

POLS 232: Public Issues

Fall 2013

Jonathan A. Jackson

Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, 10:30-11:20

Office: Oldfather 517

Classroom: Hamilton 133

Email: jonathan.jackson@huskers.unl.edu

Offices hours: MW 1:00-2:00, TR 10:30-11:30, or by appointment

Required texts

CQ Researcher: *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy*

(Other readings as assigned)

As this class is based on current issues, some readings will be assigned one or two weeks ahead of time. Students are also strongly encouraged to visit the Real Clear Politics (<http://www.realclearpolitics.com/>).

Overview and Purpose

Bulletin Description: Major public issues in American politics. Government spending, civil rights; welfare and health care; poverty; education; urban problems; crime, violence and repression; defense policy; agricultural policy; environment/energy policy.

This course will examine a number of issues in American politics and government. While there will be much discussion and some debate in class, our primary focus will be on understanding the facts behind the issues, why they are sources of contention in American politics, and how those issues will develop in the future.

Course Requirements

All students are expected to do the assigned reading and work, attend class, and participate. Exams and quizzes will be based on both the readings and lectures, and the themes of those assignments will be a major part of our in-class discussions. Therefore attendance and class participation are vital.

There will be a total of 1000 points for the course. They will be weighted as follows:

- Attendance and Participation: 100 points
- Two Quizzes 300 points (150 points each)
- Essay: 150 points
- Group Report 150 points
- Final Exam: 300 points

The points for each assignment will added together and the decimal point shifted one to the left to get the final grade. For example, a total of 756 points for all assignments represents a final grade of 75.6; a C.

Quizzes and Exam

The quizzes will be a mixture of multiple-choice, true-false and short answer questions. Each quiz will cover the prior section's materials (in other words, not comprehensive). The Final Exam will be comprehensive but will slightly emphasize the material not covered by prior testing (that is the material covered in the few weeks before the exam).

The goal of the exam and quizzes is to gauge the level of understanding the student has of the material covered. They are designed to encourage proper study skills, critical thinking, and analytical reasoning.

Essay

The essay will be a maximum of four concise, well-written pages, written in 10-point Times New Roman font with unmodified margins, single spaced except between paragraphs. An additional page will be allowed for notes and a bibliography (no Wikipedia but it is a good source to find the original research). There is no need for a cover page; place paper title and student information in the header. The ideal paper starts as a seven-page first draft and is trimmed down to four by cutting fluff. You may choose any topic, with the approval of your instructor. The paper should examine a political issue, explore the views and political structure of two or more groups involved with that issues, and hypothesize a likely short or long term outcome for the issue based on your analysis. The writing must be the original work of the student except for properly credited quotes.

The essay will be graded holistically: There is no "counting off" of mistakes, although persistent or distractingly glaring errors will affect the score. Instead, the essay will be judged on the student's ability to research, analyze and make arguments about major developments or issues. The best papers identify a question or thesis and use research to develop a logical conclusion. This is the same way writing is graded in the GRE and judged in the work world, so you should become accustomed to it.

You should submit your topic for approval before the first quiz (September 27). Your instructor will be happy to provide guidance and assistance for the paper, but there will be no draft submissions. It is due by the start of class on November 25.

Group Report

Every student will be assigned to one of five groups during the first week of class. Those will also be the initial in-class discussion groups (although there may be some changes in the discussion groups to expose students to more varied opinions).

During the last week of class, each group will conduct a 15-minute oral presentation. The presentation should be 10-12 minutes with the remained of the time reserved for Q&A. The group will also turn in a three-page synopsis of the report with the names of all group members.

Like the essay, the group report should examine a political issue, explore the views and political structure of two or more groups involved with that issues, and hypothesize a likely short or long term outcome for the issue based on your analysis. It must be on a different topic than that covered on any

group member's essay. You do not need prior approval on the group report topic, although you are welcome to discuss it with the instructor.

The report will be graded by three factors: the oral presentation (judged by the instructor and students in the class), the synopsis (judged by the instructor), and peer evaluations of your work (judged by fellow members of your group).

