

**POLS 2890**  
**Weird Democracy: US Politics in a Global Perspective**  
Spring 2020  
12:30-1:45 pm T / Th  
318 Classroom Building

Dr. Holley E. Hansen  
Murray Hall 203  
Email: [holleyh@okstate.edu](mailto:holleyh@okstate.edu)

Office Hours: 4:30-7pm M,<sup>1</sup>  
9-11am & 1:30-2:30 pm F,  
or by appointment

## Course Description

While many Americans think that the US is a typical democracy and a model for others around the world, the reality is that we are actually a weird case with very weird rules. In this course, students will learn some of the main differences in how democracies are run in other parts of the world, and discuss the political, economic, and social outcomes that emerge from these differences.

## Required Reading

No need to purchase books! All of our required readings are posted on the Canvas page.

## Class Expectations

Make sure you are familiar with official university policy (consult the attachment at the end of this syllabus for more information), especially regarding academic integrity. And, a few quick highlights regarding policies relevant to this course:

- You are expected to **read** each assignment **before class time** the day it is due.
- You are welcome to use **cell phones or laptops**. Just make sure you are not using them in a way that is distracting to other students.
- I have a pretty flexible **attendance policy** (see “Attendance & Participation” in the grading section below), but be aware that if you start missing classes, you will have a very hard time passing the course.
- Our one assignment is a group project, which means if your group cannot meet the deadline and needs to turn in the assignment **late**, you are required to contact me before the deadline so we can set up a meeting to discuss what problems you are having and come up with a strategy to complete the work in a timely matter.
- This is not a class where you get to talk about your feelings. This is a class that teaches you how to make arguments with **evidence**, not opinion or ideology. Related to this, for your assignments...

---

<sup>1</sup> I am one of the volunteers for the Pete’s Pet Posse Therapy Dogs program along with my dog, Cooper. As part of my volunteer activities, Cooper will be present during my Monday office hours. If you need to meet during this time and would prefer not to have a dog around, just let me know and I will make alternative arrangements.

- ...cite things properly! **Plagiarism** is theft of another's work or ideas, and is a violation both of the student handbook and academic ethics. Not only that, it's a felony that violates US copyright laws.

In case you are wondering, plagiarism includes:

- 1) Claiming someone else's work as your own.
- 2) Copying the exact phrase from a source *without giving the author(s) credit*.
- 3) Using data from a source *without giving author(s) credit*.
- 4) Failing to put a quotation in quotation marks.
- 5) Using an idea or concept from an author *without giving credit to the source*.
- 6) Giving incorrect information about the citation source.
- 7) Changing the words or phrasing of the sentence but still keeping the original meaning *without giving credit to the source*.

From this list, you might notice that most of the time, all it takes to NOT plagiarize is to properly cite and give credit to the people from whom you are borrowing information or ideas. When in doubt, cite it!

## Grading

Following university guidelines, our grading scale is:

%	Grade	Explanation
90-100	A	Exceptional & outstanding work
80-89	B	Very good work
70-79	C	Adequate work; superficial grasp on concepts
60-69	D	Very poor work; poor understanding of the material
Below 60	F	Failing; unacceptable work

Remember, "A" is a rare grade reserved for projects that demonstrate outstanding skill and effort. In case you are wondering, I do round up, so an 89.5% will classify as an "A."

Our class work includes:

### **Attendance & Participation: 100 points**

Each week, I will mark you down if you attend class, which earns you part of these points. If you miss class for any reason, you can make up the points for that week by attending a "civic engagement" event. These can either be things that I announce as eligible *or* events and activities that you find and participate in...as long as they have some sort of political focus. You will need to submit some evidence of your participation – either a short summary (1 page) for on-campus talks or a selfie for community events when/if this sort of thing is appropriate.

The rest of these points will be based on the *quality* of your participation week-to-week. Students who regularly attend the course and actively participate will receive full points here...other students, not so much!

I will have this attendance/participation sheet with me in class, and you are always welcome to check in with me to make sure I have you down for attendance and/or participation each week.

## Constitutional Reform Video: 100 points

You will work with a team of 4-6 students to complete a 5 minute MAXIMUM video covering a possible reform to the U.S. Constitution. The major components of this assignment include:

- 1) A 3 page “script” **research paper**, which includes proper citation and a properly formatted reference list (*the reference list does **NOT** count towards your 3-page limit*). You **must** engage with (and cite) at least one reading from our syllabus. I expect the rest of your references to be from academic research, professional sources, and/or news articles from trustworthy and respectable sources.

