

Political Science

Professors: Berry, Dugas, Einspahr (Chair), Elman

Political Science is an essential component of a liberal arts education, providing students with the tools to understand the complex world of politics and, in the process, to become better citizens. As a field of academic study, Political Science is both a classical discipline and a more recently developed social science. The study of politics utilizes philosophical, historical, comparative and empirical analysis to examine governments, transnational institutions, political movements, politics, and policies. Knowledge of these areas enables students to participate more effectively in the political process on behalf of their own values. Students also learn skills to scrutinize both their own value systems and those of others.

The Political Science Department seeks to provide broad yet rigorous training in the fields of U.S. politics, comparative politics, international politics, and political theory. This training provides a thorough grounding for study in graduate and professional schools (including law school), as well as preparation for public service, nongovernmental employment, civic engagement, and political activism at the local, state, national, and international levels.

Requirements for the Major in Political Science

Number of Units

Nine units are required, not including the SIP.

Required Courses

POLS 105 Introduction to U.S. Politics: Theory and Practice

POLS 106 Introduction to Comparative Politics

POLS 107 Introduction to International Politics

POLS 490 Contemporary Behavior, Theory, and Methodology

ONE of the following:

POLS 257 Justice and Political Community: Classical Political Thought

POLS 260 Liberty, Equality, and Authority: Modern Political Thought

POLS 263 American Political Thought

The political science department requires all majors to pass a written comprehensive examination covering the fields of U.S. politics, comparative politics, international politics, and political theory. In addition, the department strongly encourages students to complete their introductory courses prior to leaving for study abroad.

Requirements for the Minor in Political Science

Number of Units

Six units are required.

Required Courses

POLS 105 Introduction to American Government

Five additional political science courses

Off-Campus Credits

One Political Science course from off-campus (study abroad or transfer credit) may count for credit toward the Political

Science major or minor. Students must formally petition the department for approval of the course and provide the necessary materials (e.g. syllabus, notes, papers, etc.) for review. In general, the Political Science Department will accept for credit only a course that is not offered at Kalamazoo College.

Political Science courses

POLS 105 Introduction to U.S. Politics: Theory and Practice

Contemporary conceptions of democracy in the United States are often based on the classic pluralist model of governance: individual citizens articulate interests, groups naturally form and lobby on behalf of those interests, a fair debate ensues, and the democratic system generates outcomes reflecting a general will. While this may serve as an ideal as to how democracy ought to operate, it is not clear whether it is an accurate reflection of how our democracy actually operates. In this course we will employ a multitude of approaches—theoretical, historical, behavioral, and institutional—to assist you in assessing the extent to which the functioning of democracy in the United States fulfills its promise.

POLS 106 Introduction to Comparative Politics

Introduction to the structure and functioning of different systems of governance within a comparative framework. What are the various paths to political development taken by various industrialized nations? To this end, students compare and contrast various political ideologies, cultures, and state institutions and their organizations.

POLS 107 Introduction to International Politics

An introduction to the study of international relations that focuses on the core issue of international war and peace. The issue is used as a means to explore how political scientists analyze international relations. The course examines different approaches to analyzing international relations (the system, state, and individual levels of analysis), as well as the ongoing debates between the paradigms of realism, liberalism, radicalism, and feminism.

POLS 205 The Politics of Revolution

The very casual use of the term "revolution" frequently betrays its importance. What, for example, does it mean to be a "revolutionary"? Moreover, what has "revolution" meant for men and women? This course seeks to clarify its meaning(s), consider its causes, and explore the consequences with attention to the French, Haitian and Russian revolutions. The revolutions of 1989 throughout Eastern Europe will also be considered.

POLS 210 Comparative Political Institutions: Social Europe

Examination of the political systems, institutions, and practices of European states. Emphasis is on analysis and comparison of social policies concerning immigration, the environment, healthcare and other issues.

POLS 220 Voting, Campaigns, & Elections

Representative democracies rely upon elections to establish and maintain the link between the will of the people and the elites chosen to represent the public will. This course will examine three interrelated concepts of the American electoral process: voting, campaigns, and elections. First, we will examine the theories and methods employed to identify likely voters and the factors that impact their vote choice. Second, we will identify the distinct factors that determine a campaign's effectiveness including: the candidate, media coverage, political strategy, and broader contextual factors. Finally, we will assess the unique configuration of our electoral design, the extent to which these characteristics structure electoral outcomes, and whether modifications are required.

