

Occidental College

2024 Spring General Course Evaluations

Course: POLS201_0: California Politics
Instructor: Isaac Hale *
Response Rate: 16/24 (66.67 %)

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?

Response Rate	15/24 (62.5%)
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- I always completed the readings for class, came on time, and participated wherever I felt it would be beneficial to the class conversation. When I has questions I would ask or email professor Hale, or consult with classmates. I also always tried to find the answer in the materials/notes that I already had before seeking help. The fact that Professor Hale posts the slides each day was very helpful to that end.
- I felt very engaged in this class. The slides and material were very approachable, and the course work wasn't super intense
- I did the readings and came to class prepared to discuss them. I answered questions in class to the best of my ability, and tried to engage with guest speakers when appropriate.
- I came to class prepared (very clear instructions and schedule so that I could do this). Support was available when needed/asked.
- One of the most helpful things in this class that increased my engagement was the pertinence of the information as I felt like every class was building on something topical occurring in CA politics. I really enjoyed the text book for this class as well as I felt like it gave a good overview of the topic. Prof. Hale is clearly passionate about CA politics and I am glad I took this class and learned from him.
- I felt like I was very engaged in this course as it was super interesting and I was excited to learn every time I came in. The content was very engaging and I loved the way it was taught. I think I came to class prepared and had a great time learning.
- I would say I was quite engaged in the class. To be honest, I felt like the time was somewhat of a hindrance to this class because I get super sleepy during this time of day. Maybe that is just a me problem. Anyways, I always did the readings and homework thoroughly and took detailed notes.
- I had high level engagement in the course. I read all the material and took notes during lectures. I was asking questions in class and keeping up the workload. I studied for the quiz with my peer in the class and went to them for support when needed.
- I would describe myself as engaged in this course. I came to class having done the readings and took active notes for the entire class period. I spoke to Professor Hale in office hours when I had a question. When we had guest speakers, I submitted my questions on time and gave my complete attention to the presenter.
- I think I was very engaged with this class. This was the only class I took this semester that was NOT for a major requirement or core requirement, so I was very much in this class because I wanted to be. I did the readings, and that was mainly what this class consisted of.
- I was very engaged in this course through making sure I was up to date on the readings so I could properly understand the lecture for the day. The lecture paired with engaging presentations allowed me to constantly maintain attention to the topic at hand.
- I was very engaged in this course! The readings were all interesting and I appreciated the mix between academic sources and everyday news sources. I also think the number of readings/assignments/quizzes/etc. was perfect. I knew that if I came to class, took notes, and did the readings, I would succeed in the course. Professor Hale was very helpful in answering emails, questions, and providing support during office hours when needed.
- I thought my level of engagement in this course was good. I engaged by coming to class prepared, having done the readings and being fully present in class.
- I was engaged with the class at a high level. I came to class with the reading done, prepared for the quizzes each Wednesday, and sought help in office hours.
- I was very engaged with the class. I did the readings consistently, and volunteered in class with questions or comments.

