

THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM
PSCI 1101-100
Autumn 2021
T/R 9:35-10:25, via Zoom

Zoom Info: <https://cuboulder.zoom.us/j/97366977586>

Meeting ID: 973 6697 7586

Passcode: 118545

One tap mobile:

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Professor: John Griffin Office: Ketchum 114D
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Office Hours: T/R 10:30-12 in person or Zoom (link above), and by appointment

Teaching Assistants:

Michael Byrd
Tyler Garrett
Alex Jensen
Madeline Mader (Head TA)
Sinan Nadarevic
Morgan Nadeau
Marija Sajekaite

This course is designed to help you gain the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and participate in American politics. You will learn many of the basic features that characterize American politics. More importantly, these basic facts have far reaching implications. They present problems, they animate discussions, they start arguments, and they stimulate research. These issues remain live. To understand the issues, you must understand the basic information. However, far more than simply memorizing basic facts, this course is designed to enable you to enter the dynamic and open-ended debate in pursuit of truth.

Student Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course you should be able to:

- Explain why we have a government
- Summarize the historical origins of the American political system
- Describe the major elements of the American political system
- Explain the consequences of the ways the system works
- Describe current events in American politics

- Identify the main positions citizens hold on important political issues
- Evaluate the arguments supporting positions on important political issues
- Specify our democratic responsibilities in the context of a diverse public

Modality

All lectures will be presented remotely and synchronously and will not be recorded except in special circumstances on request (i.e. you live in a time zone that requires you to attend class in the middle of the night). If you expect to miss a class due to illness, we recommend that you seek out the class notes from a classmate. Some recitation sections will take place in person and others will be held remotely. Masking policies will follow university requirements; at the present time masking is required of students in indoor, public settings (e.g. classrooms, hallways), but not instructors if they are able to remain 6 feet from other individuals. Office hours modality will be both in person and remote for Prof. Griffin, while recitation modality will be by Instructor.

Details regarding the protocols regarding “chatting” in lecture and recitation will be shared by your instructors.

Do not share course Zoom login information with anyone not enrolled in the course.

Readings

Required: [GOVT11](#) (or a prior edition), by Sidlow and Henschen (paperback or ebook); and readings on Canvas

Recommended: *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, or another major national news source.

Unless otherwise noted, readings not in GOVT will be available on Canvas or via a provided link. Page numbers refer to the numbers on the page itself, not the page of a pdf document. I may also make announcements about the course via your colorado.edu email account, so please check it.

Throughout the semester, we will relate the course’s concepts and controversies to current events. Therefore, you are required to stay abreast of those events. There are several good free online news sources, as well as low-cost subscriptions for students.

Grading

Exams

Your grade first will be determined by three midterm exams and a non-cumulative final exam. The first midterm exam will be worth 10%, and the remaining midterm exams and the final exam will each be worth 15% of your final grade. The format of the tests will be multiple choice

and short answer questions. The exams will be administered in Canvas and will have a time limit. **The exams will be open book, open note, open world, meaning you can refer to any source during the exam with the exception that you cannot ask for or provide assistance to any other person (friend, relative, etc.)**

In general, we do not change grades. If we have added your scores incorrectly, we'll thank you for noticing and change the grade. Your TA and I will also be happy to discuss with you how you can improve in the class. Please do not ask us questions about exams until 24 hours after they are handed back. All information assigned can appear on the exam, even if we do not discuss it in class. If you believe your work deserves a higher score, you are free to make the argument to us in writing. Your argument must summarize what your test said, what the ideal test would have said at the point in question, and explain why your test should earn a higher grade. The document must be submitted within 7 days from the time we delivered the exam back to you.

Except for a documented emergency, you must take the exams when they are scheduled. There are simply too many students to reschedule exams. If you know that you will not be able to attend one of the exams because of university business (e.g., a sporting event, a debate), you should speak to your TA early in the semester. If you have an emergency on the day of the exam, you will need documentation to prove that your absence was beyond your control.

Paper Assignment

There will be one short paper assignment (8 page limit). You will be asked to apply some of the topics learned in the course to a policy area of your choosing. Some modest independent research will be expected and there is a deadline of October 22 to submit your preliminary research. The paper will be worth 25% of your grade. **The final paper deadline is Friday November 19 at 5:00 p.m., at which time your paper should be uploaded to Canvas.**

Lecture Attendance

Attendance at lectures is recommended. You will likely perform much better on the exams if you attend lectures regularly as the lectures will contain information not in the textbook and will also touch on topics such as current events that will be on the exams.

Recitation

Your recitation grade will count for 20% of your overall course grade. To earn full credit for recitation attendance you should participate regularly by asking pertinent questions and offering up answers to your Instructor when invited to do so. Further details will be provided by your TA in a recitation syllabus.

