



CONTEMPORARY POLITICS AND ISSUES

PSC 1010

Dr. Mark Setzler

Spring 2024 Syllabus

COURSE BASICS:

Instructor contact information:

Phone: 336.841.9018 (office)

Email: msetzler@highpoint.edu

Course Website: marksetzler.org/PSC1010 (password to open readings: icecream)

Office location: Norcross Hall, Room 160

Seminar Meetings:

Section 1: MWF: 9:15–10:25 in Phillips School of Business, Room 222

Section 2: MWF: 10:40–11:20 in Phillips School of Business, Room 215

Office Hours:

- Mon. & Wed.: 12:00 – 2:00
- Tues. & Thurs.: 1:30 – 2:30
- If you are in class during these times, I can schedule virtual or in-person meetings at other times as long as you give me sufficient notice.

If you are able, please let me know in advance that you would like to come by during office hours. I try to schedule student appointments so they do not overlap.

Course description, teaching methods, and workload:

This course surveys a number of the most pressing issues being explored by contemporary political scientists. Why are some communities plagued by violence while others live in peace? Why doesn't America's democracy work better? Why do countries that have no intention of using weapons of mass destruction still seek to possess them? How are democratic values and behaviors first established in a society, and how are they passed on to future generations? Students will explore these and other central questions in political science as they learn how the systematic study of political ideas, institutions, and behaviors offers unique insights into many of humanity's most profound social and political challenges.

This class is designed primarily for majors and minors who have a strong interest in the subject area. It is designed to prepare you to take upper-division coursework in our department and this class's heavy reading load reflects this objective. I use teaching methods designed to provoke student input, questions, and discussion; our time in class is supposed to engage the material more deeply than would be the case if you were just reading about the same ideas. In most class meetings, I will either deliver an interactive lecture that engages topics and issues not covered closely in the reading assignments or guide a conversation based on your assigned readings. Either way, your frequent input is welcomed and will make the class much more informative for all involved than will one-way lectures. While a series of focus questions on PPT slides will keep our discussions on track and help students to identify major ideas and concepts, you should consider our classroom primarily as a place of debate and informed dialogue, where your input and ideas are a critical component of student learning. Please aim to make the most of our

seminars and class exercises by consistently coming to class having read all assignments closely and fully prepared to ask questions, comment insightfully on the day's reading assignments, and engage the ideas and perspectives of other students.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the term, students will:

- Understand and demonstrate the main differences between informed political commentary and political science findings with respect to these activities' main objectives as well as the types of evidence and methodologies they use. This outcome will be assessed with the first examination and a long essay at the end of the term.
- Comprehend how the major fields in political science study and explain various types of contemporary political activity. This outcome will be assessed with three exams.
- Describe and make basic applications of many of the core concepts and theories that political scientists in the major subfields of the discipline use to analyze major political ideas, institutions, and issues. This outcome will be assessed with three exams.
- Describe, properly categorize, compare, and appraise the basic features of different types of regimes, political activities, and the main governmental, electoral, and party systems in use in the world today. This outcome will be assessed with three exams.
- Understand the necessity of and use properly formed thesis statements, effective topic sentences, professional prose, and appropriate citation in social science writing. This outcome will be assessed with at least two paper assignments.
- Consistently demonstrate an appropriate level of engagement and professionalism in a work-like setting. This objective will be assessed with a professionalism rubric and grade.

ACCESSING REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- Major assignments as well as any PPT slides reviewed in class will be in a folder linked to the course website, accessible at the address noted at the start of the syllabus.
- This course has no required textbook, but there will be plenty of assigned reading. Your reading will come in the form of book chapters, academic journal articles, news-magazine outtakes, and various types of online materials. **The reading assignments can all be accessed from the online assignments schedule, which is linked to the course's homepage.** Unless instructed otherwise, you typically should at least quickly review readings for the day they are noted in the schedule. To open many of the readings, you will need to input the password: **icecream.**

STUDENT ASSESSMENT:

- **Three examinations: 45 percent of the course grade.** At roughly equal intervals, you will take tests that assess your understanding of class lectures, reading materials, and any other assigned materials in the preceding course unit. Although they will vary somewhat in format, each exam will be equally weighted in your course grade.
- **Two analytical essays examining one of the discussion week topics: 25 percent.** Beginning the third week of the course, most weeks will include a seminar devoted to discussion and critical thinking sessions that will center on an analysis of the week's reading assignments. Before each "discussion seminar," I will post focus questions and a writing topic on the course website.