POLS 225 Constitutional Law

The cornerstone of American democracy rests upon the U.S. Constitution. In addition to laying the blueprint for the institutional design of our government, the Bill of Rights, in theory, establishes the fundamental rights and liberties of all American citizens. In this course, students will familiarize themselves with the structure of the federal court system, the contrasting modes of legal reasoning employed by justices on the court, and the often competing legal, political, and societal factors that influence the Supreme Court's rulings. We will focus on three substantive areas of constitutional law: 1) equal protection under the 14th Amendment; 2) the right to privacy; and 3) freedom of speech. By tracing the evolution of the law in these three key areas, students will sharpen their legal-reasoning skills, and be better equipped to evaluate the extent to which the Court has fulfilled our Constitutional ideals.

POLS 229 Race, Law, & US Politics

This course focuses on the nexus between race, law, and politics in the United States. First, we will compare distinct theories of the law and legal reasoning. Second, we will examine how the court operates within the larger political system. Third, we will analyze theories of racial formation in the United States to reveal the connections between an individual's or group's conception of race, proposed strategies, and desired outcomes. Finally, we will trace significant Supreme Court decisions and federal legislation on matters pertaining to race from the nation's founding to the current day. Our legal and political analysis of "race law" will better enable us to gauge the progress that we have made, as well as, identify the significant hurdles that lay ahead.

POLS 230 Congress & the Presidency

Legislative power in American democracy is divided principally between two legislative institutions: Congress and the Presidency. By design our founders created a government comprised of separate institutions with overlapping powers and distinct constituencies. In this course we will investigate both the origins and consequences of this institutional design. We will examine the ways in which each institution has shifted over time, the political and contextual factors that served as a catalyst for these changes, as well as their consequences on both policy-making and representation. Finally, we will identify the mechanisms elites employ to pursue legislative objectives, the barriers they face, and the level of representation and policy-making that results.

POLS 231/SEMN 209 The Politics of Rights & Immigration

According to the UN Charter of Fundamental Rights, one has a fundamental right to leave one's country of origin (1948, Article 13), yet there is no corresponding right to enter another country. This sophomore seminar considers the consequence of this tension with attention to normative questions of who should be allowed entry to and citizenship within (other) states. In addition, we explore the empirical complexities that inform and result from these judgments. This broadly international and interdisciplinary seminar privileges states, laws (domestic and international) and actual policy over the last sixty years, with particular attention to North America and Western Europe - key destinations for migrants and thus crucial laboratories to investigate the myths, realities, policies and consequences of immigration. At a time when there are growing pressures for increased immigration in Western Europe, we conclude by noting recent developments within the European Union to harmonize asylum and immigration policies. We ask - what are the ethical challenges and what might the future look like?

POLS 245 Politics of Latin America

This course provides an introduction to contemporary Latin American politics. The first part of the course examines the historical factors and socioeconomic conditions that have influenced the development of Latin American politics, including its frequently troubled relationship with the United States. The second part examines the principal political structures that have characterized Latin American politics in the form of authoritarian, revolutionary, and democratic regimes.

POLS/AFST 248 Politics of Sub-Saharan Africa

This course offers an in-depth perspective on the study of Sub-Saharan African politics. It examines Africa's post-independence democratic strides, security issues, and the failure and successes of statism. It specifically exposes students to the challenges and the conundrum of the postcolonial state and the efforts in dealing with such challenges in Africa. The end of the Cold War as well as the demise of apartheid affected the political landscape in Africa, thus strengthening the role of grassroots organizations and of other external forces to engage in the process of state reconstruction.

POLS/CLAS 257 Justice and Political Community: Classical Political Thought

This course examines political thought from the Greek period through the Italian Renaissance. We will pay particular attention to classical conceptions of human nature, justice, the ideal political order, and the obligations of citizens to their political communities. We will also form an appreciation for the Greek and Roman foundations of subsequent political systems. Thinkers covered may include Thucydides, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, St. Augustine, and Machiavelli. Offered biannually.

POLS 260 Liberty, Equality, and Authority: Modern Political Thought

This course examines political theory in the "modern" period (roughly 1650-1900). Many of the works considered here are central to the "canon" of political theory, shaping not only the kinds of questions we have come to ask about "the political," but how we go about asking them. In particular, liberalism has been central to the political development of the west. In this class we will work toward a deep understanding of liberalism as well as radical democratic, conservative, and socialist challenges to this important paradigm. Theoretical topics covered include classical social contract theory; the emergence of the abstract "individual" endowed with natural rights; attempts to reconcile the value of equality with that of liberty; and "radical" responses to deep structural inequality. The work of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Burke, Wollstonecraft, Marx, and others will be discussed and analyzed.

POLS 263 American Political Thought

In this course we will approach American Political Thought (APT) as a set of narratives and counter-narratives about the meaning and value of American freedom in relation to social, economic, and political equality. Dominant narratives about the meaning of freedom have often functioned to exclude certain groups, while resistance to that exclusion has often taken the form of contestation over the meaning of freedom itself. We will examine the tensions within American narratives of freedom from the time of the first Puritan settlers to today.

