

POLS 1101: American Government- Fall 2016

Tuesday/Thursday 12:30-1:45pm

LeConte 135

Instructor: Professor Alexa Bankert

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Office: 110 E Clayton Street, Room 414

Office Hours: Tuesday 2-4 or by appointment

Course Description and Objective

This course is important – whether you are a Political Science major or not. You will be introduced to the fundamentals of the American government, such as its political institutions and main actors. Most importantly, this class aims to demonstrate how you are connected to the government in your daily life and present you with tools to become informed and act in politically meaningful ways. For this purpose, we will also examine what being American means in today’s society and how our political institutions and behavior compare to other countries. By doing so, you gain a better understanding of how specific features of the American system shape politics. Ultimately, you will leave this class with a comprehensive understanding of how to critically evaluate and actively participate in the American political system.

Required Text

“We the People” (Tenth Essentials Edition) - by Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore J. Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline J. Tolbert, and Robert J. Spitzer (ISBN-13: 978-0393937053/ ISBN-10: 0393937054)

Evaluation

Response Paper: You will complete one short paper in this course. Topics are listed in the syllabus and match each week’s theme. You can pick a topic of your interest. Short papers can range from 5 to 10 pages (double spaced) and are due at the end of a week’s theme as listed on the syllabus.

Final Exam: The final exam is **not** cumulative and will primarily consist of multiple choice questions with varying levels of difficulty. *As of now, the exam is scheduled for Thursday, December 8th from 12pm to 3pm.*

Midterm: The midterm will primarily consist of multiple choice questions with varying levels of difficulty. These questions will cover material from the first half of the semester. *As of now, the midterm is scheduled for Tuesday, October 4th.*

Weekly Assignments: There will be short weekly assignments which you can access on the Study Space website that accompanies your textbook (<http://www.wwnorton.com/college/polisci/we-the-people9/>). Weekly assignments are due at the end of each week.

Readings and Quizzes: The required readings typically include one chapter of the textbook per class session. If any additional readings are assigned they will be made available electronically on Blackboard. It is important that you stay current with these readings so that you can follow along with lectures and participate in class discussions. Please complete the reading assignments **before** the first class each week. *There will be unannounced short quizzes (3-5 questions) based on the assigned readings for that week. Make sure you are familiar with each chapter's key terms.*

In-Class Participation: If you know something, say something! And if you have a question, other people are likely to have questions, too. So do not hesitate to speak up. In addition, we will have class discussions that should demonstrate your critical reflection on the material covered in class as well as on weekly assignments.

Attendance: I am sure you already know this but just to make sure: You are expected to come to class, to be attentive and engaged in the lecture, and to participate in class discussion. You should not be texting, talking, or surfing the internet while class is in session.

Grading Breakdown by Percentage:

Final Exam: 25%

Midterm: 25%

Response Paper: 20%

Weekly Assignments: 10%

Quizzes: 10%

Attendance and Participation: 10%

Grading Scale for Final Semester Grades

100-94 A	79-77 C+	63-60 D-
93-90 A-	76-74 C	59-0 F
89-87 B+	73-70 C-	
86-84 B	69-67 D+	
83-80 B-	66-64 D	

Late Assignments, Incompletes, and Extensions

Late assignments will be docked 5 percent per day (half letter grade), for each day that a project is late (including weekends). I cannot grant incompletes in the course, except in cases of emergency or where university policy applies. If you need a (reasonable) extension, come talk to me. I am a friendly person.

Office Hours

Students who are having difficulty with the course materials and/or assignments are encouraged to see me during office hours. I am not (always) scary. Don't be afraid to come by. However, please note that office hours are for clarification of material, not for recreating a lecture if you skipped class.

Syllabus Policy:

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus if necessary. I will give you fair notice (at least a week) if something, such as a reading assignment, is to change.

Disability Resource Center

If you anticipate needing classroom or exam accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you must register for services with the Disability Resource Center. Additional information can be found here: <http://drc.uga.edu/>

Withdrawal Policy

Undergraduate students can only withdraw from four courses and receive a withdrawal-passing (WP) grade while enrolled at the University. Students can drop any class without penalty during the drop/add period at the beginning of every semester. Dropped courses during the drop/add period do not qualify as withdrawals. Instructors have the ability to withdraw a student from the class due to excessive absences (see course attendance policy). Please review the policy here: <http://www.reg.uga.edu/policies/withdrawals>

Culture of Honesty Policy

You are responsible for knowing and complying with the policy and procedures relating to academic honesty. To understand what constitutes dishonest work, as defined by the University, please carefully review the policy here: <https://ovpi.uga.edu/academichonesty/academic-honesty-policy>

Course Schedule**August 11th**

Topic: General introduction to the class, the syllabus, the textbook, and online resources

First Week: August 16th and 18th

Topic: The Citizen and the Government

Readings: Chapter 1 in “We The People” pp.3-26.

Weekly Online Assignment: Video Exercise on Study Space for Chapter 1

Potential Short Paper Topic: Make a list of the most important political values you hold. How do they fit into the broader American values? (Due: August 19th)

Second Week: August 23rd and 25th

Topic: The Founding and the Constitution

Readings: Chapter 2 in “We The People” pp.29-61

The Constitution of the United States of America pp.A11-A23.

Weekly Online Assignment: Simulation on Study Space for Chapter 2

Potential Short Paper Topic: Imagine that you are a delegate to the Constitutional Convention. What would you include in (or exclude from) the document? (Due: September 26th)

Third Week: August 30th

Topic: Federalism

Readings: Chapter 3 in “We The People” pp.63-91. Also, listen to

<http://www.npr.org/2013/03/28/175596229/the-road-to-the-supreme-court-arguments-on-gay-marriage>.