At some point during the first course unit, students must choose one of these writing topics and compose a 1,500-word essay that examines that particular week's readings (and only those readings) as well as our class's discussion of them. You will choose when you want to write this essay, with the caveat that the papers for each topic generally will be due the Tuesday immediately following the discussion section. Before writing any paper in this class, please first consult the online handouts on citation requirements and essay grading criteria.

The second discussion-section paper may be submitted at any point after you have completed the self-performance essay assignment, which will be written as soon as mid-term grades are distributed.

- **A self-performance report: 10 percent.** This assignment will ask you to write an essay analyzing your study habits, writing, and test performance for the first half of the course. The purpose of the exercise is to provide you with an opportunity to think systematically about what you are doing well and areas where you could improve to learn more in this class. The assignment will be completed soon after we return from mid-term break and is designed to help you acquire and sharpen self-reflection skills that are important elements of a successful professional career related to your political science training. The assignment's format will be similar to annual self-evaluation reports that are frequently assigned in professional work settings. The content grade for this assignment will reflect the quality and depth of your reflection and use of examples, while the rest of the grade will be assessed with the grading rubric used for your other analytical writing. You will receive a separate handout with this assignment's details.
- **Final exam essay: 10 percent.** During the second half of the final exam period, you will write a several-page essay asking you to reflect on the course's major themes. You will be given the writing prompt several days in advance of the testing period.
- **Professionalism—class preparation, participation, and engagement: 10 percent.** This grade component will be calculated as described in the rubric on the course website. I assess participation and professionalism at multiple points during the semester, adjusting the component's overall grade up or down to reflect how you have done up to that point in the term as a whole. In brief, your grade will assess the extent to which you are consistently following all course policies (including those addressing electronic devices) and exhibiting the preparation, speaking, listening, and professional skills necessary to remain fully engaged for significant periods in professional settings.

GRADING:

University policy mandates that letter grades accurately reflect student performance. A-range grades are reserved for excellent work that is "notably superior" for a given course's grade level. Bs are assigned to work that is "clearly above average," when compared to typical student work in a course at this level. C-range grades are assigned to "satisfactory work" that at least meets the very low end of a course's expectations. Ds are assigned where student performance is obviously and consistently "unsatisfactory" and thus markedly weaker than what is typical for a student taking a college course of this level. An F indicates that a significant portion of the work has not been completed or is so deficient that it does not merit college credit.

To facilitate the calculation of overall assignment and course grades involving multiple types of activities and differing grade weights, most instructors convert letter grades into numerical values and vice-versa. When I assign letter grades to tests, papers, and course and assignment elements, those grades are recorded as numerical scores, which are then weighted as explained in the grading components section of the syllabus and on assignment rubrics. Unless otherwise specified in an assignment's instructions, the numerical values substituted for letter grades are calibrated so that a modestly lower letter grade on one item or component will not lower your

overall grade if you earn higher grades on at least two other equally weighted items. For example, a student who obtains an A- on two essay questions and then a B+ on a third question will earn a 90 A- grade for the three items as a whole. Unless otherwise specified in an assignment's instructions, the numerical values substituted for letter grades are calibrated so that a modestly lower letter grade on one item or component will not lower your overall grade if you earn higher grades on at least two other equally weighted items. For example, a student who obtains an A- on two essay questions and then a B+ on a third question will earn a 90 A- grade for the three items as a whole.

At the end of the semester, I will convert the overall numerical score you have earned into a letter grade using these cut-off points: 92.5% and above, A • 90, A- • 87.5, B+ • 82.5, B • 80, B- • 77.5, C+ • 72.5, C • 70, C- • 67.5, D+ • 62.5, D • 60, D- • Below 60%, F

COURSE POLICIES:

- **Changes to the schedule, specific assignments, or course policies.** Instructors and the University reserve the right to modify course requirements and policies as unanticipated circumstances dictate. I don't expect to make any major changes to courses once I have written their syllabi, but sometimes I need to make modifications part way through the semester as unexpected challenges (e.g. weather-related cancellations) or opportunities emerge. If any alterations are necessary, you will be notified as soon as possible.
- **Attendance.** Students are expected to attend class except for documented instances of: 1) documented illness or serious emergency; 2) OARS-approved online accommodations in combination with an instructor-approved plan to replace missed classwork with alternative assignments or; 3) other unavoidable, documented circumstances.

