

POLI 2051: Introduction to American Government

MWF 9:30 AM-10:20 AM

131 Allen

Instructor: Tatum Taylor

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Office: 310 Stubbs Hall

Office Hours: T/TH 10:00-12:00 and by appointment

Aim of the Course:

This course is designed to introduce students to the fundamentals of American government and politics and critically engage the class with issues and themes related to the American political system. We will examine the fundamental components of American government including representation, political institutions, mass participation, and the policy-making process. Students will end the course familiar with the decision making-process in the American political system.

This course is a general education course and has been designed with the LSU learning competency statement in mind: "LSU graduates will demonstrate an understanding of the informing factors of global interdependence, including economic forces, political dynamics, and cultural and linguistic difference."

Structure of the Course:

The course will be divided into 3 units, with an exam being given at the end of each unit to test student mastery of course material covered in that unit. To reinforce course material and to ensure students are keeping up to date with the readings, pop quizzes will be given on eight occasions throughout the course. All quizzes and tests are administered in class, in person. No makeup quizzes or exams will be given. Lessons are a combination of lectures and class discussions.

Grading:

The class is out of 400 points total

3 exams (80 points/20% each)

8 pop quizzes, drop lowest 2 (20 points/5% each)

1 writing assignment (40 points/10%)

Students also have the opportunity to attend guest lectures for extra credit. These events occur throughout the semester in either the Manship school or the political science department. I will post the information on these events to Moodle, as well as send out an email, as soon as possible (usually a few weeks before the event). Students may attend two lectures, each worth 10 points/2.5% of the final grade, for a total of 5% in bonus points. I cannot guarantee how many of these events will take place over the semester, so it is best to attend early. To receive extra credit, students will email me a “selfie” of themselves there (such that I can tell you attended) and provide a 200 word write-up of what you learned/thought was interesting/disagreed with/agreed with/etc.

Late work will not be accepted. I do not formally take attendance, but missed quizzes cannot be made up absent a university excused absence. If you do need to miss class, please check with your classmates for that day’s lecture notes. If there is anything from the readings or lecture that is unclear, if you have any questions, or if you just want to flesh out a topic more than what is possible during class time please do not hesitate to email me or visit my office hours (that’s what they’re there for!).

Exams will be a combination of multiple choice and short answer questions. There are three exams total, with no midterm. The final exam will focus more heavily on the third section of the course but all material covered previously in the semester is fair game. Before each exam I will hold a review session where students may come to class with questions or topics that need revisiting. This is your time to make sure you have the information you need to be prepared for exams (these classes may also serve as makeup days in the event of weather cancelations).

For the writing assignment, choose one of the four chapter excerpts we read during the semester (Lupia and McCubbins 1998, Aldrich 1995, Campbell et al. 1960, Mahew 1974) and write an approximately 800-word essay on whether the author(s) arguments are still true today. Take a stance either in agreement with the reading or in disagreement with the reading, and explain why you feel this way. Reinforce your argument with material from the class and current events (or events that have occurred since the work’s publishing date). I expect students to back up their assertions, opinions, ideas, and talking points with concrete evidence, as well as provide citations (this includes in-text as well as a references page). The writing assignment is due on **November 16th** at 11:59 PM.

Grading scale:

A+ = 100-97 / A = 96-93 / A- = 92-90

B+ = 89-87 / B = 86-83 / B- = 82-80

C+ = 79- 77 / C = 76-73 / C- = 72-70

D+ = 69-67 / D = 66-63 / D- = 62-60

F = 59 and Below

Text:

The Struggle for Democracy (12th Edition) (ISBN: 9780134571706).

Additional readings are posted to Moodle. I may assign more readings throughout the semester as I come across them and post those to Moodle as well. Students are expected to have completed the readings for each day listed on the schedule BEFORE we meet for class that day.

Attendance:

Students are expected to attend every class and pay attention to the instructor. Roll will not be taken at every class, but the pop quizzes cannot be made up, so it is in your best interest to attend class. The two lowest quiz grades will be dropped which will serve as a means of overcoming a quiz missed due to illness, etc. If you do experience an exceptional problem preventing your class attendance, come see me as soon as possible and we may be able to work out a solution. There is nothing I can do about prior absences/late work at the end of the semester. Regular attendance and keeping up with the course readings are necessary to do well in this class.

