Introduction to the US Political System (GOVT-020-130)

BASICS

Dates: June 4 - July 27, 2017

Location: Online

Faculty: Mark Carl Rom, Associate Professor of Government and Public Policy, McCourt School of Public Policy and Department of Government

Contact Information: Please email through the Canvas Inbox. If you have issues with the Canvas Inbox, you can use - romm@georgetown.edu

Virtual Office Hours: By appointment through Zoom. Contact your instructor by email to set up an appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

We will have four main goals in this class.

The first is to work together with integrity, by upholding the Georgetown Student Pledge:

In pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life I commit myself to respect and to uphold the Georgetown University honor system:

To be honest in every academic endeavor, and

To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community as we live and work together.

Your instructor also commits himself to uphold this pledge and to work with you to meet these ideals.

A second goal is for you to become a more informed and competent citizen and political activist.

To accomplish this goal, you will need to build your knowledge about American politics and to learn how political knowledge can empower political activity. We will do this by reading books by political scientists and articles about politics, by discussing and reflecting on what we have read, and by taking content exams. At the end of the semester, you should have a strong grasp on the facts and concepts regarding the core structural factors in American politics (the Constitution, federalism, civil rights, civil liberties), the key institutions (Congress, the presidency, judiciary, and the bureaucracy), the principal organizations (interest groups, political parties, the news media), and the important behaviors (political culture, socialization, ideology, public opinion, voting, campaigns and elections). This knowledge is essential for effective citizenship and activism.

A third goal is to for you to engage in diverse explorations in and reflections on American politics while interacting with your classmates.

To this end, you will select among a wide variety of activities outside of the assigned readings to explore the US political system. You may attend political events, watch documentaries, listen to podcasts, or read classic or novel articles on politics. You may engage in video exercises or data explorations. In most cases, you will post reflections on these activities, and then conduct peer reviews of them. The more "Engagement" points you earn, the closer you come to reaching this goal.

A final goal is for you to develop your skills as a political analyst (and perhaps even a budding political scientist) — that is, one who uses logic and evidence to make systematic statements about politics.

For example, a careful study of voting behavior will allow us to make statements about the probability of certain outcomes (e.g., whether an individual will vote, how that individual will vote, and what the likely outcome of an election will be). You will develop these skills through the readings, video exercises, and your research project. To accomplish this goal you will write a research paper in which you pose interesting and important questions about American politics, gather evidence to address these questions, and compile your evidence and answers to present to the class.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

Course-level Learning Objective 1: You will enhance your understanding of American politics by engaging in a thoughtful exploration of the concepts listed in the Module list below.

> Module-level Learning Objective 1: You will develop factual knowledge of the the formal and informal features of American politics involving political institutions and political behavior. This knowledge will be assessed through content quizzes.

> Module-level Learning Objective 2: You will develop your interpretive skills regarding the formal and informal features of American political institutions and political behavior. These skills will be assessed through the comments you post on the various Engagement activities.

> Module-level Learning Objective 3: You will develop an understanding of how institutions and behavior interact. Institutions affect behavior; behavior affects institutions. This knowledge will be assessed through the comments you post on the various assignments listed, as well as through your research project.

Course-level Learning Objective 2: You will learn how political scientists think about and conduct research on political phenomena.

> Module-level Learning Objective 4: You will learn the core theoretical concepts and analytical frameworks commonly used by political science scholars, including the concepts of collective action problems, coordination, rules, environment, strategies, and choices. You will be assessed on this knowledge through the content quizzes, your reflective posts, and your research projects.

> Module-level Learning Objective 5: You will develop an understanding of how political scientists use theory, logic, and evidence to make statements about political institutions and political behavior that are supportable and generalizable. You will be assessed on this knowledge through the content quizzes, your reflective posts, and your research projects.

After completing this course, you will have the skills necessary to pose your own questions about American politics (either through raising other general questions as above, e.g., "How are political parties regulated in the United States?", or in applying these questions to specific cases, e.g., "Was the media biased against President Trump in the 2016 presidential election?), to collect evidence that attempts to answer those questions, and to explain your answers to a public audience.

After completing the course, you will have the competence necessary to provide a moderately sophisticated interpretation of American political phenomenon. Although political interpretations are often subjective, and although political phenomena are open to multiple and often competing interpretations, a sophisticated interpretation uses both factual knowledge and conceptual understanding.

