

PSC 121: American National Government and Politics

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00-12:20
School of Management 102

Instructor:

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Location: Eggers Basement, Bay 29

Course Summary

American National Government and Politics is aimed at developing a systematic way to think about American government that goes beyond knowing current events. It provides students with a broad background in concepts and questions central to the study of political institutions, behaviors, and processes in the United States. Students will be asked to apply political science theories to important debates in American politics. In doing so we will develop tools that will help us to evaluate the political world and make sophisticated arguments about the practice of politics. Among the questions we will discuss are: How do people make voting choices? Does the president have too much power? Does the Supreme Court have too much power? Why does the United States have two parties? What do polls mean? Do political campaigns matter?

Learning Objectives

This course has two kinds of objectives. The first is to gain substantive knowledge about American politics, and the second is to acquire skills that you acquire as a university student. The specific outcomes are as follows:

- 1) Understand the basic structures and institutions in the American political system and how they affect governmental outcomes,
- 2) Develop tools and principles to evaluate political behavior of individuals and groups in the United States as they interact with the political system,
- 3) Learn about the tools that political scientists use to study politics,
- 4) Improve research and writing skills through analysis of political science literature.

Course Readings:

There are two required texts for the course:

- Theodore J. Lowi, Benjamin Ginsburg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere, *American Government: Power and Purpose*. W.W. Norton Press. 13th Edition.
- Ken Kollman, *Readings in American Politics: Analysis and Perspectives*. W.W. Norton Press. 3rd Edition.

Each of the required books are available at the SU Bookstore, and are also widely available on your favorite bookstores on the web. Used copies are perfectly acceptable, and you may also use the 12th edition of *American Government: Power and Purpose*, if you so choose, but you will be responsible for identifying the appropriate sections for readings where page numbers differ from the 13th edition. You must obtain the 3rd edition of *Readings in American Politics* in order to have access to all of the assigned readings on the syllabus.

The remainder of the course readings will be academic political science articles and popular newspaper and magazine articles drawn from the web. These readings will be posted on Blackboard. Refer to the course calendar, Blackboard notifications, and emails from the instructor for updates on the reading schedule and where to find materials.

Readings on the syllabus should be read BEFORE the class for which they are listed.

Course Requirements

Reading and writing assignments are central to the course. Keeping up with the syllabus is essential to success in the course. Grades are *earned* based on the quality of work submitted. You are encouraged to see me if you are unsure about the expectations for any assignment. I will go over the paper assignments in detail when they are assigned. Use of office hours is highly encouraged—students who come to office hours to discuss assignments are much more likely to succeed.

Written Work: There are four written components of the course. There will be one midterm exam and one final exam, as well as two short papers. Both papers will involve applying the tools of political science in order to evaluate contemporary problems in American politics. The first paper will be assigned on **September 22nd** and due on **October 6th**. The second paper will be Assigned on **November 8th** and due on **November 29th**. Papers will be 3-5 pages in length. See the assignment sheet for additional details.

All grading of written work will be done anonymously. This means that written work must be submitted with a **title page on which your name appears**, and then **your name should not appear on any other page**. All written work should include page numbers. Plagiarism will not be tolerated—see Academic Integrity in Course Policies, below.

Notes and Quizzes: You are required to take reading notes so that you are prepared to participate in class discussions. You may take notes using whatever format is most useful for you, but using the following format should result in useful notes:

- Evaluate the **source** of the argument. Is this a detached academic source or does the author have an agenda?
- Identify the **argument**. What is the main idea that the author wants to relay to the reader? What assumptions does the author make? Are important terms clearly defined?
- Identify the **evidence**. What kinds of evidence does the author use to support his/her claims? Is this evidence reliable?
- Evaluate the **conclusion**. Are you convinced by the argument? Why or why not?
- Consider the **implications**. If you accept that the authors conclusions are true, what impact does this have on our understanding of American politics? Does it affect who wins and who loses?

We will collect these notes five (5) times throughout the semester. They will receive a grade from zero to four, with **four** being complete, accurate, and thoughtful, **three** being mostly complete and accurate, **two** indicating that the readings were completed, but key arguments are missing or unclear, and **one** for incomplete notes. Students who do not submit notes will receive zero points. One “note check” will be

dropped. I encourage notetaking by hand, but if you complete your notes on your computer, you will need to print your notes.

