

POSC 010: American Politics

Department of Political Science

Instructor: Nick Jenkins

Fall 2020

Office Location: Sproul Hall 2228

Classroom: CHASS 1020

Office Hours: W: 4-5pm; TH: 1:30-3:30pm

Class Times: MWF: 9 - 9:50am

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Course Description

Do you ever wonder why our elected officials struggle to enact important reforms or why the government moves so slowly? Do you ever feel like our elected officials don't represent the will of the people or that they do things that cause people harm? Well, the American colonists felt this way to, in fact, they felt this so strongly that many of them were willing to risk their lives to create a better system. Their daring efforts in large part resulted in the system of government that we have today. Why did they make setup our government the way that they did? What were the short comings of their decisions and how have we acted to correct those short comings? In order to think of ways our political system might be improved, we first need to understand why it was setup the way that it was and how it currently works.

In this class, we will work to develop an understanding of the government in the United States and its political decision making processes. Our journey will begin with a look at the American colonies. Prior to the American revolution in 1776, the colonists were growing increasingly frustrated with their English rulers. Throughout our course, the following questions will guide our investigation:

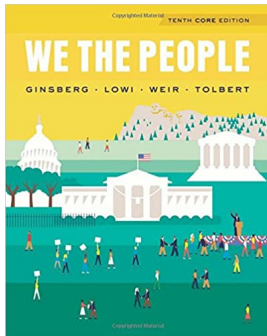
1. Why does the U.S. government exist as it does today?
2. How do individuals participate in the U.S. political process?
3. What are the functions of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches?
4. How do we decide what policies to pursue and how do they get enacted?

It is also important to know that this class will not involve an explicit discussion of current events. We will use current events to illustrate the U.S. political system at work, but political science is

about building an understanding of why political systems work the way they do and how decisions are made using the political process.

Required Materials

Textbooks can be boring and expensive - one of the world's worst combinations! I've tried to mitigate both of these in the selection of our course textbook. I spent some time reading undergraduate reviews of different American Politics textbooks and picked the one that had the best combination of the highest ratings and lowest cost - one of the world's best combinations! Here is the book we will be using: [We the People \(Core Tenth Edition\)](#)



The core edition of *We the People* contains the exact chapters that we will cover in class so you're not paying for a bunch of chapters that we won't be discussing. Also, the 10th edition of this book was published in 2014 so it is still relevant and because it is an older edition it can be bought used on Amazon for less than \$10. Also know that the any other version of the text (essentials and full editions) will work as well as newer versions.

In addition to the textbook, I will also assign various new stories that serve as good real-world examples of topics that we are discussing in class. It's my hope that these articles will help to "ground" the course by giving you real examples of the political process at work. These readings will be posted to iLearn.

Course Promises

In this course, I will make the following promises to you. By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

1. Describe the functions and responsibilities of the three branches of the U.S. government
2. Describe how individuals participate in politics and how they can participate in the policy-making process
3. Identify the difficulties of changing the current political system and implementing public policy
4. Participate in the political process as an informed individual.
5. Think critically about the political decision making process and how this form decision making affects decision outcomes.

6. Research, prepare, and deliver a report that provides valuable information to your colleagues, and that sparks and holds their interest (this is what Political Scientists aim to do in their professional work).

Course Expectations

This course will only fulfill these promises if you promise the following in return:

1. **To attend class.** I have designed this class for the readings and lectures to complement one another. As a result, attending lecture will be an essential component for your to develop a mastery of the course material.
2. **To read the assigned materials.** Similar to the lectures, the readings will provide additional details on each topic that may not be covered in lecture. They will also give you an opportunity to practice applying your knowledge of American government to understand real world decisions that have been made.
3. **To be attentive and participate in class.** Participation does not only mean speaking aloud in class. Students should participate by actively following class discussions and engaging with lecture activities.
4. **To complete the required assignments in a timely fashion.** The assignments in this course are designed for you, and me, to measure your progress on meeting the course promises. Each assignment will give you practice at mastering these promises and I will give feedback to help guide you in your journey. Providing feedback is time consuming, however, so you will get the most useful feedback, and therefore the most use out of each assignment, only if you turn in your work on time.