REQUIRED BOOKS

Ken Kollman, *The American Political System*, 3rd Edition. (New York: W.W. Norton 2017) You can purchase a paperback or the Ebook.

John Sides, Daron Shaw, Matt Grossmann, Keena Lipsitz, *Campaigns and Elections*, 2nd Edition. (New York: W.W. Norton 2015) You can purchase a paperback or the Ebook.

Robert Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

Baglione, Lisa A., *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science*, 3rd Edition. (Los Angeles: Sage/CQ Press, 2016).

Ken Kollman, *Readings in American Politics: Analysis and Perspectives*, 4th Edition. (New York: W.W. Norton 2014)

PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

This course consists of 8 modules and an orientation. All modules are open and available to you at the start of the course for your planning purposes. However, the modules and activities must be done sequentially and certain activities and assignments must be completed by certain dates. In general, you can always work ahead by completing assignments in the upcoming weeks. However, you cannot 'work behind' -- all work must be completed by the due date.

You are expected to complete all the course material. Each modules includes readings, quizzes, and various "Engagement" activities. Beginning midway through the semester you will also be required to post weekly updates on your progress on the Research project. You will post your Research project on the assigned date.

Participation is essential to your success in this class. In distance education courses you are required to participate just as if you were in a face-to-face course. This means that in order to get full credit for participation, you will have to complete all of your

module activities and assignments by the assigned dates, including the peer reviews for the Engagement activities. You must also participate in the group activities as assigned. Your participation is important for your grade, but also because your fellow students are counting on you.

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US Political Systems

TIME EXPECTATIONS

Our online classes are designed to meet the same academic standards as our place-based (face-to-face) courses. Our accelerated modules shorten a 15-week class into 7.5 weeks while requiring the same level of participation, commitment, and academic rigor. You should thus plan on spending 15-20 hours per week on the work for each module.

COURSE ACTIVITIES AND ASSIGNMENTS

You must complete a multiple choice quiz based on the syllabus during the first week of class and receive a score of 100 percent. This quiz will not count toward your grade, but no other work submitted will be graded until you complete the syllabus quiz. If you do not receive a 100 percent on the exam, you may take it again until you do.

Knowledge Component

Our first task is to develop your substantive knowledge (facts, concepts, theories) about American politics. This corresponds with the learning goals of "remembering" and "understanding". High performance requires persistence, focus, and skill.

For each assigned reading, you can take an online quiz on Canvas. Each quiz from the Kollman text will contain a randomized set of 25 multiple choice content questions taken directly from the book. The quiz from the Dahl text contains 20 content questions taken from that book. Most quizzes from the Sides book contain 15 content questions taken from the text.

Kollman's The American Political System contains 14 quizzes; Dahl's How Democratic is the American Constitution? contains 1 quiz; Sides' Campaigns and Elections contains 14.

You will thus take 29 quizzes for the course. Your two lowest quiz scores will be dropped. Your Knowledge score will be based on the total number of points you earned on the other 27 quizzes, and this will be worth 30 percent of your overall grade.

Engagement Component

Our second task is to build your skills in "applying" and "analyzing" American politics through participation in various political activities. These activities will generally not be assessed in detail; you will get credit if you make a good-faith effort to complete the activity.

The Engagement component consists of various activities that go outside of the content elements in the Knowledge component. You will complete these activities to earn points. Approximately 450 are possible. The student who earns the highest number of points will receive a score of 100 percent. All other students averages will be based on that student. For example, if the highest number of points earned is 418, that person will receive 100 percent (418/418 = 100 percent). If another student earns 390 points, that student would earn 390/418 = 93.3 percent.

Here are two important things you should realize. First, although each individual activity is optional -- you can choose among the various options -- your overall Engagement score will be based on the number of points you earn. Second, the points you earn the first point count as much as the points you earn in the last week, so you should begin earning points right away!

You may earn engagement points in various ways:

You may attend any political event related to American politics, document it, and post a brief reflection (~250 words or so) on it. If it's a "live" event, please take a selfie or other picture of the event and post it. If the event is a video or podcast ("media" event), then provide a link to it. The media event must be at least 30 minutes in length.

Your reflection should contain the following elements: 1) How did you discover this live or media event? What prompted you to attend? 2) In what way did this event "connect" with the material of the class? "Connect" means did the event confirm, challenge, or extend the ideas from your readings? 3) What left you puzzled?

To receive credit for this Engagement activity, you must also complete your peer review, certifying that the reflection you reviewed contains all three of these elements.