Quizzes will be open note and include basic comprehension questions from the readings. Computer use will not be permitted during quizzes. There will be three (3) 8 point quizzes during the semester. **Quizzes will be unannounced. There will be no makeup quizzes.** For excused absences, students may submit notes for a note check in lieu of the quiz.

Grades will be assigned based on the following rubric:

Paper #1	15%
Midterm Exam	25%
Paper #2	15%
Final Exam.....	30%
Notes and Quizzes	15%

Course Policies

Academic integrity: The Syracuse University Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. This means that it is your responsibility to be familiar with the Policy in general and to learn about the specific expectations of each of your instructors regarding proper citation of sources in written work. The policy also governs the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments as well as the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verifications of participation in class activities, and it prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. **The presumptive penalty for a first offense by an undergraduate student is course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of Academic Integrity Policy.** For more information and the complete policy, see <<http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>>.

Laptops and other electronic devices: During class, your jobs are to listen actively, take careful notes, reflect on the concepts we are discussing, and participate in those discussions when you have something to say. None of these jobs requires a laptop, a tablet, or a phone, and the use of such devices during class can be quite distracting to students sitting nearby. Therefore, **no electronics will be permitted in class.**

Late paper policy: Deadlines will be extended only under unusual circumstances, and only with Dr. Gardner's explicit permission. If you must be absent for one of the exams, you must inform me as early as possible, but **in no case later than two weeks before the exam.** Late papers will be reduced by a third of a grade for each day that they are late.

Grading policy: All grading of written work will be done anonymously. This means that written work must be submitted with a title page on which your name appears, and then your name should not appear on any other page. If you have any questions about written assignments, either before or after they are due, you are welcome to speak with either me.

Grade appeals: Grades may be appealed in rare circumstances. To do so, you should submit a clean copy of the paper to me, along with an explanation for the reason why you think you deserve a higher grade than you received (1 page). I will then re-grade the paper from scratch. This means that you could receive a grade that is lower, higher, or the same as the grade originally assigned.

Academic support services: SU provides a variety of tutoring and academic support services, and I encourage you to avail yourself of these resources. Doing so may help you learn the course material better, determine the best strategies for studying that material, improve your writing skills, and have less stress about your success in the course. Tutoring centers include the Tutoring & Study Center (TSC), the Writing Center, the Math and Calculus Clinics, the Physics Clinic, the Chemistry Clinic, and the Athletics Academic Services Center. Details at <<http://tutoring.syr.edu>>.

Reasonable accommodation: If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), located at 804 University Avenue, room 309 (443-4498). ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue Accommodation Authorization Letters when appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible. Visit the Office of Disability Services website for more details <<http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/>>.

Religious holidays: In accordance with SU's Religious Observances Policy, I will excuse any absences that result from religious observances, provided that you submit the required on-line notification form via MySlice during the first two weeks of the semester.

Office hours and email communication: My regular office hours are listed above, but you are welcome to make an appointment for some other time. If you just have a quick question, I encourage you to reach me by email. In addition, I will regularly use Blackboard's announcement and mail feature to contact all members of the class. As such, all students are responsible for regularly checking their SU email accounts throughout the semester.

Course Calendar

(This is current plan of how we will progress through the semester. You should *always* consult Blackboard or my emails to the class for changes in the schedule.)

August 30: Course Introduction

September 1: NO CLASS. I will be attending the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association in Philadelphia.

Read: AGPP pp. 26-31, "How Do Political Scientists Know What They Know?" [BB]

Part I: Foundations

September 6: The Logic of Politics

Read: AGPP pp. 2-25
RAP 1.2 Mancur Olson, Jr., from *The Logic of Collective Action*

September 8: The American Political Tradition

Read: RAP 1.1 John Locke, from *The Second Treatise of Government*
BB Rogers Smith, from "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America."

