Political Science 104; Spring, 2019          Office Hours: T+Th 3-4 p.m. and by appt.
American Politics and Government                 Telephone: 263-2283
Professor David Canon                           Email: dcanon@polisci.wisc.edu
T+Th 1:00 - 2:15 p.m., 1310 Sterling Hall       Office: 413 North Hall

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Course Description:
This course is an introduction to American politics and government. By the end of the semester you should have a good understanding of how the government makes policy and why decisions are made as they are. The course will combine accounts of how "Washington really works" from the popular media, scholarly work on the governmental process, and debates on various political issues and institutions. This is an especially exciting time to be taking a class on American politics, with the government shutdown and debates over the wall with Mexico, continuing debates over Social Security and Medicare, energy and global warming, immigration, gun control, how to deal with the budget deficits, growing concerns about polarization and gridlock in Washington, and the Trump presidency and the Mueller report.

The course begins with a discussion of the foundations of our governmental system: the Constitution, federalism, capitalism and questions concerning the democratic nature of our government. Then we will examine the American political institutions: Congress, the president, the bureaucracy, and the courts. From there we turn to political participation and examine public opinion, parties, campaigns and elections, the media, and interest groups. Finally, we will see how it all fits together by examining civil rights, social policy, economic policy, and foreign policy. While the course is a lecture class (intimate discussions are a little difficult with nearly 250 students), I encourage you to raise questions you have about anything presented in the lectures. The weekly discussion sections also provide an opportunity to critically examine the course material.

Course Format

This class is offered for 4 credits with two 75-minute lectures and one 50-minute discussion section each week. It also carries the expectation that students will work on course learning activities for about two hours out of classroom for each credit hour (that is, eight additional hours a week). This course will be primarily a lecture class given its size. Yet, I encourage class participation. I often will begin class with a
discussion of current events, especially as they relate to the presidency. I encourage you to bring questions to class and to respond to issues I may raise. You also will have the opportunity to discuss the readings and lectures in your weekly discussion sections. The goals of this class are both theoretical and practical: I aim to give you a theoretical basis for understanding American politics and a greater awareness of the events to which theory can be applied. I also hope to provide you the tools you need to evaluate the political system and engage you in national politics.

Learning Outcomes

The goal of this class is to familiarize you with American political institutions, prepare you to take upper-level classes in American politics, and to get you interested in American politics.

Course Evaluation:

The grades for the course will be based on two midterms (27.5% each), attendance and participation in discussion section (10%), and a final exam (35%). The midterm exams will be a combination of multiple choice and short IDs and the final exam will be a combination of multiple choice, short IDs, and one long essay. The multiple choice and short essay portions of the final exam will not be comprehensive and only cover material since the second midterm; the long essay, which I will give you in advance, is comprehensive in nature. All reading material and lectures will be fair game on the exams. I also strongly encourage you to use the InQuizitive adaptive learning tool that comes with the textbook (links are provided on the course Canvas site).

Books and Readings:

The following books are required for the course and are available for purchase at the University of Wisconsin Bookstore on State Street. The books are shrink-wrapped together as a packaged deal.


A few additional required readings are on posted on Canvas, which you can access through your Student Center on MyUW. Also, I urge you to read a good national newspaper, such as the *New York Times, Wall Street Journal*, or the *Washington Post*. The national news weeklies, such as *Newsweek* or *Time* also would be useful for keeping you current on what is happening in the world of politics.

Student Responsibilities

A friendly word of advice on the readings that should be taken seriously: you should complete the assigned reading before the topic is discussed in lecture. At a minimum you should complete the reading before your discussion section or you will not be prepared to participate. Also, many of the lectures will use the readings as a point of departure, so your understanding of lecture material will be enhanced by having completed and understood the assigned reading. The reading load averages about 85 pages a week. This should not be a difficult pace to maintain if you do not fall behind. If you put off reading anything until before the exams will you find yourself staring at 425 pages for each of the exams . . . this strategy is not recommended. One other thing I should mention – the reading load is not equally distributed across the weeks. Some weeks you will only have 30-40 pages of reading; other weeks will be more than 100. Therefore, it may be useful for you to try to get ahead on the next week's readings when the reading load for a given week is relatively light.
Other Considerations
Your success in this class is important to us. All students are strongly encouraged to visit office hours if only to introduce yourself and share how the course is working for you. We expect the classroom to be an inclusive and welcoming environment where each student has the potential to learn. For more information on diversity and inclusion the University of Wisconsin see: https://diversity.wisc.edu/.