All events must concern the US political system in some way, and they must occur during the period between June 4 and July 27 (so, no using that campaign rally you attended when you were 14 or that movie you watched last summer). If you have any questions as to whether the event qualifies, please contact your instructor in advance. Completing these tasks (i.e., attending/watching, posting, and peer reviewing) is worth 5 points per event. You may do one such activity each week.

You may read any of the chapters from Kollman's *Readings in American Politics: Analysis and Perspectives* (not the Kollman American Government text) that is

appropriate for that week's module and post a reflection.The reflection must contain three elements: 1) What was the most important thing you learned from this reading? 2) Were you persuaded or convinced by the author's arguments? Why or why not? 3) What about the reading left you puzzled? How could you resolve this puzzle? The completed assignment is worth 5 points. To earn credit, you must also complete your peer review, certifying that the reflection you reviewed contains all three elements.

This book has the identical structure as The American Political System (e.g., the first section is "Fundamentals", the second section is "The Constitution and Its Founding", and so forth) so you can pick any chapter from the appropriate unit. This book is not required reading; the chapters are used only to earn Engagement points. Each chapter you read, post, and peer review is worth 5 points. You may do one such reading each week.

There are also a wide variety of Engagement activities that are connected to the Kollman American Political System text. These activities include "puzzle" videos, "What Do Political Scientists Do?" videos, video exercises, and data explorations. The points for these vary, but are posted on the activity. If they require reflections and peer reviews, the instructions are posted on the activity.

Research Component

Our third task is to develop your skills as a political analyst and political scientist. In this component, you will develop questions about American politics and seek to answer them in a research paper. Your answers will be based, in part, on the research that has been conducted by other researchers.

You will thus conduct an original research project that demonstrates your understanding of and engagement in American politics

In this project you will ask interesting and important questions about American politics, seek to answer these questions as best you can, and present your answers in a research paper. In attempting your questions, you must use social science research (through using, for example, Google Scholar or JSTOR) and also cite at least one scholarly book or article. We'll talk more about these things as we proceed.

The research projects are also a collaborative part of the course: you'll be creating individual projects, but doing so while working with others as part of a team. Beginning in the middle of the semester, each week you will submit a project update as specified. You will be required to provide your teammates feedback on their progress. Both your updates, and your feedback, will be considered in our final assessment of your projects.

Deadlines:

In developing your research project, you will have several deadlines.

Research proposals must be posted by Sunday, July 1 by 6 p.m. Your proposal should briefly describe the topic you plan to explore and why you are interested in that topic, and then pose the main question you plan to answer. You should also list other questions that are related to your main question. More details on your proposal appear at the bottom of this page.

To get credit for your proposal, you must also provide feedback to your other teammates. This feedback should involve questions you have for them regarding their proposal, focusing on the questions they have posed. You must post your feedback no later than the following Wednesday (e.g., your first feedback must be posted by midnight Wednesday, July 4).

You must post project updates each of the next weeks, on July 8, July 15, and July 22. Each week you will be assigned specific tasks to work on for your update. The update must describe (or, better, show) the progress you have made on your research. Each week, you must also provide feedback to your teammates by the following Wednesday.

Your final project must be completed and the file posted on Canvas by 6 p.m., Sunday July 29. This gives you the final weekend of the semester to finish your writing.

Content:

You will write a research paper of approximately 3000 words with all elements (a-f) listed below.

You will develop a set of questions concerning American politics, policy, or government. You should feel free to discuss possible questions with your instructor.

Your paper must involve questions about your specific topic; it cannot be merely 'about' the topic. For example, if you were examining the role of political participation in the 2016 presidential election:

What were the turnout rates of various groups (e.g., women and men, blacks and whites, high and low income)?

How did these turnout rates differ from previous presidential elections?

How did these rates vary by state?

Which groups were most instrumental in Trump's victory?

In answering these questions, you must explore the answers that other political scientists have provided to similar questions. For example, in answering the question "What were the voting patterns of the electorate?" you will need to investigate what political scientists have learned about voting patterns in general.

Your paper must have a hypothesis. For example, the questions above might generate the hypotheses:

Male turnout increased, helping Trump.

Female turnout decreased, hurting Clinton.

The voting patterns changed little in the 2016 presidential election (as compared to 2012), but voting rates changed substantially.

