

PSCI 1101-880: Introduction to American Politics (Honors)

Fall 2018

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Class	Day	Time	Room
1101-880	MWF	11:00-11:50	1B64 KTCH

1 Course Description

In this introductory (honors) course, we will examine the basic components of American democracy, including institutions, political parties, and of course, everyday citizens. However, as we find ourselves in the midst of the midterms, we will examine all of these things through the lens of electoral politics. Thinking about issues and developments as we reflect on the 2018 campaign season, we will relate what we see to theories of politics and enduring debates over the meaning of representation.

We will begin by looking at the history and foundations of American politics, before moving on to examine the various connections (or “linkages”) between citizens and government — this will force us to consider topics such as public opinion, the media, voting behavior/elections, and the roles played by political parties and organized interests. In the final third of the semester, we will turn our attention to governmental institutions, including Congress, the Bureaucracy, and the Judiciary; we will close by considering how these (and other) components of the American political system work to structure policy outcomes. Over the semester, we will emphasize ideas of conflict, process, and the ubiquity of politics.

My objectives for this course are to help you understand:

1. the basic structure of American government.
2. how the Constitution affects the organization of government, its relationship across levels, and its relationship with citizens.
3. political behavior as it occurs at both the individual and mass levels, as well as in groups/organized interests, and through electoral politics.
4. the fundamental organization of the branches of government, and the roles that each play in policy-making processes.
5. how to apply course knowledge/skills as thoughtful (and potentially active) members of our democratic society.

Please note: This is a rigorous course, and includes a number of readings that are advanced/difficult. Students should expect to spend roughly 8-12 hours per week on reading assignments (in addition to attendance in class). Readings are to be completed ahead of the class meeting for which they are assigned.

Also, over the semester we will tackle subjects that evoke passion and controversy — this will be especially true given the current climate in American politics. You may disagree with others, and you may feel uncomfortable when you are confronted with certain information, opinions, or arguments. Working through and respecting differences is an important part of both higher education and democratic process — please try to be respectful of others and civil in tone when you ask questions or make comments.

2 Course Requirements and Evaluation

2.1 Required Texts

Please purchase the following from the merchant of your choice:

1. Bianco, William T. and David T. Canon. 2017. *American Politics Today*, 5th ed. Norton. ISBN 978-0393639834
2. Canon, David T., John Coleman and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds. 2017. *Faultlines: Debating the Issues in American Politics*, 5th edition. Norton. ISBN: 9780393603446

A copy of each of these texts has been placed on two-hour reserve at Norlin library.

As part of course preparation, I expect you to follow current events/U.S. political news during the semester. Other readings/materials may be made available through the course website on *Canvas*. Note: I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus — material may be added, dropped, and re-arranged based on the pace and performance of the class. Please familiarize yourself with *Canvas*, and check it regularly for updates and announcements. I will also communicate with the class via email, and students are expected to check their CU email on a daily basis.

3 Grading and Grade Components

The system used to assign final course grades will be:

- A+: 98-100
- A : 94-97
- A-: 90-93
- B+: 87-89
- B : 84-86
- B-: 80-83
- C+: 77-79
- C : 74-76
- C-: 70-73
- D : 60-69
- F : 59 and below

Final grades will be calculated based upon the following,¹ and you must complete *all portions* of the

¹Extra credit opportunities *may* arise throughout the semester — stay tuned.

course to receive a passing grade:²

1. **Exams:** First “midterm” (15%) + Second “midterm” (20%) + Final (20%): **55%**

There will be three exams, and each will be focused on the course material covered in assigned readings, lectures and class discussions. The exams are *non-cumulative*, and will be essay. I will announce the specific structure (number of questions, etc.) and remind everyone of what material will be covered the week before the exam. Review sheets will *not* be provided, but I will cover less material in exam weeks so that there is time for catch up and review.

2. **Class Participation:** 5% Lecture Clicker Questions + 15% Discussion Activities: **20%**

I will do a fair amount of “interactive” lecturing in this class, meaning that I will ask for your input as I discuss material. In addition, most Fridays I will do less lecturing, and we will spend class discussing and debating issues in American politics. Accordingly, **participation** counts for a total of 20% of your final course grade, with one-fourth of this coming from Clicker points (you responding to questions I put up during lecture), and the other three-fourths from my notes on your participation in class. As part of our weekly issue discussions, I ask you to please treat your colleagues with respect when asking questions, making comments, and otherwise participating in activities.

3. **Lecture Clicker Questions/Attendance:** **5%**

While I encourage you to use learning strategies that work for you, being in class is fairly important for success. I will use lectures to explain/go over major course ideas (generally focusing more on the Bianco and Canon text), though I will bring in other material, ideas, and examples that jell with the assigned readings. Attendance is required (counting for 5% of your final course grade), and will be tracked by the use of “Clickers.”

