

# Occidental College

## 2024 Spring General Course Evaluations

**Course:** POLS101\_1: Amer Politics/Public Policy  
**Instructor:** Isaac Hale \*  
**Response Rate:** 15/26 (57.69 %)

### 1 - 1. How would you describe your level of engagement in this course? How did you engage in class? For example: Did you come to class prepared? Did you seek help from the instructor, peers, or other supports when needed?

<b>Response Rate</b>	13/26 (50%)
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- good
- I would say my level of engagement in this course was high.
- I sometimes came prepared to class but I sometimes didn't. While plenty of questions are asked throughout, the class is pretty lecture-heavy and sometimes difficult to follow. I did not seek lots of support from the professor, but when I did, it was helpful.
- I began the semester doing all of the readings and stopped doing them after the middle of the semester because I have taken a class that covers most of this material but I couldn't bypass this course. I always did all of the assignments and sometimes spoke in class.
- I was one of the more engaged students in this class, I answered many questions and the format of the class was that a lot of questions were asked so if you thought you knew the answer to something or if you did the readings you could easily participate a lot.
- I felt that I was engaged in the course. I did the readings, took notes, and participated in class.
- We were assigned readings on particular days. I did seek help from my professor when needed.
- I felt very engaged in the class as he offered class a lot of questions to think about, even if they possibly obvious. His no phone/computer policy seemed questionable, but it actually helped people focus and helped me stay engaged in a fun learning environment.
- Despite some parts of political science being tedious and boring, Professor Hale genuinely made them engaging for me. I did not expect to be as engaged in politics and the class in general but I was positively surprised as I feel more enlightened about the country we live in! We engaged in debates, videos, and exercises.
- I feel like I always came to class prepared however I should've sought more help from my professor. I liked watching videos in class because it created a nice break between lectures.
- I was pretty engaged in this course, I would mostly come to class prepared but would be very involved in class. I often would ask questions, answer questions, and occasionally would stop after class to follow up on topics I was confused about. Me and my peers would often work together on our weekly reflection papers, and help each other with material we had questions on.
- For the earlier weeks of class, I did most of the readings. However, towards later weeks, as I had work for other classes, I found that I did not have enough time to complete the readings. While I was able to understand the lectures, the response papers were more difficult for weeks that I had not completed the readings, although this makes sense, as the readings introduce concepts that are covered in depth in the lectures, and the readings also frame the lectures in wider contexts.
- I enjoyed engaging with this class through the reading materials provided, the lecture slides to take notes on, and some fun videos to discuss! I really think this was an intro class that had to much material to work with.

### 2 - 2. How did this course influence, change, or help shape your understanding of the subject matter?

<b>Response Rate</b>	15/26 (57.69%)
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- yes
- This course was highly influential on my understanding of the foundations of American democracy and the field of political science.
- The course revealed to me the layers of the political system, including the good and the bad. This course highlighted the structural flaws of the political system and how it evolved into what it is today. I have learned a lot about the inner workings of American politics and it has showed me how difficult it is to make progress, and the reasons why that is.
- The course helped reinforce some of the fundamental aspects of politics but I don't think it necessarily changed my understanding since I knew a lot of this prior to the class.
- I definitely learned a lot about American politics and this course broadened significantly my understanding of the subject matter. Aside from the basic highschool class on American politics I didn't have much prior knowledge of this topic so this was a great introductory course.
- It helped me have a better understanding on politics.
- Since I am an international student and had no idea about the politics in America, This class was an eye opener as to how different it is from my home country.
- Simplifying grand ideas and topics into understandable terms made the overall material comprehensive for all students, no matter the difficulty of a given topic (for example, pivotal politics models). By breaking down these complex topics and ideas into simple concepts, applying them to current news was easy.
- It helped me better understand a lot of the political and democratic processes in the US, specifically how elections work and how legislation is constructed and passed. These fundamental understandings of the US Democratic Republic were fascinating and will definitely help me as I pursue my interests in politics, law, and environmental policy.
- I was not always interested in politics, as I thought before it was a waste of time and my opinion made no difference. After listening and engaging in this course, I swiftly understood that was not the case. I learned that as citizens we have an accountability to be informed and stand up our rights and opinions.
- I was never tuned in to politics very much and this class helped me understand the basics and process of things happening politically in our world.
- This course really shaped my understanding of the American political structure, and built it up from very little academic knowledge. I haven't taken a politics class before, so my only connection to politics was through the news and current events. This class gave me a strong understanding the political system that I now feel confident applying to the real world, and has helped me better understand current political issues.
- I found the idea that checks and balances lead to a status quo bias as especially insightful, as in previous classes in high school, checks and balances were presented in an uncritically positive light. I also gained a greater interest in the material. I previously thought that the course would be an entry level course to fulfill a core requirement, but it was extremely interesting to the point that I decided to take an additional political science course for the next semester.
- This course gave me more context to understanding the political systems of the U.S. As a UEP major it helped me better understand the policy side of the major. I also was able to connect the dots between the econ 101 class I took last semester and POLS 101; seeing the overlap in ideology and how one affects the other.
- It really expended my knowledge on American Politics and really was the best government/politics intro class I have taken.

