

# POLS 1101: Introduction to American Government

## Section 2

### Spring 2016

Department of Political Science  
Idaho State University

## 1 Instructor Information

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Office Hours: Tuesdays: 1:00pm to 3:00pm,  
Wednesdays 11:00am to 12:00pm  
and by appointment  
Class Location: Rendezvous 209  
Course Time: 9:30 to 10:45 TR

## Co-Instructor

Kurt Fertig, BA  
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Office Hours: Tuesday: 12:30pm-1:30pm,  
Thursday: 12:30pm-1:30pm,  
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## 2 Course Description and Purpose

Why do I have to pay taxes? Is Obamacare constitutional? Who should I call if I don't get my tax return? Can a state legalize marijuana? Can you carry a gun on campus? Why do I have to get my dog a license, but not my cat? All of these questions are important to our daily lives; to answer *any* of these questions requires understanding how American government works. This course serves as an introduction to how the American political system works, and how people behave in that system.

This course assumes little knowledge about politics, it is after all an introductory course. It functions almost like a buffet, we'll explore lots of topics, including the structure of American government (the rules of the game) and the way people and groups behave in that system (how the players play the game). If find you're interested in a topic we cover (and I hope you will!), we probably have a course dealing specifically with that topic. Just talk to me and I'll let you know what that course is so you can register for it next semester.

Each week we'll cover a different aspect of American government in the abstract along with concrete examples. So for instance, we might talk about federalism, and then use drug legalization as an example of federalism in practice. In many cases, we will spend a whole day discussing concrete examples. The goal here is that you see the concepts in action and have a concrete example, which you have likely heard about and care about, to help you grasp the material. In order for this to work, you have the readings and participate in class- remember, I am interested in you participating in class; there is no penalty for answering incorrectly in classroom discussion.

I realize many of you may not be political science majors. To that end, this course emphasizes writing. Writing is a critical skill that is important regardless of your major or eventual career.

Accordingly, you will write two brief summary papers about the readings over the course of the semester as well as a short research paper.

### 3 Course Format

This course meets two times a week. Typically, on Tuesday and for the first half of Thursday we will have the traditional style lecture which covers the “nuts and bolts” of that week’s topic, along with periodic examples. Usually on the second half of Thursday, we’ll look at a specific example of that topic from contemporary American politics as a case study. For example, we might talk about how the Supreme Court works on followed by a discussion of the Court’s decision in the same-sex marriage case. The purpose of this format is to give you *both* the “how” and a practical example that helps explain the “why do we care?” aspect of American politics.

### 4 Requirements

#### Text

There is one required book which the majority of our readings will come from. Other readings are posted on Moodle and are noted on the course schedule.

The book is available at the campus bookstore, for both purchase and rental. However, you can purchase or rent the book for a substantially lower rate online. To this end, I provide the ISBNs for the books in the syllabus and will place all of the first week’s readings on Moodle to allow for shipping time. After the first week I expect you to have the book and bring it with you to class. Unfortunately, I will not be able to place the book on reserve at the library.

1. Barbour, Christine and Gerald C. Wright. 2015. *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics*. 6<sup>th</sup> Brief Edition. Congressional Quarterly Press: Thousand Oaks, CA.  
**ISBN: 978-1-4833-5289-3.**  
**ISBN-13: 9781133602330**

#### Assessment

This course is worth 100 points which are broken up over several different items. It is your responsibility to keep track of your grade over the course of the semester

- Participation and Attendance: 10 points
- Short Research Paper: 15 points
- Discussion Reaction Paper: 5 points
- Quizzes: 10 points
- Exams: 60 points

1. **Participation and Attendance (10 points)**– Attending class is important since we will go over difficult concepts in class and you'll have the opportunity to ask questions about parts of the readings and lectures which are not clear. However, coming to class is only half the battle. You also have to participate in class. Of course, asking informed questions or joining the classroom discussion is a part of participation, but so too is actively listening (ie: Are you taking notes and paying attention or are you sleeping and texting?).
2. **Quizzes (10 points)**– Over the course of the semester, we will have seven quizzes, which will occur approximately every two weeks. Quizzes will consist of multiple choice, true or false, fill in the blank, and/or short answer items. They can cover anything previously discussed in class or anything from that day's readings. If you do the readings and pay attention in lecture, you should have no problem with the quizzes. I will take your top five quizzes over the course of the semester to compile your total quiz score (with each worth 2% of your final grade). Quizzes cannot be made up, therefore it is imperative you attend class regularly and read for class.
3. **Short Research Paper (15 points)**— One of the most important goals of this class is to get you accustomed to writing. To this end, you will complete two assignments, a research paper proposal/outline and a short (4-6 page) research paper which explores a policy proposal put forth by President Obama in his State of the Union address. Early in the semester, we will have a brief research tutorial from the library staff to help you conduct your research paper. For more information, please see the Short Research Paper handout.
4. **Discussion Reaction Paper (5 points)**— Over the course of the semester we will have eight case studies where we dedicate the second half of Thursday's class to talking about a contemporary example of the concepts we cover in class. For one of these case studies, you will write a brief reaction paper which summarizes the case study's reading and ties it to the concepts from the lectures earlier that week. You must sign up for the case study you want to write on at the start of the semester and you cannot change your choice. For more details, see the Discussion Reaction Paper handout.
5. **Exams (60 points)**—There are three exams, each is worth 20 points, or two letter grades. Exams are all multiple choice, and none are cumulative. Before each exam I will provide a study guide. Attending exams is imperative, if you miss an exam and do not have a valid documented excuse (ie: a doctor's note) the make up exam will be a separate research paper.

