

**American Government & Politics - Four Credits**  
**Political Science 1201**  
Fall 2016

Instructor: Adam Olson

Office: Imholte 20D

Office Hours: Tu: 2:00-4:00, W: 10:30-11:30, and by appointment

Class Hours: M-W 3:30-5:10

At its root, politics is about the conflict between different actors and a finite amount of resources. Put differently, "politics is who gets what, when, how." In this conception of politics, an emphasis is placed on the rules of the conflict, the behaviors of those actors and their tangible goals. Using that definition, this course introduces the history, institutions and processes of American politics. In organizing the course around this definition, it should provide you with the ability to critically understand trends in American politics and provide the requisite knowledge needed to do so confidently.

This course is designed to encourage you to take an active role in pursuing your education and I will do my best to provide the proper guidance to help you make the most of your time. Structurally, this means that each class session will be composed of both lecture and seminar style discussion. Since it is an election year, I hope that we have an abundance of examples to draw on when grappling with some of the questions of this course. Attendance is not mandatory but those who miss class often may find it very difficult to do well. Make up examinations will be allowed provided that you either let me know ahead of time or have a legitimate/reasonable absence. I expect there to be several opportunities for extra credit, given that this is an election year, so should an opportunity arise I will announce it in class.

Class will meet on Mondays and Wednesdays at 3:30 pm in Imholte Hall 111. Slides for each individual lecture will be posted online after the meeting. I will also create study guides for each exam and hand them out ahead of time. If there is interest for study sessions to answer questions before a test, they can be arranged. As with most political science courses, your enjoyment and ability to participate will greatly benefit by following the news. By reading a variety of news sources with a range of view points you'll develop a reservoir of political knowledge and intuition that you can use to critically examine the points made by me, the readings and future events as they unfold.

Final grades for the course will be determined according to the following five assignments:

**20%** Midterm Examination 1

**20%** Midterm Examination 2

**20%** Midterm Examination 3

**20%** Final Examination

## 20% Critical Essay

Every examination will be a mix of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. There are three non-cumulative midterm examinations which are thematically arranged around that relevant chunk of the course. The final examination will be a mix of cumulative and non-cumulative, meaning that the multiple choice and short answer will be drawn from the last third of the course but the essays will require you to draw upon the class as a whole.

The critical essay is focused on reading one of the three 'optional' books outlined below and writing a 1500-2000 word paper evaluating the book based on the material presented in this course. All of the books are about some current public policy problem in the United States. Each essay should pose a question and make an argument answering the question. Essays can focus on any part of the book. Here are some sample questions. Did American political culture contribute to creating a particular problem and if so, how? How can the American institutional arrangement fix the problem? Did the American institutional arrangement contribute to creating a particular problem, if so how? Can the problem be fixed given the unique state of American politics? What was the role of the voters in creating a problem and/or how can public accountability be used to alleviate the problem? A stand alone assignment sheet will be handed out early in the semester with more details.

All grades for this class follow the standard scale: >93%=A, >90%=A-, >88%=B+, >83%=B, >80%=B-, >78%=C+, >73%=C, >70%=C-, >68%=D+, >63%=D, >60%=D-, <60%=F

### **Books to Purchase:**

#### *Required*

1. Christine Barbour and Gerald C Wright (2014). *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics*. 7th Edition. Washington, District of Columbia: CQ Press

Reading assignments that come from sources other than *Keeping the Republic* will be posted online.

#### *One of Three:*

1. Michelle Alexander (2012). *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York, New York: The New Press
2. Kathryn J Edin and H Luke Shaefer (2015). *2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America*. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin
3. Andrea Louise Campbell (2014). *Trapped in America's Safety Net: One Family's Struggle*. Chicago Studies in American Politics. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press

# University Statements

## **Senate student academic workload policy**

For undergraduate courses, one credit is defined as equivalent to an average of three hours of learning effort per week (over a full semester) necessary for an average student to achieve an average grade in the course. For example, a student taking a four credit course that meets for four hours a week should expect to spend an additional eight hours a week on course work outside the classroom.

## **Equity, Diversity, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action**

The University provides equal access to and opportunity in its programs and facilities, without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

## **Statement on accommodations for students with disabilities**

It is University policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. This publication/material is available in alternative formats to persons with disabilities upon request. Please contact the Disability Resource Center, 589-6163, Room 362 Briggs Library to discuss accommodation needs.