If you need to miss a class or two during the semester for personal, professional, or university-sanctioned obligations, please discuss your situation with me as soon as possible, the same way you will need to do so in future work environments. I have built a maximum number of permissible absences to accommodate these types of situations.

If you are unable to attend a class for any reason, you are responsible for obtaining missed materials and submitting assignments when they are due. As discussed below, make sure to contact me as soon as possible about any absences that will influence your ability to complete assignments as scheduled.

Attendance concerns will be documented in Starfish, and *students who miss more than five classes typically will be withdrawn*. If you are tardy for a class, it is your responsibility to alert the instructor at the end of class so that you are not marked as missing and to explain why you are late. Your punctual, regular attendance also is assessed as part of your professionalism grade.

Make sure to consult the university's Academic Calendar before making your end-of-term, mid-term break, and holiday travel plans. Students are expected to attend class and be available for presentations, assignments, and tests whenever the university is in session or final examinations are being held. Out of fairness to all students (most of whom would like to leave early for breaks and holidays), if you book a ticket to leave school early at the end of the term or for a school break, be prepared to receive a zero grade on any assignments you miss. You should note the date of the final exam for this course (and all of your others) on the first day of the course: <https://www.highpoint.edu/registrar/final-exam-schedule/>.

- **Student remote access to classes.** HPU is committed to in-person learning, and the faculty have been instructed to not permit short-term remote attendance to classes unless explicitly approved by the University (specifically, Karen Naylor, our dean of Academic Services, knaylor@highpoint.edu). Long-term remote learning related to accessibility issues must be approved by the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (OARS).
- **Late work and extensions.** Make-up tests for unscheduled absences normally will not be allowed except in the case of serious extenuating, verifiable circumstances (e.g., a serious illness).

As likely will be the case with your future employers, I can be more flexible about postponing tests and giving assignment extensions when you provide advance notice and a reasonable justification for needing to move an assignment's date. If you know you will not complete an assignment, take a test, or give a presentation as scheduled (e.g., required participation in a university-sponsored event or a religious holiday), see if I am willing to grant an extension well before the assignment is due.

If a student's late work is accepted or a late exam permitted, the typical penalty will be a five percent deduction per day, starting the same day the work was due. This penalty will double if a student does not promptly notify me that they have missed a due date, explain why work is tardy, and tell me when the work will arrive.

- **The use of electronic devices in class.** Please do not use phones, laptops, or other distracting electronic devices during our seminar meetings unless their use has been approved explicitly or you have been instructed otherwise. Repeated use of electronic devices will result in a reduction in your course grade as explained in the online grading rubric addressing expectations and grading for professionalism and engagement. If you have OARS accommodations or a unique situation related to your learning style, see me for guidance.
- **Recording and distributing course content.** Some students may seek permission to record in-class lectures to assist in their notetaking. Neither your instructor nor your classmates have granted permission for any recorded or online content to be shared outside the instructional purposes of this class. Per college guidelines, "Any audio or video recording in the class, including the instructor's lecture/discussion, or other classroom activity, is strictly prohibited unless authorized by the instructor and students in the classroom. This includes the unauthorized recording of online discussions and online breakout rooms." If you want to record classes to assist in effective note-taking, this will be encouraged as long as you check in with your instructor ahead of time to make sure you understand the guidelines and restrictions.

You also may not share any completed assignments, test questions, or graded work with other students who are or will be preparing similar assignments. Unless explicitly told otherwise, assignments and feedback in this course are intended to assess your understanding of the material and analysis; distributing or posting online completed work, test items similar to those that other students may be asked to complete in the future, or providing answers to other students undermine the instructional purpose of assignments. Regardless of intent, distributing materials in these ways would provide other students with an unfair academic advantage and violate the University's Honor Code even if you have no idea who the recipient of your assistance might be. This prohibition includes posting your assignments, tests, or any graded work onto "study" websites, as doing so may help others to violate HPU's Honor Code.

