American Political Development  
RPOS 319-10351  
University at Albany, SUNY  
Political Science Department  
Fall 2017  

Professor Timothy Weaver  

Room: SS 116  
Meeting day and time: Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:15am-11:35am  

NOTE: This is a preliminary syllabus and is subject to change  

Contact details:  
tweaver@albany.edu  

Office Hours (uptown): Tuesdays—2:45pm to 4:45pm and by appointment.  

Course overview  

This course introduces students to the institutions that comprise the American political system, explores competing ideas about relationship between government and citizens, and examines how key interests engage in political struggles to achieve their goals. In doing so, we will harness the insights of the sub-field known as American Political Development (APD) to think about how American government and politics has been structured over time. In contrast to mainstream “snapshot” accounts of American politics, this historical perspective will enable us to appreciate the degree to which the contemporary political conflicts are shaped by America’s evolving institutional arrangements, political ideologies, and entrenched interests.  

At the outset of the course we will discuss the central ideas behind the study of APD. We will then examine the key ideas and interests that have shaped the development of American political institutions since the 17th century. Each week after that we will consider a theme (e.g. the welfare state) and/or an institution (e.g. Congress) to explore how they have evolved over time. Throughout the semester, we will think about how our historical perspective can sharpen our understanding of contemporary developments in American politics.  

Course objectives  

- To help you gain an understanding of what the sub-field of APD is and why it might be helpful in the study of American politics.  
- To enable you to think about American political institutions as structured by historical as well as contemporary forces.  
- To encourage you to reassess your current understanding about the central interests and ideas that have shaped American politics.  
- To develop your critical thinking, writing, and presentational skills.
**Academic dishonesty**

The University at Albany takes academic dishonesty extremely seriously. Please familiarize yourself with the University’s policies in this regard. I recommend you watch this video on plagiarism that will help you avoid it: [http://library.albany.edu/infolit/plagiarism1](http://library.albany.edu/infolit/plagiarism1)

Often students leave themselves open to the charge of academic dishonesty because they fail to provide proper citations in their written work. Please be sure to always remember the following: if they are not your words, you must use quotation marks and citations; if it is not your idea, you must cite the source from which the idea came.

**Course requirements**

Though short lectures will be used to frame the key themes for each week, this class will primarily be run as a seminar. As a result, it is essential that you participate meaningfully in class discussion. This means that you will come to class having read and thought carefully about the reading material assigned. You will be assessed according to the quality of your participation in class and your performance on an early-semester short-answer test, a mid-term exam, and a final exam.

Your grade breakdown is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short answer test</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>In-class on September 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>In-class October 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>Take-home exam due December 17</td>
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</tbody>
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Questions for the final exam will be distributed on December 10.

Students will be expected to meet all deadlines. Extensions will only be granted in cases of medical or personal emergency.

**Grading**

The grading scale will be as follows:


If you feel you have been awarded an unfair grade, you may contest it. However, if you want to do so, it must be done *in writing* and no sooner than 48 hours after you have received the grade. In your written complaint you need to provide a specific account of what in particular you are concerned about.

**Accommodations**

Students with disabilities that may impair their ability to complete the assignments listed in this syllabus and/or who require special accommodations should contact the Disability Resource Center. If you do require accommodations please let me know during the first two weeks.
Readings

There is one required text for the course, which is available for purchase at university bookstore. It is:


Additional readings will be available on Blackboard.

Course schedule & reading assignments

Week 1: Introduction

Tuesday August 29: Introduction to APD (lecture)

Thursday August 31: NO CLASS (PLEASE GET STARTRED ON TUESDAY’S READING)

Week 2: What is “American Political Development?”


Week 3: American political culture I: Liberalism & republicanism


Week 4: American political culture II: Multiple traditions

Thursday September 21:  NO CLASS (Rosh Hashanna)

**Week 5: SHORT-ANSWER TEST & the Constitution**

Tuesday September 26:  ***IN-CLASS SHORT-ANSWER TEST***


**Week 6: Federalism**

Tuesday October 3:  Essays from Margaret Weir, Suzanne Mettler, and David Brian Robertson in J&R, pp. 102-123.


**Week 7: Public opinion & MID-TERM EXAM (OCT 12)**


Thursday October 12:  ***MID-TERM EXAM (IN CLASS)***

**Week 8: Interest groups**


**Week 9: Political parties & elections**

Tuesday October 24:  Readings from John Aldrich, Sidney Milkis, and Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williams in J&R, pp. 238-256.

Thursday October 26:  Readings from V.O. Key, Samuel L. Popkin, and Anthony King in J&R, pp. 271-284.
Week 10: Congress


Week 11: The presidency


Week 12: The judiciary


Week 13: The welfare state


Thursday November 24: CLASSES SUSPENDED (Thanksgiving break)

Week 14: The American political economy


**Week 15: Race and class**

