Introduction to U.S. Politics (GOVT 101)
Fall 2014

Professor Nick Goedert
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Meeting Times: 11-12 MWF or 3-4 MWF
Office Hours: Tuesday 2:00-4:00, Wednesday 1:30-3:00
Office: Kirby 005

Description

This course offers a broad introduction to U.S. politics, examining the structure of the national government, as well as the methods by which citizens influence it. Students will learn about the following specific topics: the nation's founding; federalism and the separation of powers; the principle institutions of the U.S. government, including the Presidency, Congress, and the Judiciary; civil rights and civil liberties; and democratic politics, including elections, political parties, public opinion, and the media. The course will proceed with an eye to current events, in particular, the current state of political polarization in the nation and gridlock in the nation's capital. This course also serves as an introduction to the subfield of American Politics within Political Science. Thus, students will be introduced to various methodologies for studying politics as well as some specific political scientists' contribution to knowledge of the subject. Finally, meaningful student participation is crucial to learning in this course, and opportunities for participation are plentiful throughout the semester.

Student Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of the course, it is expected that students will be able to:

- Provide an explanation for the purpose of government.
- Describe the basic institutional and legal structures of the U.S. government.
- Describe the broad historical development of these institutions and structures.
- Explain the mechanisms by which citizens influence government institutions.
- Understand past and current weaknesses of the U.S. government and democratic process.
- Evaluate public policies and recommend specific programmatic improvements.
- Demonstrate familiarity with the academic field of American Politics and its key methodologies.

Readings

The course has three required books:

- *Presidential Leadership in Political Time* by Stephen Skowronek (2011)

The primary textbook and reader are available from the campus bookstore as a package at a discount, and all the books should also be available online. Additional articles and book excerpts will be posted on Moodle as noted in the syllabus.
Because the amount of reading for this course is substantial, I encourage you to skim the chapters from *Logic* that introduce each unit. But you should read carefully the excerpts from *P&P* and the other readings, as they will constitute the bulk of our class discussion.

### Class Expectations and Requirements

The course grade consists of the following:

1. Midterm Exam #1 (in class October 3): 15%
2. Midterm Exam #2 (in class October 31): 15%
3. Final Exam: 30%
4. Research Paper: 25%
5. Participation & Moodle posts: 15%

**Exams:** There will be three examinations in the course, two in-class midterms on October 3rd and 31st, and a final on the designated final exam date. The final will be cumulative, but focus on material from the last third of the semester. Each exam will have a designated in-class review session, and the final will have at least one additional optional review session. All exams will include a mix of multiple choice and short essay questions, with the final also including a longer form essay. All exams are open-notes, although you are not permitted to use electronic devices or access the internet during the exam.

**Research Paper:** 25% of your grade will be based on an 8-10 page research paper addressing an area of American government or politics that you believe needs to be reformed. Details of the paper requirement will be discussed in class. Papers will be due on the day of the final class meeting (December 5th). I am willing to read drafts or outlines submitted prior to the Thanksgiving holiday.

**Participation and Moodle Posts:** Class participation will be composed of both your participation in class discussions and your responses to the readings posted on Moodle. For each class session, students are expect to:

- Attend all classes, having read the designated material from syllabus;
- Be well-prepared to answer questions about the facts and findings of the week’s readings
- If you cannot attend a class, please let me know ahead of time

You are required to post *four* reading responses on Moodle over the course of the semester. At least one of these posts should be made before the first midterm, and at least one more post should be made before the second midterm. Additionally, at least one post should be made prior to a “current events discussion class” in which you link to an article discussing current events that you believe touches on the class material for that week. You should post under the correct unit on the GOVT 101 Moodle site. **Posts are due by 4pm on the day before the associated class meeting.**

There is no required format or length to the Moodle posts, although I would expect many will be about one typed page or two paragraphs. You may respond to any aspect of any the day’s readings; you may tie together multiple readings, readings from previous weeks, current events or your own life experiences or simply argue why you think a particular argument is correct or incorrect, etc.

