**Political Science 120: American Government**

Dickinson College, Fall 2019  
MWF 10:30-11:20, Denny Hall – Room 304

Professor Sarah Niebler  
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Phone: (717-254-8093)  
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Office Hours: Tuesday 1:30-3:00; Wednesday 1:30-3:00; and by appointment

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**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 daily 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
The vast majority of our course materials will be online or articles I will post to Moodle. I will also assign podcast episodes from time to time. Additionally, I suggest you use the following open-source textbook as a resource. There will not be assigned readings from this book, but lectures will be based on concepts from the text. Each week, I will indicate which chapter(s) of the text is relevant to the week’s topics.


I suggest downloading the text and saving it to your desktop, so you do not have to have access to the internet in order to read the text.

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

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.
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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percent of Overall Grade</th>
<th>Due Date(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance and Participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Autobiography Paper</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>September 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constitution Paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>Draft – September 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Final – October 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>October 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Policy Paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Draft – November 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Final – November 22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>Wednesday, December 18</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>at 9:00 a.m.</td>
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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/) 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80-82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0-59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

**Accommodating Students with Disabilities**
Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded equitable access 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 hinder your access to learning or demonstrating knowledge in this class, please contact Access and Disability Services (ADS). They will confidentially explain the accommodation request process and the type of documentation that Dean and Director Marni Jones will need to determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more about available supports, go to www.dickinson.edu/access, email access@dickinson.edu, call (717) 245-1734, or go to ADS in Old West (lower level), Room 005.

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

**Technology in the Classroom**
A 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

I: What is Political Science? How do we talk about politics?

September 2
- Introductions and Expectations – No Reading

September 4

The Constitution, Federalism, and the Foundation of the American Government

Chapters 2 and 6 in American Government

September 6
- U.S. Constitution (Available via National Archives at: https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript)

September 9
- Federalist #10 (Available via National Archives at: https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-10-02-0178)
- Federalist #51 (Available via National Archives at: https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-04-02-0199)
- (Audio) Cabinet Battle #1 from Hamilton Soundtrack (Available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lNTssCJTHY)

September 11
- Federalist #46 (Available via National Archives at: https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-10-02-0261)
September 13

- **Political Autobiography Due – Bring Hard Copy to Class**

Democracy, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights in the U.S.
Chapter 18 in American Government

September 16

- Zinn, Howard and Sidney Hook, “How Democratic is America?” (Available on Moodle)

September 18

- Bill of Rights and 14th Amendment of U.S. Constitution (Available via National Archives at: https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript)
- Summary of Assigned Cases on Oyez (OH-ay) website (Available at: https://www.oyez.org/)

September 20

- *(Audio)* Sanders, Sam. 2018. “Free Speech vs. Hate Speech” podcast from It’s Been A Minute. (Available via WBEZ at: https://www.wbez.org/shows/its-been-a-minute/free-speech-vs-hate-speech/3949457c-4e22-44c4-b3fd-b720e35ba49d)

September 23


September 25

September 27

- **Constitution Paper Peer Review – Bring Hard Copy of Draft**

**II: Institutions**

**Congress**

*Chapter 3 in American Government*

September 30


October 2


**Presidency**

*Chapter 4 in American Government*

October 4

- **Constitution Paper Due – Bring Hard Copy to Class**
October 7

Bureaucracy
October 9
- Wilson, James Q. “From Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It” (Available on Moodle)

October 11

October 14
- **Midterm Exam**

Judiciary
*Chapter 5 in American Government*
October 16
- Federalist #78 (Available via National Archives at: https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-04-02-0241)
October 18


October 21

- **No Class – Fall Pause**

Mass Media

*Chapter 7 in American Government*

October 23


October 25

- Arceneaux, Kevin and Martin Johnson. 2013. “The Reach of the Partisan Media” (Available on Moodle)
- Stewart, Emily. 2019. “#KamalaHarrisDestroyed debate signals how much we still don’t understand about social media manipulation” (Available via Vox at: https://www.vox.com/recode/2019/8/2/20751789/kamala-harris-destroyed-tulsi-gabbard-bots-google)
III: The Role of the People

Public Opinion & Ideology
*Chapters 8 and 9 in American Government*

**October 28**

**October 30**

**November 1**

**Elections**
*Chapter 10 in American Government*

**November 4**

**November 5 (Tuesday)**
- **Vote if you are eligible to do so! Local elections matter!!**

**November 6**

**November 8**
- **No Class – Prof. Niebler at Conference**

**November 11**
- The 2020 Presidential Race – Where Do We Stand?
- Readings TBA

**Political Parties**
*Chapter 11 in American Government*

**November 13**

**November 15**
- **Public Policy Paper Peer Review – Bring Hard Copy of Draft to Class**
November 18


Interest Groups & Social Movements

*Chapter 12 in American Government*

November 20


November 22

- **Public Policy Paper Due – Bring Hard Copy to Class**

November 25


November 27

- **No Class – Thanksgiving Break**

November 29

- **No Class – Thanksgiving Break**

**IV: Public Policy Issues**

Voting Rights

December 2

Immigration Policy
December 4


Gun Policy
December 6

- Cooper, Marc. 2016. “Gun Control is a Misfire” (Available via The American Conservative at: https://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/gun-control-is-a-misfire/)

Social Policy and Religious Rights
December 9

Environmental Policy
December 11


The Future of American Politics
December 13


Wednesday, December 18 @ 9:00 a.m.

- Final Exam