- **E-Mail accounts.** I rely on your HPU email account to distribute important course materials and announcements. I assume that any message sent to your university mailbox will be accessed by you within one day. When contacting me, please use my email account; I may well not see messages sent via Starfish or Blackboard.
- **Using OARS-approved accommodations.** Students with accommodations due to a diagnosed disability must submit appropriate documentation and receive instructions from the Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (336-841-9026; oars@highpoint.edu). Only that office can approve accommodations (including requests to use a computer for note-taking). Remember, by federal policy, students must verbally request each specific accommodation to which they are entitled and proactively discuss with instructors the implementation of their accommodation(s). Accommodations cannot be applied retroactively. If your OARS-approved accommodations include typing exams, a separate testing environment, or extended testing time, you must follow OARS policies and procedures that require you to *make appropriate arrangements with the testing center several days ahead of exams*.
- **Using artificial intelligence assistants, including ChatGPT and similar technologies.** Public access to artificial technology (AI) bots capable of writing and editing clear, elegant prose

is a recent development. At least in the short term, you will find that courses and instructors may have different policies regarding the use of AI, depending on each course's specific learning outcomes.

For this class, any use of any AI for proofreading and editing *must* be disclosed in a short note at the start of your assignment (in the title section where you put your name and other assignment specifics).

One of the key objectives for all of the political science classes I teach is to help students learn how to better formulate, organize, synthesize, and articulate *their* comprehension of and views about facts, concepts, theories, and ideas covered in class materials and homework. In other words, my pedagogy and assignments are structured to help you build critical thinking, analytical, writing, and communication skills by applying them. You build and demonstrate knowledge and mastery by learning how to explain complex ideas and present original arguments in your own words. Consequently, you will *not* be permitted to use AI for *any* of the following purposes:

- To *write*—either in draft or final form—partial or full responses to any prompt on any assignment.
- To *patchwrite* material, which is taking a block of someone else's writing and replacing some words or slightly rearranging the phrasing to conceal the fact that the writing or structure of the prose is mostly not your original work.
- To *paraphrase* material written by someone else, presenting in any assignment the AI-generated writing as if you had used your own effort, understanding, and writing skills to synthesize and summarize someone else's ideas.

In short, do not cheat yourself out of opportunities to build and hone *your* fundamental writing skills. If there is any doubt about the authorship of any writing you submit for credit, you will be asked to complete an oral or hand-written assignment demonstrating your ability to clearly explain passages from your assignment as well as the course materials on which the assignment is based.

- **Academic dishonesty.** We all must support and enforce the university's Honor Code. As a condition of membership in the university community, every High Point Student is honor-bound to refrain from cheating, collusion, and plagiarism. You also are honor-bound to report violations of the honor code should you ever observe them. Without exception, students taking or facilitating an inappropriate academic advantage will have an honor code violation case filed, and they will be sanctioned according to the applicable university policies.

While there are many forms of academic dishonesty, its core element is easy to understand: Cheating refers to any effort to gain academic credit or a higher grade by representing that you have behaved appropriately, completed work, and adhered to both syllabus and assignment-specific expectations when this is not true. The HPU Honor Code also states that facilitating cheating by other students is an act of academic dishonesty. Examples of academic dishonesty include:

- The presentation of writing or work done by another student or an AI assistant as your own work (unless explicitly instructed otherwise, you must use quotation marks around phrasing that is not your own)
- Patch writing, which is plagiarism with slight modifications to the original writing (see above)
- Verifying test or assignment answers against other students' work without having been given instructor permission to do so or without other students being aware they are providing you with assistance
- Splitting assigned work among multiple students who subsequently each represent in papers or exams that they individually completed the entirety of the required work on their own