Papers should be formatted using Times New Roman, 12 point font, double-spaced, with margins no less than 1 inch, and need to include the following information:

- a. An overview of a current constitutional rule (e.g. Electoral College, life terms for the Supreme Court, lack of an equal rights amendment...). Summarize the major intent behind this rule and/or discuss the benefits that supporters of this rule point to as why this is a useful institution. This will act as your introduction rather than some “fluffy” beginning.
- b. Cover the problems created by this rule.
- c. Discuss at least 1 and no more than 2 possible reforms to this rule. Be sure to explain exactly what this reform entails. For instance, if you are proposing term limits for the Supreme Court, how long would the term be (in years), how many terms are they allowed, and are you also including a mandatory retirement age?
- d. Overview the likely consequences (good and bad) of adopting this reform.

Tip: I expect you to build your argument based on evidence. This can include analysis/examples from other countries *or* academic research that has been conducted comparing U.S. states that have adopted similar reforms. Arguing that something is a good policy based on opinion or because it is “popular” will not be convincing.

- 2) A **video** that uses this paper for its narration. You should find photos and images to accompany your essay “script.” Transfer everything into an mp4 (or equivalent) format so that it plays as a video on a PC.

You do not need to read out the full citations if you are using in-text parenthetical citation format, but I want you to include your paper’s references in a “credits” slide (or slides) at the end of the video. Also, any pictures, visualizations, or maps you use should be properly cited on the slide they appear.

You will turn in the paper *and* the video to the Constitutional Reform Assignment Dropbox.

Your grade will be based on the quality of the evidence you present in your paper/narration, the overall mechanics of the presentation (voice pacing, easy to read citations on the slides, well-organized argument, good use of pictures to expand on the evidence of the narration), and the overall visual appeal of the video. Team members will also be able to award points “bonuses” to those teammates who went above and beyond in helping to complete this project.

## Course Schedule and Readings

### Week 1 (Jan. 14 & 16): Telling a “Good” Democracy from a “Bad” One

- O’Neil, Patrick H., Karl Fields, and Don Share. 2018. *Cases and Concepts in Comparative Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. pp. 146-152.
- O’Neil, Patrick H., Karl Fields, and Don Share. 2018. *Cases and Concepts in Comparative Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. pp. 376-377.
- Shuster, Simon. 1 August 2017. Vladimir Putin Doesn’t Understand the Limits of Donald Trump’s Power. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/4881972/vladimir-putin-donald-trump-executive-power/>
- *Optional:*
  - Siegel, Joseph T., Michael M. Weinstein, Morton H. Halperin. 2004. Why Democracies Excel. *Foreign Affairs*, 83: 57-71.
  - Jiménez, Mérida. 15 November 2017. Is democracy in a worldwide decline? Nope. Here’s our data. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/11/15/is-democracy-in-a-worldwide-decline-we-measured-it-heres-what-we-found/?utm\\_term=.61cadd6741f5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/11/15/is-democracy-in-a-worldwide-decline-we-measured-it-heres-what-we-found/?utm_term=.61cadd6741f5)

### Week 2 (Jan. 21 & 23): Executive Differences

- O’Neil, Patrick H., Karl Fields, and Don Share. 2018. *Cases and Concepts in Comparative Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. pp. 152-153, 155-161.
- Graham, Benjamin A. T., Michael K. Miller, and Kaare Strom. 2017. When democracies are under attack, it’s time to rein in executive power. *The Monkey Cage* [blog], October 15. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/10/15/when-democracies-are-under-attack-its-time-to-rein-in-executive-power/?utm\\_term=.93ae047dad68](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/10/15/when-democracies-are-under-attack-its-time-to-rein-in-executive-power/?utm_term=.93ae047dad68)

### Week 3 (Jan. 28 & 30): The Perils of Presidentialism

- Linz, Juan. 1990. The Perils of Presidentialism. *Journal of Democracy*, 1, 1: 51-69. **Exerts only.**
- Kiersz, Andy. 2016. No matter who wins the election, America could be barreling towards a constitutional crisis. *Business Insider* [website], November 8. <http://www.businessinsider.com/juan-linz-and-threats-to-american-democracy-2016-11>

### Week 4 (Feb. 4 & 6): The United Kingdom, Birthplace of Democracy

- O’Neil, Patrick H., Karl Fields, and Don Share. 2018. *Cases and Concepts in Comparative Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. pp. 203-214.

