

RPOS 101W: Introduction to American Politics

Spring 2019

Room LC 21

T/TH 10:15am-11:35am

Class No. 8085

A-E graded

Professor Sally Friedman

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Office Hours: Tues/Thurs 11:45am-1:15pm, contact Office (Humanities #016, basement); Weds 2:30- 3:30 in Milne Hall #221 (downtown campus); by appointment

Teaching Assistants:

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

Course Description

What difference does it make that Republican Donald Trump rather than Democrat Hillary Clinton won the 2016 presidential election? How come after the election in spite of the Republican party controlling both the presidency and Congress, their proposals for repealing health care haven't materialized, and the new tax bill passed but with considerable difficulty? What in any case in the modern day should be the role for the federal, state and local governments? What should be done by the private sector? In the modern day and in an increasingly demographically diverse society, how can and have ordinary citizens made a difference? What are, as the text calls them, the gateways and gates impacting citizen participation?

The intentions of this course are to help you to think through these and similar questions by acquainting you with the basics of the political process in the United States, to introduce you to the major debates and controversies that have been relevant since the Founding and to engage in discussions of why it all matters.

Thus, 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, the characteristics of the governmental system they created and the role the conflicts and debates of their time play in our 21st century lives. Thereafter, the course is organized into three sections: (1) the workings of the major governmental institutions; (2) the role of the public and the many alternative channels by which the preferences of the public get translated into public policies; and (3) the ways actors inside and outside of government impact the policy making process. Throughout, the theme for the course centers around citizen participation (what the text labels as gateways) and the obstacles (gates) that sometimes work against such participation. As does our text, we share a conviction that participation in politics, inside or outside the system, can make a difference; understanding the

basics of how the political system works is worth the effort; by the end of the course you will be able to decide for yourself.

Note that in addition to the Tuesday/Thursday classes, you are expected to be enrolled in a Friday discussion section, engagement in which comprises a significant portion of your grade. Discussion is every bit as important as lecture!

Course and General Education Learning Objectives

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 controversies in terms of broader course concepts;
5. Understand the controversies surrounding political participation, the advantages/disadvantages of different ways to participate and the difference that participation by individuals and groups can make.

In addition, this course fulfills both the US History and Social Science requirements in the General Education program. For more information, go to <https://www.albany.edu/generaleducation/social-sciences.php> and <https://www.albany.edu/generaleducation/us-history.php>.

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

Finally, this course is set up to satisfy both the oral discourse and the lower level writing competencies for the Political Science major. The main feature of both requirements is that you engage in an initial assignment, receive feedback and then get another crack at a similar task. Thus, part of your work in discussion section will include two short presentations to the group. You will receive feedback on both, and the assumption is that you will incorporate the feedback from your first presentation to make the second one better. Similarly, you will fulfill the writing requirement for the class by writing two approximately three-page papers (details to come); you will receive feedback on both, and you will be expected to take comments from the first paper into account as you draft your second.

Required Reading

*Geer/Schiller/Segal/Herrera. Gateways to Democracy: An Introduction to American Government (with MindTap™ Political Science Printed Access Card) [4th ed. © 2016]
(Note MindTap is an online platform which features an electronic copy of the text, a number of study aids and practice quizzes to help you get a sense of where you stand)

*Issues of CQ Researcher (short articles describing current debates) available on blackboard

A note on acquiring the text:

There are a number of options for you to access the textbook: you can purchase the hard copy from the bookstore (it is cheaper to buy the book with options for Mindtap than without those options); you can purchase the e-book; and you can explore possibilities for rental as well as purchase; you will have access to the textbook and MindTap as part of your Cengage Unlimited subscription (available at the college bookstore and at cengage.com).

More information on textbook discounts can be accessed at <http://services.cengagebrain.com/course/site.html?id=3402458>

Once you have purchased the text (which includes your MindTap access), you will need to register for MindTap. This is done by clicking this link:

<https://www.cengage.com/dashboard/#/course-confirmation/MTPNHQQNQZKV/initial-course-confirmation> and completing the registration process. Here is a video to walk you through it: <https://play.vidyard.com/m52vRVVKTAAor2M5PCFMQ9S>.

