

GOVT 151: American Government & Politics

Fall 2013

Mondays & Wednesdays, 8:30-9:50am or 1:10-2:30pm

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Office/Office Hours: PAC 331, Tuesdays 10:00am-1:00pm

Purpose: This course serves as an introduction to the systematic and scientific study of American politics, political institutions, and political actors. Students will be introduced to the basic institutions of American government, especially as established in the Constitution, and with an introduction to currents of thought among social scientists about the workings of U.S. politics and political actors. This course familiarizes students with innovative as well as classic approaches to studying U.S. government. In the end, each student will have a solid grounding in our national political institutions and processes, sharper reading and writing skills, and insight into approaching politics critically and analytically.

As a result of this course, students will be able to:

Overall Course Objectives

- Cultivate an appreciation for and attention to American politics as a habit in everyday life
- Feel like a more informed citizen of the United States and of the world
- Develop a deeper understanding of political science as a discipline and understand how political scientists perform their work

Specific Learning Objectives

- Clearly communicate the importance of American politics in American life through both verbal and written assignments
- Critically analyze biased political media sources, one-sided political analyses, and/or partisan reasoning
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to the study of American political institutions and actors

*This syllabus does not constitute a binding contract and any assignment, reading, or requirement may be altered at the discretion of the professor at any time.

Etiquette: Although I will spend some of our class time lecturing, we will have many dialogues, both in class and online. In these discussions, you are encouraged to use your personal experiences and perspectives as well as your understanding of the course material and current events. Direct personal attacks against others in the class are not permitted. Insulting anyone one inside or outside the class on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, age, sexual orientation, religion, party affiliation, or national background is not permitted. Violations of these rules will be reflected in your grade and, if they continue, may result in disciplinary action by the University.

I highly value class discussion and interaction. I regard it as an integral part of the learning experience and learning from you is one of the joys of my job. Therefore, I expect you to attend lectures and to complete the assigned readings before attending class. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and your interpretations of the way the course material informs our understanding of current events.

Disability Resources: Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-2332 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

Copyrighted Class Materials: All course materials including but not limited to class notes, lectures, handouts, and presentations are the copyrighted materials of the instructor. The copying and sale of any such materials will subject the involved parties to the provisions of the Federal Copyright Act.

Assessment Plan: More details for each assignment will be provided in lecture.

1. Midterm Examination: (20%). The exam will consist of both short answers and an essay(s).
2. Debate Leadership (10%) and Memo (15%): We will conduct policy debates for several weeks and you will lead either the pro or con side of one debate with a partner. Your presentation should be roughly 15 minutes, with more time for rebuttal. More details to come. Sign-up for debate issues will take place by the end of week 2 and debates will begin during week 3.
3. Along with your presentation, you will turn in a 2 or 3-page, single-

- spaced memo outlining your arguments along with a description of two other sources that contributed to your presentation.
3. Short paper: (15%). You will write one short paper (5-7 pages) critically reflecting on one of the course's topics. You should *not* just summarize the readings but instead should discuss how they compare to and contrast with other readings or contemporary American politics. Due November 20.
 4. Final exam: (30%). The exam will consist of both short answers and an essay. The exam will be comprehensive, covering all material from the entire term.
 5. Participation: (10%). We will have a variety of different exercises during class that will give you many opportunities to voice your opinions about current events and the course materials. This includes turning in two questions during each of the debates in which you are not participating, short in-class assignments, etc.

Grade Requests: Grading can be a subjective exercise and sometimes, despite my best efforts, I make a mistake. If you want to contest your grade on a specific assignment, you must wait 24 hours before you may discuss it with me. I ask that you give me a one-page (at most) explanation for your request. At my discretion, I may re-grade the assignment but it should be noted that your grade may go up **or down** as a result of the re-grading.

Writing Specifications: Please note that all written assignments are expected to be typed, doubled spaced with one-inch margins and in a 12-point font. Acceptable fonts are Palatino Linotype or Times New Roman. Please number your pages and be sure that your paper is stapled before you turn it in. The clarity of your writing will affect the strength of your argument and therefore students should proofread and spell-check their work carefully. You must cite any information and/or ideas that you take from someone else's work. Also note, you should limit your use of direct quotations (someone else's words surrounded by "") to the rare occasion when the original author has stated your point perfectly and it cannot be improved. Otherwise, you are generally better off stylistically using your own words and citing the ideas and facts provided by other authors. For citations, I prefer that students use the American Psychological Association (APA). However, any citation method is acceptable as long as it is used correctly and consistently. For additional information on APA style, visit <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/> or <http://www.apastyle.org/learn/tutorials/basics-tutorial.aspx>

Course Syllabus

Required Texts

- Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavrek. 2013. The Logic of American Politics (6th Edition). Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.
- Kernell, Samuel & Steven S. Smith. 2013. Principles and Practice of American Politics (5th Edition). Washington D.C.: CQ Press.
- (Debate readings- will be distributed in class) Ellis, Richard J. & Michael Nelson. 2013. Debating Reform: Conflicting Perspectives on How to Fix the American Political System. 2013. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

Readings not in the Kernell, Jacobson, Kousser, & Vavrek book (KJKV) or the Kernell & Smith book (K & S) are marked “online” and/or will be distributed in class.

Classes begin on Monday, September 2

Week 1: Introduction

Monday, September 2 (No Assigned Reading)

- Introduction to the course, student and professor expectations, syllabus review.

Wednesday, September 4:

Topics: Collective action, the prisoner’s dilemma, institutional design, public and private goods, principals and agents.

