POLS 110: Introduction to Political Science (Honors and Writing Intensive)

Sankaran Krishna
Krishna@hawaii.edu
640D Saunders Hall
Th: 12:00 – 2:30
Room: Bus Ad D-301
Off. Hrs. MTW 1-4 pm

Course Description: Political Science is the systematic and academic study of politics and is placed under the broader rubric of the Social Sciences. Unlike many other subjects, Political Science is remarkable for the degree of contestation or range of opinion about the very object of inquiry, viz. “Politics.” Thus, while irrespective of their particular theories, astronomers would all agree that their subject constitutes the study of objects in extra-terrestrial space, or even historians (again, irrespective of approach) might all agree that their discipline tries to understand or explain the past, political scientists differ widely in terms of their definition or understanding of “politics.” To some, politics is about who gets to govern and the various forms of governance that exist and their comparative merits; for others, politics is about how power is irradiated throughout society and in all relationships – between fellow-humans, between humans and other species, and between humans and the environment or nature defined most broadly; for still others, politics is about how our fundamentally rational impulse for maximizing what is best for us as individuals can give us insights into the ways in which our societies function; and for still others politics is the study of public policies and their differential impacts on various groups and classes, and so on. Given this broad range of viewpoints on what constitutes the very term that underlies the discipline, viz., politics, this introductory course will attempt to offer a wide variety of perspectives – rather than focus on one particular variant as the correct or ideal way- on what is and how to do political science.

We will begin with some readings that offer an introduction to the discipline of Political Science – how is it commonly defined, what are the sub-disciplines that constitute it, what are the different foci of attention, and how has the discipline evolved over time and in different contexts.

From there, we walk through certain themes or topics that help us understand how we frame the world around us in political terms. We begin with two contrasting narratives as to how and why economic wealth is produced by individuals or nations – and why there is inequality in the world. One might be described as the reigning common sense in today’s world and is derived from Adam Smith and the other from a utopic and egalitarian perspective, that of Karl Marx. We look at related readings as well. These readings set the terms of debate between the pulls of liberalism and social democracy in broad terms, a debate that continues to animate much of political discussion to this day.

We then turn to issues of political domination, specifically colonialism – of some regions, countries, or individuals by others. Our section on colonialism includes works by George Orwell, Mohandas Gandhi, Edward Said and Ashis Nandy. Colonialism in the modern era fundamentally transformed the world and polarized it into a developed west and a largely underdeveloped east or Global South (to use a contemporary term).

We follow that by looking at issues of racial inequality, wherein we read the works of Frantz Fanon, George Lipsitz, Peggy McIntosh and Ira Katzenstein among others. The focus here will be to take the discussion of race, racism and racial inequalities from beyond the level of
the individual or the anecdotal and look especially at the structural attributes of race and privilege: how are they transmitted inter-generationally and what are the consequences of both wealth and poverty over the long duration.

We next look at patriarchy and note the ways in which our world is profoundly gendered by considering the work of Simone De Beauvoir and others from a feminist perspective. We specifically focus on how the national security state is gendered in specific ways by looking at the work of Cynthia Enloe and Carol Cohn.

The final set of readings – by Deleuze, Foucault and Nandy invite us to radically reimagine the political and politics from a perspective that is less wedded to what one might call epistemic realism and more attuned to the intertwined character of power and knowledge in our worlds.

As this is an introductory course, my ambition is to awaken an enthusiasm in you towards the study of politics and the political world in general. Ideally, the readings in the course will offer us opportunities for discussion and debate rather than outline a precise body of works and the contents of a well-rehearsed and coherent discipline with a handful of canonical texts. I am hoping to accompany the readings with a wide selection of appropriate documentaries and videos that illustrate the more theoretical discussions.

As a Writing Intensive course, you can (a) expect to do a fair amount of writing over the semester – in fact somewhere in the region of 40+ pages of writing; (b) expect detailed feedback on your drafts in terms of grammar, usage and style; and (c) have the opportunity to submit a rough draft of your final paper for comments from me prior to your submitting the final draft at the end of the semester.

