Introduction to American Politics  
Spring 2014

Instructors and contact info
Professor Sally Friedman  F 10:30-12:30  
sfreidman2@albany.edu
Professor Anne Hildreth  TH  3-4:30  
ahildreth@albany.edu

Teaching Assistants
Adam Bjorlin  W 1-3  
Josh Caldon  T 12-2  
Ryan Pettibone  M 12-2

Each of us will hold our office hours in Political Science contact office,  Humanities 16, 442-3112

Please feel free to contact us by email or visit our office hours if you have a question about the class, Political Science, or politics.

We will also be assisted this semester in the classroom and for study assistance by undergraduate peer mentors who have previously taken the course.

Course Description
What difference does it make that Democrat Barack Obama rather than Republican Mitt Romney won the 2012 presidential election? What factors influence the activities of politicians in the three branches of government, President, Congress and the Courts? What factors influence policymaking on key issues including gun rights, immigration or energy? These are important questions directly relevant to the lives of all of us. In this course, we will introduce you to the workings of American politics and the actors, institutions and policies that are associated therewith. We begin at the beginning: the first section of the course reviews the views, debates and conflicts dating from the founding period in American politics. In examining the actions of the framers of the constitution we explore how they resolved their differences and the role the conflicts of their time play in our 21st century lives. Thereafter, the course examines the role of the public and elections, the workings of the major institutions of government and the ways actors inside and outside of government impact the policy making process. We share a conviction that participation in politics, inside or outside the system, is an important responsibility that comes with citizenship. Given this significant role for political participation, how come some people become active while others choose not to get involved? And what difference does it make: in what ways do our actions actually have an impact?

Course and General Education Learning Objectives
By the end of the course we expect students will be able to:

1. Identify the various aspects of American politics: the role of the public, the workings of institutions and the policymaking process;
2. Understand the debates and conflicts articulated during America's Founding period and their connections to politics today;
3. Make connections among the institutions, actors and policies that are a part of the political process;
4. Evaluate current political issues in terms of the founding debates, citizen participation, institutions and policy process;
5. Understand the controversies surrounding political participation and citizenship, the advantages/disadvantages of different ways to participate and the difference that participation by individuals and groups can make;
6. Locate themselves on ideological and political continua and clearly explain where they stand on the debates and controversies we discuss and why.

In addition, this course fulfills both the U.S. History and Social Science requirements in the General Education program. It also can be used for the Flexible Gen Ed course requirement.

**U.S. History** courses enable students to demonstrate:
1. knowledge of a basic narrative of American history (political, economic, social, and/or cultural), including an awareness of unity and diversity in American society;
2. knowledge of representative institutions in American society and how they have shaped and been shaped by different groups;
3. an understanding of the relationship(s) between America and other parts of the world;
4. an understanding of various tools and approaches used in interpreting U.S. history.

**Social Sciences** courses enable students to demonstrate:
1. an understanding that human conduct and behavior more generally are subject to scientific inquiry;
2. an understanding of the difference between rigorous and systematic thinking and uncritical thinking about social phenomena;
3. an understanding of the kinds of questions social scientists ask and the ways they go about answering these questions;
4. knowledge of the major concepts, models and issues of at least one discipline in the social sciences;
5. an understanding of the methods social scientists use to explore social phenomena, such as observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, employment of mathematical analysis, employment of interpretive analysis.

If you took AP Government in high school and transferred the credit into UAlbany you should not take this course. This course is the direct equivalent for that AP course, you cannot receive credit for both courses.

**A Note on Class Structure and Expectations**
We are hoping you will be a full participant in this class. Your participation and contributions-- in both lecture and discussion sections-- is valued. Thus, even in a course of about 150 people, class sessions will include lectures, a variety of individual and group exercises, discussions and simulations. In class sessions, we will explore material that sometimes covers and sometimes complements the assigned chapters. Readings should be done in advance of the class session to which they are assigned. Occasionally, folders on Blackboard will contain supplemental readings – required and recommended – that complement course discussions.

**Service Learning Opportunity**: Students interested in engaging questions of citizenship first hand through tutoring a new American can participate in an optional service learning component of this course (and additional credit through RPOS397). This service learning opportunity is offered through a
cooperation arrangement between the Albany Office for New Americans and the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs and Policy. More details will be available in sections.

