

Course Expectation Resource Sheet - PLS 101

“What can students expect if they choose this course?”

Course: PLS 101 - American Democracy & Citizenship

Department: Political Science and Philosophy

Credit Hours: 3

Prerequisite: None

Catalog Description: This course familiarizes students with the institutions and constitutional framework of the United States and Missouri. The course emphasis is on the values, rights, and responsibilities that shape the public decision making of active and informed citizens and influence contemporary public affairs in a democratic society.

Catalog: 2025-2026 **Last Updated:** 9/19/2025

Gen Ed Course: Yes

Gen Ed Area: PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Gen Ed Requirement: Constitutions of US & Missouri & American History & Institutions (GEC 114)

CORE-42 Course: Yes

CORE-42 Area: Social & Behavioral Sciences (Civics)

MOTR Code - MOTR Title: POSC 101 - American Government

Is credit also available through:

Advanced Placement (AP)?: Yes

College Level Exam Program (CLEP)?: Yes

International Baccalaureate (IB)?: No

(click link for more information and required scores)

Responses and Advice from Department Representatives

Please refer to your individual class syllabus for details and communicate regularly with your teacher for specific questions and concerns.

Last Updated: 8/10/2026

The following responses apply to: Both online and seated courses.

What expectations do you have for students in this course?

They mainly need to attend lectures (or watch them, if the course is online), take detailed notes, do the assigned readings and prepare carefully for the exams. While professors generally have other assignments, most of them base the grade largely on multiple choice exams. PLS 101 is mainly about perspiration, rather than inspiration. It's not rocket science, but students have to invest significant time and effort to learn the material.

What types of study skills do you expect students to use in this course?

Notetaking, reading and an ability to commit to memory a substantial amount of material. Organization and thoroughness are important in PLS 101.

What study techniques seem to work best for students who do well in this course?

If the professor provides a study guide, it's usually a good idea to fill it out carefully and thoroughly. One-sentence answers to study guide questions are often not enough to prepare students to answer tests questions. Since memorization of events, institutions and concepts is often an important aspect of PLS

101, tools like flashcards and Quizlet can be useful. Studying with a partner can also be useful to some students, as long as the partners are similarly committed to performing well in the class. I should mention that AI is changing this picture rapidly. In some cases, AI chatbots may allow students to prepare reasonably well for a PLS 101 exam, quiz or other assignment without doing the assigned readings or attending lectures. However, if a lot of the class grade depends on proctored exams (as is usually the case in PLS 101, even online) then the student will still need to prepare thoroughly, even if they use AI to fill out their study guide. In other words, they will still have to know the material, even if they can use AI, rather than traditional class materials, to access the knowledge they need.

What behaviors or habits seem to cause students to struggle in this course? What types of struggles do you see most often? What recommendations do you give to students who struggle in this course? What other advice do you offer to students for success in this course?

Not attending or watching lectures and, more generally, not being willing to invest the time and effort necessary to learn the material. I think a lot of our students underestimate the effort that's required to succeed at the college level because they come from backgrounds where the academic standards were not very high. Also, students may come from social contexts in which exposure to public affairs and intellectual debates is limited. That makes the material in PLS 101 less understandable and engaging to them. That said, if students are willing to open their minds to the topic, rather than falling back on the excuse that they "hate politics," it can lead them to invest more effort in PLS 101 and perform better. It's common for students to perform poorly on exams. If that happens, it's important for the student to react quickly and decisively to change their trajectory in the class by studying harder and asking the professor for advice. If they wait for a couple of exams to go by, they may find themselves in too deep a hole to salvage a solid grade. Students are also sometimes very inconsistent in their effort level. They will study hard for an exam, get a solid grade, then slack off on the next one. If the goal is a good grade, it's important to be disciplined and not leave anything to chance. In some cases, the student may need to put aside activities or modify habits that cut into their study time.

How do you describe the course to students when they ask "What is this class about?" (without using the catalog description)?

It's about how government decisions are made that affect us with regard to things like healthcare, taxes, educational opportunities, marriage, public security, incarceration and income.

Beyond meeting a General Education requirement, what benefits can students realize from choosing this course?

They can learn why their government works the way it does and what they can do to try to change it if they choose. If there's a core public affairs course, PLS 101 is arguably it.

Other than your major/minor/certificate students, what groups of students could find this course relevant to their degree program or career path?

Students who aspire to play a significant leadership role in any organization that is either part of government or affected by government, which is pretty much all of them. Also, engaged students who care about things beyond their own pocketbook or personal life.

*Prepared by the Reynolds College Center for Student Success
Reynolds College of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (RCASH)
For use by all students and academic advisors at Missouri State University
Online Undergraduate Catalog information takes precedence over catalog information on this resource*