POLS/WGS 265 Feminist Political Theories

A core course in the Women, Gender, and Sexuality curriculum, Feminist Political Theories introduces students to a wide variety of feminist theoretical frameworks. We will examine what it means to do feminist theory; modern feminist theories, including liberal, radical, Marxist, socialist, and anarchist feminisms, as well as intersectionality theories; postmodern feminist thought, including queer and transgender theories and third-wave feminisms; and postcolonial feminist theories from early modernity to postmodernity.

Prerequisite: Sophomore Standing

POLS 267 Environment and Political Theory

This course will serve as an introduction to the growing field of environmental political theory, or political ecology, including the writings of political theorists past and present on the relationship between politics, humans, and non-human nature and attempts by contemporary political theorists and environmental activists to articulate principles for organizing society in relation to the natural world. Students will confront their own assumptions about the proper relationship between humans and the natural world, which are embedded in core political concepts such as citizenship and democracy, and work to form reasoned judgments in relation to current environmental problems and controversies.

POLS 270 The European Union: Institutions, Actors, Aliens and Outcomes

This course offers a broad introduction to the European Union and the politics of European integration. We move from a historical overview to a description and assessment of several basic political institutions and conclude with the impact that European integration has had (and continues to exercise) over matters ranging from agriculture and the environment to crime citizenship, migration, gay rights, and women's rights.

POLS 285 United States Foreign Policy

The first part of this course provides an introduction to, and a historical overview of, U.S. foreign policy from the end of World War II to the present. Particular emphasis is given to security issues, the development of the Cold War, and the search for a guiding doctrine for contemporary U.S. foreign policy. The second part of the course examines the way in which U.S. foreign policy is made, looking specifically at the role of the Presidency, Congress, and the bureaucracy.

POLS 295 Special Topics

Special Topics offerings focus upon topics not addressed in the department's regular offerings. The course can be repeated with a different topic. Check the course schedule to see when Special Topics courses are being offered.

POLS 295 Special Topics

From hazardous chemicals and nuclear accidents to stratospheric ozone depletion and concern over tropical rain forests and "sustainable development," environmental justice activists have raised our consciousness and endeavored to provide a coherent vision of policies and programs they want implemented. How did activists express their claims, what are some of the specific challenges they faced, and how have different states/regions around the world responded?

POLS 295 Constructing and Reconstructing Israel

The basic introduction to Israeli politics offers a historical and ideological overview that moves us from the late nineteenth century to Israel's establishment as a state in 1948. Therefore, we explore the formation of Israel through migration, key political institutions, and wars. We conclude with current challenges and thus consider some of the unanticipated consequences of Zionism.

POLS 295 Politics of East Asia

East Asia draws much attention from the world due to its interesting mix of the emerging world power (China), the third largest economy in the world (Japan), the two democracies having experienced rapid growth and democratization (South Korea and Taiwan), and one of the most closed and secretive dictatorships on Earth (North Korea). This course is designed to provide a general understating of the political history and contemporary politics of East Asia. The main goal of this course is to help students develop their ability to analyze various political phenomena using concepts and approaches and prepare themselves for higher-level courses in political science courses moving forward

POLS 295 Comparative Democratization

The study of both democracy and democratization has become a cornerstone of American political science. However, the concept of democracy, the best way to promote it, and why democratization occurs (and why it sometimes does not) are often hot topics of contention within the field. While a Western, procedural conception of democracy dominates American political science, alternative way of thinking and theorizing about democratic regimes do exist. This course will critically survey literature that addresses these debates. Case studies and examples will be drawn from all over the world and various countries' experiences with democratization. Of particular interest, however, will be the way in which democracy promotion has become a key tenet of American foreign policy.

POLS 295 State and Local Government

This course provides a basic understanding of politics at the state and local level, including the relationship between state and local governments and the federal government. The Michigan state constitution will be compared to other state constitutions, and we will examine Michigan's legislative, executive, and judiciary branches as well as political attitudes and behavior at the state level. Finally, the course will explore local politics, particularly as various cities in Michigan deal with budget crises

POLS 295 Qualitative Methods in Political Science

This course is designed to familiarize students of politics with a variety of qualitative strategies for research design, data collection and data analysis. We will examine the advantages and disadvantages of these methods and the kinds of questions each is best suited to address. In addition, we will focus on the skills required for designing and carrying out a research project using the many techniques available within qualitative methods. Methods covered include ethnography, case studies, elite interviewing, interpretivism, the use of focus groups, and archival research.

POLS 305 International Law and Organization

This course addresses: 1) the history, structure, promise, and limitations of international organizations, especially the United Nations; 2) the basic nature and scope of international law; and 3) how the interplay of international law and organizations affects key areas of global relations, particularly the use of force, collective security and peacekeeping, the treatment of civilians in war, and human rights more generally.

