

Introduction to American Government and Politics
PSCI 1100
Summer Session II 2017
MTWRF 10:00 AM-12:00 PM
Location: 320 Commons Center

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Office Hours
8:45 AM - 9:45 AM Wednesdays
or by appointment

Course Description

The currents of American political life are defined by the constraints that enduring political institutions apply to channel evolving public opinion. Much of the tumult in American politics we see today can be understood through consideration of the foundations of American government, major political institutions, and mechanisms that link citizens and government. This course will examine how the government of the United States is organized, the rationale behind its organization, and the ways citizens, political actors, and political institutions interact to achieve political goals. This course is appropriate for political science majors who wish to gain a foundation in American politics as well as for non-majors who simply wish to gain a better understanding of American government and processes.

Objectives

- To acquaint students with the fundamentals of American government
- To introduce students to key political science concepts and research
- To familiarize students with perspectives on American politics informed by research on gender and race
- To develop students' critical thinking and analytical skills through class discussion and written assignments

Required Texts

- Bianco, William. 2001. *American Politics: Strategy and Choice*.
- Kernell, Samuel, and Steven Smith, ed. 2016. (6th Edition) *Principles and Practice of American Politics*.
- Fiorina, Morris P, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2011. (3rd Edition) *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*.

Grading

Participation 10%; Short Assignments 18%; 3 Exams 24% each.

Reading and any additional assignments should be completed before class on the day assigned. Some assigned readings are political science journal articles accessible via JSTOR by logging in at <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/> using your VUNetID. Pay careful attention to the syllabus and to any adjustments that may occur. You are responsible for material presented in lectures and discussed in class regardless of your attendance. Notes will not be supplied for students who have missed class, so plan to make other arrangements. Late and makeup assignments will be allowed only with a doctor's note or other equally serious documented reason for the absence. Athletes and other students who will miss class due to extra- or co-curricular travel should inform me of the relevant dates early in the semester. Students with any other special needs should meet with me early in the semester so that proper accommodations can be made.

Class participation and attendance count for 10% of your final grade. Obviously, those who do not attend class cannot participate in class discussion. Attendance in class will be taken regularly throughout the semester. Because the exchange of ideas is an important part of learning, you are encouraged to frequently ask questions and share your informed opinions during regular class. In order to maintain an atmosphere conducive to learning, students should use professional language in class discussions and written work. No offensive slang or profanity is permitted. Disagree without being disagreeable.

Six short assignments will be used to calculate 18% of your final grade. These short assignments include in class exercises and a cumulative set of strategy assessments for enacting a policy reform at the federal level. Students will receive ample notice if preparatory work outside of class is required, as may occasionally be the case. The set of 5 policy reform short assignment prompts will be emailed to the class on July 17, and each student must select a different policy. The lowest short assignment grade will be automatically dropped. Missed short assignments cannot be made up and will be graded as zeros.

Exams constitute 72% of your final grade. Three non-cumulative exams are each worth 24% and will take place during class on July 24, August 3, and August 10. Make up exams will be administered only with prior approval.

Academic honesty is expected. Turn in material that you have completed yourself. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without proper citation) will be tolerated. Both cheating and plagiarism are serious offenses that will be reported for disciplinary action. Please refer to the Student Handbook and/or speak with the instructor if you have any questions in this area.

Course Outline

Political Foundations

July 11

Introduction and Course Overview

Take two minute survey: <https://www.socsisurvey.de/IASTalumni/?q=psci1100>

July 12

Designing Institutions

What makes decision-making "political?" What is rationality? What are institutions and why do they matter? What factors influence the likelihood of cooperation and compromise in decision-making?

Bianco, "Introduction," pp. 3-15 and "Cooperation in Politics," pp. 36-66

July 13

(KS)-Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (excerpt), pp. 1-8; Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," pp. 9-17

Putnam, "The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life," *The American Prospect*

URL: <http://prospect.org/article/prosperous-community-social-capital-and-public-life>

Short Assignment 1 - In Class

July 14

The Constitution

What were the primary debates during the constitutional convention? In what ways did the Constitution provide for a just and fair government?

