

Political Science 101: Introduction to American Politics

Fall 2023

Professor: Miranda Yaver
Email: yaver_miranda@wheatoncollege.edu
Class Time: Tuesday/Thursday 11am-12:20pm
Class Location: Meneely Hall 207
Office Hours: Monday 1:30-3:30 or by appointment
Office Location: Knapton Hall 204

Course Description:

This course is designed as a broad survey of American politics topics, ranging from American political institutions to political behavior. Over the course of the semester, we will work to understand why the American political system functions the way that it does. From its constitutional foundations and the federal system of government, to major rulings by the Supreme Court, to voter turnout and public opinion, to current events, we will study the ways in which the branches of government (legislative, executive, and judicial), political parties, and interest groups interact to formulate public policy in the United States. We will discuss the themes of the course primarily through an empirical lens, though we will also discuss normatively the opportunities for institutional and policy reform, engaging in current political events when appropriate.

The central aim of this course is to acquire a better understanding of the complexities of American government and the policy outcomes that emerge from it, as well as to become better acquainted with the social science discipline of political science. This course is intended for those who are interested in deepening their knowledge of the American political system as part of their general education as well as those who may be interested in majoring or minoring in political science.

Learning Objectives:

- Explain the political theory of the United States Constitution and identify its central consequences
- Understand the rules and procedures of the policymaking process
- Understand the factors shaping electoral outcomes
- Articulate a policy reform and defend it with logic and evidence
- Analyze the consequences of policy proposals
- Respectfully engage with those of differing political views

Course Requirements:

- Two 5-page response papers on two weeks of your choosing (one before the midterm, one after the midterm): 15% (30% each)

- Take a topic from the first half of the class (*e.g.*, civil liberties) and one from the second half of the class (*e.g.*, the judiciary) and find a contemporary article (*e.g.*, from the *New York Times*, *Vox*, etc.) that speaks to that topic, and discuss to what extent it supports or challenges the content in the textbook and lecture
- 5-page report on a presidential candidate and their campaign, drawing on theories of American politics: 20%
 - Identify the candidate (*e.g.*, Joe Biden, Donald Trump, Ron DeSantis)
 - Discuss how their attributes relate to theories of the presidency and presidential campaigns
 - Discuss how their campaigns relate to theories of campaigns and elections
- Midterm exam: 15%
- Final exam: 20%
- Attendance and class participation: 15%
 - Includes sharing a current event with the class on a designated day to facilitate a class discussion on contemporary American political developments

Note on Exams: The content of the exams will reflect the content that was discussed in class. However, students are responsible for understanding the additional content laid out in the readings and the slides. All exams will be take-home, open book, and open note (but *no collaboration*).

Final Course Grading: The final grade for the course will be assigned based on the following scale:

A: 93+%	A-: 90-92%	B+: 87-89%
B: 83-86%	B-: 80-82%	C+: 77-79%
C: 73-76%	C-: 70-72%	D+: 67-69%
D: 63-66%	D-: 60-62%	F: > 60%

Policy Regarding Late Assignments: It is imperative that students turn in work at the specified deadlines. Failure to do so will result in a third letter grade reduction per day late unless you have received an extension in advance (thus, an A paper is reduced to an A- if submitted a day late). Work will not be accepted at all more than one week late unless said extension was granted in advance. If you have concerns regarding your ability to complete your work on time due to physical or mental health reasons, you are encouraged to seek appropriate treatment from campus services and to discuss with me *in advance* whether an extension is needed.

Policy Regarding Re-Grading Assignments: Students will be provided a paragraph of comments on papers so that there will be clarity as to any points that were missed. If you wish to have your paper re-graded (not rewritten, but re-grading of the same assignment), you must be aware that the re-graded assignment can result in a higher *or lower* grade.

Note on Participation: Attendance and participation is vital to understanding the concepts of the course. If you miss 6 or more classes, I will recommend that you drop the course.

Note on Office Hours: You should plan to come to office hours at least twice during the semester to discuss your academic goals and progress in the course.

Note on Laptops and Slides: Laptops are permitted in class so as to facilitate easier note-taking for students. Further, slides will be posted online at the end of each topic so as to promote accessibility and academic support for students. However, if the posting of slides proves to dampen attendance, I reserve the right to discontinue their posting.

All members of the academic community should be able to engage fully in the academic opportunities and services provided, regardless of disability status, and to that end accommodations to this course can be made if necessary. Please feel free to discuss with me any concerns you may have.

Statement on Academic Integrity: All work that students submit is expected to be of their own creation and give proper credit to the ideas and work of others. Thus, plagiarism, cheating, and receiving unauthorized assistance with the work in this course will not be tolerated. This includes the use of AI (*e.g.*, ChatGPT). Should a student violate academic integrity in this class, the matter will be reported to the college administration. If you have questions about citations of sources, ask prior to submitting the given assignment. Students are encouraged to consult writing services for additional assistance on writing and citation so as to avoid plagiarism.

Helpful Campus Resources: There are a number of resources on campus that may help you in your physical, emotional, and academic wellbeing.

- Student Health Center: 14 Taunton Avenue, 508-285-9500
- Student Counseling Center: 42 Howard Street, 508-286-3905
- Peer Tutoring: Scholars Lab at Wallace Library

Textbook:

The following textbook is required:

- *American Government: Power and Purpose, 16th Edition*, by Theodore Lowi, Benjamin Ginsburg, Kenneth Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere, eds. (abbreviated AGPP on syllabus)

Remaining readings will be posted online.

Recommended News Sources:

Students are encouraged to consume a diverse news “diet” of sources from wide-ranging perspectives. Suggested sources include:

- *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Daily Beast*, *The Atlantic*, *Vox*, *The Bulwark*, *The Economist*.