The Moodle posts will not be given individual letter grades; for the most part, they will be graded on a pass/fail basis. If I find your post particularly interesting or insightful, I may ask you to expand on it in class.
Class Schedule

Unit 0: Introduction
• August 25: Class Overview
  o Reading: Logic, Ch. 1
• August 27: Designing Institutions
  o Reading: P&P, 1-1 (Olson) and 1-2 (Harden)
• **NO CLASS Friday, August 29**

Unit 1: The Constitution & Federalism
• September 1: Introduction to the Constitution
  o Reading: Logic, Ch. 2
• September 3: The Federalist on Representation
  o Reading: P&P, 2-2 (Brutus) and 2-3 (Madison)
• September 5: The Federalist on Balance of Powers
  o Reading: P&P, 2-4 (Madison) and 3-1 (Madison)
• September 8: Federalism and the Civil War Amendments
  o Reading: Logic, Ch. 3

Unit 2: The Legislature
• September 10: Introduction to Congress
  o Reading: Logic, Ch. 6
• September 12: The Historical Congress
• September 15: The Modern Congress
• September 17: The Modern Congress, cont.
  o Reading: P&P 6-2 (Binder), “The Empty Chamber”, George Packer (New Yorker, 2010)
• September 19: Current Events Discussion

Unit 3: The Executive
• September 22 Introduction to the Presidency
  o Reading: Logic, Ch. 7
• September 24: The Historical President
  o Reading: Skowronek, Presidential Leadership, Ch. 2
• September 26: The Modern President
  o Reading: P&P, 7-1 (Neustadt) and 7-3 (Kernell)
• September 29: The Modern President, cont.
  o Reading: P&P, 8-3 (Lewis), Skowronek, Presidential Leadership, Ch. 6
• October 1: Current Events Discussion & Exam Review
• **October 3: Midterm # 1**
Unit 4: The Judiciary

- October 6: Introduction to the Courts
  - Reading: *Logic*, Ch. 9; *P&P*, 9-3 (Hamilton)
- October 8: The Historical Court
  - Reading: *Marbury v. Madison* (Marshall), Additional Reading TBD
- October 10: The Historical Court, cont.
  - Reading: *Logic* Ch. 5; *P&P*, 5-3 (*Roe v. Wade*) and 5-4 (Rosenberg)
- **NO CLASS October 13 (Fall Break)**
- October 15: The Modern Court
  - Reading: *P&P* 9-1 (Scalia) and 9-2 (Breyer), *NFIB v. Sebelius* (Roberts)
- October 17: *Current Events Discussion*

Unit 5: Campaigns and Elections

- October 20: The American Electoral System
  - Reading: *Logic*, Ch. 11, *P&P* 10-1 (Asher)
- October 22: Historical Campaigns
- October 24: Modern Campaigns
  - Reading: *P&P*, 11-1
- October 27: Modern Campaigns, cont.
  - Reading: 11-3 (West) and 11-5 (Blumenthal)
- October 29: Districting & Exam Review
  - Reading: “Redistricting, Risk, and Representation”, Nicholas Goedert (*ELJ*, 2014)
- **October 31: Midterm #2**
- **November 3: Current Events Discussion**

Unit 6: Public Opinion

- November 5: Election Wrap-Up
  - Reading: Election returns!
- November 7: Public Opinion Formation
  - Reading: *Logic*, Ch. 10; *P&P*, 10-2 (Stimson)
- November 10: Modern Campaigns
  - Reading: *P&P*, 10-3 (Fiorina) and 10-4 (Wilson)
Unit 7: Parties and Interest Groups

- November 12: Introduction to Parties
  - Reading: Logic, Ch. 12
- November 14: Historic Party Systems
  - Reading: TBD
- November 17: Modern American Parties
  - Reading: P&P, 12-1 (Aldrich) and 12-2 (Bartels)
- November 19: Interest Groups
  - Reading: Logic, Ch. 13; P&P 13-1
- November 21: Current Events Discussion

Unit 8: The Media

- November 24: Introduction to the Political Media
  - Reading: Logic, Ch. 14
- NO CLASS November 26 or November 28 (Thanksgiving)
- December 1: Media
  - Reading: P&P, 14-1 (Hamilton) and 14-2 (Baum)
- December 3: Modern Media
  - Reading: P&P 14-3 (Purcell), Additional Reading TBD
- December 5: Current Events Discussion & Wrap-Up

Final Exam (Date TBA)

**Academic Honesty**

Academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism or cheating, is a violation of College policy and may result in a failing grade and/or other disciplinary measures. Please review the guidelines on “Principles of Intellectual Honesty” available in the Student Handbook (go to http://www.lafayette.edu/currentstudents and click on Student Handbook under Resources and Services), which elaborate College policy on plagiarism and academic integrity.