

Introduction to the U.S. Political System

Government 020

Rachel Blum
Georgetown University
rb459@georgetown.edu

Summer 2015

Class meets: M-TR, June 1-July 3, 1-3:00 pm, ICC 210A

Office hours: TBD.

1 Course Description

This course is designed to provide students with a broad understanding of the U.S. political system. We will begin by examining the history of key U.S. political institutions and the rationales behind them. Next, we will turn to the key players competing in the system. After this, we will look at the basic institutions, rules, and policies under which these players compete. Students who complete this course are expected to have a basic mastery of these ideas, which would then allow them to delve more deeply into specific areas of American politics.

2 Goals and Expectations

Goals

By the end of the semester, students should feel confident in their knowledge of the U.S. political system and be able to write a thoughtful paper on some aspect of it.

Expectations

Attendance

Attendance is expected. If you for any reason miss class, you will be expected to cover any missed material on your own (I will not provide additional coverage of the materials to those who miss class). Most class materials will be available online and in the assigned readings, but simply reviewing the lecture slides will not be sufficient to provide coverage of the material. You should ask classmates for their notes as well. As long as you work to catch up on missed material and participate well in class, one or two absences will not

impact your participation grade. There is no need to notify me if you will be absent due to illness, a family emergency, etc. The only exception to this attendance policy is the exams.

All students are expected to take the exams at the scheduled time and turn in their papers on time. If you know that you will be unable to do so due to unavoidable reasons, please contact your Dean. I will require confirmation from your Dean before allowing you to make up the exam, or before accepting any late work.

Technology

Students are expected to refrain from using technology during class (computers, iPads, tablets, phones, etc.).

3 Graded Components

Class participation: 15%

Midterm exam: 25%

Final paper: 30%

Final exam: 30%

Class participation (15%)

This is a lecture class, so you must be present and attentive if you plan to do well. This includes participating in class exercises, occasional discussions, and weekly quizzes. Attendance is a necessary but not sufficient condition for participation.

There will be a quiz on the readings most class sections to test if you have done the reading. Your quiz score will be the average of your 10 best quizzes. Quizzes cannot be made up.

The rest of your participation grade will be based on other class activities.

Midterm exam (25%)

The midterm exam will take place in class on June 15th. It will contain a variety of short identifications, short answers, and short essays on all materials covered up to that point. It will be closed book and closed note.

Final paper (30%)

You will write one paper on a topic discussed in class. I will provide prompts, or you may choose a different topic. Topics must be approved by June 18th. Papers will be due by email at 5 pm on June 30. Late papers will be penalized 10 percentage points per day. More details will be given in class.

Final exam (30%)

The final exam will take place on July 2. It will be cumulative, and in the same format as the midterm.

4 Required Readings

Many of the readings will be available electronically (on Blackboard), but you are required to purchase the following books from your favorite retailer. I'm personally a fan of Amazon and half.com.

Dahl, Robert. 2003. *How Democratic is the American Constitution*. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Kollman, Ken. 2011. *The American Political System*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Gelman, Andrew. 2008. *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Mettler, Suzanne. 2011. *The Submerged State: How Invisible Government Policies Undermine American Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mayhew, David. 2004. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. 2nd edition. New Haven: Yale University Press.

5 Schedule

Please complete the assigned reading before coming to class

June 1: Orientation/Why Government?

Kollman, Chapter 1

Noel 2010 (online)

June 2: Constitution and Founding

Kollman, Chapter 2

Federalist Papers 10, 44, 51, 78, 84 (online)

Antifederalist 84 (online)

June 3: Federalism & Representation

Kollman, Chapter 3

Federalist Papers 16, 17, 39, 41 (online)

Antifederalist 17 (online)

Dahl (selections)

June 4: Preferences and Ideology

Kollman, Chapters 4, 16, 17, and 18

June 8: Political Parties and Interest Groups

Kollman, Chapters 11 and 12

Bawn et al. 2012

June 9: Congress

Mayhew (selections)

Coleman, Chapter 5

Aldrich and Rohde (online)

June 10: Presidency

Kollman, Chapter 6

Federalist 70

June 11: Judiciary.

Kollman, Chapter 8

Marbury v Madison (online)

June 15: Midterm

June 16: Bureaucracy and Delegation

Kollman, Chapter 7

June 17: Comparative Political Systems

June 18: Elections I: Voting Behavior. Final paper topic must be approved.

Kollman, Chapter 10

June 22: Elections II: Candidate Behavior & Nominations

Kollman, Chapter 13

Sides and Vavreck (online)

June 23: Public Opinion

Kollman, Chapter 9

Gelman (all)

June 24: Media

Kollman, Chapter 14

June 25: Campaign Finance and Lobbying

Kollman, Chapter 13

Kaminer 2012

Bai 2012

La Raja and Schaffner 2012

June 29: Recent movements: Tea Party & Occupy Wall St. Final Papers Due

Readings online (TBD)

June 30: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Kollman, Chapter 4

Brown v Board of Education

Gideon v Wainwright

Griswold v Connecticut

Roe v Wade

July 1: Social, Economic, and Foreign Policy

Kollman, Chapter 15, 16, and 17

Mettler (all)

July 2: Final exam