As alluded to previously, I will use clickers to gauge your reactions to the course material, public opinion topics, and other current events. You are responsible for having a working clicker by **September 10th**, and from that point on I will use the software to keep track of attendance. If you arrive late to (or leave early from) a lecture and miss the clicker question, there is no make-up option. You are allowed **six** unexcused absences from class; each additional absence (i.e., me having no clicker record of your participation that day) on top of this will result in a 1/2 point deduction off your final course grade (up to 5% off). Because I permit you to miss essentially *two weeks* of class with no excuses required, I will not accept/track excuses for missing class (except under exceptional, legitimate circumstances — please note that such judgments are made solely at my discretion, and that I require proper documentation). If you are not well, have a personal crisis, have a doctor’s appointment, etc., please use one of your unexcused absences. If you are going to miss class for an extended period because of a life event, see me and we will discuss options.

4. **Research Paper:** Paper (15%) + Benchmark Assignment (5%): **20%**

You will be required to write a 4-5 page paper on the 2018 midterm elections. The paper will be due roughly the week of **November 13th** (the precise due-date within this week will be announced in October). A “benchmark” assignment designed to help you complete this assignment (worth 5% of your final course grade) will be due prior to this sometime in late October/early November. Details/detailed directions on the benchmark assignment (including its due date) and paper will be provided by the beginning of October. Late papers and benchmark assignments will not be accepted (any legitimate excuses will be accepted solely at my discretion).

²I reserve the right to round grades up based on effort and improvement—grades are not automatically rounded up/this is done at my discretion.

4 Course Policies

4.1 The Classroom Environment

Please be respectful of others when attending class — try to avoid late arrivals, early departures, ringing cell phones, and conversation not related to the course. Moreover, while I am fine with you using laptops in class, I ask that you put phones away and minimize distractions on your computer (excessive web browsing, games, etc.). If you are texting or causing a distraction, you may be asked to leave class.

4.2 Contacting Me

I am excited to be working with you this fall. If you have questions, please send an email to me and I will reply as soon as possible (usually within 24 hours; if you do not hear back in 48 hrs., please email again). If your question requires a lengthy explanation/discussion, please come to office hours or make an appointment. Whenever you contact me, it is important to be professional, meaning that written communication must adhere to the following (if an email or note does not meet these criteria, you may not receive a response):

1. Please address me respectfully.
2. Please clearly identify yourself and your section.
3. Please use capital letters, periods, and appropriate grammar.
4. Please include information that helps me to respond to your question (i.e., take the time to explain your question, give sufficient detail, etc.)

4.3 Grading Policies and Standards

I will return graded material as promptly as possible. While I try to be very careful in grading, I am aware that I sometimes make mistakes. If you receive an exam or paper back and believe that a mistake has been made, I will be happy to talk to you about it. Under many circumstances, I will re-grade an entire paper or exam — note that this means that your grade may go up, go down, or remain the same.

4.4 Disability/Religious Observances

I am more than happy to make special arrangements for students with documented disabilities that have been documented through Disability Services (colorado.edu/disabilityservices). If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit your accommodation letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (for exam accommodations provide your letter at least one week prior to the exam) so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities in the academic environment. Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or by e-mail at dsinfo@colorado.edu for further assistance. If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see Temporary Injuries guidelines under the Quick Links/Students Tab at the Disability Services website and discuss your needs with me.

Campus policy regarding religious observances requires that faculty make every effort to deal reasonably and fairly with all students who, because of religious obligations, have conflicts with scheduled exams, assignments or required attendance. Please see full details at: <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/observance-religious-holidays-and-absences-classes-andor-exams>. Please notify me about potential conflicts at least 2 weeks in advance of exams/due-dates.

4.5 Discrimination and Harassment

The University of Colorado at Boulder policy on Discrimination and Harassment (<http://www.colorado.edu/policies/discrimination-and-harassment-policy-and-procedures>), the University of Colorado policy on Sexual Harassment, and the University of Colorado policy on Amorous Relationships

applies to all students, staff and faculty. Any student, staff or faculty member who believes s/he has been the subject of discrimination or harassment based upon race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, religion, sexual orientation, or veteran status should contact the Office of Discrimination and Harassment (ODH) at 303-492-2127 or the Office of Judicial Affairs at 303-492-5550. Information about the ODH and the campus resources available to assist individuals regarding discrimination or harassment can be obtained at <http://hr.colorado.edu/dh/Pages/default.aspx>.

4.6 Academic Honesty

All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the Honor Code. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, threatening behavior, unauthorized access to academic materials, clicker fraud, submitting the same or similar work in more than one course without permission from all course instructors involved, and aiding academic dishonesty. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council (honor@colorado.edu; 303-735-2273). Students who are found to be in violation of the academic integrity policy will be subject to both academic sanctions from the faculty member and non-academic sanctions from the Honor Code. Additional information regarding the Honor Code policy can be found online and at the Honor Code Office. If you violate the honor code, you will receive a “zero” on the assignment/portion of the course grade in question.