If you have a disability or circumstance that could affect your performance in class, please contact me early in the semester so that I can identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. The McBurney Center for Disability Services can provide official documentation of disabilities (for more information see https://mcburney.wisc.edu/).

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. This includes using someone else’s words or ideas without proper attribution. We will report any cases of academic dishonesty to the Assistant Dean for Academic Integrity. Please make sure you are familiar with the policies outlined by the Dean of Students (https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/).

Finally, electronic devices (laptops, phones, etc.) will not be allowed in class except for legitimate academic purposes. I will talk more about this on the first day of class.

Online course material
The Canvas site for the course also includes chapter reviews, study questions, on-line quizzes, links to other political sites, political blogs, vocabulary flash cards, plus other readings and resources. Outlines of the powerpoint presentations will be posted before each lecture on Canvas.

Lecture Schedule, Reading Assignments, and Discussion Questions:
The following abbreviations are used in the outline of assigned reading for each day: “TED” for The Enduring Debate and “APT” for American Politics Today. There are a few on-line readings that will be available on Canvas.

I. FOUNDATIONS

A. Introduction to the Course – January 22
   Preface and Chapter 1 in APT, xxi-xxiii, 2-26.

B. The Constitution – January 24
   Chapter 2 in APT, 30-66.

Discussion Section Questions, (Discussion sections will meet starting after lecture on the 22nd): What are the three themes of the textbook? Can you think of examples from your life that illustrate the idea that “politics is everywhere?” Why is government necessary? Do you think conflict in politics is a good thing or bad thing? Why? What were the central problems the Founders faced at the Constitutional convention and how
did they resolve them? What are some of the unresolved constitutional problems? What is distinctive about the American constitutional system? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a strong central government? What explains the simplicity and durability of the Constitution? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the document’s simplicity? How did the Founding Fathers' view of people help shape the Constitution? What does Madison say about the relation between self-interest and the nature of government in Federalist #10? What is the proposed solution in Federalist #51?

The Constitution, continued – January 29
Levinson, Abbot, and Olson, “Should the Constitution be Fundamentally Changed?,” TED, 65-85.

C. Federalism – January 31
Chapter 3 in APT, 70-98.

Discussion Section Questions: What is Charles Beard’s “economic interpretation of the Constitution”? To what extent do the ideas he talks about still shape our government today? Do you think it is good to regularly amend the Constitution to reflect changing values and address current problems, or should the Constitution be changed only rarely? When should the national government have the power to coerce states to adopt national policies against their will, if ever? How has the balance of power between the states and the national government evolved over time? How are the states fighting back to resist centralization at the national level? What role has the Supreme Court played in this evolution (as in the medical marijuana and assisted suicide cases)? Do you think the Supreme Court should have intervened in either of these cases, or left those decisions up to the states? Which level of government should play the primary role in immigration policy? What if the national government does not enforce its own laws? Should the states be able to step in to fill the void? How has the Supreme Court addressed this issue?

D. Civil Liberties – February 5-7
Chapter 4 in APT, 102-144.
Cole and Helfman, “Should There be a Religious Exemption to Nondiscrimination Law?,” TED, 138-151.

Discussion Section Questions: Should the Bill of Rights apply to the states as well as the federal government? Why? Should hate speech be allowed? Do you agree with Rauch’s assessment of the problems associated with trying to limit hate speech? If so, is all speech protected by the Constitution? If not, where do you draw the line between protected free speech and speech or actions that may be harmful to others? What about defendants’ rights, protections against illegal searches and seizures (as discussed in lecture and in the textbook)? Should there be a religious exemption to nondiscrimination law? If so, could that exemption apply to race and gender as well as sexual orientation? If not, how does the state decide where to draw the line on protecting religious freedom?

E. Democracy in the United States –February 12
Howard Zinn and Sidney Hook on "Democracy: How Democratic is America?," on Canvas.

II. POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

A. The Courts – February 14
   Chapter 14 in APT, 488-526.

Discussion Section Questions: How democratic is America? Are Zinn’s or Hook’s arguments more compelling? What are the central areas of their disagreements? How can their arguments be related to the state of American democracy today? Is capitalism consistent with (or indeed reinforce) democracy, or does it serve as a ‘prison’ for policy makers? How powerful is the political elite in the United States? What is the proper role for the federal government in terms of controlling the market? How does the tradeoff between freedom and power relate to the debate about the relationship between capitalism and democracy? In what areas should government use its power? Are the federal courts the "least dangerous branch?" What is the proper role of the Supreme Court in the American political process? Should they be responsive to political forces, as O’Brien discusses? What is the meaning of "judicial restraint" and "judicial activism"? Are they related to "strict constructionism"? Which approach to interpreting the Constitution, Scalia’s textualism or Breyer’s consequentialist approach, do you find more appealing? Can the Supreme Court be an agent of social change?

*********** First In-Class Midterm Exam on Tuesday, February 19th ***********
(exam will cover readings and lectures through February 14th)

B. The Bureaucracy – February 21
   Chapter 13 in APT, 454-84.

Discussion Section Questions: Does the bureaucracy serve the public interest? What is the proper standard for assessing the bureaucracy? Efficiency? Equity? How does this play out in the comparison of the DMV and McDonalds presented by Wilson? What are the advantages and disadvantages of contracting out some government programs to the private sector (“privatization”)? How does the debate over privatizing government programs fit into Wilson’s discussion? As discussed in lecture, what are the differences between “police patrol” and “fire alarm” oversight, and which do you think would be the preferable form of oversight?

C. Congress – February 26-28
   Chapter 11 in APT, 374-414.
Discussion Section Questions: Is Congress truly the "first branch" of government? What aspects of its operation either justify or undermine that label? Do the justifications for the bicameral legislature presented by the Founders still ring true today, or would we be better off with a unicameral legislature? What are the advantages and disadvantages of the strong reelection goal among members of Congress? How does the "home style" adopted by a member of Congress help in this quest for reelection? What are the types of things that members do that influence their home style? Why do Hibbing and Theiss-Morse argue that having a responsive Congress is "too much of a good thing?" Do you agree? Would term limits help solve the problem of an over-responsive Congress? How resilient is our system of checks and balances? Is Congress giving up too much authority to the executive branch? What happens when the president and Congress refuse to compromise (as with the recent government shutdown)? Does this gridlock reveal the fragility of our constitutional system?

D. The Presidency – March 5-7
Chapter 12 in APT, 418-50.
Charles O. Jones, “Perspectives on the Presidency,” TED, 199-205.
Nichols, Posner, Guelzo and Hulme, “Should the Electoral College be Replaced with a Direct Popular Vote for President?,” TED, 206-18.

Discussion Section Questions: Neustadt argues that the president’s central power is the “power to persuade.” Do you agree? Has the president become too powerful? What would the Founding Fathers say about the current state of the presidency? How are the president’s powers limited by our system of separated powers? Have these limits on presidential power changed during war time? What are the arguments for and against reforming the electoral college? Do you think it will ever be changed?

III. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

A. Public Opinion – March 12
Chapters 6 in APT, 198-228.
George Gallup, “Polling the Public,” TED, 303-310.

B. The Media – March 14
Chapter 7 in APT, 232-58.

Discussion Section Questions: What are some of the problems associated with interpreting the results of public opinion polls? How can question wording shape the results of polls? How did question wording influence the interpretation of President Clinton’s impeachment? Can you think of other examples how question wording influences the outcome of polls? To what extent should political leaders listen to public opinion? How as the “new media” changed coverage of politics? Is this good or bad for the political system? How have the media
changed governing? Do you think they play too much of a role in politics? If so, how could this be changed?
What is the impact of media choice on political knowledge and turnout? What are the implications for politics?
Is partisan bias in the media good or bad for democracy? If you think it is bad, how can the “political silo”
effect be changed?

**** Spring break, March 18-22 ****

B. Campaigns and Elections – March 26-28
   Chapter 9 in APT, 296-336.
   Fund, Beinart, and Minnol on “Reducing Fraud or Suppressing Voters?,” in TED, 352-61.

Discussion Section Questions: How do voters decide who to vote for? What does this view of voting behavior
say about how we should interpret the results of elections? Do elections “send a message” or can we really tell
much about what voters want from the outcome of elections? Which of the three theories of voting reviewed
by Menand sounds the most convincing? Do you think that Americans should be required to vote? What are
the advantages and disadvantages of compulsory voting? What are the implications of requiring identification
for voters? Do you support this policy? Do you think voter fraud is a problem?