(KS)-Brutus, "Anti-Federalist No. 3," pp. 18-21; Madison, "Federalist No. 10," pp. 22-25; Madison, "Federalist No. 51," pp. 27-28.

July 17

(JSTOR)-Roche, John P. "The Founding Fathers: A Reform Caucus in Action." *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 55, No. 4 (December 1961) pp. 799-816

July 18

Federalism

(KS)-Kettl, "Federalism: Battles on the Front Lines," pp. 47-64; Rauch, "A Separate Peace," pp. 65-67.

(JSTOR)-Buchanan, James M. "Federalism and an Ideal Political Order and an Objective for Constitutional Reform." *Publius*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Spring 1995) pp. 19-27.

July 19

Civil Rights

Film: *Eyes on the Prize: No Easy Walk*

Engler and Engler, "How did Gandhi win?" *Waging Nonviolence*

URL: <http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/gandhi-win/>

Engler and Engler, "Gandhi's strategy for success - use more than one strategy," *Waging Nonviolence*

URL: <http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/gandhi-strategy-success/>

July 20

Lawson, "Debating the Civil Rights Movement: The View from the Nation," 3-46; Payne, "Debating the Civil Rights Movement: The View from the Trenches," 115-155 (both readings available through Brightspace).

July 21

Civil Liberties

(KS)-Roe v. Wade, pp. 111-116; Rosenberg, "The Real World of Constitutional Rights: The Supreme Court and the Implementation of the Abortion Decision," pp. 117-137

Short Assignment 2 Due

July 24

Exam I

American Political Institutions

July 25

The Congress

How is Congress organized and why? What motivates the legislative behavior of members of Congress?

(KS)-Smith, "Congress, the Troubled Institution," pp. 138-150; Bianco, "Strategic Behavior in Congress," pp. 121-146

July 26

How does Congress decide? What are prospects for reform to end partisanship and polarization? (KS)-Binder, "The Politics of Legislative Stalemate," pp. 151-160; Aldrich and Rohde, "Congressional Committees in a Continuing Partisan Era," pp. 161-176.

July 27

Film: *The West Wing*, "Five Votes Down" & "The Short List"

July 28

The Presidency

How might we understand presidential power? How does the personality of the president shape what the presidency is at any given time?

(KS)-Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents* (excerpt), pp. 177-191; Kernell, *Going Public* (excerpt), pp. 192-204.

Short Assignment 3 Due

July 31

Bianco, "The Separation of Powers and the Executive Branch," pp. 147-173.

August 1

The Judiciary

Is the judiciary the "least dangerous branch?" Can the Supreme Court insulate itself from the ma-

for political controversies of modern American life? What are some consequences of "politicizing" the courts?

(KS)-Scalia, *A Matter of Interpretation* (excerpt) pp. 233-244; Breyer, from *Active Liberty*, pp. 245-253.

Short Assignment 4 Due

August 2

Hamilton, "Federalist No. 78," pp. 254-257; Carp and Manning, "Selecting Justice: The Ideology of Federal Judges Appointed by President Barack Obama," pp. 258-272.

Short Assignment 5 Due

August 3

Exam II

Linking Citizens and Institutions

August 4

Public Opinion

(KS)-Asher, "Analyzing and Interpreting Polls," pp. 273-293; Schudson, "America's Ignorant Voters," pp. 351-356.

August 7

Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, *Culture War?* (Read entire book.) (KS)-Abramowitz, "The Polarized Electorate," pp. 316-324.

August 8

Voting, Campaigns, and Elections

Bianco, "Voters and Vote Decisions," pp. 67-90; "Winning and Holding Elective Office" pp. 91-120. (KS)-Popkin, *The Reasoning Voter* (excerpt) pp. 325-329; Jacobson, "No Compromise: The Electoral Origins of Legislative Gridlock," pp. 330-350.

Short Assignment 6 Due

August 9

Film: *The War Room*

(KS)-Vavreck, "U.S. Presidential Election Forecasting: Want a Better Forecast? Measure the Campaign, Not Just the Economy," pp. 357-361. Silver, "The Real Story of 2016" *FiveThirtyEight*
URL: <https://fivethirtyeight.com/tag/the-real-story-of-2016/>

August 10

Exam III