles? Do you want to improve your academic writing skills? The writing tutors at the Learning Center are experts at helping students improve their writing. Writing handouts are available at psu.box.com/v/WritingResources and in print in SEC 201.

Other Academic Support

Is English an additional language for you and your home language is “getting in the way?” Are you spending excessive amounts of time trying to finish your assigned readings? Are you nervous about participating in class and presenting speeches? American & Academic Literacy (AAL) appointments support international and other multilingual students with

their transition to the U.S., and can help all students with their speeches. Our Academic Skills Consultants can also help with time management, organization, and study skills. Like us at facebook.com/PSHLearningCenter and follow us on Twitter [@PSUHLC](https://twitter.com/PSUHLC).

Course Schedule

We will attempt to follow this schedule as closely as possible, but we may take more time on some concepts and less time on others. For this reason, a digital version of this syllabus can be found on [my website](#). Slides used in class will also be posted on the online syllabus and Canvas after class. All changes to the schedule will be announced in class or via e-mail and the online syllabus will be constantly up-to-date. Required course readings are listed and due dates for assignments are in bold. Links to some additional readings are included in the syllabus on my website, others will be uploaded to Canvas. If you have trouble, please do not hesitate to [e-mail](#) me.

Week 1: Introduction to American Government

- August 26: Introduction to the class and each other
- August 28: What is Government and Who Governs?
 - Krutz Chapter 1
- August 30: Democratic Engagement
 - Krutz Chapter 1
 - **Syllabus Quiz Due**
- August 31: **Regular Drop Deadline**

Week 2: The Constitution

- September 2: Labor Day - No Class
- September 4: The Revolution and Articles
 - Krutz Chapter 2
- September 6: The Constitution
 - Krutz Chapter 2

Week 3: Federalism

- September 9: Why Federalism?
 - Krutz Chapter 3
- September 11: Intergovernmental Relationships
 - Krutz Chapter 3
- September 13: Competitive Federalism
 - Krutz Chapter 3

Week 4: Civil Liberties

- September 16: What Are They?
 - Krutz Chapter 4
 - **Quiz 1 Due**
- Constitution Day!
- September 18: How Do They Develop?
 - Krutz Chapter 4
- September 20: Contacting Officials
 - [How to Contact Your Elected Officials](#)
 - [Pennsylvania's Sunshine Act](#)

Week 5: Civil Rights

- September 23: Rights Claims
 - Krutz Chapter 5
- September 25: Rights Movements
 - Krutz Chapter 5

- September 27: Today's Rights Claims
 - Kahn, Karen. 2019. "[Youth Climate Case Claims Constitutional Right to a Livable World](#)." *Nonprofit Quarterly*. June 10.
 - Movement Advancement Project, National Center for Transgender Equity, and Transgender Law Center. 2016. *[Understanding Issues Facing Transgender Americans](#)*. July.
- **Official Contact Assignment Due**

Week 6: Public Opinion

- September 30: What does it tell us?
 - Krutz Chapter 6
- October 2: How do we measure it?
 - Krutz Chapter 6
- October 4: Does it matter?
 - Krutz Chapter 6

Week 7: Voting and Elections

- October 7: How It's Done
 - Krutz Chapter 7
- October 9: Gerrymandering
 - Read [Flashes of Insight](#) and consider your top values
- October 11: Draw the Lines Lab
 - Read the [District Builder User Guide](#)
 - Watch the [District Builder Demo](#)

Week 8: The Media

- October 14: What is it?
 - Krutz Chapter 8
 - **Quiz 2 Due**
- October 16: What is its impact?
 - Krutz Chapter 8
- October 18: Writing an Op-Ed
 - Harvard Kennedy School. “[How to Write an Op-Ed or Column.](#)”
 - Duke. “[Writing Effective Op-Eds.](#)”
 - **Voting Assignment Due**

Week 9: Political Parties

- October 21: Where did they come from?
 - Krutz Chapter 9
- October 23: What purpose do they serve?
 - Krutz Chapter 9
- October 25: Polarization
 - Krutz Chapter 9
 - **Op-Ed Assignment Due**

Week 10: Interest Groups and Lobbying

- October 28: Types of Groups and Formation
 - Krutz Chapter 10
- October 30: Tactics
 - Krutz Chapter 10

- November 1: Do they have an effect?
 - Krutz Chapter 10

Week 11: Congress

- November 4: Design and Powers
 - Krutz Chapter 11
 - **Quiz 3 Due**
- November 6: Legislative Process
 - Krutz Chapter 11
- November 8: Mapping Day
 - **Gerrymandering Assignment Due**

Week 12: The Presidency

- November 11: Design and Powers
 - Krutz Chapter 12
- November 13: The Electoral College
 - Krutz Chapter 12
- November 15: Evolution
 - Krutz Chapter 12

Week 13: The Courts

- November 18: Design and Powers
 - Krutz Chapter 13
- November 20: The Supreme Court
 - Krutz Chapter 13