Classroom Etiquette:

Since this is a small class, I will frequently include class discussions along with lectures into our meetings. It is important that you conduct yourselves in an appropriate manner in the classroom. Classroom etiquette requires that students be attentive and respectful to one another (this means listening when others are making comments or asking questions). Please make sure that your phones and other devices are turned off or are silenced during class time so they do not serve as a distraction to you and those around you.

Technology:

I should mention now that numerous studies support increased information retention from handwritten notes as opposed to typed notes. That being said, laptops are allowed in class to take notes and refer to readings. If it is clear you are using the laptop for another purpose, I will ask you to put it away. Please make sure cellphones are silenced and put away during class time. If I notice students obviously on their phones or texting during class I will ask you to put it away or leave the class.

Student Obligations:

It is your responsibility to come to class having read the material and to be ready to discuss the material assigned. If you have questions, please do not hesitate to ask. The only way I can know which items you are struggling with is if you bring them to my attention. I am more than happy to go over unclear topics again, time permitting. As a student it is also your responsibility to do your own work. Under no circumstances will cheating be tolerated. Any cheating or plagiarism will be immediately reported to the dean of students.

Students with Special Needs Policy:

If you have special needs that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please let me know as soon as possible, and see a coordinator in the Office of Disability Services so that such accommodations may be arranged. The Office of Disability Services is located in 115 Johnston Hall and may be reached at 225- 578- 5919.

Course Calendar:

Unit I: Foundations

Week #1: August 20-24: Introduction to U.S. Government and Politics

8/20 – Intro & Syllabus

8/22 – Ch 1

8/24 – Ch 1

Week #2: August 27-31: The Constitution

8/27 – Ch 2

The Constitution

The Declaration of Independence

8/29 – Ch 2

Federalist #10 and #51

8/31 – Ch 2

Week #3: September 3-7: Federalism

9/3 – Labor Day, no class

9/5 – Ch 3

9/7 – Ch 3

Week #4: September 10-14: Civil Rights and Liberties

9/10 – Ch 15

9/12 – Ch 15

9/14 – Ch 16

Week #5: September 17-21: Civil Liberties

9/17 – No class, watch *The Sixties: A Long March to Freedom*

9/19 – Make up day/exam review

9/21 – **Exam 1**

Unit II: Linkages

Week #6: September 24-28: News Media

9/24 – Ch 6

9/26 – Ch 6

9/28 – Ch 6

Week #7: October 1-5: Public Opinion

10/1 – Ch 5

10/3 – Ch 5

Lupia and McCubbins (1998) *The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need to Know?*

10/5 – Fall break, no class

Week #8: October 8-12: Political Parties

10/8 – Ch 9

10/10 – Ch 9

10/12 – Ch 9

Aldrich (1995) *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Party Politics in America*

Campbell, Converse, Miller, and Stokes (1960) *The American Voter*

Week #9: October 15-19: Campaigns and Elections

10/15 – Ch 10

10/17 – Ch 10

10/19 – Ch 10

Week #10: October 22-26: Interest Groups

10/22 – Ch 7

10/24 – Make up day/exam review

10/26 – **Exam 2**

Unit III: Institutions

Week #11: October 29-November 2: The President & Federal Bureaucracy

10/29 – Ch 12

10/31 – Ch 12

11/2 – Ch 13

Week #12: November 5-9: Congress

11/5 – Ch 11

11/7 – Ch 11

11/9 – Ch 11

Mayhew (1974) *Congress: The Electoral Connection*

Week #13: November 12-16: The Courts/Domestic Policy

11/12 – Ch 14

11/14 – Ch 14

11/16 – Ch 17 + Writing assignment due

Week #14: November 19-23: Domestic Policy

11/19 – Ch 17

11/21 – Thanksgiving, no class

11/23 – Thanksgiving, no class

Week #15: November 26-30: Foreign Policy

11/26 – Ch 18

11/28 – Ch 18

11/30 – Make up day/exam review

Final Exam: