Political Science 104

Introduction to American Politics and Government

I. Course Description
This course offers an introduction to the major institutions, participants, and processes in American politics. The focus is on how the structure of our political system conditions the practice of politics at the national level -- the ongoing struggles among competing groups and individuals for influence over government activities and public policy. We will examine the principles underlying the constitutional framework of American government, and analyze the three branches (Congress, the Judiciary, and the Executive) while trying to understand the advantages and problems inherent in a system of "checks and balances." We will also consider important extra-governmental actors, such as political parties, interest groups, and the media. In the final part of the course, we will look into important issues of public policy, and focus on economic, budget, and social welfare policies.

My goals in this class are to:

(1) show you that politics can be interesting – even fascinating.

(2) give you the skills to become informed consumers of political information, including an understanding of how your priors affect your receptivity to and how you assimilate and process that information, and the ability to distinguish between what is empirical and what is opinion (or, why everything derided as “fake news” is not, in fact, “fake”).

(3) introduce you to the ways that political scientists see the world.

By the end of the course you should be familiar with the basics of the federal government’s constitutional structure; the function of the main branches of government, the activities of key extra-governmental actors such as political parties, interest groups, and the media; and the different forms of political participation.

There is no such thing as a boring time to study politics, and every year presents important controversies and challenges. We are on year into the most unusual presidency in modern American history, itself the result of the most unusual presidential election in modern American history, with a result that virtually nobody saw coming. While it is a truism that Trump sees himself as a “disruptor,” that appellation does not quite capture the chaos of an administration that has blown through many of the norms that have long been considered central to the governing processes. To the president’s supporters, dismissing those norms is not a bug, but a feature. But democratic norms are essential to the operation of stable government (we will investigate why this is the case). With Trump we are in many respects in uncharted territory.
And whatever you think of Donald Trump – a welcome overthrower of a corrupt political establishment or an existential danger to the Republic – the problems we face are not going to remain static, nor will rest of the world sit back and wait for the U.S. to figure all of this out. Terrorism, nuclear threats, North Korea, ISIS, climate change, income inequality, Russia, China, health care, taxes, immigration, the social safety net, the opioid crisis, technological change, criminal justice reform, the future of Social Security, the national debt, and on and on, have not gone away. Even under “normal” times, these would be challenging problems. In a highly polarized climate in which Democrats and Republicans seem to loathe each other and “compromise” is a filthy word, it is even harder.

The particulars of these political disputes might appear to be unique and new, but they are not. Rather, they reflect the same deep tensions about the role of government, conflicts over values, the nature of the social contract, underlying political beliefs, and how the costs and benefits of government action are distributed, that have shaped American politics since the beginning of the Republic. Our task this semester is to sort this out, or, if that’s not possible, at least to identify a framework and vocabulary for analyzing and putting into context what amount to extraordinary contemporary events.

II. Course Readings
You should purchase the following books, which are available at the University bookstore in a discounted package (though you're free to buy them elsewhere if you can get a better deal, and there are sure to be lots of used copies available). Make sure you have the correct edition and version¹:


I will identify textbook readings by chapter. Readings in The Enduring Debate are assigned by number.

I will place additional readings on Learn@UW along with information about scheduling and assignments, and will from time to time send current events readings over email.

You are also required to read a national news source. You can obtain a reduced-rate student digital subscription to the New York Times, Washington Post, or the Wall St. Journal. Note that even these websites do not always reliably distinguish between straight reporting and opinion.

Local or regional papers and web pages for television news (CNN, MSNBC, ABC, Fox, etc.) are not an adequate substitute.

The exams will include questions about current national political events.

¹ I cannot stress this enough: do not rely on earlier editions or, in the case of the textbook, the “brief” or “core” versions. The content, pagination, and organization will be different, and you will miss important information.
III. Credit and Grade Components
This course is 4 credits, reflecting 150 minutes of lecture and 50 minutes of section each week over approximately 15 weeks. The expectation is that you will spend a minimum of 8 hours each week outside of class on reading, studying, section assignments, and other forms of preparation.

Your grade will be determined by your performance in four areas: section attendance and participation, and three in class exams (a 6 week and 12 week midterm, and an exam during the summary period). The weights for each are:

- 6 week exam: 20%
- 12 week exam: 25%
- Summary Period exam: 30%
- Section attendance and participation: 25%

The 6 week and 12 week exams are not cumulative. The Summary period exam is weakly cumulative, with about 80% of the questions coming from the last part of the class and the remaining content from the earlier parts of the class if it is related to what we have discussed during the last course section. All exams will be graded on a curve.

I will distribute a detailed study guide 1 week before each exam, and will schedule a review session 1 or 2 days prior to each exam, depending on room availability.

IV. Discussion Sections
Here is the section and TA information:

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<tr>
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Discussion section attendance is required. The sections are a critical part of the course: they are a useful way to stay current with the class material, and are also a good place to seek help if you have questions. In the first section your TA will provide you with more details about what is expected, and will give you information about their office hours.

Discussion sections will meet the first week of class. Those of you in Monday Sections (303 and 309) will get information via email.
We can usually accommodate requests to switch sections if you have a valid reason (class schedule conflict, a job, etc.) and there aren't too many of them. Please email Ben directly if you need to do this. Do not try to do it through the student center. Section switch requests must be made by Friday, January 26th.

Each week, your TA will provide information about discussion activities for the next week, including which readings will be the specific focus, as well as any assignments and outside activities that you must prepare.

**IV. Thoughts On Taking Notes on a Laptop (or, “Old Man Yells at Cloud”)**

You probably rely heavily on a laptop to take notes in class. What you probably don't realize is that this is not a good educational strategy. Students who take notes longhand generally retain and understand more (and get higher grades) than students who use laptops, mostly because when you use a laptop you put more effort into transcribing everything verbatim than trying to understand what the speaker is saying (and research shows that the laptop is what hurts). Taking notes longhand forces you to process and analyze what is important as you go. The evidence is becoming overwhelming, and the distraction element is impossible to ignore. Few people can resist the temptation to go online to check email, shoot a text about how boring *Federalist* 10 is, or drop in on Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, ESPN, or whatever site is your favorite. You may think you can multitask, but you can't. What's even more compelling is that *when you use a laptop or go online during class, you distract and lower the performance of people sitting around you.*

So, I am banning laptop use in this class. You must take notes longhand. I will post full lecture notes prior to every class so you can print them out and use them as a template.

**However, I understand that some of you may have a legitimate educational reason to use a laptop to take notes.** There are a variety of circumstances that can justify this, but rather than specify what those are I will leave it to your judgement. **You get the final decision on whether or not you have a legitimate reason.** The only conditions are that if you decide that you will use a laptop in either lecture or section (or both), **you must use it exclusively for note taking (and not multitasking or surfing) and you must notify me in an in-person meeting.**

I will also ask you to put away your phones and other electronic devices at the beginning of lecture unless you are using them to take notes as outlined in the previous paragraph. Going offline will seem impossible at first, and your friends may worry that you have fallen down a well when you don't respond to their text messages within 15 seconds. But I assure you that you will not actually die from disconnecting, even though it might feel that way initially. You may even come to realize that you aren't paying attention in class when you are online, and that you don't really need to know if Netflix is serious about rebooting *Firefly* or whether Brienne of Tarth and Sandor Clegane are ever going to hook up. At least not right this second.

Remember what the Dalai Lama says (or probably would say) about this kind of thing: *if you're here, be here.*

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**V. Course Administration**

This is a large class. You may feel overwhelmed by the number of students and want to just fade into the background. That is understandable, but not necessary. Please see your TA or me if you have any questions or problems about the class, lectures, or readings (honest, we don't bite), or if you are facing other difficulties. It is always easier to deal with things when they come up, we're actually pretty good at helping, and we can direct you toward appropriate resources.

Here is a list of guidelines that will help us both make it through the class.