### Assessment Scale

A: 93-100	A-: 90-92	B+: 87-89	B: 83-86	B-: 80-82	C+: 77-79
C: 73-76	C-: 70-72	D+: 67-69	D: 63-66	D-: 60-62	F: <60

### Disclaimer

Since politics is a reflection of the society in which we live, we will cover several topics which some might consider disturbing. These topics are included because we cannot adequately study American

government without discussing topics such as racism, to name just one. You have my assurance that I will do everything reasonably related to keeping these discussions academic.

### **An Important Note About Grades**

I do not post grades to Moodle; instead, I maintain an offline gradebook. Since the course is worth 100 points, you can keep track of your performance in the class by noting your scores on exams and assignments. Because of federal student privacy laws, I cannot discuss grades via e-mail. If you need a grade check for whatever reason, please let me know via e-mail the day before you want that check.

## **5 Course Policies**

### **Contacting the Instructor**

The teaching assistant and I are happy to help you either via e-mail, office telephone, or in-person during office hours. Of course, if office hours do not fit your schedule let us know and we can schedule a meeting at a time that is more convenient. If you come to office hours you should come prepared; bring your book, notes, and read the material in advance. If you contact us via e-mail, we will respond within 48 hours, though in most cases it will be less than six hours. However, in any e-mail you must identify yourself and use proper format which consists of an opening (As simple as the recipient's name), a closing (as simple as your name), and a descriptive message subject. If you do not follow that convention or if you use Internet shorthand (ie: "u" instead of "you,") I will not reply to the message. Telephone calls will be returned as soon as possible, though e-mail is usually quicker.

### **Make-up Exams and Assignments**

To qualify for a make-up test a student must notify me of the absence in advance via e-mail and provide documentation. Make-up exams will be a written research paper.

Papers are due in hard copy at the beginning of the class on the date indicated in the schedule. I will not accept e-mail copies or papers placed under my door. Please do not be afraid to print multiple rough drafts and revise them before turning them in. I am happy to look at drafts and help you with crafting your final paper. I do not accept excuses about dogs, computers, or traffic. Be responsible.

### **Extra Credit**

The only extra credit I offer is a one point increase on each paper grade (remember, the course is only worth 100 points) for visiting the writing center. Appointments are usually necessary for the writing center. When visiting the writing center, be sure to ask them to send me a report about your visit.

## Academic Honor Code

Academic integrity is the expected norm for all academic activity at ISU, and all members of the ISU community are expected to act in accordance with this principle. Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest, and responsible manner. Consistent with this expectation is an ISU code of conduct that all students should act with personal integrity, respect other students dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts. Academic integrity includes a commitment not to engage in or tolerate acts of deception, falsification, or misrepresentation. Such acts of dishonesty violate the fundamental ethical principles of the University community and compromise the worth of the work completed by others.

Plagiarism is an act of academic dishonesty and shall be dealt with according to ISU policy. Plagiarism is any misrepresentation of another's work as your own. For example, copying portions of articles, papers, web pages, etc, or using portions of another person's work (either word for word or paraphrasing) without proper citations. If you have questions about plagiarism, please come talk to me, or refer to Plagiarism Statement written by the ISU Department of English and Philosophy: (<http://www.isu.edu/english/DeptDocs/PlagiarismStatement.pdf>).

I adhere to the University policy regarding academic misconduct and expect academic integrity. Academic misconduct will result in an "F" for the assignment, a possible "F" for the course, and the filing of charges with the University against the student involved. Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, taking credit for work done by others, cheating, and helping others to cheat. I encourage students to study together and exchange ideas and information, but you must do your own work when taking exams and completing writing assignments. If you are unclear on this topic, please let me know. I am happy to discuss it further.

## Students with Disabilities

ISU is committed to providing equal opportunity in education for all students. If you have a diagnosed disability or if you believe you have a disability (physical, learning, hearing, vision, psychiatric etc.) that might require reasonable accommodation in this course, please contact the Disability Services Center, Rendezvous Building, Room 125 (282-3599) or on the web at <http://www.isu.edu/ada4isu>. It is the responsibility of students to contact instructors during the first week of each semester to discuss appropriate accommodations. Of course any communication with me about disabilities remains strictly confidential.

