

Introduction to American Government
POLI 2051
Tuesdays, 6:00pm – 8:50 pm

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course comprises a broad overview on the subject of “American Politics” and is designed to familiarize you with the fundamentals of American government, its institutions, campaigns and elections, public opinion, and the role of mass media. While this course treats these topics as separate subject areas, one of the major goals of this class is to *identify how these components of American government fit together*.

The semester is structured into three main parts. The first section will be the obligatory review of the early history of the American government, an overview of the constitution and how federalism shapes politics, and a discussion on civil liberties and civil rights. The second section hits the major formal and informal institutions of the American government: Congress, the Presidency, and the Judiciary, and political parties. Finally, the third section will cover the nuts-and-bolts of campaigns and elections, interest groups, public opinion, and the role that the media plays in covering and shaping all of the above. It’s vital that you do the assigned reading so that you have something to contribute in class. Because this course meets only once a week, *class attendance is expected*.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Exams (60%): You will be presented with 3 exams, each worth 20 percent of your final grade. These exams are scheduled for 2/7/2016, 3/21/2016, and 5/2/2016. The exams are *not* cumulative; instead, they will cover the material that we spent reviewing during the weeks preceding the examination.
2. Short essays (20%): In addition to these exams, you will be required to write two one-page essays. These essays will comprise 20 percent of your grade, meaning that they are each worth 10 percent of your total grade. These essays should be single spaced, **with 1 inch margins and a maximum length of one page**. Think critically. I’m interested in what *you* think about the readings. **Do not copy and paste large blocks of quotes from the readings; use your own words**. On dates the essays are due, **please bring a hard copy of your assignment to submit in class**.
 - **Essay 1, due 2/14/2016**...Define elite polarization. Why is it important? What are some the underlying causes of this phenomenon in Congress? [Response to Barber and McCarty reading, available on Moodle]
 - **Essay 2, due 4/04/2016**...Discuss some of the underlying factors that shape why individuals participate in elections. [Response to the Harder and Krosnik reading, available on Moodle]
3. Attendance (20%): Come to class. There will be **four** attendance checks this semester. If you’re present, you receive full credit; if you’re absent...then you don’t. University approved absences will be honored—your dog eating your car keys won’t.

TEXTBOOKS

Required texts for this class:

The New American Democracy, 7th edition. 2011. Fiorina, Morris, Paul E. Peterson, Bertram Johnson, and William G Mayer. Longman Publishing.

CLASS AND GRADING POLICIES

This syllabus was revised on 1/17/2017, but I do reserve the right alter it should need arise. That said, you will be given fair warning should we need to make changes at a later date. Please be a good classroom citizen. As always, be kind to others, listen rather than just “hear,” and respect your peers even in disagreement.

Late work is not accepted. When assignments or presentations are scheduled for a given date, then that is the date on which I will accept your work, with the caveat that “university excused absences” obviously provide for makeup opportunities (keep in mind, however, that documentation must be provided in those cases). It is your responsibility to complete all works assigned in this course in full observation of the Academic Honor Code. Cheating, plagiarism or any form of academic dishonesty are unacceptable. University policies regarding academic honesty will be strictly enforced. If you have any questions about academic dishonesty, please speak either with me or with someone in the *Office of the Dean of Students*.

Please keep in mind that LSU uses a +/- grading system.

>97%	A+
93-97%	A
90-93%	A-
87-90%	B+
83-87%	B
80-83%	B-
77-80%	C+
73-77%	C
70-73%	C-
67-70%	D+
63-67%	D
60-63%	D-
<60%	F

If you have a disability which may require accommodation, you should immediately contact the Office of Services of Students with Disabilities to officially document the needed accommodation. You can find more information at <http://students.lsu.edu/disability>

Part 1. The Foundations of American Government

- Week 1 **Political Culture**
1/17/2017 Read Chapters 1 and 4 in *New American Democracy*
- Week 2 **Constitution / Federalism**
1/24/2017 Read Chapters 2 and 3 in *New American Democracy*
Read Federalist no. 51 at <http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa51.htm>
- Week 3 **Civil liberties and Civil Rights**
1/31/2017 Read Chapters 16 and 17
Read: <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/>
- Week 4 **Exam 1**
2/07/2017

Part 2. Institutions of Government

- Week 5 **Congress**
2/14/2017 Read Chapter 12 in *New American Democracy*
Read Barber and McCarty (available on Moodle)
DUE: SHORT ESSAY 1
- Week 6 **The Presidency**
2/21/2017 Read Chapter 13 in *New American Democracy*
Read: https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2016/11/11/glenn-greenwald-trump-will-have-vast-powers-he-can-thank-democrats-for-them/?utm_term=.d51b68d819fc
Read: <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2014/11/20/365467914/so-just-what-is-an-executive-action-anyway>
- Week 7 **The Judiciary**
3/07/2017 Read Chapter 15 in *New American Democracy*
After Innocence documentary
- Week 7 **Parties**
3/14/2017 Read Chapter 8 in *New American Democracy*
Read Federalist no. 10
- Week 8 **Exam 2**
3/21/2017

Part 2. Campaigns and Elections, Public Opinion, and the News

- Week 9 **Campaigns and Elections**
3/28/2017 Read Chapters 10 and 11 in *New American Democracy*
Read: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2015/03/01/this-is-the-best-explanation-of-gerrymandering-you-will-ever-see/>

- Week 10
4/04/2017
Participation
Read Chapter 6 in *New American Democracy*
Read Harder and Krosnick (available on Moodle)
[additional reading TBD]
DUE: SHORT ESSAY 2
- Week 11
4/18/2017
Public Opinion
Read Chapter 5 in *New American Democracy*
Read Converse (available on Moodle)
Read: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/nyhan-reifler.pdf>
- Week 12
4/25/2017
The News Media
Read Chapter 6 in *Struggle for Democracy* (available on Moodle)
Read: <https://www.brookings.edu/essay/covering-politics-in-a-post-truth-america/>
Read: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2016/dec/18/what-is-fake-news-pizzagate>
Read: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jan/13/crying-fake-news-is-handy-for-politicians-but-toxic-for-democracy>
Read: <https://flipboard.com/@flipboard/flip.it%2F3qlb3j-the-trump-story-media-dare-not-utter-th/f-8cea408b66%2Fsalon.com>
- Week 13
05/02/2017
Final Exam: 8pm-10pm