4.7 Professional Courtesy and Learning Environment

Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Those who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, color, national origin, sex, pregnancy, age, disability, creed, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, veteran status, political affiliation or political philosophy. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student’s legal name. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on classroom behavior and the student code.

5 Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

5.1 Foundations: American Government — History and Framework

Learning Objectives

- We will discuss the difference between “politics” and “political science.”
- We will discuss the fundamental characteristics of American democracy.
- We will consider the ways in which the Constitution affects government’s organization, the relationship between state and national governments, and the relationship between these governments and citizens.
- We will learn about the fundamental political principles underlying the U.S. Constitution.

Topics and Reading Assignments

Week 1: 8/27-8/31. The American Political System — Politics and Political Science

M 8/27: Introduction to the class, syllabus.

W 8/29: Read the Preface of *American Politics Today* (*APT hereafter*)

F 8/31: No class meeting (make sure you get the course books, etc.)

Week 2: 9/3-9/7. Understanding American Politics

M 9/3: No class (labor day)

W 9/5: Chapter 1, APT

F 9/7: Read Chapter 1 in *Faultlines*³ (*FL hereafter*)

Week 3: 9/10-9/14. The U.S. Constitution and the Founding

M 9/10: Read Chapter 2, APT

W 9/12: Read the *Declaration of Independence*, *Articles of Confederation*, *The Constitution & Amendments*, and *The Federalist Papers* — pieces are located in the appendix of APT

F 9/14: Read Chapter 2, FL

Week 4: 9/17-9/21. Federalism

M 9/17: Read Chapter 3, APT

W 9/19: Chapter 3, APT (continued)

F 9/21: Read Chapter 3, FL

Week 5: 9/24-9/28. Civil Liberties

M 9/24: Read Chapter 4, APT

W 9/26: Chapter 4, APT (continued)

F 9/28: Read Chapter 4, FL

Week 6: 10/1-10/5. “Midterm” Exam 1

M 10/1: Catch-Up/Review

W 10/3: Midterm Administered in class

F 10/5: Go over exam

5.2 (Mass) Politics: Citizens and “Linkages” to Government

Learning Objectives

- We will learn about the ways in which citizens participate in public affairs.
- We will learn about how cultural, economic, and social factors influence participation and preferences.
- We will think about how parties and interest groups connect citizens and government.

Topics and Reading Assignments

Week 7: 10/8-10/12. Public Opinion & the Media

M 10/8: Read Chapter 6, APT

W 10/10: Read Chapter 7, APT

F 10/12: Read Chapter 9, FL

Week 8: 10/15-10/19. Political Parties & Elections

M 10/15: Read Chapter 8, APT

W 10/17: Read Chapter 9, APT

F 10/19: Read Chapters 10-11, FL

³A chapter in *Faultlines* means all the pieces within a chapter, not just the first selection

Week 9: 10/22-10/26. Elections & Interest Groups

M 10/22: Chapter 9, APT (continued)

W 10/24: Read Chapter 10, APT

F 10/26: Read Chapter 12, FL

Week 10: 10/29-11/2. “Midterm” Exam 2

M 10/29: Catch-up and Review

W 11/31: Midterm Administered in Class

F 11/2: go over exam

5.3 (American Governing) Institutions

Learning Objectives

- We will consider how the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government are organized and what responsibilities they have.
- We will look at the roles the branches play in policy-making processes.
- We will consider the ways in which the branches of government interact with/represent the general public.

Topics and Reading Assignments

Week 11: 11/5-11/9. Congress

M 11/5: Read Chapter 11, APT

W 11/7: Chapter 11, APT (continued)

F 11/9: Read Chapter 5, FL

Week 12: 11/12-11/16. Presidency & Bureaucracy

M 11/12: Read Chapter 12, APT

W 11/14: Read Chapter 13, APT

F 11/16: Read Chapters 6-7, FL

Week 13: 11/19-11/23. Fall Break — No Classes!

Week 14: 11/26-11/30. The Courts & Civil Rights

M 11/26: Read Chapter 14, APT

W 11/28: Read Chapter 5, APT — **Research Paper due this week**

F 11/30: Read Chapter 8, FL

Week 15: 12/3-12/7. Domestic Policy

M 12/3: Read Chapter 15, APT

W 12/5: Read Chapter 16, APT

F 12/7: Read Chapter 13, FL

Week 16: 12/10-12/14. Foreign Policy; The American Political System — Course Conclusion

M 12/10: Read Chapter 17, APT, Chapter 15 FL

W 12/12: Course Conclusion — Closing Thoughts

F: No class (university reading day)

Final Exam Sunday, December 16th, 7:30-10:00 p.m.