1. If you need information about the course, the first place to check is this document. The next step is to contact Head TA Ben Power (bpower@wisc.edu).

2. Don't be reluctant to ask questions during lecture. If there is something that you don't understand, if I'm talking too fast, or if you want clarification, don't be bashful: Let me know. Trust me on this – if you have a question, other people do, too.

3. The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility.

   If you have a McBurney VISA, please contact Ben as soon as you can to provide a copy and so that we can discuss your accommodations.

4. Please use your wisc.edu email address when you communicate with me, Ben, or your TA. We cannot respond to non-university email accounts, as it is impossible to verify identities.

5. There are no make-up exams; this size of the class simply precludes this. The dates of the midterm and final are listed below. Clear your calendars now. Exceptions to the no-make-up rule will be made only for cases of (1) absence due to membership on an officially recognized University group or athletic team that will be out of town on the day of an exam; (2) unexpected and serious illness or injury; (3) bona fide family emergencies. Be ready to provide documentation. An unexcused absence from an exam will result in a score of 0 for that exam.

   **6 week exam:** Monday, February 26 (in class)
   **12 week exam** Monday, April 9 (in class)
   **Final Exam:** Sunday, May 6, 7:25-9:25PM

   If you know you have a schedule issue that falls into one of the excepted categories, see me as soon as you can.

6. Your TA and I will always be willing to talk with you about your exam and assignment grades, explain how we evaluated your work, and suggest ways for you to improve your performance. We do our best to be fair and consistent in our grading. However, we do not haggle over grades or points, or provide extra credit assignments. Period. Barring clerical error, grades are final.

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3 A few examples what doesn't count under (3): nonrefundable plane tickets, family vacations, activities of non-University groups such as fraternities or sororities, or 3 finals in 24 hours.
7. I expect all of you to conduct yourselves with integrity, and have some simple advice for those of you who may be tempted to rely on dishonest short-cuts and cheat your way through this class: don't do it. It is a disgrace, and grossly unfair to your fellow students.

By enrolling in this course, you assume the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison’s community of scholars in which everyone’s academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, providing answers to others in any fashion during an exam, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. For more information, refer to https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/ (copy and paste into a browser if you can't get the link to work). This site also provides important information about your rights in the event that you are accused of misconduct.

If we catch you cheating, I will give you an F for the course, and will report your misconduct to the Dean of Students for review and possible additional action (which could extend up to suspension or expulsion if the misconduct is serious or if it is not your first offense). In addition to the immediate consequence, this could prevent you from getting into some undergraduate programs here, interfere with plans to attend graduate or professional school, block you from obtaining a job that requires a government security clearance, or prevent admission to a state bar. That’s an enormous price to pay for a single act of dishonest stupidity. Let’s not go there.

I take this very, very seriously.

If you have any questions about these guidelines or need further clarification, please see me or your TA.
VI. Course Schedule
This schedule lists the topics and readings covered in each lecture. While you do not have to bring the books with you to lecture, the schedule gives you a guidepost to whether you are current with the readings. Generally, if you have completed the readings required for that week's section, you can consider yourself current. For readings not specifically covered in section, you are current if you have completed the readings assigned here by the end of the week in which they are assigned.

The reading load for this class is moderate (it averages about 100 pages per week), and it is vital that you stay up to date. Some of the readings are difficult, and you won’t be able to reel everything in 2 days before the exams.

Jan. 23
Semester Begins (Tuesday)

May 4th
Semester Ends (Friday)

Part I: Foundations and Structure

Week 1
Jan. 24
Introduction and Administration. What is politics? What is American politics?

Readings
TEXT: chapter 1

Week 2
Jan. 29
Values, interests, and the dilemmas of politics. A famous political scientist Harold Lasswell (1902-1978) wrote that “politics is who gets what, when, and how.” Is this true? What does it really mean?

