

American Government: A Historical Introduction
POLSC-11000
Fall 2017
Saturdays, 9:10am-12pm, Room HW1729

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Course Description

This course explores the development of the U.S. political system, from the American Revolution (and a little before this), up until the present day. The first weeks of the course will focus on the formation of the system, and we will read a number of documents from the time, both supporting and objecting to the system that was being developed. Having looked at the origins of the system, we will next consider specific concepts and institutions enshrined with the Constitution, such as the three branches of government. In the second half of the course, we will examine some of the ways in which the Constitution has created space for other political institutions, even if these are not specifically identified in the Constitution. We will conclude the course by thinking beyond the Constitution, and the limits of the political system that it creates. Throughout the course we will consider both historical and contemporary cases. The reading list for the course focusing on more historical material, but students are encouraged to follow the news closely, and to raise current political issues in our discussions.

Course Objectives

This course aims to help you:

- Gain a deeper understanding of the U.S. political system, by reading both historical documents, and contemporary theories and accounts.
- Understand the continuity and change at work in the history of the U.S. political system – both the ways in which the system of today resembles the original system, and the ways in which it has changed and developed.
- Improve your critical thinking skills (meaning your capacity to grasp abstract concepts, but also your ability to see and look beyond the limits of these concepts).
- Evaluate the validity of, and assumptions behind, various claims and beliefs about the U.S. political system – including your own. The point is not necessarily to change your opinions, but to challenge them by pushing you to think beyond the familiar.
- Improve different writing skills and speaking skills, including your ability to summarize the main points of an argument succinctly.

Assignments and Grading

Class Discussion = **15%**
First Exam (October 21) = **25%**
Second Exam (December 16) = **25%**
Historical Paper (November 17) = **20%**
Attendance and Participation = **15%**

Class Discussion. Each week, several students will be responsible for leading part of our discussion. You will be expected to briefly summarize some of the important points from the readings, and then think about how the readings might relate to some recent events (note: this means that you're going to have to pay attention to the news). This should take about 20 minutes. In the first week of class, you will sign up for the week in which you want to lead discussion. There should be about three students leading discussion each week; it is up to you to decide how you will structure the time.

First and Second Exam. First exam on October 21. Second exam on December 16. Both exams will take place in class. Questions will be a combination of multiple choice, and short written responses. Each exam will cover material from one half of the course, this means there is no final exam that covers all of the course material.

As we are only meeting once a week, it will be very difficult to organize make-up exams, and there will be a penalty attached to any make-up exams. Do your very best to be on time for both exams.

Historical Paper. Due on November 17 (by 11:59pm). For this assignment, you must visit a site, and then write a short, 5-page paper that discusses the political significance of the site. You must actually visit the site, and document your visit. All papers must be submitted through Turnitin, and there will be a penalty for every day that a paper is late, after 11:59pm on Nov 17. More information about this assignment will be provided in class.

Attendance and Participation. You are expected to attend and participate in discussion, in every class.

Course Readings

- The textbook for this course is: *The Logic of American Politics*, by Kernell, Jacobson, Kousser, and Vavreck. The newest version of this textbook is edition 8, but you do not need the newest version for this course. I still use edition 7, so you are very welcome to do the same (and it should be a lot less expensive than the new edition). You're also welcome to use edition 6 (should be less expensive again), but just be prepared that some of the page numbers and references might have changed. We will be using the textbook almost every week in class, so you will need access to a copy of it.
- All other readings will be posted to Blackboard, or will be accessible by a link, provided in the schedule below. Some of the historical texts are also included in the appendices at the back of the text book.
- All of the readings listed below are required readings.

Course Expectations

- Arrive on time and prepared for each class. We'll be diving straight into a discussion at the start of each session, so even though we meet early on a Saturday, you need to turn up ready to participate (bring coffee and breakfast, if they'll help get you started).
- Most readings will be posted on Blackboard, and I will use Blackboard as the main way to contact the class with any announcements or changes to this syllabus. Please make sure

that you are checking your Hunter email, or whichever account you have linked to Blackboard.

- You will also need a Turnitin account, in order to complete the Historical Paper for this course. More details about this will be provided in class.
- Students are welcome to use whatever technology is helpful to them in class, but are asked not to do so in a way that will distract other students (or the instructor). Keep everything on silent, and keep the things on your screen relevant (even if we're too polite to say so, we can all see what's on your screen).
- An incomplete grade (INC) is only available under exceptional circumstances, and to students in good standing at the end of the semester (that means that you have been present, participating, and have completed all of your work to date).
- CR/NC is only available to students that have completed all assignments (that includes attendance and participation).
- This course digs into some confronting material, and some of the topics covered may be quite uncomfortable or concerning for students. Please read through the syllabus carefully ahead of time, and contact the instructor if you anticipate encountering any problems at some point in the semester. It isn't always possible to see difficult situations coming ahead of time, however, so if any topic or discussion becomes particularly troubling, you are welcome to leave the room and take some time out. Students are encouraged (but never required) to talk the instructor about any such issues; you will never have to disclose anything that you consider private, but we should be able to make a plan so that you can participate as comfortably as possible in class.

