

# POSC 151W: Political Issues, Fall 2016

## Course description and goals

This course is designed to introduce students to some of the fundamental questions and issues of politics. We will begin by asking what questions should be considered “political,” and why they should be thought of as political questions.

We will not, however, spend the entire semester in theorizing. Politics is a practical science, and we will consider the real-world implications of some of our provisional answers to fundamental political questions, focusing on current political issues. Though some of the topics we’ll cover are already set, the issues we discuss during the latter part of the semester will be determined by student interest.

By the end of the semester, students will have:

- explored some important political issues,
- developed an understanding of those issues,
- begun to develop positions on those issues, and be able to defend those positions,
- developed their analytical and writing skills, and
- learned some computing, research, and information management skills that will benefit them in their future studies and careers.

In the course of our exploration of the issues chosen for this semester, students will also learn how to ask appropriate questions, such as:

- What is the issue at hand?
- How should we understand or frame the issue?
- What assumptions underlie competing approaches to the issue?
- What are the central questions involved?
- What kind(s) of evidence would help us begin to answer our questions?
- Where might we look for such evidence?

As students work to accomplish these objectives through their participation in class and their completion of assignments, they will also meet some of the broader goals of the Sophia Program in Liberal Learning. We will focus particularly on:

## Social Science I LO1 outcomes:

- A Saint Mary’s student identifies and explains social science concepts and theories about human

behavior, systems, and cultures.

- A Saint Mary's student applies social science concepts and theories in her analysis of human behavior, systems, and cultures.
- A Saint Mary's student recognizes and explains effects of diversity and equity in specific areas such as class, race, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and/or privilege.

## LO2 outcomes in writing:

LO2	Writing Program Outcomes (suboutcomes for LO2)
A Saint Mary's student employs conventions of academic writing...	All goals below express these conventions. Mechanics* focuses on technical details such as citation form. This is also addressed by the Revision outcome: "A Saint Mary's student reevaluates and revises her work in response to feedback."
...to formulate meaningful claims,	A Saint Mary's student expresses the central idea of her essay in a focused thesis (Thesis).
construct effective arguments	A Saint Mary's student organizes her material in a logical sequence of well-structured paragraphs (Organization)
and employ evidence appropriately.	A Saint Mary's student supports her ideas with sufficient persuasive evidence (Support).
She communicates her ideas in writing with precision and style.	A Saint Mary's student expresses her ideas clearly and appropriately for the intended audience (Style), AND *A Saint Mary's student follows conventions of grammar, punctuation, syntax, and citation in the discipline in which she is writing (Mechanics).

## When and where we meet

All of our class meetings are in Madeleva 211B.

We meet Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 10:00–10:50 a.m., and on Tuesdays we meet from 9:30–10:20 a.m.

## Contact information and office hours

The most reliable way to contact me is by email at [acavende@saintmarys.edu](mailto:acavende@saintmarys.edu). Please note that I do not check email on Sundays — ever. I *occasionally* check on Saturdays, but not regularly. With those exceptions, I make every effort to respond to within 48 hours. If it's been longer than that and you haven't heard back, please don't hesitate to check with me to be sure I received your message.

I'm also reachable by phone. My office phone is 574–284–4430.

My usual office hours are

- 11:00–12:00 on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays
- 10:30–12:30 on Tuesdays

My office is Spes Unica 263.

If those times don't work for you, I'm happy to make alternate arrangements. Feel free to stop by the office to see if I'm in and it's a good time; if it isn't, we'll arrange a time that works for both of us. Alternately, bring your calendar to class and we'll set something up. If you use Google Calendar, my free/busy times are visible to everyone at Saint Mary's, and you're welcome to make an appointment on your calendar and invite me to the meeting.

## Readings

We have only one textbook for this course:

Scott, Gregory M., and Stephen M. Garrison. 2011. *The Political Science Student Writer's Manual*. 7th ed. Boston: Pearson.

We'll select appropriate readings for each of our topics as the semester progresses.

## Course calendar and assignment schedule

Below, you'll find our calendar for the semester's work.

The calendar is public, so if you're using Google Calendar, you can click the button to subscribe; if you do, any changes made here will automatically be pushed to your account. In any case, please be sure to check the calendar regularly. Though I've planned the semester out carefully, sometimes the unexpected occurs, so there may be some minor changes along the way.

You will note that many of our class sessions have no readings assigned as yet. *This is intentional*. We will locate appropriate readings together based on the questions raised in class.

(The online version of the syllabus has a dynamic Google Calendar embedded here. Topics covered include Brexit, digital privacy and the Fourth Amendment, immigration, and race and politics in the United States. During the last two weeks of the semester, students give group presentations on issues of interest to them.)

## Assignments and grading

# Essays

## Drafted essays (450 points, or 45% of semester grade):

- Essay 1: Brexit/EU blog post (long form). At least 750 words. (100) DUE SEPTEMBER 5
- Essay 2: “Framing” essay: explore the ways in which two different sources frame the same issue. At least 1000 words. (100) DUE SEPTEMBER 19
- Essay 3: Article review. At least 1000 words. (125) DUE OCTOBER 31
- Essay 4: Sourced essay. At least 1250 words. (125) DUE NOVEMBER 30. You should submit a full draft by November 14.