Readings


Jan. 31
The Structure of American Politics: Culture, Context, and the Constitution

Readings
TEXT: chapter 2
READER: 3, 4, 5 (Debate over American political identity)
Declaration of Independence (p. 537)

Week 3
Feb. 5
Constitutionalism

Readings
6, 7
9, 10, 11 (Debate over amending the Constitution)
Feb. 7  Institutions and Structure: Separation of Powers and Federalism
Readings
TEXT: chapter 3
READER: 12 (Federalist 46), 13, 15, 16, 17 (Debate over Immigration reform and state authority)
Additional: *The Federalist* no. 51

**Week 4**
Feb. 12  Balancing Government Power and Individual Rights – Civil Liberties
Readings
TEXT: chapter 4
READER: 19, and 20,21 (Debate over religious exemption to nondiscrimination laws)

Feb. 14  Civil Rights
Readings
TEXT: chapter 5
READER: 18
Additional: Martin Luther King, Jr, “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” on Learn@UW

**Week 5**
Feb. 19  Congress: Structure and Process
Readings
TEXT: chapter 6
READER: 22,23

Feb. 21  Contemporary Challenges for Congress: Polarization and Gridlock
Readings
READER: 24, 25, 26

**Week 6**
Feb. 26  Six Week Exam (in class)

Feb. 28  The Presidency: The office and Powers
Readings
TEXT: chapter 7
READER: 27,28

**Week 7**
Mar. 5  The Presidency: Contemporary controversies
Readings
Additional: Matt Taibbi, “The Madness of Donald Trump,” *Rolling Stone*, September 19, 2017 (October 5 print publication date). On Learn@UW
Victor Davis Hanson, “President Nobama,” *National Review*, January 16, 2018.
Mar. 7   The Courts: Structure and Function of the “Least Dangerous Branch”

Readings
TEXT:   chapter 9
READER:  36, and Marbury v. Madison p. 575-580
        39, 40 (Debate over constitutional interpretation)

Part II: Participation

Week 8
Mar. 12  Organizing to Promote Group Values and Interests. The Problem of Collective Action.

Readings
TEXT:   chapter 13
READER:  57, 58, 59
        60,61 (Debate over donor anonymity)

Mar. 14  Political Parties

Readings
TEXT:   chapter 12
READER:  55, 56 (Debate over third parties)

Week 9
Mar. 19  Public Opinion

Readings
TEXT:   chapter 10
READER:  41, 42
Additional:   Tom Nichols, “How America Lost Faith in Expertise – And Why That's a Giant Problem.” Foreign Affairs, March/April 2017. On Learn@UW.

Mar. 21  The Role of the Media in Contemporary Politics

Readings
TEXT:   chapter 14
READER:  44, 46 (Debate over partisan media)

Week 10
March 26-28 Spring Break

Week 11
Apr. 2   Elections and Campaigns

Readings
TEXT:   chapter 11
Additional:  47,48
        50-52 (Debate over voter ID)

Apr. 4   The 2016 Election

Readings
READER:  29,30,31 (Debate over Electoral College)
**Part III: Policy and Process**

**Week 12**

**Apr. 9**  
12 Week Exam (in class)

**Apr. 11**  
Introduction to Analyzing Policy

**Readings**


**Week 13**

**Apr. 16**  
Bureaucracy and Implementation

**Readings**

TEXT: chapter 8
READER: 32, 33
34, 35 (Debate over privatization)

**Apr. 18**  
Economic and Budget Policy

**Readings**

TEXT: chapter 15

**Week 14**

**Apr. 23**  
Economic and Budget Policy: Regulation, Income Inequality

READER: 62-64
65-67 (Debate over income inequality)

**Week 15**

**Apr. 25-30**  
Social Policy

**Readings**

TEXT: chapter 16
READER: 68 and 70-71 (Debate over ACA repeal)

**Week 16**

**May 2**  
Foreign Affairs and Defense Policy

**Readings**

TEXT: chapter 17
READER: 74-75 (Debate over use of military power)

**SUMMARY PERIOD EXAM:** Sunday, May 6, 7:25-9:25PM. Rooms TBA