

Political Science 120: American Government

Dickinson College, Fall 2018
MWF 9:30-10:20, Denny Hall – Room 304

Professor Sarah Niebler

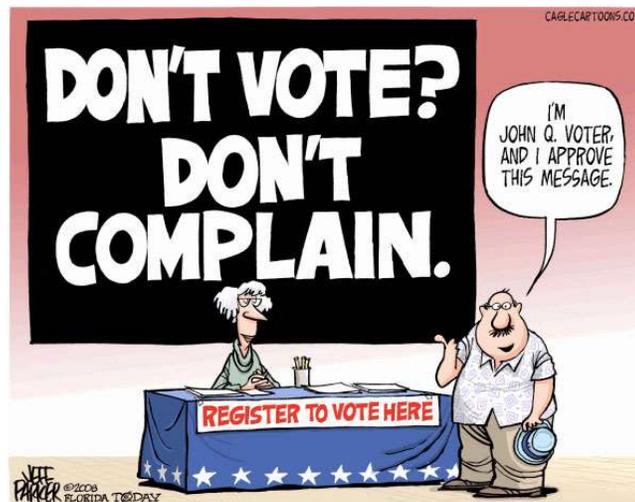
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Office Hours: Monday 10:30-12:00; Thursday 3:00-4:30; and by appointment



Course Description and Learning Objectives

This course is an introduction to the American political system, including its development, institutions, and practices. We begin by examining the principles and political logic shaping the design of U.S. political institutions and the founders' compromises in constructing the Constitution. We also consider issues of civil liberties, civil rights, and democracy. Next, we analyze the major institutions that make up the federal system: Congress; the presidency; the bureaucracy; and the courts, plus we think about the role of state and local governments. We then turn to the formal and informal channels linking individuals to government -- public opinion; voting; elections; mass media; political parties; and interest groups -- and evaluate how well the current American political system represents the needs and preferences of a diverse nation. We conclude the semester by examining several areas of public policy based on current and recent events happening across the country and the world.

This course has four major learning objectives. By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Understand how the existing American government was formed, how it works, and the public's role in the American political system.
2. Critically engage with evidence and be able to articulate how political institutions and rules affect the behavior of politicians and of members of the electorate.
3. Question preconceived ideas about American politics and think deeply about how well the American political system works.

4. Form and express political opinions. You will have numerous opportunities to evaluate political information and make compelling arguments. Honing these skills will make you a better democratic citizen.

We will begin many classes with a brief discussion of current political events and what is happening in the world. As students of American politics, you should follow the news on a daily basis using reputable news sources (e.g., *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Economist*, NPR). Your ability to effectively discuss and engage with current political events will factor into your participation score as well be assessed on the midterm and final exams.

Course Materials

We will rely on two major texts for the course. The first is available at the Dickinson College Bookstore. The second is an open-source text available online.

- Canon, David T., John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer. 2018. *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. Eighth Edition.
- Kurtz, Glen and Sylvie Waskiewicz (eds). 2017. *American Government*. Download for free at: <https://openstax.org/details/books/american-government>

Additional readings are available on Moodle or online as specified in the syllabus.

Requirements and Grading

The success of this course depends upon your regular attendance and contributions to class discussion. Course attendance is not optional. That said, I know things sometimes come up and, as such, you may have **three** absences throughout the course of the semester without penalty. I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences, so please use these three judiciously. Missing more than three classes will result in a reduction of your attendance and participation grade.

Additionally, simply showing up for class is not enough to guarantee a high participation grade. I also expect you to read the assigned material and to be prepared to ask questions and offer thoughtful, critical analysis about it during class. Attendance alone with little or no contribution will earn you approximately a C in participation.¹

Beyond participation, your grade will be based on two papers, two exams, and a brief political autobiography. The relative weight and due date of each component is as follows:

| Assignment | Percent of Overall Grade | Due Date(s) |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| Attendance and Participation | 10% | |
| Political Autobiography Paper | 5% | September 14 |
| Constitution Paper | 15% | October 5 |
| Midterm Exam | 20% | October 17 |
| Public Policy Paper | 25% | November 19 |
| Final Exam | 25% | December 18 at 9:00a.m. |

¹ I recognize that some students are hesitant to speak in front of class. If this is the case, please come talk with me during office hours early in the semester.

The Political Autobiography paper is a short paper designed to help me get to know you and what your experiences with politics have been. I will hand out the formal assignment guidelines for this paper in the first week of class.