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### 3 - 3. What skills or capacities did you expect to gain from this course? How and to what extent did the course help you to develop those skills or capacities?

**Response Rate** 14/26 (53.85%)

- nothing much understood all the topics prior to this class
- I expected to improve my ability to have discussions about both American politics and politics in general. I would say this course was very helpful in achieving these goals.
- I expected to gain an understanding of how policy is passed and the process behind it, which I successfully learned. This course helped me develop skills that better understand people on all ends of the spectrum, from voters to lobbyists and incumbents, and the thought process of their actions which is more nuanced than one might assume.
- I expected to learn the basics of the US political system which was accomplished. I didn't necessarily expect to gain any specific skills and I wouldn't say I necessarily did gain any skills.
- I expected just a general idea of American politics to be gained throughout this course -- in reality, I gained a good amount of knowledge, honestly more than I even expected. The format of the course was nice with the weekly response papers so I thought that really helped with my learning.
- I expected to learn more & felt the course was very informative
- I expected to get a basic idea of how politics worked in the US and now I believe I have a basic understanding.
- How to be strong political thinker is what I have learned from this class. This class has made clear that people in all political sections, even ones that abstain from every political conversation, have a self-interest and effect the political environment in the US. Being able to move around self-interests and compromise is critical for everyday situations and I feel this class opened that ideology to me as our society continues to get more polarized, politically active, and self-interested.
- I learned the skill of note taking and elaborating on lectures, as most of the assignments were mostly based on in class lecture.
- I hoped to gain just an overall better understanding of how politics works. Although some things were difficult to understand, this class taught me the basics.
- I was simply expecting to learn about politics, which I feel I absolutely did. This class has provided me invaluable foundational knowledge that I know I will require in my future endeavors. Furthermore, this class helped me feel confident writing and speaking about political issues through my engagement and submissions.
- I also improved my writing as a result of the response papers, which required me to summarize the material and then make an argument.
- I would say this course did not help me develop very many skills but rather just gave me a lot of information. I would have liked to develop more writing skills specific to politics and perhaps public speaking about politics.
- I expected to gain foundational knowledge on the US political system and government. All aspects of engagement with this course really came from going to class, doing the readings, and following along in lecture.

### 4 - 4. What aspects/features of the instruction were particularly effective or ineffective? What aspects/features of the course facilitated or impeded your learning? For example: How well did the professor structure class periods (e.g., discussion facilitation, group work, in-class exercises, lectures, handouts, etc), reading questions, assignments, exams, community-based work, field work, laboratory work, studio work, etc.?

**Response Rate** 15/26 (57.69%)

- n./a
- I thought the lectures were all very interesting and avoided feeling slow or boring through good pacing and well placed humor.
- I liked the VOX videos and clips we watched during class sometimes because the visuals and explanations made it a lot easier to understand. I think the talk-heavy lectures were hard to follow at times. I think the pivotal politics model practice was effective because it was hands-on.
- I think the weekly response papers were a good way to get students to participate in class since coming to class was part of the way you could get answers for the response paper. I also prefer this to a response to every reading. I think the class did get monotonous some times because it's so lecture heavy.
- I thought that the weekly response papers was effective and the way the professor asked questions often during the lecture to not only keep the class engaged but to make sure that we were following along.
- I liked the response papers. I think it was a good way to see how we understood the material.
- The response paper which was due every week were particularly effective as it helped me get a better understanding of the topic which was taught at the end of every week.
- The overall structures of the lectures were very well organized and easy to follow, given the expectation that readings for that day were done. One particular thing I appreciated was that the slides were always posted after every lecture, making class material more accessible and showing the professor genuinely cared about students learning.
- His lectures were great, giving enough time to take notes, ask questions, and think about what every thing he was trying to teach us about the American political system. To some, learning about politics and how democratic processes work in the US can be daunting, but he did a great job and I had no issues learning about the content. The style of homework and assignments were very doable and effective, too. I have no issues at all with this class.
- I sometimes felt the readings that were assigned were unnecessary as the lecture and powerpoint slides do a great job of analyzing and discussing them in class. But all in all, reading of all kinds and going over something twice has no harm.
- My professor was very organized from the get-go which helped me be more organized in this class. I liked the response papers and how the questions were challenging because looking back at the course material only helped me learn more than I thought I did.
- One of the most effective aspects of this course was the assumption Professor Hale made that we did not know anything prior to this class, but that we were smart enough to understand higher level ideas. I never felt lost or confused in the class because Prof Hale did such a fantastic job going over all the building blocks in depth, and slowly built up our understandings until we were able to put things together in a more advanced manner by the end of the class.
- The response papers were helpful, as they checked my understanding of the material. The papers also made my notes useful, which was a positive side-effect.
- I feel like the lecture style of this class was a bit repetitive. Improvements could be having more handouts and group exercises. Also going over the readings more would have been helpful. The lectures spoke adjacently to the readings but we did not spend a lot of time on the content of the articles which gave less motivation to actually read them. I enjoyed most learning about contemporary politics because it was engaging and relevant. Sometimes learning about really old white men's theories on politics can feel less relatable.
- Professor was very welcoming and engaging with all students and made it a class where participation was valued!

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### 5 - 5. What aspects of the course or instruction helped or hindered the creation of an inclusive learning environment that is responsive to, and promotes the success of, a diverse group of students?

Response Rate	13/26 (50%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• n/a</li> <li>• I thought prof Hale did a good job encouraging participation during the lectures.</li> <li>• N/A</li> <li>• Everyone was encouraged to participate and while not everyone did, the option was definitely open and the professor tried not to call on the same students too often and hear new voices.</li> <li>• Professor hale made the class fun and wanted to help everyone better understand politics</li> <li>• We were asked to form a group to complete a particular handout and I believe that helped or hindered the creation of an inclusive learning environment that is responsive to, and promotes the success of, a diverse group of students.</li> <li>• Everyone had a chance to speak and offer their political opinion on things, however, there was never no judge from the professor and was always open to any type of questions. The class felt very open to students and their curiosity, no matter what your identity and understanding of politics was.</li> <li>• Professor Hale, was often neutral and did a great job to include most perspectives and groups of people, which is important in politics, as the country, consists of many diverse individuals.</li> <li>• Everyone was open to different views and ideals, leading this learning environment to me very responsive.</li> <li>• Professor Hale did a great job keeping this class very lighthearted while still underscoring the deep sociopolitical issues that have plagued the US government. He strongly condemned the government on the harmful decisions they made, but always was able to do this in a very gentle way, adding humor when applicable. This helped the class be very inclusive and representative of its students, but also created an environment that wasn't too heavy where everyone felt able to participate.</li> <li>• I appreciated how the teacher tried to call on people who did not respond as much, as that helped other people participate more.</li> <li>• I would have loved to learn more about the perspectives of POC politicians and been assigned readings that grounded what we were learning in class in real world situations. For example I think readings would be more engaging if we read interesting news articles and then talked about how politics influences these real life situations. The most interesting assigned reading of the semester for me was the one about turbotax.</li> <li>• He created a space for everyone to engage with political matter and made funny jokes to keep the class lighthearted when dealing with serious matter.</li> </ul>	

### 6 - 6. What other suggestions (if any) do you have for the next time the course is taught?

Response Rate	10/26 (38.46%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• n/a</li> <li>• I think response papers should be graded a little differently. The questions were helpful for understanding the material, but I felt that I was marked off for very minor and specific things. This wouldn't necessarily be an issue if the papers were not graded out of 6 points and didn't makeup 60% of my grade. I would suggest that the papers are at least graded out of more points.</li> <li>• Nothing in particular</li> <li>• -</li> <li>• None, it was a great and informative class.</li> <li>• N/A</li> <li>• none :)</li> <li>• n/a</li> <li>• Keep in mind there are a lot of non POLS majors in this class and it would be great to ground the content of this course in a broader way. I grasp the necessity of covering the syllabus requirements, but I'm enthusiastic about integrating the content with other subjects in a creative manner.</li> <li>• Nothing it was awesome intro to politics, will be taking another course!</li> </ul>	

### 7 - 7. What else (if anything) would you like to share about the course or the instruction?

Response Rate	8/26 (30.77%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• n/a</li> <li>• Prof Hale is a quite charismatic and engaging lecturer and seemed genuinely interested and highly knowledgeable on the subject matter.</li> <li>• Great professor and a great introductory course, gained a good understanding of the subject, maybe the response papers were sometimes graded very critically but I guess if that's the format then that makes sense.</li> <li>• -</li> <li>• N/A</li> <li>• nope:)</li> <li>• I think Professor Hale is a very good teacher, and his class structures, his engagement, and his material all promoted a wonderful experience over the past semester. He is very kind and understanding about issues that can arise, and treated all students fairly and with empathy. I really appreciate him and his course, and everything it has helped me with</li> <li>• Overall a very engaging course, the professor is also able to make course content interesting and relevant.</li> </ul>	