Course Expectations: Students are expected to come to class having done the readings assigned for that week, and prepared to discuss the material with their colleagues. Each week, you will write a 2-3 page summary of the reading. This summary will integrate the material in the reading with the class discussion on it and is usually due the Thursday after. There will 14 such summary papers. (I will talk more about these summary papers in the first class). Besides the weekly summaries, you will write a final paper for the course which will be about 10-15 pages in length and explore the topic of any one of the weekly readings in much greater detail. We will talk more about this end-of-semester research paper at length in class. The 14 weekly summaries together constitute 60% of your final grade; the end of semester paper is worth 25% of the final grade; and the remaining 15% accrues from regular attendance and class participation in the seminar throughout the semester.

Course Readings: The readings for this course are all uploaded on Laulima – as are a number of other related supplementary readings you may consult for your benefit. The readings are arranged on a week-by-week basis: please consult this syllabus to make sure you know what the assigned reading for the next class is and be prepared for the same. I emphasize the importance of doing the readings prior to the class meetings.

Grading Policy: I define an “A” as representing excellent work, combining mastery over the materials with originality and clarity in your take-home essays and exam, and engaged, constructive class-participation. “B” is good and competent, but not exceptional, work both on the exams and in the classroom. “C” is average work, showing a reasonable amount of
effort and understanding. “D” is poor and barely adequate, and “F” is unacceptably shoddy and inadequate work. I urge you to stay abreast of the readings and participate fully from the beginning. Given the way the seminar is structured, it is best not to fall behind. As a rule, if you attend every class and submit every one of the assignments, chances are very good that you will get at least a B minus for the course – possibly better. The surest way to get a C or worse is to miss class and not submit assignments.

Class Schedule:

**Aug 27th:** Introduction to the course: what is politics? What is political science? Where does this discipline stand in relation to others in a typical university? What can you do with a degree in political science? Introduction to the syllabus, the readings, expectations, grading – followed by self-introduction by participants.

**Sep 3rd:** Introduction and Chapter One from David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (eds.) *Theory and Method in Political Science* (Laulima1) and Introduction from Jenny Edkins and Maja Zehfuss (eds.), *Global Politics: a new introduction* (Laulima2). First weekly summary due today.

**Sep 10th:** Read excerpts from Adam Smith *Wealth of Nations* and excerpts from Thomas Friedman, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*. (Together found as Laulima3).

**Sep 17th:** Read Robert Axelrod, “The Emergence of Cooperation,” (Laulima4) and Hugh Ward, “Rational Choice,” chapter 3 from Marsh and Stoker, (Laulima5).

**Sep 24th:** Read excerpts from Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*; Marx, “On the Jewish Question” (together found as Laulima6) and “Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts.” (Laulima7 – to be uploaded).

**Oct 1st:** Read excerpts from Ha Joon Chang, *The Bad Samaritans* (Laulima8).

**Oct 8th:** Read Sankaran Krishna, “How Does Colonialism Work?” (Laulima9) and excerpts from Globalization and Postcolonialism (Laulima10).


**Oct 22nd:** Read excerpts from Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Laulima13).

**Oct 29th:** Read Peggy McIntosh on “White Privilege and Male Privilege” and George Lipsitz, “Possessive Investment in Whiteness.” (Laulima14)

**Nov 5th:** Read Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail” and excerpts from Mohandas Gandhi’s “Hind Swaraj”. (Laulima15)

**Nov 12th:** Read excerpts from Ira Katznelson, “When Affirmative Action Was White.” (Laulima16).
Nov 19th: Read introduction and conclusion from Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (Laulima17) and Carol Cohn, “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals” (Laulima18).

Dec 3rd: Read Gilles Deleuze, “Postscript on the Societies of Control” and Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History.” (Laulima19).

Dec 10th: Summarizing the course; presentations by students of their final research papers.