

# PSCI 1101-100: Introduction to American Politics

A-Term, Summer 2020

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Class	Day	Time	Room
1101-100	(online)	(online)	(none)

## 1 Course Description

In this introductory 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 2020 presidential election, we will examine all of these things through the lens of electoral politics. Thinking about issues and developments as we approach November, 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 course, 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 term, 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: Although we will follow an online format, this is a rigorous course, and includes a number of readings that are difficult. Students should expect to spend a significant amount of time on reading assignments (in addition to online discussion and evaluative activities).

## 2 A Comment on the Online Environment

While the substance and goals of this class remain unchanged from the conventional classroom, we will not meet for lecture and group discussion. Online classes provide you with flexibility and some control over your learning/the pace of material, but also require that you hold yourself to the broader schedule and required deadlines. Deadlines are firm (see below for details)—assignment and exam links close at specific times. It will also be important that you take the online discussion exercises seriously, as they will not only enhance your learning experience, but aid in the experience of your colleagues.

## 3 Course Requirements and Evaluation

### 3.1 Required Texts

I have ordered the following texts through CU's bookstore (though feel free to purchase them from the merchant of your choice). Used copies should be available for both texts (just be sure to get the right edition), and an e-version should be available for the Bianco and Canon text.

1. Bianco, William T. and David T. Canon. 2019. *American Politics Today*, 6th essentials ed. Norton. ISBN 978-0393679946 (“APT”)
2. Kernell, Samuel and Steven Smith, eds. 2019. *Principles and Practice of American Politics, Classic and Contemporary Readings*, 7th edition. Sage-CQ Press. ISBN: 978-1506390475 (“PNP”)

As part of course preparation, I expect you to follow current events/U.S. political news during the term. Other readings/materials may be made available through the course website on *Canvas*. Note: I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus 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.

## 4 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, and you must complete *all portions* of the course to receive a passing grade. I reserve the right to round grades up based on effort and improvement, but grades are not automatically rounded up/this is done at my discretion. (Note: Extra credit opportunities *may* arise— stay tuned.)

Ian Shapiro (Ian.Shapiro@Colorado.edu)—a Ph.D. candidate in the department of political science at CU—will assist with grading some course assignments. Ian has an M.A. in political science, years of research and teaching experience, and expertise in American politics. Feel free to contact either of us with questions about the course.

**1. Exams:** First “midterm” (20%) + Second “midterm” (20%) + Final (20%): **60%**

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 consist of multiple choice and short answer items. I will remind everyone of what material will be covered on each exam a few days beforehand. The exams will be open book and open note.

**Important:** Once you start an exam, you will have exactly 1 hour to complete it (or to the published ending time for that exam (i.e., 11:30 pm MDT)). After 1 hour the computer will automatically end your exam and submit the answers to us. Once you have begun an exam you will not be able to close and re-open it. Exams must be completed by 11:30 pm on the day on which they have been assigned—after that point you will be logged out and your answers submitted. (Late exams will not be accepted.)

**A word of advice:** Prepare for exams as you would for any regular, in-person, non-open book/note test. You only have one hour to complete exams, and thus not enough time to look up all material “on the fly.”

**2. Participation:** Discussion Activities: **20%**

The class is intended to be “interactive,” meaning that I will ask for your input as we move through course material. In the online environment that means that during the term you will be required to comment on questions/topics that I post, and to comment on others’ comments. Because our class is sizable, I may break the class into smaller discussion groups (I generally do this based on whether the last number of your student ID is even or odd).

There will be 5 discussion topics during the term, with each being worth 4 pts. (for a total of 20 pts. towards your final course grade). For each topic you will be asked to do the following:

- (a) Post a 1 paragraph (i.e., 4-6 sentence) response to the topic/prompt (additional details will be written into the prompt/topic). (2 pts.)
- (b) Post a short (i.e., 3-5 sentence) response to **two** of your colleagues’ posts. (1 pt. each, 2 pts. total)

Each discussion topic will take place over a window (generally 3 days), and all posts should be completed within said window. Posts that occur after 11:30 pm (MDT) on the day the discussion closes will not be counted towards the course participation portion of your grade. (Late posts will not be accepted.)

I ask you to please treat your colleagues with respect when asking questions, making comments, and otherwise participating in online discussion activities.

**3. Short Writing Assignments:** **20%**

During the course you will write two short essays (300-500 words each), with each being worth 10% of your final course grade. Prompts/specifcics for these will be posted during the term, but in general, these will ask you to relate a course idea to something going on in contemporary politics. The short essays are to be submitted through the drop in Canvas, and must be uploaded by 11:30 pm (MDT) on the assigned date to receive credit (late assignments will not be accepted).

## **5 Course Policies**

### **5.1 Politics and the Online Classroom Environment**

During the course we will tackle subjects that evoke passion and controversy — this will be especially true given the current climate in American politics, not to mention the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. 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.