### Week 5 (Feb. 11 & 13): Parliamentary Debate as Sport

- O’Neil, Patrick H., Karl Fields, and Don Share. 2018. *Cases and Concepts in Comparative Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. pp. 214-222.
- In class: watch Prime Minister Question time

### Week 6 (Feb. 18 & 20): “Fixing” Legislatures? The Allure & Pitfalls of Term Limits

- Kousser, Thad. 2016. If you want a more powerful President Trump, impose term limits on Congress. *The Monkey Cage* [blog], October 19.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/10/19/if-you-want-a-more-powerful-president-trump-impose-term-limits-on-congress/>
- Elder, Laurel. 2012. The Partisan Gap Among Women State Legislators. *Journal of Women, Politics, & Policy* 33(1): 65-85. **Read pp. 66-74 and 76-80 only.**
- *Optional:*
  - Schaller, Tom. 2010. Throw All the Bums Out? Bad Idea. *FiveThirtyEight* [blog], 19 March. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/throw-all-bums-out-bad-idea/>
  - Butcher, Jordan and Aaron Kushner. 2018. No, term limits won't #DrainTheSwamp. We did the research. *Monkey Cage* [blog], May 8.  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/05/08/no-term-limits-wont-draintheswamp-we-did-the-research/>
  - Cummins, Jeff. 2013. The Effects of Legislative Term Limits on State Fiscal Conditions. *American Politics Research* 41(3): 417-442.
  - Carey, John M., Richard G. Niemi, Lynda W. Powell, and Gary F. Moncrief. 2006. The Effects of Term Limits on State Legislatures: A New Survey of the 50 States. *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 31(1): 105-134.
  - Carroll, Susan J. and Krista Jenkins. 2001. Unrealized Opportunity? Term Limits and the Representation of Women in State Legislatures. *Women & Politics* 23(4): 1-30.

### Week 7 (Feb. 25 & 27): Electoral Rules...and Why They Matter

- O'Neil, Patrick H., Karl Fields, and Don Share. 2018. *Cases and Concepts in Comparative Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. Chapter 6: Democratic Regimes. pp. 162-169

### Week 8 (Mar. 3 & 5): Germany, or “How to Design a Constitution to Prevent Dictatorship”

- O'Neil, Patrick H., Karl Fields, and Don Share. 2018. *Cases and Concepts in Comparative Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. Germany. pp. 293-308.

### Week 9 (Mar. 10 & 12): The Rule of Law

- O'Donnell, Guillermo A. 2004. Why the Rule of Law Matters. *Journal of Democracy* 15(4): 32-46.

## **Mon, Mar. 16-Fri, Mar. 20: Spring Break**

*No Class.*

### Week 10 (Mar. 24 & 26): Comparing Legal Systems

*I'll be away at a conference, so this week's participation will be based on you watching a pre-recorded lecture I'll be posting on Canvas, then completing a very short quiz about what the lecture covered.*

- O'Neil, Patrick H., Karl Fields, and Don Share. 2018. *Cases and Concepts in Comparative Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. pp. 154-155.
- Ringhand, Lori A. and Paul M. Collins, Jr. 2017. Should 18 Years be the limit for Supreme Court justices? *The Chicago Tribune*, March 24.  
<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/commentary/ct-supreme-court-term-limits-18-years-20170324-story.html#>
- *Optional (but highly suggested for those who want to do judicial term limits for your video):*
  - Calabresi, Steven G. and James Lindgren. 2006. Term Limits for the Supreme Court: Life Tenure Reconsidered. *Harvard Journal of Law & Public Policy*, 29, 3: 769-878.

#### Week 11 (Mar. 31 & Apr. 2): Rights & Liberties

- O’Neil, Patrick H., Karl Fields, and Don Share. 2018. *Cases and Concepts in Comparative Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. Chapter 6: Democratic Regimes. pp. 172-173.
- Liptak, Adam. 2012. “‘We the People’ Loses Appeal With People Around the World.” *New York Times*, February 6. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/07/us/we-the-people-loses-appeal-with-people-around-the-world.html>

#### Week 12 (Apr. 7 & 9): Tech Session

- No readings! Instead, I’ll be covering some software options you might use for completing your video projects.
- You won’t be turning them in, but it is a VERY good idea to have your research papers done by today!

#### Week 13 (Apr. 14 & 16): Assignment Workday

- No class – use this time to work on your group projects. I’ll be in my office during our class hours for any group who needs help.

#### Week 14 (Apr. 21 & 23): The Weirdness of the Electoral College

- Colomer, Josep M. 2016. The electoral college is a medieval relic. Only the U.S. still has one. *The Monkey Cage* [blog], December 11. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/11/the-electoral-college-is-a-medieval-relic-only-the-u-s-still-has-one/?utm\\_term=.f9be3c4d34b2](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/12/11/the-electoral-college-is-a-medieval-relic-only-the-u-s-still-has-one/?utm_term=.f9be3c4d34b2)
- In class: Watch *Electoral Dysfunction* short documentary
- **Video Assignments Due by 11pm**

#### Week 15 (Apr. 28 & 30): Video Viewing

- No readings! We’ll be watching the videos you completed for the course and voting for top video.
- This is our last class meeting, so enjoy not worrying about this class during finals week!