

American Political System

POL 241

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Class meets: T/TR, 1-2:20 pm, HRN 204

Office hours: T/TR, 12-1 pm, 2:20-4 pm, or by apt., HRN 213

TA: Colin Greig (greigcj@miamioh.edu)

1 Course Description

This course provides students with a broad understanding of the American political system. We will begin by examining the history of key U.S. political institutions and the rationales behind them. Next, we will turn to the key players competing in the system. After this, we will look at the basic institutions, rules, and policies under which these players compete. Students who complete this course are expected to have a basic mastery of these ideas, which would then allow them to delve more deeply into specific areas of American politics.

2 Student Learning Outcomes

This course will further the learning outcomes for Political Science Majors in the following ways:

1. Through course readings and lectures, students will be able to define and explain key concepts in American Politics.
2. Through written assignments and class debates, students will hone evidence-based reasoning, including identifying appropriate data, evidence, or argument for their projects.
3. Through course readings and written assignments, students will learn to identify the appropriate methodology approach to their research design, as well as understanding the ethical components of research choices.

4. Through class debates, written assignments, and interactive assignments, students will practice applying political science knowledge to contemporary political issues.
5. Drawing from material in lectures and readings, students will practice formulating and advocating for positive change in our society through their written and interactive assignments.

Course Policies

The following is a summary. More detailed explanation of policies are below.

Students are expected to:

- Come to every class prepared to actively discuss and engage in the readings and participate in discussions, debates, and office hours.
- Turn in assignments on time.
- Be respectful of peers and instructor.
- Check email and read the Canvas site frequently.

In return, you can expect that I will:

- Create an encouraging class atmosphere where students feel comfortable asking questions.
- Show an interest in your learning, and respect your opinions.
- Give timely feedback on your work.
- Check email and read the Canvas site frequently.

2.1 Absences

The Student Handbook states, “Every student is expected to attend every class session for which the student is duly registered.” (Part VII, Section 01.701).

- Unexcused absences: each student has **two** unexcused absences. This means you do not need to get permission for or inform me of these absences, and they will not impact your participation grade. (You will still be responsible for any assignments, including quizzes, due that day.)
- Excused absences: these require prior written approval from me, and will not impact your grade. These include things like illness, athletic events, serious family emergencies, jury duty, pregnancy, military service, etc. In accordance with University policy (Part VII, Section 01.701.B), students must give written notice to the instructor within the first two weeks of class of a religious observance, participation in athletic events, or other academic-related group activities that prohibit class attendance.

- Turning in assignments: Exceptions to deadlines may be made for illness or serious emergencies at the discretion of the professor. Students participating in a university event, sport, or club should expect to continue to submit assignments on the regular due date.
- Inclement weather/snow: In the event of inclement weather preventing me from reaching campus, we will hold our class sessions online via Canvas. I will make slides and a lecture available, and will enable discussion via chatroom. Each student will be required to post at least one substantive comment in the class chatroom on these days. This will not impact assignment due dates.

2.2 Academic Dishonesty

- Cheating, plagiarism, and any form of academic dishonesty in any portion of the academic work for a course will not be tolerated and shall be grounds for awarding a grade of Withdrawal Academic Dishonesty (W(AD)) for the entire course. A W(AD) is calculated as an F in your grade point average.
- Your papers will be submitted on Canvas via Turnitin.

Assignment Due Dates

- All written assignments must be turned in on Canvas at the time specified. Late assignments will not be accepted, even if the assignment is turned in one minute past the deadline.
- Computers/Internet/Printing: You will be using computers throughout this course for your assignments. Computers and computer software are not foolproof. You should take precautions so that such computer issues do not affect your ability to turn in an assignment. Make multiple copies of your written work, save another copy on a network drive, email a version to yourself. Save your drafts frequently, i.e., every five minutes. Print out copies often. If you take these reasonable precautions, you will not be deterred from meeting due dates, even if your computer should malfunction. Computer, internet, or printer malfunctions are not an excuse for a late paper.

Classroom Conduct

- Cellular Phones: My expectation is that you will turn your phone off and place it in a bag or otherwise out of view during class time.
- Laptop computers/tablets: My expectation is that you will not bring these to class, or will keep them in a bag.

Emails

- You are responsible for reading and following any instructions I send via email/Canvas.

- You are encouraged to email with questions, but follow this checklist first:
 - If your question can be answered by the syllabus, a classmate, the university’s resources (IT, library, etc.), or google, do not email me until you have exhausted other options. Otherwise, I may not respond.
 - Only email me with reasonable and appropriate requests. E.g. a request for a recommendation with adequate time is reasonable; a request to print your paper is not.
 - Although I attempt to respond quickly, please allow at least two business days for response.
- Be professional and courteous to myself and the TA in your emails. Address me by my correct title (Dr. Blum or Professor Blum), use complete sentences, and keep your request clear and concise.

Grades

Grading System

- A range (90-100): Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
- B range (80-89): Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
- C range (70-79): Achievement that meets course requirements in every respect.
- D range (60-69): Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements.
- F (0-59): Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed.

Grade Disputes

- If the problem is simple and obvious (an addition error or entry mistake on Canvas): show evidence of the error to the TA, who will rectify the mistake.
- If the problem is *not* simple and obvious, submit a written statement (no more than 1 page, hard copy) with the original assignment explaining why the grade should be changed to the TA. The TA retain’s the right when re-grading an assignment to raise or lower your grade.
- If the TA cannot resolve your problem, you may email me, along with an explanation of the problem and your correspondence with the TA.

