

American political system: Political Science 1101

University of Colorado-Boulder

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“If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be governed by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself. A dependence on the people is, no doubt, the primary control on the government; but experience has taught mankind the need for auxiliary precautions.”

- Federalist 51 (Madison)

“Each man’s experience starts again from the beginning. Only institutions grow wiser: they accumulate collective experience and owing to this experience and this wisdom, men subject to the same rules will not see their own nature changing, but their behavior gradually transformed.”

- Henri-Frederic Amiel (1821-1882)

Course objectives

The purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to the logic of political science. This class is meant to prepare you for higher-level coursework and the assessments in this course gives you the tools you need to criticize the logic of various arguments. Along the way, we will seek to gain a better understanding of the American political system, focusing primarily on how its institutions and historical ideas shape how people behave. To begin with, we will explore the causes, ideas and reasons for the U.S. constitution, and the extent to which those ideas have worked in the last two hundred years. We will then examine both the historical and contemporary context of how federalism, Congress, the presidency, elections and the courts work in real situations. The course will also delve into issues that transcend time and space, such as how institutions work to ensure that citizens cooperate with one another.

Course requirements

You are required to come to every class day, *prepared by the reading for discussion*. This means that everyone is expected to have done all the reading and each person is responsible for

sharing their unique understanding of the topics. Each person's contribution is highly valued and necessary for a successful seminar. For this reason, 15% of your grade will be composed of a combination of attendance and class participation. There are four in class quizzes and assignments that are each worth 5% of your grade. There are two exams: a midterm and a final, each worth 32.5% of your grade. Exams are based partially on the reading, some of which we will not discuss in class. They are also partially based on your understanding of our class lectures and discussions and will be an assessment on your understanding of the tools we use to create and criticize scholarly arguments.

Lectures are not in any way redundant of the reading. You will be expected to integrate what we learn in class with your reading.

Incompletes are strongly discouraged by the College and are only given for non-academic reasons.

Required text

The Logic of American Politics (any edition)

Academic honesty

All the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without proper citation) will be tolerated. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students. **If you cheat, you will fail the course.** Please review the University's policy regarding academic integrity: <http://www.colorado.edu/policies/acadinteg.html>

Disabilities accommodation

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) provides protection from illegal discrimination for qualified individuals with disabilities. Students requesting instructional accommodations due to disabilities must arrange for such accommodation. Please review the University's services for such accommodations: <http://www.colorado.edu/sacs/disabilityservices/index.html>

Note: You will be expected to behave professionally in this class. I will not tolerate disruptive behavior, including, but not limited to, reading newspapers, playing on your laptop conversing during lectures, insulting classmates or the instructor.

Make-up exams will not be given (unless there is a major and substantiated complication which prevents completion, and that determination will be made solely at the discretion of the instructor.)

Course outline and lectures

	Lecture Topic	Reading Due
Day 1	Logic of scientific inquiry: kinds of arguments, logical fallacies	
	Quiz 1 on statements	
Day 2	Introduction to Political Science: Philosophy, rational choice and political behavior	Chapter 15
Day 3	Why government? Justice and cooperation	
Day 4	The emergence of democracy and the rule of law	Chapters 1
Day 5	The American constitution	Chapter 2
Day 6	Federalism	Chapter 3
Day 7	Midterm	
Day 8	Courts	Chapter 9
Day 9	Rights	Chapter 4
Day 10	Liberties	Chapter 5
Day 11	Congress	Chapter 6
Day 12	Presidency	Chapter 7 and 8
Day 13	Public Opinion and Social Movements	Chapters 10 and 11
Day 14	Final exam	