******* Second In-Class Midterm Exam on Tuesday, April 2nd *******
(exam will cover readings and lectures through March 28th)

D. Political Parties – April 4
   Chapter 8 in APT, 262-92.
   Nicol Rae, “Be Careful What You Wish For: The Rise of Responsible Parties in American National
   Politics,” TED, 373-83.

Discussion Section Questions: What are the major differences between the Democratic and Republican parties?
Would our political system benefit from stronger parties? What would are the advantages and disadvantages of
stronger parties? How do parties provide collective responsibility? Is this possible under divided government?
What does Rae mean by “be careful what you wish for”? Would our democracy be stronger with a multi-party
system?

E. Interest Groups – April 9
   Chapter 10 in APT, 340-70.
   Alexis de Tocqueville, “Political Association in the United States,” TED, 392-95.
   Campaign Legal Center and Riches, “Donor Disclosure: Is Anonymous Campaign Funding a Problem?,”

IV. Public Policy

A. Foreign Policy – April 11
Discussion Section Questions: What are the various strategies used by interest groups to influence politics (as described in the textbook). Which do you think is likely to be more effective? Which of these tactics are appropriate and which should be regulated? What are some of the advantages of political association and organization described by Truman? Do interest groups reflect the collective interests of the nation? What are the implications of Olson’s collective action problem for the representativeness of interest groups? Do all groups have their voices heard through the political process, as the pluralists such as Truman would maintain, or are some groups unrepresented because of the logic of collective action? How can collective action problems be solved? Is “dark money” a problem? What are the most important consequences of dark money?

What is the proper role of the United States in the international community? Is economic and political globalization out of sync? Does economic globalization pose challenges to the United States more generally? How do Soros and Sutherland differ in their interpretations of the impact of globalization on poor countries? Which argument do you find more convincing? How serious a threat is global terror? Do politicians use the threat of terror for their own political ends, is the focus on fighting terrorism a necessary part of modern politics?

B. Civil Rights – April 16-18
   Chapter 5 APT, 148-94.
   Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President at the 50th Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery Marches,” TED, 121-129.
   Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter From the Birmingham Jail,” on Canvas.
   Warshawsky and Jones et. al., “What Does it Mean to be American?” TED, 34-44.

Discussion Section Questions: What are the “multiple traditions” that Smith refers to? Does his argument change your view of our founding era? What is the best means of achieving an integrated society? Describe the progress made in the area of civil rights in the past 50 years. What remains to be done? How do the events at Selma still resonate today? Lincoln and King take opposing views about the place of civil disobedience in trying to promote social change. Which do you find more convincing? If you think that civil disobedience can be appropriate, how does one decide where to draw the line between legitimate civil disobedience and lawless behavior? Which of the authors makes a more convincing case concerning what it means to be an American? What are the implications of this debate for immigration policy in the United States?

C. Social Policy – April 23-25
   Chapter 16 in APT, 572-610.
   Obama and Haislmaier, et. al., “Should the Affordable Care Act be Repealed?,” TED, 483-506.

Discussion Section Questions: What different techniques does the federal government use to achieve its social policy goals? What should be done to reform Social Security, if anything? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the various proposals? Does the recent volatility in the stock market change your views (if you support some type of privatization)? What are the types of policy outlined by Lowi? How does the nature of the
type of policy influence the nature of politics associated with that issue? What role should the government play in providing health care, if any? Should market forces play more of a role in health care? Is Obamacare a reasonable middle ground between a national health care plan and a market-oriented system, or is it just making things worse, as its critics claim?

D. Economic Policy and Summing it Up – April 30-May 2
   Chapter 15 in APT, 530-68.

Discussion Section Questions: To what extent should the federal government have responsibility for making sure that the economy is running smoothly? Is the government responsible for providing a “social safety net,” as argued by Roosevelt? Or should the market be allowed to operate freely without as much government regulation or intervention, as argued by Hoover? What are the implications of the debate over how to measure GDP for economic policy? How might economic policy differ if we valued “low GDP man” over “high GDP man”? Is economic inequality a central problem that should be addressed through economic policy?

*** FINAL EXAM, Sunday, May 5th, 2:45-4:45 p.m., Location TBA ***