

## **RPOS 101W: Introduction to American Politics**

Spring 2019  
University at Albany, SUNY  
M/W 5:45pm - 7:05pm, HU 020

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**Instructor:** Dr. Pidgeon

**Office Hours:** Monday/Wednesdays, 5:00-5:30 p.m., and by appointment

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**Teaching Assistant (TA):** Donnett Lee

**Office Hours:** Fridays 4:00-5:00 pm, and by appointment

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### **Course Description:**

How does the political process in the U.S. Work? Why was it created the way it was? Who are the 'players' involved? Who participates, who doesn't and why not? Who holds political power? What relationships are there between formal (Congress, Supreme Court, the Presidency) and informal (Interest groups, political parties, media and the public) institutions?

The intentions of this course will be to learn the basics of the political process in the United States, what institutions and players are involved, and why it all matters. You will learn about the political process through informal institutions and actors where we see the influence of the media, political parties, interest groups, the public and social movements alongside formal institutions and actors such as the president, courts, Congress, and other political elites. To bring this process to life, we will discuss recent and ongoing controversies in contemporary U.S. politics with the hopes of identifying and discussing the major debates underlying some of the most divisive issues faced by our country in the past, present, and likely, future.

### **Course Objectives:**

By the end of this course students should be able to:

- Describe the fundamental ideas, themes and issues of American politics and explain what our political system looks like and why it was created as it was.
- Critique different and competing theories surrounding political processes in the United States.
- Identify and compare the structures in which decisions are made and the actors that make and influence those decisions.
- Discuss and formulate arguments about how and why politics matter in the United States with others, using evidence from contemporary political issues to construct coherent arguments in writing and orally.
- Assess how politics influence your daily lives and identify and develop necessary skills for productive involvement.

**General Education Social Sciences Course Objectives** [http://www.albany.edu/gened/dp\\_socsci.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/gened/dp_socsci.shtml)

- an understanding that human conduct and behavior more generally are subject to scientific inquiry
- an understanding of the difference between rigorous and systematic thinking and uncritical thinking about social phenomena
- an understanding of the kinds of questions social scientists ask and the ways they go about answering these questions
- knowledge of the major concepts, models and issues of at least one discipline in the social sciences
- 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

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**Course Text:**

**American Government: Stories of a Nation**, Brief Edition  
Scott F. Abernathy, SAGE Publishing

The textbook can be bought at the bookstore or directly through the publisher at:

<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/american-government/book259726>

The textbook can be rented through Vital Source, if you prefer not to buy it:

<https://www.vitalsource.com/products/interactive-american-government-brief-interactive-scott-f-abernathy-v9781544324449>

Other readings will be accessible through Blackboard, in class, or in discussion (as necessary) to supplement the textbook readings and/or activities.

You will be expected to complete assigned readings that will be discussed and applied on the day listed on the syllabus. (Example: if the reading is listed on February 5th you should be prepared to apply it in class on February 5th.)

**Course Requirements:**

The course is graded A-E. Formal requirements, in addition to full participation in class discussion on the basis of the assigned readings, are:

Short papers: 300 pts (3 at 100 pts each)

Participation in Lecture: 100 pts

Attend/part. in Discussion: 150 pts

Quizzes: 100 pts (10 at 10 pts each)

Midterm: 150 pts

Final Exam: 200 pts

**Grade Breakdown:** In this class your grade will be based out of 1000 total possible points. Each assignment and portion of the course is worth a set number of points and will be graded accordingly. At the end of the class your final grade will be based on your total number of points earned throughout the class.

**Final Grade Rubric**  
(Divide final points by 10)

<b>Start of grade range</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Letter</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>D-</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>D+</b>	<b>C-</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>C+</b>	<b>B-</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>B+</b>	<b>A-</b>	<b>A</b>

**Attendance:**

This course has a great deal of in class and collaborative work. Attendance itself is not graded, but it is a crucial component of the course requirements and your overall grade. Since graded in-class and in-discussion activities constitute a significant part of your grade, frequent absences will affect your overall course grade.

There are no make-up opportunities for in-class, in-discussion, out of class activities or quizzes, unless proper documentation is provided beforehand, in which case alternatives will be provided.

***If you know that it will be difficult for you to consistently get to class or discussion on time and stay the entire period, you should drop this course and take it the next time it is offered, when you have more time.***

Since there will be occasions in your life when missing a class meeting, assignment, or quiz is simply unavoidable, this course has two No-Fault safety valves:

*1. Quizzes count for a total of 100 pts of your grade. There will be an opportunity to gain up to 120 pts. Therefore, there is an additional 20 points (or 2 extra quizzes) that can take the place of any quiz missed.*

*2. In-class activities (lecture and discussion) count for a total of 200 pts. There will be an opportunity to gain up to 220 total points on activities. Therefore, there is an additional 20 pts that can take the place of missed assignments.*

That being said, if you are absent from the course for an extended period of time you will be expected to follow the University policy on excused absences. Different make up assignments will be given in these circumstances.