## **Statement on classroom conduct**

Students are expected to interact with the instructor and other students with respect and courtesy. Students should attend every class session prepared to learn and work. Participation in class is expected, which includes both speaking up and listening. Give class your full attention while here. Complete all assignments including the reading – in a timely fashion. Do not bring cell phones or recording equipment to class without the instructor's consent. Students whose behavior is disruptive either to the instructor or to other students will be asked to leave. Students whose behavior suggests the need for counseling or other assistance may be referred to counseling services. Students whose behavior violates the University Student Conduct Code will be subject to disciplinary action.

## **Statement on academic misconduct**

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. In this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

## **Statement regarding sexual harassment**

University policy prohibits sexual harassment as defined by the University of Minnesota

Regents' policy: <http://www1.umn.edu/regents/policies/humanresources/SexHarassment.pdf>.

## Course Outline

### Introduction & Welcome

Wednesday, August 24th - Introduction

### American Political History & Philosophy

Monday, August 29 - What is politics?

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter One

Wednesday, August 31st - American Political Culture

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter Two

Monday, September 5 - **Labor Day, No Class**

Wednesday, September 7 - Politics of the American Founding

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter Three
- Articles of Confederation, Declaration of Independence, U.S. Constitution (Barbour and Wright, Appendix 1-3)

Monday, September 12 - Federalism I

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter Four
- Shanna Rose and Cynthia J Bowling (2015). "The State of American Federalism 2014-15: Pathways to Policy in an Era of Party Polarization". In: *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 45.3, pp. 351-379

Wednesday, September 14 - Federalism II

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter 16

Monday, September 19 - Fundamental American Liberties

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter Five

Wednesday, September 21 - The Struggle for Equal Rights

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter Six

Monday, September 26 - **First Midterm**

## **American Political Institutions**

Wednesday, September 28 - Congress I

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter 6

Monday, October 3 - Congress II

- Barbara Sinclair (2014). *Party wars: Polarization and the politics of national policy making*. Vol. 10. University of Oklahoma Press, Chapter One, Five

Wednesday, October 5 - Presidential Elections

- John Sides and Lynn Vavreck (2012). *The Gamble: All In*. Princeton University Press, Chapter Two
- Barbour and Wright, pg 527-545

Monday, October 10 - Presidential Behavior

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter Eight

Wednesday, October 12 - The Bureaucracy

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter Nine

Monday, October 17th - **Fall Break, No Class**

Wednesday, October 19 - The Courts

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter 10
- Gerald N Rosenberg (2008). *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?* Second Edition. American Politics and Political Economy Series. University of Chicago Press, Chapter Two

**Monday, October 24 - Midterm Two**

## **American Political Behavior**

Wednesday, October 26 - Public Opinion

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter 11

Monday, October 31 - Political Parties

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter 12

Monday, November 7 - Elections

- Barbour and Wright, Rest of Chapter 14

Wednesday, November 9 - Election Recap

Monday, November 14 - Interest Groups

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter 13
- E E Schattschneider (1960). *The Semisovereign People*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Chapter One

Wednesday, November 16 - The Media

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter 15

**Monday, November 21 - Third Midterm**

Wednesday, November 23 - **Day Before Thanksgiving, Class Canceled**

## **American Public Policy & Policy Making**

Monday, November 28 - Introduction to Policymaking and Social Policy

- Barbour and Wright, Chapter 17

Wednesday, November 30 - Social and Environmental Policy Part Two

- Lawrence R Jacobs (2010). "What Health Reform Teaches Us about American Politics". In: *PS: Political Science and Politics* 43.04, pp. 619–623
- Jacob S Hacker (2010). "The Road to Somewhere: Why Health Reform Happened". In: *Perspectives on Politics* 8.03, pp. 861–876
- Suzanne Mettler (2010). "Reconstituting the Submerged State: The Challenges of Social Policy Reform in the Obama Era". en. In: *Perspectives on Politics* 8.03, pp. 803–824

Monday, December 5 - Economic Policy

- Barber and Wright, Chapter 18
- Charles E Lindblom (1982). "The Market As Prison". In: *Journal of Politics* 44.2, pp. 323–336

Wednesday, December 7 - Wrapping it all up

**Tuesday, December 13 - Final Exam, 1:30-3:30**