

# American Politics- PS 0200 Section: 30471

**Fall 2017**

**Meets:** Tuesdays & Thursdays 1-2:15 PM **Location:** A221 Langley Hall

**Professor:** Dr. Laura Bucci ([lcb52@pitt.edu](mailto:lcb52@pitt.edu))

**Office:** 4800 W. Posvar Hall

**Office Hours:** Monday 1-3, Wednesday 10-12, or by appointment

*In a political system where nearly every adult may vote, but where knowledge, wealth, social position, access to officials, and other resources are unequally distributed, who actually governs?"—Robert Dahl*

## 1 Course Description

The goal of this course is to get you to think about the politics taking place around you. Whether or not you knowingly engage in political life, politics affects all decisions about who gets *what, when, and how*. Discussing politics makes some people uncomfortable, but is important to the continuation of civic life, and a responsibility that we share as citizens. Your goal in this course is to learn, or refine your ability, to speak accurately and constructively about political happenings using the lens of political science.

This is not a course in current events, it is also not the civics course you might have taken in high school. While we will discuss what is happening in the government, we will do so to better understand the topics of each week. We will use established research in political science to understand fundamental questions: Where do our political views come from, and why are they so slow to change?<sup>1</sup> Why do so few people vote?<sup>2</sup> What can government do when citizens disagree about fundamental issues?<sup>3</sup> Do institutions “work” for everyone?<sup>4</sup>

## Learning Objectives

By the end of this course you should be better able to:

- Know the basic structures of American government, and how they function
- Write clearly and concisely
- Evaluate current politics using social science theories and research
- Understand implications of political decisions for relevant populations

## Grade Components

1. **Tests** (4, each 15% of your grade):

- Tests will consist of 10 multiple choice questions that require a sentence justification of your answer (5 points each= 50 points). If you guess the correct answer, you will receive partial credit. If you pick the wrong answer, but justify it well, you would also receive partial credit. Each exam will also have 5 concept identifications and why this topic is significant to our understanding of politics (5 points each= 25 points). Items will be taken from bolded terms we talk about in class. We will discuss “good” answers for these types of questions.<sup>5</sup>
- If you miss any one exam, a makeup will be scheduled at the end of the semester.

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<sup>1</sup>Your family, your hometown, your early experiences - Because they're important to how you see yourself

<sup>2</sup>Why should any vote at all?

<sup>3</sup>Quite a bit and sometimes nothing

<sup>4</sup>No

<sup>5</sup>What does this concept suggest about who gets what, when, and how? How does this event differ from what existed historically? Who benefits from this term, and who is hurt? A term is important for many reasons, and we will talk more about this in class.

- *A word of caution:* The makeup exam should not be taken in cases where you can attend the regular exam period, and is intended to act only as a last minute safety valve for some unforeseen circumstance. This makeup exam is only identification questions, and students, on average, tend to do better on their in class examinations when material is fresh in their minds. Students are not allowed to make up material from more than one exam missed.

## 2. Participation (25%)

- Learning lasts the longest when students are active and engaged in the classroom. I expect you to be ready to discuss materials within the classroom, engage in in-class activities. It is important that you demonstrate you can think critically about the information presented, and be able to speak respectfully about political topics to your classmates.

Participating means that you need to be **in class**. You are allowed to miss two classes with no penalty, but all additional absences will be penalized, as you will not be participating.

- If you tend to get sick at the end of the semester, save your absences. Better to accidentally come to all the classes, then to end up hurting your grade.

## 3. One page reading responses (3, each 5% of your grad)

- At three points you will write a one page response about a textbook chapter. The format of the response: Paragraph 1 briefly points to the key questions/concepts of the day's reading, Paragraph 2 explains something that you know now that you did not know before, and Paragraph 3 points out questions you still have regarding the material, or something you hope to learn in the future. Responses can relate to any day's readings in the period. The first response should be on **Chapters 1-4** and is due by **9/21**, the second response is on *Chapters 5-8* and is due **10/24**, the third due by **Dec. 7** and should be from the remaining chapters. Responses should be typed and submitted no later than **1pm**.
- LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. YOU HAVE ABOUT A MONTH BETWEEN ASSIGNMENTS- DO THEM EARLY.

## Required Text

*Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics* by Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright, 8th Edition ISBN:978-1-5063-6218-2 (do not get the essentials edition, it is a **different book**.) The book is available in the bookstore, or can be purchased online.

You are expected to follow a major news source: *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times*.

## 2 Course Policies

Failure to adopt these principles could result in lowered grades, removal from the course, or disciplinary action. By remaining enrolled in this course you agree to:

### 1. Do your own work

- Plagiarism is a form of cheating. It is serious, it will be punished. If you are unsure what plagiarism looks like, please consult the [guidelines for academic integrity](#)
- The University states that "All students are expected to adhere to the standards of academic honest. Any student engaged in cheating, plagiarism, or other acts of academic dishonesty would be subject to disciplinary action. Any student suspected of violating this obligation for any reason during the semester will be required to participate in the procedural process, initiated at the instructor level, as outlined in the University Guidelines of Academic Integrity. This may include, but is not limited to, the confiscation of the examination of any individual suspected of violating the University Policy."

- Do not cheat; do not attempt to cheat. I will notice, and I will report it to the University. In my experience, people never cheat *well*, and you are doing a great disservice to your own academic career, and disrespecting your fellow classmates. All definitions from your textbook should be paraphrased.