Weekly Online Assignment: Video Exercises on Study Space for Chapter 3

Potential Short Paper Topic: Think about same-sex marriage which puts state power in contention with national power. Write out your stance on whether the issue should be addressed at the national or state level. Justify your decision. (Due: September 2nd)

Note: There will be no class on Thursday, September 1st

Fourth Week: September 6th and 8th

Topic: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Readings: Chapter 4 in “We The People” pp. 93-139

Weekly Online Assignment: Policy Debate – You Decide on Study Space for Chapter 4

Potential Short Paper Topic: Imagine you are a legislative staffer. Draft a policy memo on the extent of government surveillance of American citizens. Should there be limits on government surveillance in the fight against terrorism? (Due: September 9th)

Fifth Week: September 13th and 15th

Topic: Public Opinion

Readings: Chapter 5 in “We The People” pp. 141-171

Weekly Online Assignment: Video Exercise on Study Space for Chapter 5

Potential Short Paper Topic: Take the Political Compass test at www.politicalcompass.org or the Pew Research Center’s political typology quiz at www.people-press.org. These sites rate your political ideology based on your opinions. Can ideology help you to guide your political opinions or should your political opinions guide your ideology? Discuss. (Due: September 16th)

Sixth Week: September 20th and 22nd

Topic: The Media

Readings: Chapter 6 in “We The People” pp. 173-197

Weekly Online Assignment: Simulation on Study Space for Chapter 6

Potential Short Paper Topic: Pick a current political topic and compare how it is reported on one of the national news (ABC, CBS, or NBC), one of the cable news (CNN, MSNBC, or FOX NEWS), and one newspaper (New York Times, Wall Street Journal, or The Washington Post). (Due: September 23rd)

Seventh Week: September 27th and 29th

Topic: Political Parties, Participation, and Elections

Readings: Chapter 7 in “We The People” pp.199-241

Weekly Online Assignment: Video Exercises on Study Space for Chapter 7

Potential Short Paper Topic: Write a list of reasons individuals may not vote. In your view, are these obstacles necessary? Examine the role of personal motivation as well as institutional barriers in your answer. (Due: September 30th)

Eighth Week: October 4th and 6th

Topic: Interest Groups

Readings: Chapter 8 in “We The People” pp. 243-269. Also, read:

<http://themonkeycage.org/2013/05/shadow-lobbyists-and-the-revolving-door-or-what-anthony-weiner-and-newt-gingrich-have-in-common/>

Weekly Online Assignment: Simulation on Study Space for Chapter 8

Potential Short Paper Topic: Imagine you are an aide to a member of Congress. Write a policy memo for or against more regulation of lobbying. (Due: October 7th)

Note that the Midterm will take place on October 4th. Thus, reading assignments are due for the class on the 6th.

Ninth Week: October 11th and 13th

Topic: Congress

Readings: Chapter 9 in “We The People” pp. 271-309

Weekly Online Assignment: Simulation on Study Space for Chapter 9

Potential Short Paper Topic: Look up your representative’s recent voting records in the Washington Post’s Database. Make a list of five issues he or she voted on, and state whether you would have voted the same way on behalf of your district. Justify your decisions. (Due: October 14th)

Tenth Week: October 18th and 20th

Topic: The Presidency

Readings: Chapter 10 in “We The People” pp. 311-339

Weekly Online Assignment: Video Exercises on Study Space for Chapter 10

Potential Short Paper Topic: Consider President Obama’s recent transgender directive or the executive order on immigration. Explain why you think the president should or should not have the power to act on these issues. (Due: October 21st)

Eleventh Week: October 25th and 27th

Topic: Bureaucracy (it is not going to be as boring as it sounds)

Readings: Chapter 11 in “We The People” pp.341-367.

Weekly Online Assignment: Simulation on Study Space for Chapter 11

Potential Short Paper Topic: Read <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/04/gsa-employees-spend-taxpayer-money-in-vegas/>. Can large bureaucratic organizations like the U.S. General Services Administration ever run effectively? Explain your answer in terms of the discussion of bureaucracy in the textbook. (Due October 28th)

Twelfth Week: November 1st and 3rd

Topic: The Federal Courts

Readings: Chapter 12 in “We The People” pp.369-399

Weekly Online Assignment: Simulation on Study Space for Chapter 12

Potential Short Paper Topic: Identify one Supreme Court case that affects your life and explain how. For ideas, search www.uscourts.gov for their “Landmark Supreme Court Cases about Students” page. (Due: November 4th)

Thirteenth Week: November 8th and 10th

Topic: Domestic Policy

Readings: Chapter 13 in “We The People” pp. 401-435

Weekly Online Assignment: Policy Debate – You Decide on Study Space for Chapter 13

Potential Short Paper Topic: Write a list of how you expect economic and social policies to affect your life in the next five years. (Due: November 11th)

Fourteenth Week: November 15th and 17th

Topic: Foreign Policy

Readings: Chapter 14 in “We The People” pp.437-461

Weekly Online Assignment: Policy Debate – You Decide on Study Space for Chapter 14

Potential Short Paper Topic: Why should we care about foreign policy? Is Isolationism possible in today’s world? (Due: November 18th)

Fifteenth Week: November 22nd and 24th

THANKSGIVING BREAK!

Sixteenth Week: November 29th and December 1st

Topic: Judging the Democratic Experiment

Reading Assignment: Achen and Bartels. 2016. Pitfalls of Democracy – Electoral Responses to Droughts, Floods, and Shark Attacks (on Blackboard)

Please note that we can also use the class time on December 1st for a review session if needed.