Introduction to U.S. Politics

GOVT 101 - 02
Fall 2015
MWF, 10:00-10:50
Kirby Hall of Civil Rights 104
Instructor: Steven White
Office: Kirby Hall of Civil Rights 110
Office Hours: MW 2:00-3:30 and by appointment
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Course Description

This course provides a comprehensive introduction to the study of American politics. We will cover the three branches of the national government (the presidency, Congress, and the judiciary), as well as parties, interest groups, the media, public opinion, elections, and the policymaking process. Along the way, we will also consider the roles of variables like race and ethnicity, gender, and social class. We will conclude by examining several contemporary issues and asking whether the “Madisonian model” can endure in a quickly changing world.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

• Describe American political institutions and their constitutional and historical foundations

• Examine what the American public knows about politics, the extent to which it engages with politics, and whether this engagement affects political outcomes

• Apply social scientific frameworks to the study of politics

• Assess debates about American politics using appropriate forms of evidence.
Assessment Criteria

This course aims to balance examinations and writing assignments to both assess comprehension of key concepts as well as help students develop appropriate writing styles for coursework in the social sciences.

The final grade will be a weighted average of the following:

10%: Attendance and participation
10%: Two response papers
25%: Midterm exam
25%: Analytical paper
30%: Final exam

Attendance and class participation will account for 10 percent of your grade. I encourage you to come to class with questions about the readings and ideas for discussion. I am genuinely interested in hearing your thoughts on the material! For those who feel uncomfortable or nervous speaking up in class, you will not be penalized for shyness and I encourage you to communicate your thoughts and questions on the readings to me via email and in office hours.

Response papers: You will each be assigned two class sessions where you will write a 2-3 page paper highlighting key themes from the readings and raising points for discussion. One will be due before the midterm exam and the second will be due after the midterm exam (exact dates TBD based on sign-up sheets). These will be due the night before via email so they can help inform our discussions the next day. Simply summarizing the readings is not sufficient. You must go beyond this and assess the claims they make: Do you buy the arguments? What do they get right? What do they get wrong? Are there other perspectives that would be a useful complement? 10 percent.

Midterm exam: This exam is designed to make sure you are learning the foundational material that will be necessary for upper-level coursework in government and law. Given the time constraints of a 50-minute class session, this exam will be primarily identification-based, with one short essay. 25 percent.

Analytical paper: The goal of this paper is for you to develop more finely tuned analytical writing skills, with a focus on the careful comparison of arguments. This will be a 5-7 page paper responding to one of three questions I will pose to the class. 25 percent.

Final exam: The final exam is more writing-based than the midterm. One third of the exam will be identification-based; one third will be an essay written in response to one of three narrowly-written prompts (e.g., one prompt might deal with parties, another with public opinion, etc.); and one third will be an essay in response to a single prompt that draws together the course material as a whole. 30 percent.
Books

This course requires you to purchase (or read in the library reserves) one textbook:


This will be complemented with other readings, which will be available on Moodle.

Academic Integrity

Cheating and plagiarism of any form will not be tolerated. Further information about the academic code at Lafayette can be found at: https://facultyadvising.lafayette.edu/policies/academic-integrity/

Accommodations

Please get in touch with me within the first two weeks of the class if you need additional accommodations. More information can be found online at: http://attic.lafayette.edu/disability-services/

Federal Credit Hour Compliance Statement

The student work in this course is in full compliance with the federal definition of a four credit hour course. Please see the Registrar’s Office web site (http://registrar.lafayette.edu/additional-resources/cep-course-proposal/) for the full policy and practice statement.

Schedule

August 31: Introduction
- Read the syllabus

September 2: Studying Politics
- Lowi, Chapter 1

September 4: Library Information Session with Ana Ramirez Luhrs
- Meet in Skillman 004
September 7: The Founding and the Constitution
  • Lowi, Chapter 2

September 9: Federalist and Anti-Federalist Debates
  • Federalist 10, 51

September 11: Federalism and Separation of Powers
  • Lowi, Chapter 3

September 14: Is the Constitution Democratic?
  • Selections from Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the Constitution?*

**SPECIAL EVENT**
Bruce Murphy, “The Constitution is What You Make of It: Reflections on the Life and Legacy of Antonin Scalia,” September 15, 7:30 pm, Kirby Hall 104

September 16: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights
  • Lowi, Chapter 4

September 18: The Centrality of Race in American Politics
  • Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*

September 21: Political Culture

September 23: Congress
  • Lowi, Chapter 5

September 25: Congress Today: Polarization and Stalemate?
  • Jill Lepore, “Long Division,” *New Yorker*

September 28: Congressional Representation
  • Nicholas Carnes, “Does the Numerical Underrepresentation of the Working Class in Congress Matter?,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 37(1), 2012, 5-34.
September 30: Presidency
  • Lowi, Chapter 6
  • Federalist 70

October 2: Presidential Power
  • “The Green Lantern Theory of the Presidency, explained,” Vox

October 5: Bureaucracy
  • Lowi, Chapter 7

October 7: Courts
  • Lowi, Chapter 8
  • Federalist 78

October 9: Judges as Political Actors
  • Erik Voeten, "Judges as Principled Politicians," Washington Post

October 12: NO CLASS, FALL BREAK

October 14: Reading Court Cases
  • Obergefell v. Hodges

October 16: Midterm Review/Catch-up

October 19: Midterm Exam

October 21: Public Opinion and the Media
  • Lowi, Chapter 9
October 23: Political Knowledge and Democratic Competence

October 26: Is the Public Polarized?

October 28: Elections
  • Lowi, Chapter 10

October 30: Voting Rights
  • Selections from Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote*

November 2: Running for Office
  • Selections from Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox, *It Takes a Candidate*

November 4: Parties
  • Lowi, Chapter 11

November 6: Why Don’t Third Parties Succeed in America?
  • Selections from Gary Cox, *Making Votes Count*

November 9: Interest Groups
  • Lowi, Chapter 12

November 11: Social Movements
  • Selections from David Meyer, *The Politics of Protest*

November 13: What is the Tea Party?
  • Vanessa Williamson et al., ”The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism,” *Perspectives on Politics* 9(1), 2011, 25-43
  • Analytical Writing Assignment Announced
November 16: Public Policymaking
   • Lowi, Chapter 13

November 18: Social Policy
   • Selections from Suzanne Mettler, *The Submerged State*

November 20: How Did the Affordable Care Act Happen?

November 23: Do Policymakers Follow the Public?
   • **ANALYTICAL PAPER DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS**

November 25: NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING BREAK

November 27: NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING BREAK

November 30: Foreign Policy
   • Lowi, Chapter 14

December 2: Contemporary Issues: Inequality
   • Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson, “Winner Take-All Politics: Public Policy, Political Organization, and the Precipitous Rise of Top Incomes in the United States,” *Politics & Society* 38, 2010,

December 4: Contemporary Issues: Immigration, Citizenship, and National Identity
   • Jeffrey Toobin, "Should I Use the Term ‘Illegal Immigrant?’", *New Yorker*
December 7: Can the Madisonian Model Endure?
   • Dylan Matthews, "The Shutdown is the Constitution's Fault," Washington Post
   • Jonathan Bernstein, "Why Madisonian Democracy Still Can't Have it All," The American Prospect

December 9: Looking to the 2016 Election
   • Readings TBD based on real world events

December 11: Final Exam Review/Catch-up

FINAL EXAM DATE TBD BY REGISTRAR