- November 22: Judicial Decision-making
 - Krutz Chapter 13

Week 14: Thanksgiving Break

- No Class

Week 15: State and Local Government

- December 2: Powers
 - Krutz Chapter 14
- December 4: Institutional Differences
 - Krutz Chapter 14
- December 6: County and City Government
 - Krutz Chapter 14

Week 16: Hot Topics

- December 9: TBD
 - Quiz 4 Due
- December 11: TBD
- December 13: TBD

Week 17: Finals Week

- Nothing Due

Appendices

A Official Contact Assignment

Have you ever had a problem that required the help of someone else to solve? Maybe you wondered why something happens and how to stop it (e.g., gun violence, suicide, car accidents, traffic, litter). Elected and appointed public officials are supposed to respond to the demands of the public. Of course, as we learn in this course, there is no single “the public” but instead many competing demands. That said, contacting your elected and appointed public officials is a fundamental aspect of living in a representative democracy. This assignment is meant to have you think about who to contact and then actually figure out how to contact them. I will present a series of scenarios. You need to identify who to contact to address the problem. I also want you to report how to contact them, with specificity. Tell me the method (e.g., letter, phone call, web form, etc) and its details (e.g., their address, their phone number, their website, etc). It is okay to report more than one mode of contact for each. The more complete your response, the better your grade.

Scenarios

1. You live in Middletown and are upset about your rapidly increasing water bills.
2. You are concerned about proposals to change federal immigration policies.
3. You think that Pennsylvania state government should keep Three Mile Island from closing.
4. You are upset about the cost of student housing at Penn State Harrisburg.

Grading

Each scenario is worth 10 points. You will receive 2 points for attempting an answer, four points for identifying the correct officials to contact, and four points for supplying the contact information for the official(s).

Tip

Don’t work on this alone. Talk to your fellow classmates, your friends, your family. If you are unfamiliar with government in the United States, talk to me.

Due September 27

B Voting Assignment

Voting is a vital core function of a citizen in a representative democracy. But, knowing how, when, and where to vote is not always simple. This assignment is straightforward. First, Pick an address that you would use as your residence. You can choose your home address (if you are a U.S. citizen/permanent resident) or Middletown, PA (if you are an international student or live on campus). I want you to identify and report the following:

- Report your city/town of residence (I don't need you to tell me your whole address)
- Report how you can register to vote in that area
- Report where voting takes place in that area (this may be very specific or vague, depending on the state).
- Report the date of the next election and what is on the ballot in your area of residence.

Don't be afraid to ask me for some help if you get stuck on any of these. It is entirely possible that the information is not readily available online. We will learn more about why that is the case in class.

Grading

You will receive 5 points for successfully completing each of the four items above. Partial credit will be given for unsuccessful, but faithful, attempts.

Due October 18

C Op-Ed Assignment

I realize that you may not read a physical newspaper, but many Americans do and you may read opinion pieces from outlets like the *Washington Post* or *New York Times*. I am guessing you have also read a blog post at some point. Writing persuasively in a short format like an op-ed or blog is a particular skill. If well done, it might convince some readers who are on the fence about the subject. If poorly done, you will not be taken seriously.

For this assignment, I want you to pick any topic that you care about. It does not matter whether the issue is school, local, state, or federal. What matters is that the issue is personally important to you. Then, I want you to write a 750 word opinion editorial making an argument. It could be an argument for political action on the issue, it could just be an argument that other people should care. We will spend a class discussing good op-ed practices. I expect these to be used.

Grading

You will be graded on the following:

1. Clarity of the topic (5 points)
2. Clarity of the argument (5 points)
3. Persuasiveness of the argument (5 points)
4. Effective writing (grammar, punctuation, etc) (5 points)

Due October 25

D Gerrymandering Assignment

There is currently much debate about how state and congressional district lines are drawn. The reality is that regardless of what mechanism is used to draw them, there are different values expressed by actors in those mechanisms. In class we will talk about those values: communities of interest, compactness, competitive elections, contiguity, county/municipal splits, equal population, incumbent protection, minority representation, party advantage, or a wild card.

You may work with up to two other people on this assignment. I want you to choose your top value (either personally or as a team). You will need to register with [Draw the Lines](#) and draw a Congressional map for Pennsylvania using their [District Builder](#) program. Once the map is done, I want you to print out the final map and the metrics reported by District Builder. I also want you to write a 500 word personal statement about why you drew the map the way you did. How does that map reflect your chosen values? Why are those values the most important?

You are NOT required to submit your map and essay to the Draw the Lines contest, but you are certainly welcome to. Whether you submit or not, it will not impact your grade.

Grading

This assignment will be worth 20 points. 10 points will be assigned to your essay. 5 for describing why you drew the map this way and 5 making a pitch for the importance of your value. Make sure you use relevant metrics from Draw the Lines to support your argument that your map reflects your values. The remaining 10 points will be given for completing a map that reflects those values.

DUE November 8