POLS 310 Women, States, and NGOs

What role do states have, if any, in defining, maintaining, constructing, or remedying sex discrimination? This course provides a comparative, historical framework to consider the challenges and opportunities feminist movements have met and continue to face as they mobilized both within and beyond their countries to demand social justice.

POLS 315 Public Opinion: Race, Class, and Gender

The preferences of the public, and how these preferences are transmitted to elected officials, serve as the foundation of representative democracy. Thus, to evaluate the success of a democracy one must begin with a clear understanding of the origins, measurement, structure, and consequences of Americans' political attitudes. This course will explore the multitude of factors that structure and influence the development of political attitudes, the extent to which these attitudes are represented in government, and whether policy outcomes are reflective of public demands. Finally, we will apply the knowledge and analytical strategies that we have surveyed to better understand racial, class-based, and gender cleavages in American politics today

Prerequisite: POLS-105

POLS 320 Democracy and Democratic Theory

What does it mean to say that something is "democratic" or that a government is a "democracy"? Almost everyone today claims democratic principles as their own, yet there is widespread disagreement about what this really means. The literal translation of "democracy" is "rule by the people," but rule how exactly, and over what matters? And who is included in "the people"? In this course we will examine the theory and practice of democracy in historical context as well as its meaning for people around the world today. Topics covered include classical democracy and republicanism; liberal, direct, radical, agonistic, and deliberative democracy; and challenges to democracy in the present age of global and corporatism. This course is not recommended for first-year students. Offered biannually.

POLS 330 The Politics of the Holocaust

Study of two fundamental elements: (1) a brief historical overview of anti-Semitism and the social construction of identity whereby Jews are rendered "Other," and (2) a focus on how and by whom the Jews were annihilated. Students will comprehend the unique fate of the Jews under National Socialism, the incorporation of racial eugenics into law, and the capacities of modern states to service genocide.

POLS 360 Domination, Liberation, and Justice: Contemporary Political Thought

In the twentieth century, a diverse group of thinkers challenged the basic underlying premises of modern political thought, refiguring how we think about domination, liberation, and justice. In this course, we will be addressing the overlapping themes of knowledge, power, history, and identity as they relate to contemporary political dilemmas. Thinkers discussed may include Arendt, Beauvoir, Butler, Foucault, Nietzsche, and other contemporary thinkers. Previous coursework in political theory or philosophy is recommended. Offered biannually.

POLS 370 Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Study of individual liberties as defined by today's Supreme Court; development of the Court's point of view in such areas as freedom of speech, subversion and disloyalty, religious freedoms and church-state separation, and equal protection of the law; the role of the Supreme Court in the political system of the United States.

POLS 375 International Political Economy

This course deals with issues arising in a world system that is increasingly united by a global economy, but that remains fragmented politically. It begins with an examination of the alternative paradigms of economic liberalism, economic nationalism, and radicalism. It then proceeds to examine in greater detail issues concerning international trade (including debates over globalization and free trade) and the international monetary system (including the roles of the IMF and World Bank, debt crises, and financial crises).

Prerequisite: POLS-107

POLS 380 Drugs, Democracy, and Human Rights

An overview of three of the most contentious issues in contemporary U.S. foreign policy. Specifically, the course examines the role of U.S. policy with regard to the problems of international human rights, the promotion of democracy, and the international drug trade. Past and present U.S. policy is discussed, as well as what U.S. policy ought to be regarding these challenging problems.

POLS/SEMN 406 Male Violence Against Women

This course focuses on male violence against and sexual exploitation of women. Students will examine the historical

development of these related issues that feminism identifies as central (e.g., prostitution, pornography, sexual harassment, rape and battery). More specifically, we will explore how the story of that oppression and the efforts taken against it have been continuously ignored and/or undermined. Prerequisite: Seniors only

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POLS/SEMN 410 From Social Movements to Non-Profits

We will compare and contrast the politics of "social movements" across different countries and in the context of "globalization". We open with an overview concerning the decline of traditional mass based political institutions (e.g., parties and unions) and consider the rise and consequences of alternative forms of political expression - including movements and NGOs (non-governmental organizations). Prerequisite: Seniors Standing

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POLS 490 Contemporary Behavior, Theory, and Methodology

Analysis of major premises and theoretical frameworks underlying current political science research.

Prerequisite: Senior standing.

POLS 593 Senior Individualized Project

Each program or department sets its own requirements for Senior Individualized Projects done in that department, including the range of acceptable projects, the required background of students doing projects, the format of the SIP, and the expected scope and depth of projects. See the Kalamazoo Curriculum -> Senior Individualized Project section of the Academic Catalog for more details.

Prerequisite: Permission of department and SIP supervisor required.

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