In sum,

3 midterm exams worth 10%, 15%, 15% = 40% of grade

1 final exam = 15% of grade

1 paper assignment = 25% of grade (reflects both preliminary and final paper performance)

Recitation = 20% of grade

Final Grade Scale

Final grades will be determined as follows:

94-100 = A 90-93.9 = A-

87-89.9 = B+ 84-86.9 = B 80-83.9 = B-

77-79.9 = C+ 74-76.9 = C 70-73.9 = C-

67-69.9 = D+ 64-66.9 = D 60-63.9 = D-

Below 60 = F

Class Policies/Procedures

The Classroom Environment

Please present yourself on Zoom as you would if you were in an actual classroom.

Online Course Evaluations

Every student should complete an evaluation during the evaluation period near the end of the semester. I ask that you provide feedback so that I can improve the course and my teaching in general.

University Policies

For a complete summary of University policies related to courses, please follow [this link](#) and select "Student Version".

Inquiries and Assistance

Your first resource for questions is the Teaching Assistant leading your recitation. Their contact information will be shared with you the first day your recitation is held. The TAs will be sure to bring to the attention of the Professor questions for which they are uncertain of the answer or that are of a serious nature. Another resource at your disposal is the Head TA, Madeline Mader madeline.mader@colorado.edu. Finally, you should be aware of campus resources such as the CU Boulder Writing Center - <http://www.colorado.edu/pwr/writingcenter> and academic support services - <http://www.colorado.edu/orientation/tutoring-academic-support-services>.

SCHEDULE (subject to change)

8/24 Introduction - Why Have a Government at all?

Podcast: The Leviathan, History of Ideas, Hobbes on Power -
<https://www.talkingpoliticspodcast.com/history-of-ideas-1>

8/26 American Political Culture
GOVT, ch. 1

8/31 Revolution and Independence

GOVT, ch. 2
Declaration of Independence

9/2 The Founding and Constitutional Design

Federalist 51
Antifederalist 17

9/7 Civil Liberties

GOVT, ch. 4
“Civil Liberties During the Covid-19 Pandemic” - <https://voxeu.org/article/civil-liberties-during-covid-19-pandemic>

9/9 Civil Rights (esp. Voting Rights)

GOVT, ch. 5
[HR1, Division A, Title I, Subtitle A \(“Voter Registration Modernization”\) through Subtitle N Part 1 \(“Promoting Voter Access”\)](#)

9/14 Marijuana, Shutdowns, and Voting Rules – the Politics of Federalism
GOVT, ch. 3

9/16 Exam 1, via Canvas

9/21 Congress

GOVT, ch. 11

9/23 Congress II

9/28 The Promise and the Danger: The Presidency

GOVT, ch. 12

[Podcast: History of Ideas - Weber on Leadership](#)

9/30 Bureaucracy

GOVT, ch. 13

10/5 The Judiciary

GOVT, ch. 14

[Presidential Commission on the Supreme Court, July 20, 2021 Hearings](#)

10/7 Judicial Selection and Decision Making

Liptak, "Rendering Justice, With One Eye on Re-election" (*NY Times*)

10/12 Flex Day

10/14 Exam 2, via Canvas

10/19 Why Do We Have (Two) Political Parties?

GOVT, ch. 7

10/21 Partisan Loyalties and Polarization

10/22 Preliminary Paper Assignment Due, 5:00 via Canvas upload

10/26 Interest Groups and Accountability

GOVT, ch. 6

Dunham, et al., "Shakedown on K Street"

4:00 Extra Credit Event – Rosenbloom Symposium "Equality", Law School Courtroom, free admission but sign in on arrival

10/28 What Shapes the News?

GOVT, ch. 10

11/2 The Media's Influence on Politics

11/4 Exam 3, via Canvas

11/9 Campaigns and Elections I – The Purpose of Elections and Electoral Rules

GOVT, ch. 9

[Podcast: History of Ideas; Schumpeter on Democracy](#)

11/11 Campaigns and Elections II – Electoral Strategies

11/16 Who Participates in Politics and Why it Matters

GOVT, ch. 8-2 and 8-4

11/18 Participation II

11/19 Final Paper Due at 5:00 p.m. via Canvas upload

11/23 Fall Break

11/25 Thanksgiving

12/30 Public Opinion and the Perils of Polling

GOVT, ch. 8-1 and 8-3

12/2 Public Opinion II

12/7 Public Policy

GOVT, chs. 15-1 and 16-1

12/9 Flex Day

12/11 Final Exam, 1:30 p.m. via Canvas