Requirements

As you can see below, the class is structured so that you have many and varied chances to succeed; your final grade depends on your consistency of effort more than your performance on one particular activity.

- a. **Midterm: 20%**
- b. **Final exam: 20%**
- c. **Quizzes and Participation: 20%.** You can expect a quiz every week or two.
- d. **Friday afternoon Discussion sections: 20%.** You have signed up for a Friday discussion section, which is a required part of this class. Attendance and participation are required, and completion of the oral discourse component of the course is counted as part of this grade.
- e. **2 approximately 3 page papers (a little longer is ok). 20%.** Details to come.

Course Policies

Class Structure and Expectations:

As you are being asked to engage in a first course on American politics highlighting the role of citizen participation, we are also asking you to be a full participant in this class. Your participation and contributions-- in both lecture and discussion sections-- is valued. Class sessions will include lectures, a variety of individual and group exercises, discussions and simulations. In class sessions we will cover material that complements the assigned textbook chapters. Readings should be done in advance of the class session to which they are assigned.

Academic Dishonesty:

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. Any form of academic dishonesty in this course will be taken seriously. You must be honest and truthful. Academic dishonesty includes a number of actions. The most well-known of these is Plagiarism, 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. Other forms of dishonesty include 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

Late Assignments. Make-up opportunities for course examinations are possible but only with notice prior to the exam and only with appropriate documentation. Late papers will be downgraded half a grade per day and will not be accepted after 3 days after the due date.

Incomplete (Grade of I): Incompletes are only given as needed and as determined by the instructor under extreme circumstances and when a majority of the course work has been completed. Arrangements must be made with the instructor to resolve the grade of *I* as soon as possible.

For more details see the link below:

<https://www.albany.edu/undergraduateeducation/grading.php>

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

*subject to minor changes.

PART I: Beginnings: Political culture, founding debates, and our constitutional structure

Week 1

1/24. Introduction

1/25. First discussion section

Week 2

1/29. The founding and Constitution

1/31. Start Geer ch. 2

2/1. Discussion section (CQ Researcher Universal Basic Income)

Week 3

2/5. Constitution cont; Geer ch. 2

2/7. Federalism; Geer ch. 3

2/8. Discussion

Week 4

2/12. Civil liberties; Geer ch. 4

2/14. Cont.

2/15. Discussion

PART II: American Political Institutions

Week 5

2/19-2/21. Congress; CQ Researcher Gun Violence July 2018; Geer ch.12
2/22. Discussion

Week 6

2/26. Executive (president); Geer ch. 13
2/28. Executive Branch cont. (Bureaucracy); Geer, ch. 14
3/1. Discussion

Week 7

3/5-3/7. Courts; Geer ch. 15; CQ researcher Racial Conflict; Review of the midterm
3/8. Discussion

Week 8

3/12. Midterm
3/14. No class
3/15. No discussion section
3/16-3/23. Spring break

Part III: Participation and Elections (Intermediaries)

Week 9

3/26. Identity and Political Socialization; no reading
3/28. Participation; Geer ch. 11; CQ Researcher Citizen Protest
3/29. Discussion

Week 10

4/2. Interest groups; Geer ch. 8
4/4. Civil rights; Geer ch. 5
4/5. Discussion

Week 11

4/9. Public opinion; Geer ch. 6
4/11. Media; Geer ch. 7
4/12. Discussion

Week 12

4/16. Political parties; Geer ch. 9
4/18. Elections; Geer ch. 10
4/19. Discussions cancelled; Passover/Easter

Part IV: Putting it altogether: Public Policy

Week 13

4/23. Elections cont.; Geer ch. 10; CQ Researcher Election Security and Voting Rights

4/25. Domestic policy; Geer ch. 16.1-16.2

4/27. Discussion

4/30. Economic policy; Geer ch. 16.3 (additional reading TBA)

5/2. Foreign policy; Geer ch. 16.4 (additional reading TBA)

5/3 Discussion

5/7. Wrap up/conclusions/last class!

****final exam: Thursday May 16th 1:00pm – 3:00pm**