Course Outline:

Tuesday, August 29: Introduction

- Introduction to the syllabus and course expectations

Thursday, August 31: Five Principles of Politics

- AGPP, Ch. 1

Tuesday, September 5: United States Constitution

- AGGP Ch. 2
- Text of United States Constitution (Appendix)
- *Federalist* 51

Thursday, September 7: United States Constitution (continued)

- AGGP Ch. 3 p. 72-81
- Olson, Walter. 2016. “An Article V Constitutional Convention? Wrong Idea, Wrong Time.”

Tuesday, September 12: Civil Liberties

- AGGP Ch. 4

Thursday, September 14: Civil Liberties and Abortion Access

- *Roe v. Wade*
- *Dobbs v. Jackson*
- Grumbach, Jacob and Chris Warshaw. 2022. “In many states with antiabortion laws, majorities favor abortion rights.” *The Washington Post*

Tuesday, September 19: Civil Rights

- AGGP Ch. 5
- *Brown v. Board of Education*

Thursday, September 21: Civil Rights (continued)

- AGGP Ch. 5 (continued)
- Alexander, Michelle. 2020. “The Injustice of This Moment is Not an Aberration.”
- Sunstein, Cass. 2004. “Did *Brown* Matter?”

Tuesday, September 26: Public Opinion

- AGPP Ch. 10
- Klofstad, “Exposure to Political Discussion...”

Thursday, September 28: Interest Groups

- *Federalist* 10
- AGPP Ch. 13

Tuesday, October 3: Interest Groups (continued)

- AGPP Ch. 13 (continued)
- Koger-Victor, “Polarized Agents”
- Rauch, Jonathan. 2014. “The Hyperpluralism Trap.” *The New Republic*
- Hacker, Jacob. 2015. “Out of Balance: Medicare, Interest Groups, and American Politics.”

Thursday, October 5: Political Parties

- AGPP Ch. 12

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10: OCTOBER BREAK – NO CLASSES

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 12: MAP DAY – NO CLASS

Tuesday, October 17: Political Parties (continued)

- Drutman, “Citizens, Parties, and the Health of American Democracy”
- Azari, “Weak Parties, Strong Partisanship”
- Leonard, Robert. 2017. “Why Rural America Voted for Trump.” *New York Times*
- Noel, Hans. 2017. “Party Leaders Should Lead, Not Get Out of the Way.” *Vox*

Thursday, October 19: Elections

- AGPP Ch. 11

Tuesday, October 24: Elections (continued)

- AGPP Ch. 11 (continued)
- Mutz, “Status threat, not economic hardship, explains the 2016 presidential vote”
- Cuthbert, Lane and Alex Theodoridis. “Do Republicans really believe Trump won the 2020 election? Our research suggests that they do.” *The Washington Post*
- *Citizens United v. FEC v. Plain English*, 2010, SCOTUSBlog

Midterm Due

Thursday, October 26: January 6

- Masket, Seth. 2021. “We Freaking Warned You.” *The Mischiefs of Faction*.
- Masket, Seth. 2022. “The Worst Legacy of January 6th – Making Insurrection Partisan.” *The Mischiefs of Faction*.
- Jefferson, Hakeem. 2022. “White Backlash Is A Type Of Racial Reckoning, Too.” *FiveThirtyEight*.
- Scudder, Molly. 2022. “The RNC called the Jan. 6 events ‘legitimate political discourse.’ What does that even mean?” *The Washington Post Monkey Cage*.

Tuesday, October 31: The Legislative Branch

- AGPP Ch. 6
- McCarty, Nolan. 2014. “What we know and don’t know about our polarized politics.” *The Washington Post*
- Binder, Sarah. 2013. “Dealmaking in a polarized Congress,” *The Washington Post*

Thursday, November 2: The Legislative Branch (continued)

- AGPP Ch. 6 (continued)
- Koger, Gregory. “The Rise of the 60-Vote Senate”
- Hibbing, John and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 1998. “Too Much of a Good Thing: More Representation is Not Necessarily Better.”

Tuesday, November 7: The Presidency

- AGPP Ch. 7

Thursday, November 9: The Presidency (continued)

- AGPP Ch. 7 (continued)
- Posner, Richard. 2021. “Why Joe Biden Must Not Shy Away from the Full Power of the Presidency.” *The New York Times*

Tuesday, November 14: The Executive Branch

- AGPP Ch. 8
- Rudalevige, Andrew. 2017. “Writing a constitution is the easy part. Here’s how the bureaucracy puts it into action.” *The Washington Post*

Thursday, November 16: The Executive Branch (continued)

- “The Trump Administration’s War on Regulations”
- Wallach, Philip. “Regulatory Pendulum”

- Hacker, Jacob. 2004. “Bigger and Better,” *The American Prospect*

Tuesday, November 21: The Judicial System

- AGPP, Ch. 9
- *Federalist 78*

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 23: THANKSGIVING BREAK – NO CLASSES

Tuesday, November 28: Judicial System (continued)

- AGPP, Ch. 9 (continued)
- *Shelby County v. Holder*
- Millhiser, Ian. 2020. “Nine Ways to Reform the Supreme Court Besides Court Packing,” *Vox*

Thursday, November 30: The Media

- AGPP Ch. 14
- Levendusky, Matthew, 2014, “Are Fox and MSNBC Polarizing America?” *The Washington Post*

Tuesday, December 5: Discussion of Findings from Presidential Campaign Memos

Thursday, December 7: Continue Discussion of Findings from Presidential Campaign Memos, Wrap-up

48-hour take-home final exam at college-designated time: December 12, 5pm