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

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- I really enjoyed how practical the flow of the course was. I feel like there could be a whole California politics major, and I appreciated the opportunity to think about this complex system in a somewhat isolated way while still connecting course content to the country at large.
- As a non-Californian (and non state resident), this class shaped an understanding of local politics that I think is generally overlooked
- The course was incredibly informative and wells structured
- It certainly deepened my understanding of California politics, however in some areas I think we sort of missed the forest for the trees. For example, I think our discussion of water rights and federalism was a bit too zoomed in and relied on the reading to fill in the gaps.
- It largely informed me on something I was interested in and did not have a lot of info about previously.
- I know so much more about California government now and I think that is so important as I live here most of the time! I now know about all of Californias fun quirks and differences in government to other states, as well as all the large problems that California faces. I feel like I got a full and really real understanding of the state of California's politics today and how we got here, as well as what we need to do to try and fix some of its largest issues.
- I really enjoyed the content of this class. I learned a lot about CA politics that I did not know beforehand and, as a result, I feel much more educated about CA government now. I also like that I feel like I will be able to use this knowledge in other states and on a larger level than just CA.
- This course really helped my understanding of California politics on a operational level as well as one a historical one. I learned a lot about why things are done the way they are in california politics because of this class as well as the key figures involved with those decisions and actions.
- This course significantly expanded my knowledge of California state politics. I had very little prior knowledge going into the course, but the curriculum was able to teach me the basic structure and go much further in depth on select issues.
- Professor Hale provided a fascinating look at California government and politics in this class, and I really enjoyed looking into all of the various parts of California's political ecosystem. I would have liked a bit more on our national representatives from California, but that's very much a personal preference rather than a critique. A great, low-stakes class that still taught me some really interesting things.
- Coming from an average understanding of the subject matter, the course really improved my knowledge regarding California and the systems it has. By showing me many different aspects about California I was able to comprehend the depth of it all.
- I came in with very little knowledge of CA government, and I feel very well-informed about CA policy. The course sparked my interest in more domestic issues, as I usually take courses outside the politics department. I think this is a wonderful course for all Oxy students, as it shaped my understanding of Los Angeles and broader state politics. The course really helped me understand the CA elections and ballot initiatives, which I think is one of the most helpful/practical skills.
- I learned a lot about California politics and I was surprised about how many new things I learned. I am from California and I feel like I know a fair amount about California politics, but this class went beyond my knowledge and was super informative.
- Prior to this class I was not aware of the different layers within California politics. Learning about the history and the people involved in shaping the policy of the state has made me think more critically of politicians within the state, but also actions taken to address social issues.
- This class was very useful to me. Being from California and going to school in Los Angeles, I was able to connect my general understanding of California culture with academic knowledge on the political systems in the state.

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	13/24 (54.17%)
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- This whole class was like a case study. I gained the ability to take broader lessons from targeted course material.
- This course helped strengthen my ability to do readings for the important takeaways and relevant topics, as well as how to craft interesting questions about course material and guest speakers' areas of expertise.
- I do not know if this course gave me particularly any skills which I did not previously have, but it was very informative. Not a lot of writing or technical aspects were done, but I don't believe that was necessary for this class.
- I expected to just learn in depth about the politics and government of California, and I feel that this is exactly what this course did. I love the way professor Hale taught the course and I feel like I was learning in a way that wasn't based in busy work or memorization. I truly learned valuable information that will inform my voting and political decisions in the future.
- I expected to learn about CA politics, which is what happened. What I did not expect was to learn so much about some national policies and issues. I also learned a lot about other states and how CA government works compared to the rest of the U.S.
- I expected to learn about the structure of California government, but I learned so much more than that. I learned about key legislation, elections, governmental agencies, and politicians. It covered so much material that is so relevant to my life being born and raised in the Bay Area and going to school in LA. I learned about the importance of polling and data tracking to understanding trends and patterns in California politics. This course was fundamental to shaping my perception and understanding of politics in California.
- I expected to gain significant knowledge about California's government and its politics. The readings, quizzes, and lectures all helped me to gain and maintain this knowledge during the semester.
- As someone who thinks of themselves as a "leftist who still thinks we can work within the system a little bit", this class was extremely helpful in providing a good look at how policy works locally and statewide in California.
- I expected to gain a throughout understanding that many factors are in play when topics and issues are brought up and that not every problem has a simple solution. By testing my critical thinking skills, the course helped me achieve this.
- I expected to do a bit more writing in this course, but we had very few writing assignments. I don't feel that we necessarily learned skills, but rather the content was the focus of the course. I learned a lot about the government structure of CA, but also how CA differs from other state governments. I learned how to analyze a policy in depth through the policy memo. I also learned how to find information on state officials and more about CA institutions.
- Considering I am from here, I thought it would be interesting to take a class about my home state and learn new things especially if I one day am involved in California politics. I thought the class was great and taught me so much about the history and current politics of California.
- I expected to gain factual information about California politics. I gained skills about how to understand propositions and their opponents, the initiative process, and the recall process. I now feel educated enough to know what each entails and what qualifies an initiative or recall to occur.
- The class provided a general overview of California policy, often comparing it to other parts of the country. I now feel much more knowledgeable on California politics.