September 13: The Constitution I: Democracy and the Constraint

Read: AGPP pp. 32-48
RAP 2.1 James Madison, *The Federalist*, No. 10
RAP 2.2 James Madison, *The Federalist*, No. 51

September 15: The Constitution II: Institutions and Federalism

Read: AGPP pp. 48-63, skim 63-72, 72-93
RAP 2.4 Robert A. Dahl, from *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?*
RAP 3.3 *Arizona v. United States* (2012)

Part II: National Institutions

September 20: Congress I: Members and the Electoral Connection

Read: AGPP pp. 186-206 (202-206 optional)
RAP 5.1 David Mayhew, from *Congress: The Electoral Connection*
Assignment: Online survey due, complete by tonight at 11:59pm

September 22: Congress II: Legislative Decision Making

In-class activity: Legislative Simulation
Read: AGPP pp. 206-213, skim 213-230, read 231-239, 242-245
RAP 5.4 Gary W. Cox and Mathew D. McCubbins, from *Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives*
Paper #1 Assigned

September 27: The Presidency

Read: AGPP pp. 246-261, skim 261-279, read 269-300
RAP 6.1 Richard E. Neustadt, from *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*
BB *U.S. v. Nixon* (1974)

September 29: The Bureaucracy

Read: AGPP pp. 302-312, 319-332, 338-340
RAP 7.1 James Q. Wilson, from *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*

October 4: The Federal Judiciary: Powers and Organization

Read: AGPP pp. 342-367
The Federalist #78 (Blackboard)
RAP: 8.2 *Marbury v. Madison* (1801)

October 6: Supreme Court Decision Making

Read: AGPP pp. 367-391
BB Lee Epstein and Jack Knight, from *Choices Justices Make*
Paper #1 Due

October 11: Political Parties

In-class activity: Why two parties?
Read: AGPP pp. 512-541, 471-476
RAP 12.1 John Aldrich, from *Why Parties? A Second Look*

October 13: MIDTERM EXAM

(October 14: Last day to register to vote in New York State)

Part III: Mass Behavior and Elections

October 18: Citizens and Politics

Read: AGPP pp. 392-403, 418-423, 432-440 (424-425 optional)
RAP 9.2 John R. Zaller, from *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*

October 20: Public Opinion

Read: AGPP pp. 403-418
RAP 9.1 Arthur Lupia and Matthew D. McCubbins, from *The Democratic Dilemma*

October 25: Interest Groups

Read: AGPP pp. 558-568, 575-596

October 27: The Media

Read: AGPP pp. 598-600, 610-630
RAP 14.1 Matthew A. Baum, from *Soft News Goes to War*
Assignment: Election predictions due

November 1: Voter Choice

Read: AGPP pp. 476-491
BB Shana Gadarian and Bethany Albertson, “How terrorism anxiety could affect Election 2016”

November 3: Campaigns and Elections

In-class activity: Analyzing campaign ads
Read: AGPP pp. 446-471, 491-511
BB Darrell M. West, from *Air Wars*

November 8: Voting and Participation

ELECTION DAY

Read: BB Alan S. Gerber, Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer, “Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment”

Paper #2 Assigned

Part IV: Governance

November 10: Representation

Read: AGPP pp. 440-443, 510-511
BB James Stimson, Michael B. McKuen, and Robert S. Erikson, from “Dynamic Representation”

November 15: Polarization

Read: RAP 13.3 Nolan McCarty, Keith Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, from *Polarized America*
BB Morris P. Fiorina, from *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*

November 17: Civil Rights

Read: AGPP pp. 146-167
RAP 8.1 Gerald N. Rosenberg, from *The Hollow Hope*
Optional: RAP 4.2 *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)

November 29: Civil Liberties

Read: AGPP pp. 104-107, skim 107-143 (but pay special attention to 4th Amendment), 143-144
Richard Posner, “Rights Against Brutal Interrogation, and Against Searches and Seizures,” from *Not a Suicide Pact*

Paper #2 Due

December 1: Social Policy

Read: RAP 16.2 Larry M. Bartels, from *Unequal Democracy*

December 6: Foreign Policy

Read: RAP 17.1 Walter Russell Mead, from *Special Providence*
RAP 17.2 Robert Kagan, from *Dangerous Nation*

December 8: Exam Review

December 15: FINAL EXAM, 3:00-5:00 PM