

POLS 1101: Introduction to American Government

Section 1

Summer 2017

Department of Political Science
Idaho State University

1 Instructor Information

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Office Hours: Via e-mail and by appointment

Class Location: Online

2 Course Description and Purpose

Why do I have to pay taxes? Is Trump's immigration executive order 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 you 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 day 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. 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 the class discussion forums- remember, I am interested in you participating in class; there is no penalty for answering incorrectly or asking a clarifying question.

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 and you will make daily discussion forum posts. More details are below and in the hand-outs posted on Moodle.

3 Course Format

This class is fully online. This means we may well never meet face-to-face. The course is divided into a series of readings. Each is assigned to a specific day and it has an associated quiz (some also have videos which will be announced by video). After taking the quiz, you will also participate in the daily discussion forum. While you can feel free to read ahead and do all the quizzes in advance, the discussion forums need to be completed the day listed on the syllabus. Roughly every week, we will have an exam (which are timed but open note).

While you may have had online classes in the past where you watch video lectures, this class will be based on your reading of the material along with the *occasional* video supplement- which I will send to you via your ISU e-mail address. As such, it is important that you check your ISU e-mail daily. Additionally, any and all changes to the syllabus will be communicated via e-mail.

The Unique Nature of Online Classes

Please be aware that while there are no class sessions for this course, this does not imply that the course will be easier or less work than a seated lecture course. Moreover, please understand that in online course it is extremely important that you be self-motivated and appropriately manage your time and keep to the due dates listed in the syllabus. This is made all the more pressing because each day of class is the same as a week in the regular semester. If you find yourself falling behind *please* contact me immediately.

This course primarily occurs through Moodle (which you can access either via BengalWeb or directly via: Moodle. To do so you need a computer with internet access (I would recommend against a tablet or smart phone as your primary means of accessing the course). It is up to you to ensure you have reliable and sufficiently fast internet access to utilize all of the course resources (including the e-mailed YouTube videos).

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 two day's readings on Moodle to allow for shipping time. After the first two days I expect you to have the book. Please order early. You cannot complete the course without the book. Unfortunately, I will not be able to place the book on reserve at the library.

1. Barbour, Christine and Gerald C. Wright. 2017. *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics*. 7th Brief Edition. Congressional Quarterly Press: Thousand Oaks, CA. **ISBN: 9781506349954**

Students often ask if they can purchase an older version of the textbook. In this case, the answer is a qualified yes. The chapter numbers are the same for the **brief** sixth edition, although the examples will be older (e.g. the 2012 election instead of the 2016 election). Do not buy the “full” version of the book and I wouldn’t go before the brief sixth edition.

While electronic versions of textbooks are now a popular choice for students, I urge you to **not** use an electronic version of the book and instead purchase a physical copy as many students report it is difficult to take the open-note quizzes and exams with the digital copy of the book.

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

- Online Discussion Forum Participation: 15 points
 - Discussion Reaction Papers: 10 points
 - Quizzes: 15 points
 - Exams: 60 points
1. **Online Discussion Forum (10 points)**– For each day’s reading, I will post a brief prompt in the online forums which may include a short article or video. This will involve taking the concepts covered in the lecture and applying them to the “real world.” For instance, when we talk about the president’s power to issue executive orders the prompt might discuss the president issuing an executive order clarifying to the IRS what a “reasonable” extension on taxes is versus an executive order that represents a sweeping change in policy (such as Obama/Trump’s respective orders on immigration). You must complete the reading and quiz before posting in the forum. The forum posts must be made the day listed on the syllabus. Exam days will not have any discussion forum posting requirement. For more details, please see the Discussion Forum Handout.
 2. **Discussion Reaction Papers (10 points)**— Over the course of the semester we will have case studies associated with most of the lectures. These can be short news articles or podcast “readings.” You must write a 2-3 page paper tying the case study back to the book reading for **two** of the case studies. You must sign up for the cases studies you want to write on at the start of the semester and cannot change your choice. The paper is due the day that reading is scheduled on the syllabus. A full list of these readings is available on Moodle. By the end of the second day of class, please submit a rank ordered list of your preferences to me via e-mail. I will do my best to get everyone their top two preferences. For more details, see the Discussion Reaction Paper handout.
 3. **Quizzes (15 points)**– Each reading will have an associated quiz which you should take after doing the readings. If you like, you may work in advance (but the forum posts must still be on the assigned day). The quizzes consist of five multiple choice questions. They are open note, but are timed at ten minutes, so I recommend taking the time to review your notes

before taking the quiz. Quizzes must be completed by 11:59pm on the assigned day. If you do the readings, you should have no problem with the quizzes.

4. **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. They are open note but timed at 75 minutes and must be completed by 11:59pm. The exam will be open from 12:01am to 11:59pm on the assigned day. Before each exam I will provide a study guide. Taking exams on the scheduled day 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.

5 Course Policies

Contacting the Instructor

I are happy to help you either via e-mail or office telephone. Additionally, for at least the first two weeks of class I will be physically present in Pocatello and happy to meet you in my office. After that, time permitting, I am happy to meet with you via Skype or Google Hangouts. If we schedule a meeting, you should come prepared; bring your book, notes, and read the material in advance. If you contact me via e-mail, I will respond within 24 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 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 via Turnitin.com on the day listed on the syllabus. 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 (either physically or virtually). 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 anothers work as your own. For example, copying portions of articles, papers, web pages, etc, or using portions of another persons 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

Monday May 15– Introduction to the Course & American Politics Basics

- Barbour Chapter 1

Basic Structures of Government

Tuesday May 16– The Constitution: The Rulebook

- Barbour Chapter 2

Wednesday May 17– *Two* Governments?!: Federalism

- Barbour Chapter 3
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “The Electoral College.” *Civics 101* (M)

Rights & Liberties

Thursday May 18– The Bill of Rights

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

Monday May 22– The Struggle for Rights

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

Tuesday May 23– **EXAM ONE**

- *No readings*

Political Institutions: The Rules of the Game

Wednesday May 24– Congress

- Barbour Chapter 6
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “Congressional Investigations.” *Civics 101*. (M)

Thursday May 25– The Presidency

- Barbour Chapter 7
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “Executive Orders.” *Civics 101*. (M)

Monday May 29– **MEMORIAL DAY— NO READINGS**

- *Enjoy your day!*

Tuesday May 30– The Courts

- Barbour Chapter 9
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “Federal Courts.” *Civics 101*. (M)

Wednesday May 31– The Bureaucracy

- Barbour Chapter 8
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “The IRS.” *Civics 101*. (M)

Thursday June 1– **EXAM TWO**

- *No readings*

Political Behavior: How the Actors Behave

Monday June 5– Public Opinion

- Barbour Chapter 10
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “Calling Your Congressperson.” *Civics 101*. (M)

Tuesday June 6– Parties and Interest Groups

- Barbour Chapter 11
- Letson, Al. 2017. “The Color of Feminism.” *Al Letson Reveals*. (M)

Wednesday June 7– Voting, Campaigns, and Elections

- Barbour Chapter 12
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “Gerrymandering.” *Civics 101*. (M)

Thursday June 8– **FINAL EXAM**

- *No readings*

FINAL EXAM: THURSDAY JUNE 8: Exam is open from 12:01am to 11:59pm. Exam must be completed by 11:59pm