

TA Syllabus, Political Science 104: Introduction to American Politics and Government

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Upstart, fledgling, juggernaut. This has been the trajectory of the United States – from reviled colony to the most powerful nation in the world. But how well do we understand this nation's essential political organization and the politics that drive its decision making? How has a constitution written long ago survived civil war, emancipation of an enslaved population, industrialization, immigration, women's suffrage, depression, world wars, communism, civil rights, Vietnam and globalization? What connects the people to the government? This class seeks to answer these and other vital questions of American politics. This is an especially exciting time to engage this subject because we are in an important and hotly contested presidential election year. This course will help you understand the swirling (perhaps overwhelming) election coverage and, more importantly, what the election tells us about the political system. Our goal is not to just to understand the here and now but to look for broad patterns that will help us understand American politics over time.

Goals & Purposes

This section has three main purposes. The first is to provide you with space and time to discuss class reading. Obviously, in order to meet this goal it is important that you come to section having read. Section is not an alternative to reading but a chance to discuss ambiguities and compare various authors' arguments. I will be calling on students so make sure to come prepared. The second goal is to review and discuss Prof. Coleman's lectures. This course deals with a fascinating subject but it can also be confusing. I will try to anticipate difficult subjects but you should also make a note of things that you don't understand from lecture. I will save some time each week for you to ask questions. The third goal is to prepare you for exams.

Section Grade

Thirty percent of your overall grade will come from your section grade. Your section grade will be composed of attendance (5% of your overall grade), web activities (5% of your overall grade), and two written assignments (20% of your overall grade). The written assignments will be two six-page papers about which I'll say more later. They are tentatively due on October 4th and November 15th.

You are expected to participate in section discussions. As members of a large university you can blend in and try to not get noticed but I encourage you to resist this option. Make the most of our time in section by asking questions and discussing concerns. My hope is that this section will be a venue for lively, thoughtful debate. As we are dealing with a complex, controversial subject matter it is also important that we respect the viewpoints of our classmates. I hope that some of our discussions will be intense, but they must also remain collegial. Though I won't be giving you a letter grade for participation, I will be keeping track of how often you participate. At the end of the semester, if your overall grade is on the borderline it will push you up or down. In addition, *come to my office hours to discuss anything about which you are unclear*. Come by and we can (hopefully) clear up your questions or engage a topic further. If you can't make it to office hours set up an appointment with me.

Attendance at section is mandatory. I will be passing out a sign-in sheet every section to ensure your attendance. Coming to section is an easy way to boost your grade. If you come to every section your attendance grade can be 105% which should help out the rest of your section grade. Your attendance grade will drop by 5% points for each section you miss.