## Classroom Courtesy

Classroom courtesy is an essential component of creating an effective learning environment. All students have the right to learn without unnecessary distractions. These distractions include: cell phones, talking during lectures (unless recognized by the instructor), reading newspapers, falling asleep, etc. If you need a cell phone for emergency purposes, leave it on vibrate. Entering and leaving are also significant sources of distraction. It is your responsibility to be on time and to stay for the entire period. In circumstances where you need to leave early, tell the instructor beforehand. Repeated disruptions of class will lead to a reduction in your final grade.

Most importantly, the syllabus includes many sensitive topics which can lead to strong feelings and heated debate. Because this is a college classroom, all discussion must be respectful and scholarly. This is to say you must be respectful, in both content and tone, of diverse opinions and not make personal or partisan attacks.

### Acceptable Comments

- are respectful of diverse opinions and open to follow up questions and/or disagreement
- are related to class and/or the course material
- focus on advancing the discussion about issues related to the course and/or course material rather than personal beliefs, and
- are delivered in normal tones and a non-aggressive manner.

### Unacceptable Comments

- are personal in nature. This includes attacks on a person's appearance, demeanor, or political beliefs.
- include interrupting the instructor or other students. Raise your hand and wait to be recognized.
- often use the discussion to argue for political positions and/or beliefs. If political discussions arise, they must be discussed in a scholarly way (see above).
- may include using raised tones, yelling, engaging in arguments with other students and being threatening in any manner.
- include ignoring the instructor's authority to maintain the integrity of the classroom environment.

### Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice. These changes may come via e-mail. Make sure to check your university supplied email regularly. You are accountable for all such communications.

## 6 *Tentative Course Schedule*

A few notes about reading the course schedule:

- “*Barbour*” refers to the required Barbour & Wright book
- “(M)” means that reading can be found on Moodle.

### The Basic Structures of Government

Tuesday January 12– Introduction to the Course

- *No readings*

Thursday January 14– American Politics Basics

- Barbour Chapter 1

## Basic Structures of Government

Tuesday January 19– The Constitution: The Rulebook

- Barbour Chapter 2

Thursday January 21– The Constitution: The Rulebook (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 2 (cont.)

Tuesday January 26– *Two Governments?!*: Federalism

- Barbour Chapter 3

Thursday January 28– *Two Governments?!*: Federalism

- Barbour Chapter 3
- Sullum, Jacob. 2015. “Ted Cruz’s Cannabis Conversion Reflects the Political Prudence of Marijuana Federalism.” *Forbes*. (M)

## Rights & Liberties

Tuesday February 2– The Bill of Rights

- Barbour Chapter 4

Thursday February 4– The Bill of Rights (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 4
- *Justices Scalia & Marshall on how to read the Constitution* (M)

Tuesday February 9– The Struggle for Rights

- Barbour Chapter 5

Thursday February 11– The Struggle for Rights (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 5
- Perry, David M. 2015. “A New Right Grounded in the Long History of Marriage.” *The Atlantic*. (M)

Tuesday February 16– **EXAM ONE**

- *No readings*

Thursday February 18– Library Research Tutorial

- *No readings*

## Political Institutions: The Rules of the Game

Tuesday February 23– Congress

- Barbour Chapter 6

Thursday February 25– Congress (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 6
- Margolis, Michael, David Resnick, and Jonathan Levy. 2003. “Major Parties Dominate, Minor Parties Struggle.” (M)

Tuesday March 1– The Presidency

- Barbour Chapter 7

Thursday March 3– The Presidency (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 7
- Oberlander, Jonathan. 2010. “Long Time Coming: Why Health Reform Finally Passed.” *Health Affairs*. 29:1112-1116. (M)

Tuesday March 8– The Courts

- Barbour Chapter 9

Thursday March 10– The Courts (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 9
- Stolberg, Cheryl Gay. 2015. “Justice Anthony Kennedy’s Tolerance is Seen in His Sacramento Roots.” *New York Times*. (M)

Tuesday March 15– The Bureaucracy

- Barbour Chapter 8

Thursday March 17– The Bureaucracy (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 8

Tuesday March 22– **SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS**

Thursday March 24– **SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS**

Tuesday March 29– *Judge David W. Gratton, Idaho Court of Appeals*

- *No readings*

Thursday March 31– **EXAM TWO**

- *No readings*



**Political Behavior: How the Actors Behave**

Tuesday April 5– Public Opinion

- Barbour Chapter 10

Thursday April 7– Public Opinion (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 10

Tuesday April 12– Parties and Interest Groups

- Barbour Chapter 11

Thursday April 14– Parties and Interest Groups (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 11
- Selected readings from the animal rights movement (M)

Tuesday April 19– Voting, Campaigns, and Elections

- Barbour Chapter 12

Thursday April 21– Voting, Campaigns and Elections (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 12

Tuesday April 26– Media & Politics

- Barbour Chapter 13

Thursday April 28– Media & Politics (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 13
- Berry, Jeffrey and Sarah Sobieraja. 2011. “Understanding the Rise of Talk Radio.” *PS, Political Science and Politics*. 44: 762-767. (M)

**FINAL EXAM: THURSDAY MAY 5, 10:00AM TO 12:00PM, IN OUR USUAL CLASSROOM**