Paper topics and guidelines for the Constitution and Public Policy papers will be handed out in class at least a week before the first draft is due and we will engage in a peer-review process during class. You will have a week after peer review to revise your paper before handing it in to me. While I do not read full drafts of papers ahead of the due date, you are welcome to come to office hours to discuss any part of the paper with me. You are also encouraged to make use of the Dickinson College Writing Center (http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20158/writing_program/567/english_writing_tutoring/1) at any stage of the writing process.

Exams will be closed-book and consist of multiple-choice questions, short identification questions, and essays. Questions will be based on current events, readings, and information presented and discussed in class. The midterm will cover material from the first half of the class, and the final exam will focus on material covered in the second half of the class. In other words, the final exam will not be cumulative, although you will certainly be asked to draw connections back to material covered in the first half of the semester.

Final letter grades will be assigned in the following way:

| | | |
|------------|------------|-----------|
| A = 93-100 | B- = 80-82 | D = 60-69 |
| A- = 90-92 | C+ = 77-79 | F = 0-59 |
| B+ = 87-89 | C = 73-76 | |
| B = 83-86 | C- = 70-72 | |

I strongly believe that much of your education at Dickinson College will occur outside the walls of the classroom. As such, I encourage you to attend lectures, talks, panel discussions, and other events on campus. If you attend such an event, then write a one-page paper explaining the content of the event **and** its relevance to the course material, I will award **up to** ½ percentage point on your final grade. You may earn credit for up to three papers.

Academic Integrity

From Dickinson College's Community Standards... "Respect for ideas — our own and others' — is a hallmark of academic integrity. We show respect by acknowledging when we have used another's words or ideas in our work. We expect others to acknowledge when they use our ideas or words in their work. Students are expected to do their own work on quizzes, papers, examinations, class assignments, etc. Normally, a paper may be submitted in fulfillment of an assignment in only one course. Exceptions require permission from the instructors. Collaboration must be noted in writing and requires the consent of all instructors."

(http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20273/dean_of_students/867/community_standards/2)

With respect to exams in this course, I expect you to do your own work. You are certainly encouraged to study with your classmates, but work on exams must be your own. Regarding papers, you will also need to do your own work and cite any and all of your sources. We will discuss ways of doing this before your first paper is due. If you ever have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please ask questions sooner rather than later.

Accommodations

Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded an equal opportunity to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you may have) a learning difference or a disability – including a mental health, medical, or physical impairment– that would impact your educational experience in this class, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to schedule a meeting with Director Marni Jones. She will confidentially discuss your needs, review your documentation, and determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more about available supports, go to www.dickinson.edu/ODS, email DisabilityServices@dickinson.edu, call (717) 245-1734, or go to ODS in 106 Dana Hall.

I am fully committed to work with all students needing accommodations in my courses. If you have already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please let me know as soon as possible so we can meet to review your Accommodation Letter and complete your “Blue Form” Implementation Plan. If you will need test proctoring from ODS, remember that you will need to provide them with at least one week's notice.

Technology in the Classroom

A recent study conducted by psychologists Pam Mueller and Daniel Oppenheimer shows that students who take notes on a computer do less well answering conceptual questions than do students who take notes by hand (<http://www.vox.com/2014/6/4/5776804/note-taking-by-hand-versus-laptop>). However, I know that many students have become accustomed to using laptops and/or tablets for note-taking. I leave the decision to you as to what works best for you. As such, I do permit students to use technology in the classroom. In fact, there might be a few days I will explicitly encourage you to use your phones and/or the internet during class. I will do my best to provide advance notice of these times so you can bring those resources to class.

With respect to audio recording, Pennsylvania is a “two-party consent” state, meaning that it is a crime to “intercept or record a telephone call or conversation **unless all parties to the conversation consent**” (<http://www.dmlp.org/legal-guide/pennsylvania/pennsylvania-recording-law>). Practically, what this means is that you should not be using any device to record class lectures or discussions. If a student with an accommodation from ODS is permitted to record class, all members of the class will be informed; students with ODS accommodations agree to strict guidelines with respect to how they use the recordings.