The following links outline the information:

[http://www.albany.edu/health\\_center/medicalexexcuse.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/health_center/medicalexexcuse.shtml)

[http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate\\_bulletin/regulations.html](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html)

**Academic Dishonesty:**

I take academic dishonesty extremely seriously. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Academic dishonesty includes a number of actions (plagiarism, cheating, multi-submissions, forgery, unauthorized collaboration, falsification, etc.) Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade on the first assignment in which a violation has occurred. If a student engages in a second violation they will receive a failing grade for the entire course. All cases of dishonesty, regardless of degree or number, will result in the filing of a *Violation of Academic Integrity Report*.

For more information on what academic dishonesty is, how to avoid it, and what the violation report entails, reference: [http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate\\_bulletin/regulations.html](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html)

**Students with Disabilities or special requests:**

If you need any class accommodations due to a disability or other circumstances, please let me know at the beginning of the course or well in advance of any assignments requiring specific accommodation(s). In some cases an academic accommodation letter will be required from Disability services, in others, the student and professor will work out the best alternative.

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**Assignments:****Short Papers**

All students are required to complete 3 short papers. Each paper will be worth 100 pts. More detailed instructions for the assignments can be found on blackboard in the “papers” folder.

***Short Paper Due dates\*:***

Short Paper #1: 2/11

Short Paper #2: 3/4

Short Paper #3: 4/8

\*Papers turned in on time on the due date will be eligible for 100 of the possible points. Papers turned in after that but by midnight, 2 days later (Paper 1: 2/13, Paper 2: 3/6, Paper 3: 4/10) will be eligible for 75 of the possible points. No papers will be accepted beyond the 2-day late period. Anyone that has not turned a paper in by the late date will receive an E.

**Quizzes**

A total of 10 (plus 2 bonus) quizzes will take place over the duration of the course. Each quiz will be worth 10 points. Quizzes will be a mix of questions pertaining to the week’s readings, lectures, discussions, and/or handouts. No make-up quizzes will be allowed. To be well prepared for the quizzes you should make sure you are keeping up with your readings and paying attention to lectures, activities, and discussions.

### **Midterm**

All students are required to take a midterm exam. The midterm exam will be worth 200 points of your grade. More information about the midterm will be provided in class prior to when it is administered.

### **Final Exam**

All students are required to take the final exam. The final exam for this class is worth 200 points of your grade. More information about the final will be provided in class prior to when it is administered.

**Final Exam Date: Monday, May 13th 5:45pm-7:45pm**

### **Exam Make Up Policy:**

If you have a good reason and formal excuse to miss an exam, then you will be eligible for a makeup exam with short answers and essays with a choice of questions different from the questions given on the original test day. Proper documentation is required in order for an excuse to be considered legitimate. If you have any questions about medical documentations please see the health centers policy at the following: [http://www.albany.edu/health\\_center/medicalexcuse.shtml](http://www.albany.edu/health_center/medicalexcuse.shtml)

Make up exams without backup documentation indicating a legitimate excuse will consist of all essays with no choice of questions.

All make up exams will be given at the instructor's convenience and not during class time. In order to be eligible for either type of make up exam, students are required to contact the professor within 2 business days of the regularly scheduled test to get approval to take the test and set up the make up date/time. Students who do not contact the instructor within 2 business days of missing the exam will not be eligible for a make-up exam and will receive a '0' for the assignment.

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**If there are any questions about any of the above outlined requirements, assignments, and/or policies please feel free to visit me during office hours, ask me in class, or via email.**

**\*Syllabus Change Disclaimer: Information contained in the course syllabus may be subject to change with reasonable advance notice, as deemed appropriate by the instructor.**

## Course Schedule and Readings:

<b>Dates</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Due Dates</b>
1/23	Introduction	None	
<u>Unit 1: Foundations</u>			
1/28-1/30	Founding	Chpt. 2	
2/4-2/6	Federalism	Chpt. 3	
2/11-2/13	Civil Liberties & Rights	Chpt. 4	2/11: Paper #1
<u>Unit 2: Institutions</u>			
2/18-2/20	Legislature	Chpt. 9	
2/25-2/27	Executive	Chpt. 10	
3/4-3/6	Judiciary	Chpt. 12	3/4: Paper #2
3/11-3/13	Review and Midterm (3/13)		
3/18-3/20	<b>Spring Break</b>		
<u>Unit 3: Mass Politics</u>			
3/25-3/27	Parties and Elections	Chpt. 7, pg. 207-239	
4/1-4/3	Media	Chpt. 6	
4/8-4/10	Public Opinion	Chpt. 5	4/8: Paper #3
4/15-4/17	Political Participation	Chpt. 7, pg. 240-246 Chpt. 8, pg. 269-276	
4/22-4/24	Movements & Interest Groups	Chpt. 8, pg. 251-269	
<u>Unit 4: Politics and Policy</u>			
4/29-5/1	Public Policy	Chpt. 13, pg.414-427	
5/6-5/8	Public Policy & Review	Chpt. 13, pg. 428-446	

\*Depending on course progress and student needs, minor changes in readings, dates, and/or due-dates, may occur.\*

**Final Exam Date: Monday, May 13th 5:45pm-7:45pm**