Grade Scale

The grade scale for this course will be:

A = 94-100	B- = 80-83	D+ = 67-69
A- = 90-93	C+ = 77-79	D = 64-66
B+ = 87-89	C = 74-76	D- = 60-63
B = 84-86	C- = 70-73	F = 0-59

As noted previously, the points for each assignment will added together and the decimal point shifted one to the left to get the final grade. For example, a total of 756 points for all assignments represents a final grade of 75.6: a C.

Class Policies

Make-up assignments: Should you miss a quiz or the exam, you can schedule a make-up exam with the instructor if you can provide evidence that you missed the class for a valid reason. This would include a doctor's note/bill or a cast on a newly broken arm. Non-valid reasons include, but are not limited to, what you did the night before and how it kept you from waking up the next day.

Incompletes and Withdrawals: Students will only be given an "I" (incomplete) for valid reasons, such as verified military deployment or illness, and only if the student has made substantial satisfactory progress in the course. To withdraw from a course, follow UNL procedures; your instructor will not do it for you.

Laptops and other electronic devices: Please put away all electronic devices at the beginning of class except those being used for the class. Turn your phone off or put it on silent (not vibrate) mode. The inappropriate use of electronic devices is distracting to you and rude to the instructor and other students.

We will start with allowing the use of laptops, but the instructor reserves the right to later ban their use except for those students with a documented disability. Even when laptops are used exclusively to take class notes, they virtually eliminate eye contact and the other types of non-verbal communication that allow for meaningful conversations to take-place. You are a student, not a stenographer.

Disability Policy: Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact me instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodations to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course

requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism and cheating, as defined by the UNL Student Code of Conduct, are not allowed. The in-class punishment schedule for such acts may include a zero for the assignment and failure of the entire course. Major violations will also be reported to the student’s department chairperson or head and to the Judicial Office.

Respect: Please show respect for the opinions of your fellow students. Students should feel free to express their views without fear of condemnation or harassment inside or outside the classroom. Likewise, students should not seek to use the free and open exchange of ideas as a license to provoke or denigrate others. Clearly, there is a balancing act involved, but it can be achieved if students engage each other in a spirit of goodwill

Schedule

Week	Subject	Reading
Aug 26, 28, 30	Introduction/Demographics = Destiny?	Chapter 1: Changing Demographics The Changing Demographics of America
Sep 4, 6	Immigration: Who gets in?	Chapter 11: Immigration Conflict (Monday is Labor Day.)
Sep 9, 11, 13	Gay Couples with Closets Full of Guns	Chapter 12: Gay Marriage Showdown Chapter 10: Gun Control
Sep 16, 18, 20	More Gun Control/ Civil Rights in America	Readings to be assigned on Blackboard
Sep 23, 25, 27	Educating the Masses / Quiz 1	Chapter 9: Future of Public Education (Readings on school reform TBA)
Sep 30, Oct 2, 4	Obamacare and More Fun with Healthcare	Chapter 13: Assessing “Obamacare” Chapter 14: Preventing Disease
Oct 7, 9, 11	Who runs this show? (Open Issue Friday #1)	(Readings on Federalism TBA)
Oct 14, 16, 18	The Internet Changes Everything?	Chapter 2: Social Media and Politics Chapter 6: Internet Regulation
Oct 23, 25	More Internet / Quiz 2	(Readings on NSA spying on Americans TBA) (Monday Fall Break.)

Oct 28, 30, Nov 1	Feeding & Financing the Machine	Chapter 4: U.S. Oil Dependence Chapter 8: Financial Misconduct
Nov 4, 6, 8	Jobs and Debt (Open Issue Friday #2)	Chapter 7: Youth Unemployment (Readings on Economics TBA)
Nov 11, 13, 15	The Big Middle East Mess	Chapter 15: Unrest in the Arab World (Readings on Syria and Egypt TBA)
Nov 18, 20, 22	Feeding American and the Rest of the Earth	Chapter 3: Farm Policy Chapter 5: Genetically Modified Food
Nov 25	More on Food, Just in Time for Turkey Day	(Readings on Ethanol Policy TBA) (Thanksgiving holiday Wed. and Fri.)
Dec 2, 4, 6	Your Friendly Neighborhood MIC	Chapter 16: Privatizing the Military (Other readings on Defense Policy TBA)
Dec 9, 11, 13	Oral Reports /Review	