Format:

Your paper will contain the following elements:

a. Abstract: In 250 words, you should concisely state your research questions, your research strategy, and your main findings.

b. Introduction: You should provide overview of the research question, its importance, and what motivated you to conduct this study.

c. Research methods: You should describe what you did and why you did these things.

d. Literature review: You should synthesize and summarize the literature as it relates to your research question, considering what the literature shows and what it leaves open for further research.

e. Research findings: You should present and interpret the evidence used to answer your questions. This evidence may mainly come from your literature review.

Citation Style

You will provide citations and references for your Research Project according to the American Political Science Association's (APSA) Style Manual for Political Science.

Research Proposal -- Additional Guidance

Regarding the key element -- the main question and related questions -- let us turn to an example.

Main Question: Do Evangelical and Non-Evangelical Christians have differing political views regarding climate change?

Related Questions: These all must be asked and answered to address the main question.

1. What is an "Evangelical"? A "Non-Evangelical"?

2. What do we mean by political views? Is it public opinion? Sermons? Articles appearing on Christian websites?

3. Climate change? Are you really referring to whether climate change is occurring? Whether it is caused by humans? Whether it is the government's responsibility to respond?

So: The most important element is your *main* question. But you really need to think hard about "what other questions must I answer to answer my main research question"?

You might also think of other questions regarding time, place, and "scope".

1. What time period are you examining? The past 5 years? 10 years? 20 years?

2. Are you going to look at national opinions? The opinions of particular states (for example, comparing California to Texas)?

3. Are you going to look at the opinions of ministers? Congregants?

You get to pick the answers to the last set of questions. "I am going to examine the statements of ministers in Georgia between 1995 and 2015."

Yes, this is complicated stuff. Keep working! Continue talking with your team -- yes, your team can help you! -- and your instructor.

YOUR GRADE

Your grade will be based on your performance on three core elements.

Your overall score will be the average of your scores across

Knowledge: 30 percent

Engagement: 40 percent

Research: 30 percent

Georgetown has the highest expectations for you in the course. Your grade will depend on your performance. To earn an A, you must demonstrate outstanding performance in all categories. In general, the following scale will be used to assign grades:

95-100 = A
90-94.9 = A-
87-89.9 = B+
83-86.9 = B
80-82.9 = B-
77-79.9 = C+
73-76.9 = C
70-72.9 = C-
< 69.9 = D
< 60 = F

ABSENCES

There are no absences in an online course. You are expected to complete all work by the due date. If you fail to submit and/or complete any of the assignments due in a module, including participating in discussion postings, writing and research assignments, quizzes, and/or peer review activities, you will receive a zero on the assignment.

MAKE-UP POLICY

In order to submit any assignment or activity late, you must have a doctor's excuse and permission from your Dean, and/or have secured my permission well in advance.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Canvas

Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies (SCS) uses Canvas as its Learning Management System. This course will be taught entirely through the Canvas platform. To learn more about Canvas, please go through the Canvas Guide for Students.

Communication with Peers

You will be expected to communicate with your peers via the discussion board and through Canvas email.

Email

In this course we will use Canvas to send email for private messages. You can either check your messages in the Canvas system or set your notifications to your preferred method of contact. Please check your messages at least once per day.

When submitting messages, please do the following:

1. Put a subject in the subject box that describes the email content with your name and module.

2. When you are replying to a message, please stick to that subject. If you need to change the subject, please write a new note or change the subject line. This helps your instructor keep track of your questions and concerns.

Do not send messages asking general information about the class, please post those in the NEED HELP? question forum.

Questions

In online courses, everyone will likely have many questions about things that relate to the course, such as clarification about assignments, course materials, or assessments. Please post these in the NEED HELP? question forum, which you can access by clicking the DISCUSSIONS button in the course navigation links. This is an open forum, and you are encouraged to give answers and help each other.

Turnaround / Feedback

If you have a concern and send your instructor a message, you can expect a response within 2 business days. If you need more immediate help, please text or call Professor Rom at 202-213-8767, and he will respond as quickly as he is able.

Netiquette Guidelines

To promote the highest degree of education possible, we ask each student to respect the opinions and thoughts of other students and be courteous in the way that you

choose to express yourself. The topics in this course are often controversial and promote debate.

Students should be respectful and considerate of all opinions. In order for us to have meaningful discussions, we must learn to genuinely try to understand what others are saying and be open-minded about others' opinions. If you want to persuade someone to see things differently, it is much more effective to do so in a polite, non-threatening way rather than to do so antagonistically. Everyone has insights to offer based on his/her experiences, and we can all learn from each other. Civility is essential.