- Hiring other students or external services to complete your assignments, such that you are passing off the effort and original work of someone else as though it were your own (working with HPU's tutors, seeing the writing center, or asking an HPU peer to read through your work to assist you with proofreading or provide you with critical feedback are all appropriate stops and encouraged; having others do your work for you is not appropriate and violates the Honor Code)
- Working with other students or outside resources to obtain test questions or assignments in advance of when they are distributed to all students in a class. Providing such assistance either directly or by posting course assignments to websites facilitates cheating and will be treated as such
- Misconstruing the circumstances under which class meetings, exams, or assignment deadlines have been missed to avoid a grade deduction
- Substantially overstating the word count of an assignment to meet minimum-length requirements
- Submitting without preapproval by all involved instructors the same work for academic credit in multiple courses

MAJOR TOPICS OUTLINE:

*Please consult the online schedule for assignment details and links to your readings and assignments. Many of the readings will be downloaded and require a password to be opened: **icecream***

- Topic 1: What will you learn in this course?: Syllabus, class policies // Getting started with some basic concepts// Writing and talking about politics in a systematic way
- Topic 2: How do we study complex human behavior "scientifically"? // Does using the scientific approach guarantee valid results or do we need to do more? // Why does the study of politics frequently involve statistics and math? // What makes political scientists different from even the best-informed political commentators?
- Topic 3: Why do so many Americans hate politics? // Would politics be better if we just designed government the right way?: A survey of utopias // **Discussion seminar 1:** Would America be better off with less politics and lots more civility?
- Topic 4: What are the central assumptions of "liberal" politics? // What are the main ideological challengers to liberalism, and do any of them have staying power? // **Discussion seminar 2:** America's liberals and conservatives: What do they disagree on, how far apart are they, and to what extent do most everyday Americans consistently fall into one of these two camps?
- Topic 5: How does America's experience with democracy compare with other types of democracies? // Why do other democracies work differently (and sometimes even better) than ours does? // **Discussion seminar 3:** What kind of changes to the US political system might make it work better? What would the tradeoffs be for different kinds of changes?

Examination #1

Remember: By the end of unit 1, you need to have completed the discussion session paper

- Topic 6: What does globalization mean for the current system of state-centered international politics? // Are international organizations going to replace national governments any

time soon? // **Discussion seminar 4:** What does globalization mean for the future look of the international political system and America's role in it?

Topic 7: Why do so many people still live under authoritarian rule? // How are totalitarian regimes unique, and why have they failed to deliver over the long term? // What, if any, steps should the world community take to extend liberties and rights // **Discussion seminar 5:** Why do countries like Iran and the US pursue weapons of mass destruction and what can we do about it?

Self-evaluation performance report

Topic 8: Why do some individuals become deeply involved in politics while most do not? // Parties, interest groups, and electoral systems // **Discussion session 6:** Do we want political equality? Should Americans be required to vote to achieve it? (No writing prompt since you will be working on your self-assessment essays)

Your second discussion section paper may be submitted at any point after you have completed the self-evaluation papers.

Topic 9: Making sense of the idiosyncratic leaders (Can we generalize about leadership qualities?) // Why do American Presidents do what they do, and how much control do they actually have? (And what can this tell us about the motivations of leaders generally?) // **Discussion session 7:** To what extent does it make sense to attribute policy failures and successes to US presidents

Examination #2

Topic 10: How well does violence work to achieve political ends? // What are the main causes and consequences of revolutions and terrorism? // Can non-violent protest work against unjust governments?

Topic 11: Why is violence still so prevalent in international politics? // Should the US use force to enforce human rights? When does violence from the outside work? // **Discussion session 8:** What do "Islamic" extremists want, and how effective has violence been in achieving these goals? How can extremism be defeated?

Topic 12: Where do our most deeply held political beliefs and values come from? // How well does a society's political culture predict people's behavior, and what type of political culture is necessary to consolidate and sustain democracy? // **Discussion session 9:** Why is democracy in trouble in the US and other advanced industrial democracies

Topic 13: What can you do with a political science degree? // Where does a career in our field begin?

Topic 14: Course conclusions and evaluations

Final Examination – As scheduled by the University.

- **9:15 Section: Tuesday, April 30, at 8 am**
- **10:40 Section: Monday, April 29, at 12pm**

You can verify the time of your other exams at: <http://www.highpoint.edu/registrar/final-exam-schedule/>. Do not make your end-of-term travel arrangements until you have verified when your exams are scheduled.