Readings:

- KJKV, chapter 1
- Mancur Olson, Jr. From *The Logic of Collective Action*. (K & S 1-1, p. 1)
- Garrett Hardin. *The Tragedy of the Commons*. (K&S 1-2, p. 12)

Week 2: The Founders and the Constitution

Monday, September 9; Wednesday, September 11

Topics: Weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation, Checks and balances, popular sovereignty, the Great Compromise, separation of powers, federalism, nationalization.

Readings:

- KJKV, chapters 2 and 3
- The Constitution of the United States (in KJKV, pp. 703-714)
- The Federalist, 10, 51 (K & S, 2-3 and 2-4, pp. 64 and 71)

Week 3: Congress and the Legislative Process

Monday, September 16; Wednesday, September 18

Topics: Representation, redistricting and gerrymandering, incumbency advantage, leadership structure, the committee system, how a bill becomes a law.

Readings:

- KJKV, chapter 6
- David Mayhew, "Congress: The Electoral Connection." From *The American Congress Reader*, Steven Smith, Jason Roberts, and Ryan Vander Wielen (eds). (ONLINE).
- John Aldrich & David W. Rohde. "Congressional Committees in a Continuing Partisan Era." (K & S 6-3, p. 231).

DEBATE 1 (9/18): Proportional Representation (Pro: p. 191; Con: p. 198).

Week 4: The Presidency

Monday, September 23; Wednesday, September 25

Topics: Various roles of the president, growth of presidential power over time, the cabinet, going public, presidential rhetoric, the president's staff.

Readings:

- KJKV, chapter 7
- Richard E. Neustadt. From *Presidential Power*. (K&S 7-1, p. 254).
- John P. Burke. "The Institutional Presidency." (K&S 7-2, p. 275).
- Samuel Kernell. From *Going Public*. (K&S 7-3, p. 300).

DEBATE 2 (9/25): Abolishing the Electoral College (Pro: p. 265; Con: p. 273)

Week 5: Supreme Court

Monday, September 30; Wednesday, October 2

Topics: Judicial review, structure of federal judiciary, Supreme Court history, justice confirmation process, judicial activism, recent decisions.

Readings:

- KJKV, chapter 9
- The Federalist, No. 78 (K&S 9-3, p. 414).
- Antonin Scalia. From *A Matter of Interpretation: Federal Courts and the Law*. (K&S 9-1, p. 383).
- Stephen Breyer. From *Active Liberty*. (K&S 9-2, p. 401).

DEBATE 3 (10/2): Term limits for Supreme Court Justices (Pro: p. 314; Con: p. 324)

Week 6: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Monday, October 7; Wednesday, October 9

Topics: Rights and liberties, recognition of rights of ethnic/racial groups, the Bill of Rights, due process, equal protection, freedom of speech, religious freedom, privacy.

Readings:

- KJKV, chapters 4 and 5

MIDTERM EXAM: Monday, October 14

NO CLASS: Wednesday, October 16

FALL BREAK: Monday, October 21 (no class)

Week 7: Interest Groups & Political Influence

Wednesday, October 23

Topics: Interest groups, PACs and Super PACs, money in politics, campaign finance reform, institutional change

Readings:

- KJKV, chapter 13
- KJKV, chapter 15

Week 8: Political Parties and Partisanship

Monday, October 28; Wednesday, October 30

Topics: Who controls the party, nominations and the united front, partisanship among voters and elites, partisanship versus ideology, factions versus parties, third parties, party system history, party decline and resurgence

Readings:

- KJKV, chapter 12
- John Aldrich. From *Why Parties?* (K&S 12-1, p. 602).
- American Political Science Association, "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System." (ONLINE).
- Larry M. Bartels. "Partisanship and Voting Behavior, 1952-1996." (K&S 12-2, p. 615).

DEBATE 4 (10/30): National primary for Presidential nominations (Pro: p. 139; Con: p. 147)

Week 9: Public Opinion

Monday, November 4; Wednesday, November 6

Topics: Voters and non-voters, ideologues and the undecided, polling, non-attitudes, partisanship, polarization.

Readings:

- KJKV, chapter 10
- Herbert Asher. "Analyzing and Interpreting Polls." (K&S 10-1, p. 436).
- Morris P. Fiorina. From *Culture War: The Myth of a Polarized America*. (K&S 10-3, p. 481).

DEBATE 5 (11/6): Compulsory Voting (Pro: p. 104; Con: p. 110)

Week 10: IN-CLASS ACTIVITY:

Monday, November 11; Wednesday, November 13

SHORT PAPER DUE WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 20

Week 11: The Media

Monday, November 18; Wednesday, November 20

Topics: Television versus newspapers, bias, reporters versus editors, sound bites, images versus text, the White House Press Corps, media effects (priming, agenda-setting, framing)

Readings:

- KJKV, chapter 14
- Nelson, Thomas E., Rosalee A. Clawson, & Zoe M. Oxley. 1997. "Media Framing of a Civil Liberties conflict and its Effect on Tolerance." *American Political Science Review*, 91(3): 567-583. (ONLINE).
- Druckman, James N. 2004. "Priming the Vote: Campaign Effects in a U.S. Senate Election." *Political Psychology*, 25(4): 577-594. (ONLINE).

Weeks 12-13: Political Campaigns and Elections

Monday, November 25; Wednesday, November 27 (No Class); Monday, December 2

Topics: The powers and limits of campaigns, turnout, how voters decide, campaign spending, positive and negative advertising, the Electoral College

Readings:

- KJKV, chapter 11
- Popkin, Samuel. From *The Reasoning Voter*. (K&S 11-1, p. 533).
- Schudson, Michael. "America's Ignorant Voters." (K&S 11-4, p. 588).

Wednesday, December 4: Final conclusions, final exam review

FINAL EXAM SCHEDULE:

8:30am section: Final Exam on Thursday, December 12; 9-12

1:10pm section: Final Exam Wednesday, December 11; 9-12