### **5.2 Contacting Me**

I am excited to be working with you this summer. If you have questions, please send an email to me and I will reply as soon as possible (usually in well-under 24 hours; if you do not hear back in 24 hrs., please email again). If your question requires a lengthy explanation/discussion, we can try to find a time to meet over the phone/via video conferencing. Whenever you contact me (or Ian), 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):

- (a) Please give your email a subject title that relates it to the class
- (b) Please address me respectfully.
- (c) Please clearly identify yourself.
- (d) Please use capital letters, periods, and appropriate grammar.
- (e) Please include information that helps me to respond to your question (i.e., take the time to explain your question, give sufficient detail, etc.)

### **5.3 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 sometimes mistakes happen. 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.

### **5.4 Special Accommodations/Disability**

I am more than happy to make special arrangements for students with documented disabilities that have been documented through Disability Services ([colorado.edu/disabilityservices](http://colorado.edu/disabilityservices)). If you qualify for accommodations because of a disability, please submit a letter from Disability Services in a timely manner (i.e., the first few days of the course) so that your needs can be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities. Contact Disability Services at 303-492-8671 or by e-mail at [dsinfo@colorado.edu](mailto:dsinfo@colorado.edu). If you have a temporary medical condition or injury, see Temporary Injuries guidelines under the Quick Links 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-and-or-exams>. Please notify me about potential conflicts in the first week of the term.

## **5.5 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>.

## **5.6 Academic Honesty**

All students of the University of Colorado at Boulder are responsible for knowing and adhering to the academic integrity policy of this institution. Violations of this policy may include: cheating, plagiarism, aid of academic dishonesty, fabrication, lying, bribery, and threatening behavior. All incidents of academic misconduct shall be reported to the Honor Code Council ([honor@colorado.edu](mailto: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 (including but not limited to university probation, suspension, or expulsion). 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.

## **5.7 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, culture, religion, creed, politics, veterans status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity and gender expression, age, disability, and nationalities. 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 term so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. For more information, see the policies on behavior and the student code.

# **6 Course Schedule and Reading Assignments**

## **6.1 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

- Unit 1: The American Political System — Politics and Political Science
  - Lecture 1: Introduction to the class, syllabus. **Reading:** read the syllabus
  - Lecture 2: Course Concepts. **Reading:** Preface of *American Politics Today* (APT hereafter)
- Unit 2: Understanding American Politics
  - Lecture 3: Course Themes (cont.). **Reading:** Chapter 1, APT; Chapter 1 in *Principles and Practice of American Politics*  
(A chapter in *Principles* means all pieces within, not just the first selection (PNP hereafter))
- Unit 3: The U.S. Constitution and the Founding
  - Lecture 4: Limited Government in the Constitution. **Reading:** Chapter 2, APT; *Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, The Constitution & Amendments*, and *The Federalist Papers* (pieces are located in the appendix of APT); Chapter 2, PNP
- Unit 4: Federalism
  - Lecture 5: Federalism, American Style. **Reading:** Chapter 3, APT; Chapter 3, PNP
- Unit 5: Civil Liberties
  - Lecture 6: Civil Liberties and Limited Government. **Reading:** Ch. 4, APT; Ch. 5, PNP
- Discussion #1 opens, Thursday, June 4 and closes Saturday, June 6 at 11:30 pm MDT
- Exam 1 Due by Tuesday, June 9th, by 11:30 pm MDT

## 6.2 (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

- Unit 6: Public Opinion & the Media
  - Lecture 7: Public Opinion. **Reading:** Chapter 6, APT; Chapter 10, PNP
  - Lecture 8: Media in the US. **Reading:** Chapter 14, PNP
- Unit 7: Political Parties, Elections & Organized Interests
  - Lecture 9: Parties: Who, What, When & Why. **Reading:** Chs. 7, APT; Chs. 12, PNP
  - Lecture 10: Participation and Interest Groups. **Reading:** Ch. 8-9, APT; Ch. 11 & 13, PNP
- Discussion #2 opens, Thursday, June 11 and closes Saturday, June 13 at 11:30 pm MDT
- Short Writing Assignment #1 due Monday, June 15, by 11:30 pm MDT
- Discussion #3 opens, Wednesday, June 17 and closes Friday, June 19 at 11:30 pm MDT
- Exam 2: Due by Monday, June 22, by 11:30 pm MDT

## 6.3 (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

- Unit 8: Congress  
Lecture 11: Understanding the Institution. **Reading:** Ch. 10, APT; Ch. 6, PNP.
- Unit 9: Presidency & Bureaucracy  
Lecture 12: The Executive Branch. **Reading:** Chapter 11-12, APT; Chapters 7-8, PNP
- Unit 10: The Courts & Civil Rights  
Lecture 13: The Judiciary. **Reading:** Chapter 13, APT  
Lecture 14: Civil Rights. **Reading:** Chapter 5, APT; Chapter 4, PNP
- Unit 11: Policy and Course Conclusions  
Lecture 15: Domestic: Social & Economic Policy. **Reading:** Chs. 14, APT  
Lecture 16: Foreign Policy/American Political System. **Reading:** Ch. 15, APT
- Discussion #4 opens, Tuesday, June 23 and closes Thursday, June 25 at 11:30 pm MDT
- Short Writing Assignment #2 due Monday, June 29, by 11:30 pm MDT
- Discussion #5 opens, Sunday, June 28 and closes Wednesday, July 1 at 11:30 pm MDT
- Exam 3: Due by Thursday, July 2, by 11:30 pm MDT