

Lehman College
POL 266, TR12, Fall 2020
Class Time: Tues./Thurs., 12:30–1:45pm

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Office Hours: Tues./Thurs., 2:00–3:00pm

POL 266: POLITICS & CULTURE **Fall 2020, “Semester of Crisis”**

Course Overview: German sociologist Max Weber famously described politics as a “slow boring of hard boards.” The political process is structured by tedious routine, and any outcome you want to achieve—any policy you want to change, any law you want to pass, etc.—can only be achieved through those established routines. Sometimes, however, the ordinary procedures of politics are thrown into disarray. All sorts of events can prompt this, from an economic recession to a natural disaster to a pandemic. When the ordinary procedures of politics are suspended, we are in *crisis*.

Given the current moment of overlapping crises we find ourselves in, it feels appropriate to center this course around the concept of crisis. What constitutes a crisis? What political processes have the present crises disrupted? What reference points do we have, in history and in popular culture, for our seemingly unprecedented moment? Why do some crises affect people differently depending on race, gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic status? Over the course of the semester, we will look at these and other questions in relation to matters of public health, crime, economic recessions, and ecology. In the process, this course will aim to establish familiarity with some foundational concepts in political science and address pressing issues through relevant academic literature.

Course Modality: This is an online course, and sessions and material will be delivered primarily over Blackboard or Zoom. We will hold regular Zoom sessions to discuss assigned material at the allotted time, but to maximize flexibility, most work is assigned asynchronously (i.e., to complete on your own schedule by the listed due dates). The course is broken into eight modules, distributed between three units. Each unit concerns a general theme. Each module covers a specific topic and last 1–2 weeks each. Each module concludes with discussion postings and a short exercise to be completed in Blackboard.

I will be holding regular office hours over Zoom as well. Please email me to schedule a meeting, preferably during the time slot listed above.

Texts: This is a ZTC (Zero Textbook Cost) course. All assigned readings will be freely available on Blackboard. A key objective in this course is to get you comfortable with reading academic social science, so some readings might be written in dense or difficult language. Over the course of the semester, we will work together on identifying and breaking down arguments in various types of academic literature. We will spend a significant amount of meeting time on the texts. For class meetings, make sure to complete readings ahead of time. Come prepared with thoughts on and questions about the texts.

Requirements and Grading: This course will be oriented around discussion primarily, including participation in both video meetings and the course discussion boards. Active and thoughtful engagement is necessary to make discussion productive. As such, I recommend you take notes on assigned readings. Formal (i.e., graded) requirements are as follows:

You will be expected to contribute to the course discussion board. On the Blackboard page for the course, there is a Discussion Boards tab with a forum set up for each module. You are asked to post to five (out of eight) forums over the course of the semester, responding to a question about a given reading in 3–6 sentences. You are also asked to respond to the post of at least one other student.

Each discussion board contribution is worth three points: two for an original post, and one for a substantive response. Discussion board contribution for the semester is worth 15 points in total.

There will be eight module exercises. Each module concludes with a short exercise that is worth five points. The type of exercise will vary depending on the module: some will be quizzes, some will be annotation exercises, and some will be short responses. Together, these exercises comprise the largest part of your grade: eight exercises, worth five points each, for 40 points total.

There will be two exams: a midterm and a final. A modest midterm exam will be administered after the fourth module, and a modest final will be administered after the eighth. Both will be open-book short answer tests. The midterm will be worth 15 points and cover material for Modules 1–4. The final will be worth 20 points and mostly cover material from Modules 5–8.

Due dates are listed in the course schedule beginning on p. 3. While you are encouraged to submit assignments by the listed dates, I recognize that under the present circumstances late assignments will be more common than usual. Late assignments will be accepted until the final exam deadline (Friday, December 18), and late submission will not be penalized.

Here's a breakdown of how grading for this course adds up overall:

Course Requirement	Points Possible
Synchronous Participation	10 points possible
Discussion Board Contributions (five)	15 points possible (3 points each)
Module Exercises (eight)	40 points possible (5 points each)
Midterm Exam	15 points possible
Final Exam	20 points possible
Total	100 points possible

Since the course as a whole is graded out of 100 points, your raw score is also your percentage grade for the semester. I assign letter grades by the usual scale, so 93-100 points is an A; 90-92 points is an A-minus; 87-89 points is a B-plus; 83-86 points is a B; 80-82 points is a B-minus; etc.

Conduct Guidelines: In all interactions with the instructor and other students, but *especially in class discussion* (whether synchronous or written), do your best to communicate as respectfully and constructively as possible. Disagreement with other students or with arguments in the assigned readings is to be expected, and it should be taken as an opportunity for substantive engagement.