Schedule

1. August 26: Introduction

2. September 2: Before the Constitution

- *Logic of American Politics*, Ch.2 (read until at least p.53, 7th ed.)
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1835. Ch.1
- Declaration of Independence, 1776 (*Logic of American Politics*, appendix 2)
- Articles of Confederation, 1777 (*Logic of American Politics*, appendix 1)

3. September 9: The Constitution

- *Logic of American Politics*, Ch.2 (read the rest of the chapter)
- Constitution and Bill of Rights (*Logic of American Politics*, appendix 3)
- James Madison, "Federalist 51," 1788.
<http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch10s16.html>
- "Brutus 2," 1787. <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch14s26.html>
- "Brutus 5," 1787. http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/a1_8_1s7.html
- George Mason, "Objections to the Constitution," 1787.
<http://www.gunstonhall.org/library/archives/manuscripts/objections.html>

4. September 16: Civil Rights

- *Logic of American Politics*, Ch.4

- Martin Luther King Jr. “Letter From A Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963.” (Blackboard)
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Case for Reparations,” *The Atlantic*, 2014.
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>

5. September 23: Congress

- *Logic of American Politics*, Ch.6
- Edmund Burke, “Speech to the Electors of Bristol,” 1774.
<http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch13s7.html>
- John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 2006. “Too Much of a Good Thing: More Representative is not Necessarily Better” in Cannon et. al. *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics* (New York: Norton), pp. 151-157. (Blackboard)

September 30: No classes

6. October 7: The Presidency

- *Logic of American Politics*, Ch.7
- George Washington, “Farewell Address,” 1796.
http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp
- Andrew J. Polsky. 2010. “The Presidency at War: Unchecked Power, Uncertain Leadership,” in Michael Nelson, ed., *The Presidency and the Political System* (Washington, DC: CQ Press), pp.489-508. (Blackboard)

7. October 14: The Judiciary

Exam review

- *Logic of American Politics*, Ch.9
- Justice Harry A. Blackmun, U.S. Supreme Court, Decision: Roe et.al. v. Wade, District Attorney of Dallas County 410 U.S. 113. (Read Part I and skim Part II, then IX to XII)
http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0410_0113_ZO.html

8. October 21: First Exam

9. October 28: Voting and Participation

- *Logic of American Politics*, Ch.11
- Robert D. Putnam, Chapter 2 “Civic Participation” in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 2000), pp. 31-47. (Blackboard)
- Manissa McCleave Maharawal, “So Real It Hurts: Notes from Occupy Wall Street,” 2011. <http://www.leftturn.org/so-real-it-hurts-notes-occupy-wall-street>

10. November 4: Parties

- *Logic of American Politics*, Ch.12
- The Pew Center for Research on People and the Press. June 2014. "Political Polarization in the American Public: How Increasing Ideological Uniformity and Partisan Antipathy Affect Politics, Compromise and Everyday Life"
<http://www.people-press.org/2014/06/12/political-polarization-in-the-american-public/>

11. November 11: Interest Groups

- *Logic of American Politics*, Ch.13
- James Madison, “Federalist 10,” 1787.
<http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/v1ch4s19.html>

November 17: Historical Paper due

12. November 18: Media

- *Logic of American Politics*, Ch.14

November 25: No classes

13. December 2: Beyond the Constitution: Guantánamo Bay

- Paul Kramer, ‘A Useful Corner of the World: Guantánamo,’ *The New Yorker*, 2013.
<http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/a-useful-corner-of-the-world-guantnamo>
- Karen Greenberg, *The Least Worst Place: Guantanamo’s First 100 Days*. 2009.
(Blackboard)
- Connie Bruck, “Why has Obama failed to close Guantanamo?” *The New Yorker*, 2016.
<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/08/01/why-obama-has-failed-to-close-guantanamo>

**14. December 9: Course Overview
Exam Review**

15. December 16: Second Exam

Hunter College Policy on Academic Integrity

Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures. The Hunter Reading/Writing Center developed this handout on quoting, paraphrasing, and plagiarism: <http://rwc.hunter.cuny.edu/reading-writing/on-line/qpp.html>.

American Disability Act Policy

In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical, and/or Learning) consult the Office of AccessABILITY, located in Room E1214B, to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance, please call: (212) 772-4857 or (212) 650-3230.

Hunter College Policy on Sexual Misconduct

In compliance with the CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct, Hunter College reaffirms the prohibition of any sexual misconduct, which includes sexual violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based harassment retaliation against students, employees, or visitors, as well as certain intimate relationships. Students who have experienced any form of sexual violence on or off campus (including CUNY-sponsored trips and events) are entitled to the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights for Hunter College.

- Sexual Violence: Students are strongly encouraged to immediately report the incident by calling 911, contacting NYPD Special Victims Division Hotline (646-610-7272) or their local police precinct, or contacting the College's Public Safety Office (212-772-4444).
- All Other Forms of Sexual Misconduct: Students are also encouraged to contact the College's Title IX Campus Coordinator, Dean John Rose (jtrose@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-650-3262) or Colleen Barry (colleen.barry@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-772-4534) and seek complimentary services through the Counseling and Wellness Services Office, Hunter East 1123.

CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct Link:

<http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/la/Policy-on-Sexual-Misconduct-12-1-14-with-links.pdf>

Syllabus Changes

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice. Any changes will be explained in class, and the updated version of the syllabus will be posted to Blackboard.