## Timed essays (150 points, or 15% of semester grade):

- Essay 1 (75)
- Essay 2 (75)

Essays are assessed based on both their respective assignment sheets and the Writing Proficiency Program’s Basic W rubric (distributed to students during the first week of class).

## Other assignments (400 points, or 40% of semester grade):

- Annotated bibliography (125)
- Online portfolio (125)
- Group presentation (100)
- Writing conference (50) (Appointments available weeks of September 26 and October 3)

These assignments are assessed based on the criteria given in their respective assignment sheets.

***This course has no final exam.***

# Attendance

Regular attendance is expected. When you miss class you cheat yourself out of both the material presented and your colleagues’ contributions to class discussion. You also cheat your colleagues of *your* contributions to the class. Accordingly, excessive absences (for whatever reason) may result in a lowering of your final grade for the course.

# Class cancellation

If I need to cancel a class due to illness or some other serious reason, I will make every effort to notify you prior to class time. I will email the class and post a notice to this site, if at all possible, and I will also try to arrange to have a notice of the cancellation posted outside the classroom.

If I am not in the classroom and you have received no notice of a cancellation, please wait ten minutes before concluding that something has happened and I've been unable to inform you.

# Technology in the classroom

## Electronic devices

I do not ordinarily police your gadget use in class, even when those gadgets aren't needed for a specific class activity. They can, after all, be very useful for taking notes, looking up information related to the class discussion, and the like. I do, however, ask that you be courteous. Please be sure that your cell phone is set to *silent* (*not* vibrate, which can actually be quite loud, especially if the phone happens to be in the same bag as your books), and that your use of any devices does not become a distraction to yourself or others. (Bear in mind that anyone sitting near you can probably see what's on your computer or tablet screen. Also, remember that multitasking while maintaining focus is *really* difficult. If you're shopping or catching up on email, Twitter, or Facebook, you're missing a lot of what's going on in class.)

I reserve the right to request that you put your device(s) away if I get the sense that you're not paying attention or that you're distracting those around you.

## Email

Email is the official means of communication at Saint Mary's College, and all official communications from the College will be sent to your saintmarys.edu address. It is therefore essential that you check that address on a regular basis (I would strongly recommend you check it daily during the work week). If you fail to do so, you may miss vital information.

Please use your saintmarys.edu address for all communications regarding this course. (If you have other email addresses and would like to be able to check them all in one central location, please see me. I can make a few suggestions about ways to do that.)

# Academic honesty

Academic inquiry always involves conversation. Sometimes that conversation is verbal; at other times, it takes written form. Whatever form it takes, academic conversation at its best enables us all to learn from each other. The proper citation of one's sources is an important way of engaging conversation partners who aren't physically present. Plagiarism makes use of our conversation partners' ideas without acknowledging their contribution; it robs them of their voice.

It is this failure to acknowledge and involve conversation partners that makes plagiarism the most serious academic offense a student or faculty member can commit. It is the passing off of another's ideas or words as one's own; in effect, it is theft. It also undercuts the trust that is essential in any community of learning. The plagiarist shows disrespect not only for those from whom she steals and for those to whom she presents the plagiarized work, but also for herself. She is, in effect, saying that she is incapable of doing her own work, or that she is too lazy to acknowledge others involved in the conversation.

For all of these reasons, Saint Mary's College maintains an academic honesty policy, which can be found on pp. 48–49 of the 2016–2017 [Academic Guide for First-Year Students](#). Accordingly, I treat incidents of plagiarism very seriously. At minimum, a student whose work is discovered to be plagiarized will fail the assignment in question. Truly egregious or repeated instances of plagiarism may result in failure for the course, not just the assignment. In keeping with the College's policy, I will report instances of plagiarism to Academic Affairs.

We will be working together this semester to ensure that everyone in the class is aware of what plagiarism is and is familiar with how to document sources correctly. (Problems with citation style and/or formatting do not constitute plagiarism. I will point out such problems and help you correct them, but as long as, when you've borrowed words or ideas from someone else, you indicate that and point to the source from which you've borrowed, you have not plagiarized.) Both our own [Writing Center](#) and the [Purdue Online Writing Lab \(OWL\)](#) are excellent resources, and can provide you with assistance in developing your writing skills as well as assistance with proper documentation. If ever you are in doubt as to whether your paper contains plagiarized elements, please ask prior to submitting it. Given reasonable advance notice, I am always happy to go over a draft with you, and to answer any questions you might have about how to cite your sources properly. Never let the pressures of academia lead you into dishonesty. Character, self-respect, and the enjoyment of good conversation are far more important than what may seem more immediately obvious measures of success.

## Students with disabilities

If you have had documented academic adjustments (accommodations) in the past, or think you may be eligible for them presently, you should contact Ms. Iris Giamo in the Disabilities Resource Office (DRO), Madeleva 103C, by email ([igiamo@saintmarys.edu](mailto:igiamo@saintmarys.edu)) for an appointment to address this matter. The DRO is responsible for coordinating academic adjustments each semester and will issue a letter of documentation to your faculty for the current semester. Requests for such adjustments will not be honored without a letter of eligibility from the DRO. Securing reasonable accommodations requires timely action on the part of the student. Please contact me for an appointment to discuss how we will implement your accommodations.