## 2. Come to class ready to learn

- Lateness: Coming to class is disruptive to your classmates, who arrived on time. If lateness becomes a problem, I reserve the right to count late students as absent.
- Use of Cellphones: I know you don't want to believe this, but I can see you sitting in class. Keep your cellphone away during class time. You'll learn better, and your friends can wait an hour.
- Taking notes: Bring a notebook to class, and don't rely totally on my slides. While you can use a computer, in my experience its far less distracting to simply write things down.

## 3. Contact me with problems

- Disability and Special Needs Accommodations: If you require special accommodations or classroom modifications, please notify both the instructor and Disability Resources and Services by the end of the first week of the term. The office of Disability Resources and Services is located in 140 William Pitt Union (412-648-7890 Voice or TDD), and their website is <http://www.drs.pitt.edu>. If you have a physical, learning, or emotional disability, please let me know as early as you can so that I can better accommodate you.
- Email: Email is a form of professional communication. Please write respectfully and professionally in emails. I tend to respond to email fairly quickly, but if I have not addressed your question in 24 hours, let me know. Nights before exams, I will be unreachable after 9pm- please start studying earlier, and I will be more than happy to answer any questions you have about the material.
- Grades: If you disagree with your grade on an exam, wait 24 hours, and send me a written note about what you believe is wrong. I am happy to discuss grades at that point.
- When you don't understand something, come to office hours. Feel free to ask questions. Don't be a martyr, if you have a question someone else probably does as well.

## 4. Respect your classmates

- An Open Classroom: It is important to me that you leave this class better able to engage critically with political topics. That said, some things are not up for debate. The classroom needs to remain a safe, welcoming, and beneficial learning environment for all students regardless age, background, political belief, ethnicity, gender, gender identity and expression, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, or ability.

There may be times in class, as there will be times in life, when not everyone agrees. That's ok. It is important that you engage with your peers in a constructive manner, and derogatory comments will not be accepted.

If there is a way to make you feel more welcome in the course, please let me know via email or come to visit during office hours.

# 3 Course Schedule and Assignments

\* I will make changes to the schedule as needed.

*In all chapters, feel free to skip the CLUES sections, you won't be tested on them. Pay attention to figures throughout, though, those are important.*

## 8/29 Introduction

Course Policies, Syllabus Review ([Playing fun games that help us learn each other's names](#))

## **8/31 Chapter One: Political Systems**

Read: KTR, Ch. 1, p.1-30

## **9/5 Chapter 2: Political Culture**

Read: KTR, Ch. 2 p.31-54

## **9/7 Chapters 1 & 2**

Review Chs. 1 & 2

In Class Activity

Understanding the Ideological Spectrum

## **9/12 Chapter 3: The Founding**

Read: KTR, Ch. 3 p.55-81

*Question to Consider: Do we need the Bill of Rights?*

## **9/14 Chapter 4: Federalism- What is it?**

Read: KTR, Ch. 4 p 83-101 Read to “The Changing Balance: American Federalism Over Time”

## **9/19 Federalism- What it Looks Like Today (Beer at a Distributor if You’re In PA)**

Read: KTR, Ch.4 the rest

*Question: Federalism allows the states some room to do as they please. When does this produce good outcomes? When does it produce bad outcomes? For whom are the outcomes good/bad?*

## **9/21 Exam Review**

**1st Reading Response Due by 1pm Today**

Bring your questions, I’ll bring answers.

## **9/26 Exam 1 Chapters 1-4**

## **9/28 Ch. 5 Civil Liberties**

Read: Ch. 5 p. 123-159

## **10/3 Ch. 6 Civil Rights**

Read: Ch. 6 165-207

*Much of this chapter is historical in nature– think about ongoing movements for civil rights*

## **10/5 Ch. 7 Congress- Elections and Representation**

Read: 209-227 Until “Congressional Organization”

## **10/10 NO CLASS MONDAY SCHEDULE**

## **10/12 Congress- Structure and Procedure**

## **10/17 Ch. 8 The Presidency**

## **10/19 Ch. 8 The Presidency & Exam Review**

## **10/24 EXAM 2 Chs. 5-8**

*Response 2 is due before the Exam*

## **10/26 Ch. 9 The Bureaucracy**

*Don't call it boring, the boring stuff is usually the most important.*

Read 291-320

## **10/31 Ch. 10 The Courts**

Before Class watch the movie *Hot Coffee* on *Netflix*<sup>6</sup>.

Read: Ch. 10 p 322-357

## **11/2 Ch. 11 Public Opinion**

Read: Ch. 11 p.359-391

## **11/7 Public Opinion- LIVE!**

*How do you expect your classmates to behave? I've made your surveys anonymous, and will analyze them based on your expectations. Do you think men are more likely to be Republicans? Are freshmen more in favor of lowering the drinking age? You tell me what you expect of your peers, and I'll tell you if it's what we see.*

## **11/9 Ch. 12 Parties**

Read: Ch. 12 p.393-425

## **11/14 Ch. 13 Interest Groups**

Read: Ch. 13 p. 426-460

**In Class Activity:** What Benefits do Some Groups Have, and Some Lack? Find a Strategy! Good luck, future lobbyists!

## **11/16 Exam 3 Review**

## **11/21 EXAM 3 Chapters 9-13**

## **11/23 THANKSGIVING**

## **11/28 Ch. 14 Voting and Elections**

Read: Ch. 14 p. 461-501

## **11/30 Ch. 15 Media**

Read: Ch. 15 p. 502-536

## **12/5 Final Prep**

## **12/7 Final Exam Chapter 14-15**

*Your Third Writing Response is Due by Today*

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<sup>6</sup>If you cannot get access to this movie, let me know ASAP, we can set up a time for everyone to meet