And finally, what happens in a class discussion stays in a class discussion unless you receive permission from the instructor to share something outside the class.

COURSE RESOURCES

Georgetown Library

Students enrolled in online School of Continuing Studies SCS coursework have access to the University Library System's eResources, including 500+ research databases, 1.5+ million ebooks, and thousands of periodicals and other multimedia files (films, webinars, music, and images). Students can access these resources through the Library's Homepage by using their University username (NetID) and password (this is the same login information used to access email). The Library does not mail physical items to students.

SCS students may make an appointment with a librarian to discuss a research topic, develop a search strategy, or examine resources for projects and papers. Librarians offer an overview of and in-depth assistance with important resources for senior or master's theses, dissertations, papers and other types of research. Appointments are conducted using Zoom videoconferencing software. It is recommended that students request appointment at least one week in advance of their desired appointment time (appointments are generally accepted between noon and 7PM EST Monday through Thursday). This service is available to currently enrolled students who need assistance with Georgetown-assigned projects and papers. Please review the Services & Resources Guide for Online Students for additional information.

ACCOMMODATION

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, individuals with disabilities are provided reasonable accommodations to ensure equity and access to programs and facilities. Students are responsible for communicating their needs to the Academic Resource Center, the office that oversees disability support services, (202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; http://academicsupport.georgetown.edu/disability) before the start of classes to allow time

to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations.

The University is not responsible for making special accommodations for students who have not declared their disabilities and have not requested an accommodation in a timely manner. Also, the University need not modify course or degree requirements considered to be an essential requirement of the program of instruction. For the most current and up-to-date policy information, please refer to the Georgetown University Academic Resource Center website. Students are highly encouraged to discuss the documentation and accommodation process with an Academic Resource Center administrator.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity in pursuit of their education at Georgetown. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to, failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are held to the Honor Code.

The Honor Code pledge follows:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

Plagiarism

Stealing someone else's work is a terminal offense in the workplace, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as "the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another." More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs. If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing, and the need to credit, check out http://www.plagiarism.org.

COMPUTER REQUIREMENTS

Students need to have sufficient technology and Internet access to complete this course. Here are the requirements listed by Canvas:

Operating Systems

Windows XP SP3 and newer

Mac OSX 10.6 and newer

Linux - chromeOS

Mobile Operating System Native App Support

iOS 7 and newer

Android 2.3 and newer

Computer Speed and Processor

Use a computer 5 years old or newer when possible

1GB of RAM

2GHz processor

Internet Speed

Along with compatibility and web standards, Canvas has been carefully crafted to accommodate low bandwidth environments.

Minimum of 512kbps

Audio and Video Capability

You will need an internal or external microphone. Most computers now come with them built in.

You will need an internal or external camera. Most computers now come with them built in.

TECHNICAL SKILLS REQUIREMENTS

As an online student your "classroom" experience will be very different than a traditional student. As part of your online experience, you can expect to utilize a variety of technologies, such as:

Communicate via email including sending attachments

Navigate the internet using a Web browser

Use office applications such as Microsoft Office or Google Docs to create documents

Learn how to communicate using a discussion board and upload assignments to a classroom Web site

Upload and download saved files

Have easy access to the Internet

Navigate Canvas, including using the email component within Canvas

Use a microphone to record audio through your computer

Use an internal or external camera to record video through your computer

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Canvas

Click on the Help link (on lower-left of page in Canvas) to reach Canvas Support, including the Canvas Student Guide and 24 hour Canvas Support Hotline at 855-338-2770.

Google Apps

Use of Georgetown University-issued accounts for Google Mail, Calendar, Groups, Talk, Docs, Sites, Video, and Contacts is governed by the contract between Georgetown University and Google. For help please visit: https://uis.georgetown.edu/google-apps.

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

Learning Resources

SCS offers a host of learning resources to its students. Two that you might find particularly helpful in this course are the Writing Center and Refworks.

The Writing Center offers professional writing support through its online peer tutoring service.

Refworks is an online research management tool that aids in organizing, storing, and presenting citation sources for papers and projects.

Support Services

SCS offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed online, at the School of Continuing Studies downtown location, and on the main Georgetown campus:

Academic Resource Center 202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu | http://academicsupport.georgetown.edu

Counseling and Psychiatric Services 202-687-6985 | http://caps.georgetown.edu/

Institutional Diversity, Equity & Affirmative Action (IDEAA) 202-687-4798 | https://ideaa.georgetown.edu/