

Professor Sally Friedman

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Office Hours: Tu, Th 12- 12:45, Tu 2:45- 4:45

W 2:30- 3:30 in Milne

Teaching Assistants:

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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—or if you just want to talk.

Course Description

What difference does it make that Democrat Barack Obama rather than Republican Mitt Romney won the 2012 presidential election or that Republican congressional candidates did so well in 2014?? What factors influence the activities of politicians in the three branches of government as they tackle policies including health care, education and immigration? ? How do interest groups, political parties and even individual private citizens influence public policy to move in directions they want, and how much influence do individual citizens really have? The intentions of this course are to help you to think about 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.

Course and General Education Learning Objectives

Thus, the learning objectives for the class are:

1. Know the basics: identify the various aspects of American politics: the role of the public and political intermediaries, the workings of institutions and the policymaking process.
2. Use the basics: Make connections among the institutions, actors and policies that are a part of the political process
3. Debate the basics: beginning with political differences at the founding, consider the pros and cons of the many controversies we will discuss; locate your own positions on these controversies and justify your positions.
4. Go beyond the basics: examine debates surrounding our broader theme of political participation and the obstacles to it (what the text labels gateways and gates), the difference (or not) the participation by individuals and groups can make and decide for yourself whether you think political participation is worth the effort.

In addition, this course fulfills both the US History and Social Science requirements in the General Education program. It also can be used for the Flexible Gen Ed course requirement. For more information, go to http://www.albany.edu/gened/dp_socsci.shtm

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 general education requirements. 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 Textbook

Geer/Schiller/Segal/Herrera Gateways to Democracy: An Introduction to American Government (with MindTap™ Political Science Printed Access Card) [3rd © 2016](Note you need the MindTap card to access the online platform we will be using throughout the class.)

More information on textbook discounts can be accessed at <http://www.cengagebrain.com/course/1-1S6CQ4M>

Once you have purchased the text (which includes your MindTap access), you will need to register for MindTap to do so

Connect to <https://login.cengagebrain.com/course/MTPN1S9PZ4TW>

Follow the prompts to register your MindTap course.

You will also be responsible for a number of short readings, e.g. newspaper articles, which will be posted.

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. **2 midterm exams, 10% and 15%.** The dates are reflected on the course schedule below.
- b. **A final exam, 15%.** The date is scheduled by the University for 12/17 at 8:00 a.m.!
- c. **Activities, quizzes and participation in the lecture, 15%.** Note that attendance in lecture is not officially required; you are however strongly encouraged to attend as we will engage in a number of in-class activities (including quizzes), many of which will be collected and will be counted as part of your grade.
- d. **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. **MindTap quizzes, 10%.** MindTap is the online platform accompanying our text. In addition to containing numerous helpful study aids (electronic and “read aloud” versions of the text, lists of key terms and flash cards), there are online quizzes for each chapter. After a couple of weeks of practice, you will be expected to do one online quiz per week, completed by noon on Fridays.
- f. **2 2.5-3 page papers, 15%.** . 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. Thus, even in a course of upwards of 150 people, 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 extensions on in-lecture or Mindtap activities will only be provided under exceptional circumstances.

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 if we get behind or move quickly.

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

8/27 Introduction

8/28 Discussion

9/1 The founding and Constitution; Geer ch. 1 and begin ch. 2

9/3 no class (professor needs to attend American Political Science Association meetings; happy long Labor Day weekend)

9/4 no discussion sections

9/8 Constitution cont; Geer ch. 2

9/10 Federalism; Geer ch. 3

9/11 Discussion

9/15 Civil liberties; geer ch. 4

9/17 Cont.

9/18 Discussion

9/22 Civil Rights and review for first midterm; Geer ch. 5

9/24 First midterm

9/25 Discussion

PART II: American Political Institutions,

9/29 Congress; Geer ch. 12

10/1 Cont.

10/2 Discussion

10/6 Executive (president); Geer ch. 13

10/8 Executive Branch cont. (Bureaucracy); Geer, ch. 14

10/9 Discussion

10/13 Courts; Geer ch. 15

10/15 Cont.

10/16 Discussion

Part III: Intermediaries

10/20 Identity and Political Socialization; no reading

10/22 Participation; Geer ch 11

10/23 Discussion

10/27 Public opinion and review; Geer ch. 6

10/29 Second midterm

10/30 Discussion

11/3 Media; Geer ch. 7

11/5 Political parties; Geer ch. 9

11/6 Discussion

11/10 Elections; Geer ch. 10

11/12 Cont.

11/13 Discussion

11/17 Interest groups; Geer ch. 8

11/19 Simulation wrapping up Part 3

11/20 Discussion

11/24 Domestic policy; Geer ch. 16.1-16.2

11/26 Thanksgiving

12/1 Economic policy; Geer ch. 16.3

12/3 Foreign policy; Geer ch. 16.4

12/4 Discussion

12/8 Rap up/last class!

12/17 Final Exam 8.00-10.00 a.m. (sorry, it's not negotiable; the University did it.)