Academic Integrity: In written assignments (including short answer questions on tests), it would be super cool if you didn't plagiarize. *Plagiarism* is the act of presenting someone else's ideas as your own. Faculty and administration of Lehman College insist on an environment free of plagiarism. Each student is responsible for knowing what constitutes cheating and plagiarism and avoiding both. The full CUNY Academic Integrity Policy can be found here:

<https://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/legal-affairs/policies-procedures/academic-integrity-policy/>

I cannot award credit in cases of *malicious* plagiarism, such as submission of an assignment lifted wholesale from somewhere else. This is not particularly common, but it does happen! Please don't do it. More common things that are *technically* plagiarism—i.e., “patchwriting,” close paraphrase without attribution—I will point out, but usually not penalize. I do require parenthetical citations with author and page number after direct quotes. For instance:

The smallpox epidemic in Sydney was “produced and pronounced by government” in the sense that public health officials “projected a pattern of illness in the population” instead of just focusing on individual cases (Bashford, 43).

Accessibility: In order to receive disability-related academic accommodations students must first be registered with the Office of Student Disability Services (SDS). Instructions for registering with the Office can be found at <http://www.lehman.edu/student-disability-services/reasonable-accommodations.php>. If you have already registered with the Office of Student Disability Services, please provide me with the appropriate documentation and discuss your specific accommodation with me, and I will do my best to provide the necessary accommodations.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Introduction: Thursday, Aug. 27

Syllabus overview and introductions

Course overview and tour over Zoom, Aug. 27

Say hi in the “Introductions” forum by Monday, Aug. 31

Unit 1: Public Health Crisis

Module 1: Controlling Public Health Crisis, Sept. 1–3

Reading for Sept. 1: Alison Bashford, “Beyond Quarantine Critique”

Reading for Sept. 3: Alison Bashford, “Smallpox in Sydney, 1881”

Module 1 exercise due by Friday, Sept. 4

Discussion posts due by Monday, Sept. 7

Module 2: Interpreting Public Health Crisis, Sept. 8–17

Reading for Sept. 8: Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, Ch. 8, pp. 80–95

Reading for Sept. 10: Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, Ch. 1, pp. 5–16

Reading for Sept. 15–17: Sarah Schulman, “The Dynamics of Death and Replacement”

Module 2 exercise due by Friday, Sept. 18

Discussion posts due by Monday, Sept. 21

Module 3: Global Health Crisis, Sept. 22–Oct. 1

Reading for Sept. 22–24: Bishnupriya Ghosh, “The Costs of Living: Reflections on Global Health Crises”

No meeting Tues., Sept. 29 — CUNY follows a Monday schedule

Film viewing, Oct. 1: Frontline, “Outbreak”

Module 3 exercise due by Friday, Oct. 2

Discussion posts due by Monday, Oct. 5

Unit 2: Constructing Crises

Module 4: Policing Crisis, Oct. 6–15

Reading for Oct. 6–8: Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, Ch. 1: pp. 3–18.

Reading for Oct. 13–15: Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis*, Ch. 1: pp. 18–28.

Module 4 exercise due by Friday, Oct. 16

Discussion posts due by Monday, Oct. 19

Midterm Exam due Thursday, Oct. 22

Module 5: Performing Crisis, Oct. 20–29

Midterm discussion, Tues., Oct. 20

No meeting Thurs., Oct. 22 — finish and submit midterm

Reading for Oct. 27–29: Benjamin Moffitt, “How to Perform Crisis”

Module 5 exercise due by Friday, Oct. 30

Discussion posts due by Monday, Nov. 2

Unit 3: “Normal” Crisis

Module 6: Crisis as Routine, Nov. 3–9

Reading for Nov. 3–5: James Fulcher, “Crisis? What Crisis?”

Module 6 exercise due by Friday, Nov. 6

Discussion posts due by Monday, Nov. 9

Module 7: Crisis as Deviation, Nov. 10–24

Reading for Nov. 10–12: Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Ch. 3, pp. 51–60.

Reading for Nov. 17–19: Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, Ch. 3, pp. 61–70.

Module 7 exercise due by Wednesday, Nov. 25

Discussion posts due by Monday, Nov. 30

Thanksgiving holiday: Nov. 26–29.

Module 8: Crisis as Norm, Dec. 1–8

Reading: Leah Muncy, "Grief for a lost future and an eroded past"

Film viewing, Dec. 3: *Anthropocene*

Final discussion, Tues., Dec. 8

Module 8 exercise due by Monday, Dec. 7

Discussion posts due by Wednesday, Dec. 9

Final Exam due by Friday, Dec. 18