Outline of the Course

Unit 1: Introduction and Foundations of American Government and Politics

American Government and Civic Engagement

September 3 – Introduction to the Course, No Reading

September 5 – Chapter 1, AmGov pages 7-34

September 7 – Schudson, “From *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life*” and Jones et al. and Warshawsky, “Debating the Issues: What does it mean to be an American?”, ED pages 26-44

The Constitution and Federalism

September 10 – Chapter 2, AmGov pages 35-68; Federalist #15, ED pages 54-58

September 12 – Chapter 3, AmGov pages 69-106, Federalist #46, ED pages 86-90
September 14 – **Political Autobiography Due**; Levinson and Abbott and Olson, “Debating the Issues: Should the Constitution be Fundamentally Changed?”, ED pages 65-85

Civil Liberties, Civil Rights, and Democracy

September 17 – Chapter 4, AmGov pages 107-152

September 19 – Rauch, “In Defense of Prejudice”, ED pages 130-137.; Cole and Helfman, “Debating the Issues: Should there be a Religious Exemption to Nondiscrimination Laws?”, ED pages 138-151

September 21 – Chapter 5, AmGov pages 153-198

Civil Liberties, Civil Rights, and Democracy, cont.

September 24 – Obama, “Remarks by the President at the 50th Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery Marches”, ED pages 121-129; Harris, “The Next Civil Rights Movement?” (Available online at: <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/black-lives-matter-new-civil-rights-movement-fredrick-harris> and on Moodle)

September 26 – Zinn and Hook, “How Democratic is America?” (Available on Moodle)

September 28 – **Constitution Paper Peer Review – Bring Hard Copy of Draft**

Unit 2: Institutions

Congress

October 1 – Chapter 11, AmGov pages 403-444

October 3 – Mayhew, “From *Congress: The Electoral Connection*”, ED pages 155-158; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, “Too Much of a Good Thing: More Representative Is Not Necessarily Better”, ED pages 172-178

Presidency

October 5 – **Constitution Paper Due**; Chapter 12, AmGov pages 445-484

October 8 – Neustadt, “The Power to Persuade”, ED pages 189-198

Bureaucracy

October 10 – Chapter 15, AmGov pages 557-588

October 12 – Wilson, “From *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*”, ED pages 228-236; McCubbins and Schwartz, “Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms (Available on Moodle)

October 15 – Congress to Campus Visit, No Reading

October 17 – **Midterm Exam**

Judiciary

October 19 – Chapter 13, AmGov, pages 485-520

October 22 – **Fall Pause**

October 24 – Federalist #78, ED pages 259-265; Scalia and Breyer, “Debating the Issues: Interpreting the Constitution: Originalism or a Living Constitution?”, ED pages 279-300.

State and Local Government

October 26 – Chapter 14, AmGov pages 521-556

Unit 3:

Public Opinion

October 29 – Chapter 6, AmGov pages 199-240

October 31 – Polling and the 2018 Midterms, Reading TBA

Voting and Elections

November 2 – Chapter 7, AmGov pages 241-286

November 5 – Streb, “Conclusion: Moving Toward A Model Electoral Democracy.” In *Rethinking American Electoral Democracy*, 2nd Edition. (Available on Moodle)

(Tuesday) November 6 – Election Day – Vote if you are eligible to do so!

November 7 – Fund and Beinart and Minnite, “Debating the Issues: Voter ID Laws – Reducing Fraud or Suppressing Votes?”, ED pages 352-361

November 9 – **Class Canceled, Prof. Niebler at Northeast Political Science Association Conference**

Mass Media

November 12 – **Public Policy Paper Peer Review – Bring Hard Copy of Draft**

November 14 – Chapter 8, AmGov pages 287-326.

November 16 – Prior, “News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout” ED pages 316-322; Sides and Jolly and Levendusky, “Debating the Issues: Is Partisan Media Exposure Bad for Democracy?”, ED pages 323-332

Political Parties and Interest Groups

November 19 – **Public Policy Paper Due**; Chapter 9, AmGov pages 327-366

November 21 – **Thanksgiving Break**

November 23 – **Thanksgiving Break**

Political Parties and Interest Groups, cont.

November 26 – Philpot, Tasha. 2007. “Toward a Theory of Party Image Change.” In *Race, Republicans, and the Return of the Party of Lincoln*. University of Michigan Press; pages 10-30. (Available on Moodle)

November 28 – Chapter 10, AmGov pages 367-402

November 30 – Olson, “The Logic of Collective Action”, ED pages 404-413; Campaign Legal Center and Riches, “Debating the Issues: Donor Disclosure – Is Anonymous Campaign Funding a Problem?”, ED pages 414-426

Unit 4: Public Policy

December 3 – Current Events Reading TBA

December 5 – Current Events Reading TBA

December 7 – Current Events Reading TBA

December 10 – Current Events Reading TBA

December 12 – Current Events Reading TBA

December 14 – Wrap up, Reading TBA

Tuesday, December 18 at 9:00a.m. – Final Exam