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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 16/24 (66.67%)

- I really enjoyed the way the course was structured. The reading was just the right amount, the quizzes were logical. The speakers were great as well. I didn't love the multiple choice aspect of the quizzes, but what are you gonna do about it.
- I found the general lecture format pretty effective, albeit sometimes draining because of the sheer number of slides. I think maybe cutting back on the number of slides might help in that regard
- The CA character of the day was a very fun and informative part of the course that allowed us to learn about the subject matter while also gaining fun knowledge about individuals in CA politics. The quizzes were a good way to ensure that students were keeping up with the required reading for the course.
- The quizzes helped to alleviate a small problem Professor Hale has had in the past (disconnected readings and class discussion).
- I think that the way this class was taught suited my learning style. I liked how it did feel relatively low stakes but since I was so interested in the subject matter it was easier for me to absorb the material and do well on the weekly quizzes. I can also acknowledge that others may have wanted even more conversation (among all of us rather than a couple who are more well versed in politics) or involvement/activity.
- One of the aspects of the introduction was the California Character of the Day. This brought in a fun, non-academic element of the class that drew me in every class period. The CCOTD was something I looked forward to every Monday and Wednesday. Something that would have helped facilitate my learning in this class would be either slowing down on slides or making the presentations shorter. I felt like every class was a race to the finish line and I did not grasp every subject.
- I thought the classes were structured super well. I love professor Hales style of teaching and lecturing and I also think the weekly quizzes were a great way to check in and make sure that I understood that weeks content. I feel like the course really focused on my learning and not just a grade and I really enjoyed that.
- I struggled with the quizzes for some reason. I felt like I did the readings thoroughly and took really good notes and yet somehow, I would always end up surprised at what was on the quizzes. I would even study before class. I do not really think they were ineffective, maybe it is just now how I am wired to learn. I did, however, really enjoy all of the guest speakers. I thought they were very informative and I liked hearing them all speak.
- I think the lectures were very effective at clearly explaining the material. I really appreciate the slides being posted to Moodle to use as a study guide for the quizzes. I appreciated the guest lectures to hear from people currently working in the industry. I think sometimes the quizzes were not on the information I studied/didn't align with the material that was taught or read for the day. I wish the quizzes covered the material we were supposed to read for the day or the week rather than previous lectures of weeks prior. It added extra pressure and made me feel worse when I thought I understood the information well.
- The class was structured in a largely lecture format. Though, traditionally, I find lectures boring and difficult to stay engaged in, Professor Hale's lecture style is engaging and interesting. I came to class each day excited to learn! The weekly quizzes were slightly anxiety producing, but ultimately helped me to stay on top of the readings and internalize the information I was learning.
- The material was very good, but I will say I wish this class was a bit more interactive, and less lecture-based. Many studies* show that students learn more when they are directly engaging in class and with the material, and while I don't have a specific answer for this problem (which annoys me as much as it annoys you, probably), but I do know that the problem exists, and that, I think, is at least a step. *STUDIES: <https://thecampanile.org/29709/opinion/emphasizing-hands-on-learning-proves-more-effective-in-retaining-information-through-humanities-stem-courses/> <https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2022/07/20/why-active-learning-more-effective-traditional-modes-opinion> <https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2019/09/study-shows-that-students-learn-more-when-taking-part-in-classrooms-that-employ-active-learning-strategies/>
- The majority of readings were effective in facilitating my desire to learn but some were more of a slog than others. Lectures functioned as they should with the quizzes being important enough to matter yet not be world ending if done poorly on.
- I loved the guest speakers brought in! I also enjoyed that the structure of the class was consistent, with quizzes every Wednesday, CA character of the day, etc. I think Hale's lectures were very well planned and followed current events perfectly! This was a great course!
- I thought the lectures were very informative and thorough. I thought having guest speakers was really unique and a great opportunity for our class. One thing I would improve on is to have less slides and go slower through the lecture. Sometimes slides were just skipped through very quickly and I was never sure if that meant it was less important.
- I found the guest speaker especially helpful and engaging. This year we had very relevant guests like Senator Durazo and LADA Gascon, but also experts within the policy research field to give the class an informed overview of the types of careers within California government. The lectures I found engaging and well organized to understand.
- Professor Hale always does his best to keep the class engaged. I actually really enjoyed his "California Characters of the Day" and attitude he brought to class. The readings felt manageable, and professor Hale is always very clear on assignment deadlines or assignments.

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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 14/24 (58.33%)

- Professor Hale was always available to answer questions. Since there were few assignments throughout we were really able to focus on getting good notes on the content.
- The classroom environment was very welcoming to any questions!
- The professor would sometimes ask students about their individual experiences working in politics, learning in other departments, or even just living in California in order to stimulate the conversation around seemingly abstract topics.
- Since the class was mostly lecture based, a lot of discussion in the class seemed to be propelled by students with particular knowledge or interest.
- I think the ability to ask questions at any time and the fact that professor Hale would work hard to make sure our questions were thoroughly answered even if it was in the next class was really great. I felt that I could really have great discussions in this class and look at both sides of every issue without having a bias involved.
- Professor Hale is exceptional at creating a fun, inclusive classroom environment and he honestly made learning about CA politics and government really exciting.
- I think there could've been work done to make students comfortable asking questions. The same few people spoke in class, so I wish there could've been more group discussion to make people more comfortable to share their ideas.
- This course and its instruction created an environment where I felt comfortable sharing my opinions about California politics, wether through a straw poll or class discussion.
- Professor Hale did a good job at making an inclusive environment for students.
- The lectures were always open for discussion or responses and many times people were able to provide more to the conversation based on their former experiences which I enjoyed.
- We did not talk to one another much, but for this class, I think that it worked well. It was lecture heavy and there was not much group work, but there was class discussion and I think that is just as valuable.
- The professor is amazing and made it so it was easy to participate. Even people who didn't quite have the right answer were responded to with positivity and enthusiasm.
- The quizzes were a good way to upkeep engagement and I did my best to prepare for them. Part of the challenge was predicting what material was going to be on it but I think it pushed me to be a better student.
- Professor Hale did his best to answer any questions. I really enjoyed when he did not know something of the top of his head, he would address it first thing at the start of the next class with a very clear and informed answer.

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

Response Rate 10/24 (41.67%)

- n/a
- perhaps more group discussion opportunities or more class wide discussions?
- Maybe more ways to involve the entirety of the class would be helpful, but I did find the lectures fascinating. Perhaps for students who need less lecture and more integration there are more hands on ways to involve the material rather than lecture and quizzes, but I enjoyed the routine of it.
- One of the suggestions I would have next time for this course is, instead of having questions submitted before each speaker, having a one page reflection do afterwards. This would have increased my level of engagement with the topics discussed, as well helped retain the information more readily.
- I loved this course! I don't really have any recommendations I think it was taught really well and it was also super fun. I learned so much and I had a wonderful time.
- Maybe some other small assignment that could be included in the grades.
- See above, that's really it.
- Perhaps one smaller writing assignment around midterms, to take the pressure off the final policy memo? Otherwise, I really enjoyed the format of the course!
- No major concerns or suggestions other than the lack of time for questions.
- I enjoy the lecture style class a lot, but providing the opportunity to converse with classmates within class time through group discussion or other activities would help me feel more connected to the class environment in general.

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

Response Rate 8/24 (33.33%)

- n/a
- California character of the day rocks
- I really loved this class and all classes that prof. Hale teaches. Thanks Prof. Hale! You should get a raise I think! Have a great summer. :)
- nope
- Professor Hale is a great teacher and he should absolutely teach this class again! A class I genuinely looked forward to most days, and the guest speakers he brought in (George Gascón, Maria Elena Durazo, Stan Oklobdzija, and others) felt well placed expanding reference on different policy issues.
- Hale is a great professor. You can tell he truly cares about his students and is passionate about what he's teaching. I am really happy I took this course, and I learned a lot!
- I really enjoyed this class and I believe that it taught me more real life valuable information on how to be an informed California resident. It helped me think critically about where I live and the policies within my city. I am very glad that I took this class and I hope that more students can take it in the future and have a similar experience and impact. Thank you for a great semester.
- I had an awesome semester in the class and hope other students did as well!