3 Graded Components

- Class participation: 20%
 - Reading quizzes (30%)
 - Reading sheets (20%)
 - Online current events discussions (30%)
 - Other participation (20%)
- Class debates: 10%
- Current events paper: 15%
- Midterm Exam: 15%
- Final paper: 20%
- Final exam: 20%

Class Participation: 20%

Reading quizzes: 30%

Reading quizzes will follow nearly all of your readings in the online textbook.

Reading sheets: 20%

Occasionally, I will ask you to read an additional scholarly work. On those days, students will be provided with a reading sheet to help them with the readings. These dates are listed on the syllabus. Students will need to use the readings to fill in information from these sheets. These sheets will be due, on Canvas, by class time on the dates they are assigned. These sheets will be graded on a 0-5 scale.

Online current events discussions: 30%

Most weeks we will have 1-2 online discussion in conjunction with class. Each student will post one substantive post connecting the concept's of that week (or the course) with a current events topic. Students will be encouraged to link to and draw from a new article on the topic, and develop their own ideas about this. Student discussions will be graded on a 0-5 scale. Students can receive up to 2 points for an original argument, up to 1 point for linking to a current events news article, and up to 2 points for commenting on at least two classmates' posts. **Online discussions will be due by class time the day they are assigned.**

Other participation: 20%

This includes attendance, participation in class discussions, and participation in office hours. A combination of these factors will determine this final component of your participation grade.

Debates: 10%

At a few points in the semester we will have class debates on American politics topics. Students will be assigned sides, teams, and topics in class. Each student's performance will be graded individually on a 0-100 scale. Opportunities for extra credit will be available.

Current Events Paper (15%)

Early in the semester, students will write an op-ed style paper on a contemporary political event. Good papers will use theories or concepts discussed in class to approach these events. Papers will be 2-3 pages long. More instructions will be provided on Canvas.

Midterm and Final exams (15% and 20%)

There will be a midterm during our regular class period and a final exam during exam week. Both will involve some combination of multiple choice, short identifications, and short essays. Any kind of question is possible for the exams. Both will be closed book and closed notes. If you do not attend the midterm or the final without prior arrangements, you cannot make up the exam.

Final Paper (20%)

A final paper will be due the week before class ends. This paper can be an extension of your current events paper, or on another topic (I will provide a list of topics to choose from). The paper will be 5-7 pages. The paper will be due in class. You must provide a hard copy in class and a copy online using turnitin.

4 Required Readings

All of the readings will be available online. Most of them are through the online textbook (Cengage MindTap American Government course). You will need to purchase access to this course (instructions are provided on Canvas). All additional readings will be linked to through this online textbook.

Module 1: Why Government?

January 24: Introduction and Overview and Lecture 1: Orientation/Why Government?
Noel (online)

January 26: Lecture 2: Constitution and Founding
Cengage Unit 1 (readings, quizzes, and discussion board)

January 31: Lecture 3: Federalism
Cengage Unit 2 (readings, quizzes, and discussion board)

February 2: Class Debate 1: the Great Compromise

February 7: Lecture 4: Representation
Dahl (online, Unit 2b), **Reading sheet 1 due**

February 9: Lecture 5: Civil Liberties
Cengage Unit 3 (readings, quizzes)

February 14: Lecture 6: Civil Rights
Cengage Unit 4 (readings, quizzes, and discussion board)

Module 2: Political Institutions

February 16: Lecture 8: Congress
Cengage Unit 5 (readings, quizzes)
Mayhew (online)
Reading sheet 2 due

February 21: Lecture 9: Presidency
Cengage Unit 6 (readings, quizzes)
Current Events Paper Due by Class Time

February 23: Lecture 10: Bureaucracy
Cengage Unit 7 (readings, quizzes, discussion board)

February 28: Lecture 11: Judiciary and Midterm Review
Cengage Unit 8 (readings, quizzes, discussion board)

March 2: Midterm exam

Module 3: Influence on Politics

March 7: IAMA I am a Professor in Political Parties, ask me anything

March 9: Lecture 12: Interest groups
Cengage Unit 10 (readings, quizzes)

March 14 Lecture 13: Campaign Finance and Lobbying
Cengage Unit 10b (readings, discussion board)

March 16: Other Party systems

March 20-26: NO CLASSES, SPRING BREAK

March 28: Lecture 14: Political Parties
Cengage Unit 12 (readings, quizzes, discussion board)

March 30: Lecture 15: Parties in Nominations
Cengage Unit 12b: Masket and Noel, (online)
Reading sheet 3

April 4: Lecture 16: Activism in the Tea Party
Cengage Unit 12c: Blum, (online)

April 6: Lecture 17: Media
Guest lecture Colin Greig
Cengage Unit 11 (readings, quizzes, discussion board)

April 11: Class debate 2: should the US be a two-party system?

Module 4: Political Behavior

April 13: Lecture 18: Preferences and Ideology
Take Pew quiz, participate in discussion (Canvas)

April 18: Lecture 19: Public Opinion
Cengage Unit 9 (readings, quizzes, discussion)

April 20: Lecture 20: Voter Participation
Cengage Unit 13 (readings, quizzes)

April 25: Lecture 21: Elections
Cengage Unit 14 (readings and quizzes)

April 27: Class debate 3: We should make elections mandatory

May 2: Lecture 22: US Policy
Cengage Unit 15 (readings and quizzes) **FINAL PAPERS DUE at class**

May 4: Review for Final

FINAL EXAM, Thursday, May 11, 3-5 pm