RPOS 101: Introduction to American Politics

Spring 2017
University at Albany, SUNY
M/W 5:45pm - 7:05pm, HU133

Instructor: Dr. Pidgeon
Office Hours: Mondays/Wednesdays, 4:30pm-5:30pm, and by appointment
Contact: jpidgeon@albany.edu, Office: Humanities B16

Course Description:

How does the political process in the U.S. Work? Why was it created the way it was? Who are the ‘actors’ 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, and 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.shtm

• 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

-------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Course Texts:

Gateways to Democracy: An Introduction to American Government, 4th edition
More information on the textbook (buying vs. renting and for discounts) can be
accessed at the following link: www.cengagebrain.com/course/1546282
Just make sure whatever version you get includes full access to Mind tap.

Other readings will be accessible through Blackboard (the web platform that this class
will use in conjunction with the textbook) and in class (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. (I.e. if the reading is listed on February 9 you should
be prepared to apply it in class on February 9th.)

Course Requirements:
The course is graded A-F. Formal requirements, in addition to full participation in class
discussion on the basis of the assigned readings, are:
Out of class Mindtap activities: 100 pts (10 at 10 pts each, with two bonus)
Short papers: 200 pts (2 at 100 pts each)
Participation (in lecture): 200 pts
Mindtap Quizzes: 100 pts (10 at 10 pts each, with two bonus)
Midterm Exam: 150 pts
Final Exam: 250 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)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start of grade range</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>60</th>
<th>63</th>
<th>67</th>
<th>70</th>
<th>73</th>
<th>77</th>
<th>80</th>
<th>83</th>
<th>87</th>
<th>90</th>
<th>93</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Letter</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>D-</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attendance:**
This course has a great deal of in class and collaborative work. Attendance itself is not graded, but participation is a crucial component of the course requirements and your overall grade. Since graded in-class 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 activities, out of class activities or quizzes. Additionally, **no late** quizzes or out of class assignments will be accepted and there will be no make up for late submissions, 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 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. Mindtap activities count for a total of 100 pts of your grade. There will be an opportunity to gain up to 120 pts (2 extra activities). Therefore, if you miss an activity you will have an opportunity to make up the missed points by completing other ‘bonus’ activities.

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/medicalexcuse.shtml
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

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.

Assignments:

Short Papers
All students are required to complete 2 short papers. These papers will be the student’s response to articles from the New York Times, Wallstreet Journal, Washington Post, TimesUnion, or BBC. Each paper will be worth 100 pts. Student’s papers should be response papers that both respond to the current controversy they are reading about,
but also apply class ideas and concepts, as well as, provide a reaction. More detailed instructions for the assignment can be found on blackboard in the “papers” folder.

**Short Paper Due dates***:

- Short Paper #1: February 20, 2017
- Short Paper #2: April 24, 2017

*Papers turned in on time, at the start of class, on the due date will be eligible for 100 points. Papers turned in after that but by 2 days later- next class- (Paper 1: 2/22, Paper 2: 4/26) will be eligible for 75 of the possible points. Papers turned in after the 2 day deadline will receive an E.

**Quizzes**

A total of 10 short answer quizzes will take place over the duration of the course on Mindtap, through blackboard. Each quiz will be worth 10 points. Two additional opportunities for bonus quiz points will also be available. Quizzes will be a mix of questions pertaining to the week’s readings. 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.

**Mindtap Activities**

A total of 10 Mindtap activities (and two bonus) will take place over the duration of this course. Students are expected to complete the full activities by the due date. No late activities will be allowed. Activities range in type and encourage students to think deeper about the readings for that week.

**Midterm**

All students are required to take a midterm exam. The midterm exam will be worth 150 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 a final exam. The final exam for this class is worth 250 points of your grade. More information about the final will be provided in class prior to when it is administered.

**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 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 3 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 3 business days of missing the exam will not be eligible for a make-up exam and will receive a '0' for the assignment.

*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.*

--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**IMPORTANT Disclaimer:**
No excuses related to technology, access to Mindtap, etc. will be accepted for late or missed Mindtap activities or quizzes unless you file a formal complaint/report through Mindtap customer service explaining that you had trouble with the website and their customer care acknowledge the legitimacy of your claims.

**Technical Support URL:**
http://support.cengage.com/magellanweb/ClassLandingPage.aspx?OptyId=1-1W1S3P2

**Course Schedule and Readings**:  
* "MT" means Mind Tap activity online, which are accessible in blackboard or on the Mindtap website. All Quizzes will be online Mind Tap quizzes in blackboard as well. All assignments and quizzes must be completed by 11:59 pm on the due date listed unless otherwise noted by the Professor*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignment Due Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1/23-1/25</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/30-2/01</td>
<td>Founding</td>
<td>Chpt. 2</td>
<td>01/29 MT 02/02 Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/06-02/08</td>
<td>Federalism</td>
<td>Chpt. 3</td>
<td>02/05- MT 02/09- Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td>Additional Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/13</td>
<td>Civil Liberties &amp; Rights</td>
<td>Chpt. 4</td>
<td>02/12- MT 02/16- Bonus Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Unit 2: Institutions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/15</td>
<td>Judiciary</td>
<td>Chpt. 15</td>
<td>02/12- Bonus MT 02/16- Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/20-02/22</td>
<td>Legislature</td>
<td>Chpt. 12</td>
<td>02/19- MT 02/20 Short Paper #1 02/23- Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/27-03/01</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>Chpt. 13</td>
<td>02/26- MT 03/02- Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/06</td>
<td>Midterm Exam Review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/08</td>
<td><strong>Midterm Exam</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/13-03/15</td>
<td><em>Spring Break - No Classes</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Unit 3: The Role of Citizens</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/20-03/22</td>
<td>Political Parties and Special Interest Groups</td>
<td>Chpt. 9</td>
<td>03/19- MT 03/23- Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/27-03/29</td>
<td>Campaigns and Elections</td>
<td>Chpt. 10</td>
<td>03/26- MT 03/30- Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/03-04/05</td>
<td>Media and Public Opinion</td>
<td>Chpt. 7</td>
<td>04/02- MT 04/06- Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/10</td>
<td>No Class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Chapters</td>
<td>Assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/12</td>
<td>Political Participation</td>
<td>Chpt. 11</td>
<td>04/13- BONUS Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/17-04/19</td>
<td>Mass Movements &amp; Civil Rights</td>
<td>Chpt 5</td>
<td>04/16- MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>04/20- Quiz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Unit 4: Policy and Politics in Practice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Chapters</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04/24-04/26</td>
<td>Domestic &amp; Economic Policy</td>
<td>Chpt 16 (sect: 16.1 - 16.3)</td>
<td>04/24- Short Paper #2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Policy Article on Blackboard</td>
<td>04/27- MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/01-05/03</td>
<td>Foreign Policy</td>
<td>Chpt 16 (sect: 16.4-16.5)</td>
<td>04/30- BONUS MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Policy Article on Blackboard</td>
<td>05/04- Quiz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/08 - 05/10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wrap up and Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Final Exam 5:45-7:45p.m.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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