**Required Textbooks**
ISBN 978-0-393-91308-8 Please be sure to buy the *full* 9th edition, which includes policy chapters.


Both are available at the University Bookstore and MaryJane Books.

**Course Requirements**
- a. Activities, quizzes, and participation in the lecture, 10%.
- b. Required postings for class and section discussions, 10%. These assignments will be described in more detail in a separate handout.
- c. Two midterms, 10% for the first (2/18) and 15% for the second (on 4/3).
- d. A comprehensive final exam, 25% (on 5/12).
- e. Discussion sections, 30%. You have signed up for a Friday discussion section which is a required part of this class. Attendance and participation for that discussion are worth 20% of your grade, and an additional 10% of your grade will be based on two short concept comparison papers, 2 pages each, supported by activities done in lecture and discussion. These papers will be described in a separate handout.

**Course Policies**
Plagiarism: The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Plagiarism is the use of someone else's work, words, or ideas as if they were your own without giving the original author credit by citing him or her. If you have any questions about plagiarism, please contact us before submitting assignments for grading. Every student is responsible for understanding what constitutes plagiarism and the University’s policy on academic integrity. It is available at [http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html)

Plagiarism violations in this course will result in disciplinary action.

Students with Disabilities: If you need any class accommodations due to a disability, please utilize University resources as needed, and please let the professor know well in advance of any assignments requiring accommodation(s). It is a function of the University to provide such accommodations as needed.

**COURSE OUTLINE**

**PART I: Political culture, the founding debate, and our constitutional structure**
In this section of the course we examine some of the constants of American politics and how they have developed over time: citizenship, the Constitution, checks and balances, federalism. Debates at the core
of the American system that seemed to be settled with the ratification of the Constitution have continued to be challenged. Core principles of our political system – liberty, equality, and democracy—are frequently re-engaged in elections and policy debates, developing new meanings in the process. What are the key features of the American political structure? In what ways have they changed and in what ways are they the same as they were at the founding? What are the key connections between American political culture, its history, and its constitutional design?

Week 1
1/23 Introduction
1/24 Discussion

Week 2  Big debates at the founding and their Constitutional "resolution"
1/28 The Founding Ginsberg Ch 1, Lindsay pp. 1-5
1/30 The Constitution Ginsberg Ch 2, Lindsay pp. 6-19 (Ch 2 intro, Fed # 10, #39, Jefferson)
1/31 Discussion Lindsay: choose one selection from House Divided pp. 28-44 (Jefferson, Douglass, Stephens, Lincoln) AND one selection from Critiquing the Founders pp. 44-58 (Teddy Roosevelt, FDR, FDR, Johnson)

Week 3  Federalism: government by the states, the nation or does it depend?
2/4 Federalism Ginsberg Chapter 3
Before Thursday’s class visit your Discussion section posting area on Blackboard and compose a one paragraph response to any ONE of the “Questions to guide you as you read” that directly precede the Brutus or Centinel reading. This response must be posted before 10:00 AM.
2/6 Federalism Lindsay pp. 73-86 (Ch 3 intro, Madison, Brutus, Centinel) mandatory post due 10AM
2/7 Discussion Lindsay pp. 92-98 (Alexander)

Week 4  Constitutional framework and modern day controversies
2/11 Civil Liberties Ginsberg Ch 4, Lindsay pp. 58-65 (Jackson, Feingold, Ashcroft)
2/13 Civil Rights Ginsberg Ch 5, Lindsay pp. 65-72 (MLK, O’Connor, Thomas)
2/14 Discussions Lindsay: Federalism pp. 107-115 (Reagan, Blackmun, Powell, O’Connor) post opportunity

Week 5  An opportunity for you to shine and then rest
2/18 *** First Exam ***
2/20 & 2/21 *** no class or discussion ***

PART II: Civic Engagement and the intermediaries that structure it
The changing nature of our polity, its people and its structures, have been matched by developments in the ways in which citizens can participate in politics and the types of vehicles that help them express
preferences to leaders and fellow citizens. In this part of the course we examine citizen engagement in its many forms and assess the variety of intermediaries like political parties, interest groups, elections, and the media that structure and organize participation. These developing features of the American political landscape have a significant impact on who we are and how we participate. What are the key historical developments in who can participate and how we participate? What are the key differences between types of participation and the different places or structures where participation can occur, like political parties, groups, elections, and media in its many forms?

**Week 6** How we become who we are and how that impacts what we do

- **2/25** Political Identity  
  Ginsberg Ch 1, Lindsay pp. 119-121, and 136-140  
  (Ch 4 intro, Tocqueville, Jordon) **post opportunity**
- **2/27** Public Opinion  
  Ginsberg Ch 6
- **2/28** Discussions  
  Lindsay, pp. 141-147 (Johnson, 26th) **post opportunity**

**Week 7** Alternative ways citizens can make a difference -- or can they?

- **3/4** Participation  
  Ginsberg Ch 8, Lindsay pp. 128 -135 (Seneca, Addams, Waite, 19th) **post opportunity**
- **3/6** Groups and Interests  
  Ginsberg Ch 11
- **3/7** Discussion  
  Lindsay pp. 122–127, 147-152 (Fed #52, Constitution, Kent AND Tocqueville, Mosely-Braun) **post opportunity**

**Week 8** Linking institutions and how they shape the information environment

- **3/11** Political Parties  
  Ginsberg Ch 9
- **3/13** Media  
  Ginsberg Ch 7
- **3/14** *** No discussions ***

***Spring Break***

**Week 9** The importance of rules, procedures and processes past, present and future

- **3/25** Elections  
  Ginsberg Ch 10
- **3/27** Election Reform  
  Lindsay, pp. 152-155 (Fed #63, 17th, Constitution,12th) **post opportunity**
- **3/28** Discussion

**PART III: American Political Institutions**

The workings of the traditional Institutions—Congress, president/bureaucracy and the Judiciary --are at the core of American government. As we learned, the founders worked long and hard to design a checks and balances system that they thought would best translate input from the public and intermediary institutions into policy best for the nation. In this section of the course, we consider how well the founders succeeded and how the various governmental institutions operate today and how they connect. The questions we will consider include: What processes and features are distinct about each institution? In what ways do and should these institutions work as the founders intended? How powerful is each? How democratic? In what ways can citizen participation impact these institutions, and which institution would you yourself want to impact most?

**Week 10** The people’s branch? The many dimensions of representation
Week 11 The expansion of Leadership in a system of separate institutions sharing power

4/8  Presidency         Ginsberg Ch 13
4/10 Presidency                  Lindsay pp.199-200 & 214-218 (Ch 6 intro, Fed #70)
4/11 Discussion                   Lindsay, pp. 219-222, 225-230 (FDR, Fed #73) post opportunity

Week 12 The not so invisible role of the unelected branches

4/15 *** no class ***
4/17 Bureaucracy and Courts Ginsberg Ch 14 & 15, Lindsay pp.156-157 (Ch 5 intro)
4/18 Discussion                   Lindsay, pp. 179-198 (Marshall, Goldwin, and Clinton OR Obama) post opportunity

PART IV: Public Policy and the Policy-making process

In this the final portion of the course we look at the nuts and bolts of the policy making process and the actors and institutions that shape the formulation, execution, and implementation of government decisions. Examining policy makes sense as a culminating unit – as a process it brings the actors and institutions from our earlier reading together in the business of government -- how individuals, groups, institutions, and political leadership (both elected and unelected) -- work together on public issues and prioritize among competing choices. In each type of policy we examine – economic, social and foreign – distinct players and environmental factors have a role. What are dominant goals in each of these policy areas? What are the fundamental differences within and across them? How do public preferences figure into each policy area, and how should they?

Week 13 Social and economic policy: goals, values and politics

4/22 Social Policy            Ginsberg Ch 17
4/24 Economic Policy          Ginsberg Ch 16
4/26 Discussion               Lindsay, pp. 281-291 (Declaration, Lincoln, Douglas) post opportunity

Week 14 The “unique” characteristics of defending the national interest

4/29 Foreign Policy            Ginsberg Ch 18
5/1 Making complex Policy choices
5/3 Discussion                  Lindsay, pp 308-315 (Ch 8 intro, Havel) post opportunity

Week 15 Conclusion and Review!

5/6 Conclusion
5/8 Review

MONDAY May 12 *** comprehensive final exam *** 10:30 AM