Assignments and Evaluation

Because writing is an essential component of nearly all career paths (and learning to write well is hard!) we will have several short writing assignments in the course. These assignments are designed to help you become a better writer, to get you to think more carefully about how governments work, to get you to think more carefully about how political decisions are made, and how to use evidence to support an argument. Below is a list of the writing assignments that we will complete in the course and their requirements.

1. **Google Documents Essay:** For your first assignment, you will answer the following question in **12pt font, 3 to 4 double-spaced pages**: *“Why were the founders motivated to*

adopt a system of federalism in the U.S. and what were they hoping that this system would accomplish? How has this system complicated the ability of state governments and the federal government to make decisions? Finally, do you think that federalism is worth it or do you think that creates more problems than benefits? Why?"

Good news, I will help you write this paper! You will use a Google Document that I have created for each of you to write this essay and I will be logging in to give you feedback and suggestions as you write. There is one caveat - I will match your level of effort. If you put a lot of work into your thinking and writing, I will give you more feedback and guidance. **This assignment is due on October 30th.** On that day I will restrict your ability to make any changes to your paper and will begin grading them. By working with you write your paper, I will be able to help you improve your writing *before* you are graded on it and this will also allow me to encourage you think through your arguments, thus making you a better researcher and writer. This assignment will contribute to the 3rd, 5th, and 6th course promises.

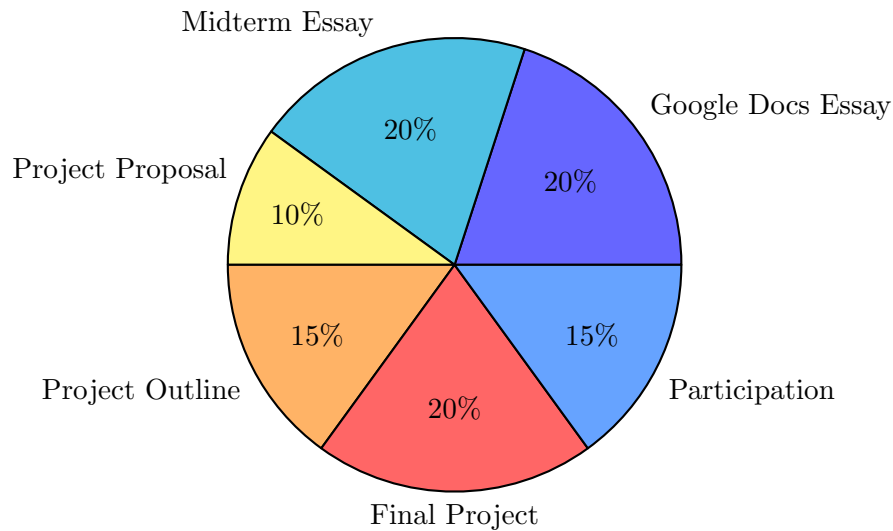
2. **Midterm Essay:** This essay will be written in class and you will choose 1 prompt from a list of 3 different prompts. Before the exam, however, I will post a list of 6 essay prompts on iLearn and I will choose 3 of these prompts for the exam. You will need to answer the question in a **maximum of 2 pages. Please bring a Blue Book to use for the exam.** **The midterm essay will be on November 6th.** This exam will require you to use your knowledge of the course material so far to support an argument. This assignment will contribute to the 5th and 6th course promises.
3. **Research Essay:** The final essay will be an original research paper of **a maximum of 5 pages double-spaced.** This assignment will be completed in stages that mimic how political scientists learn about the way that political events work, why politicians and governments do what they do. This project is an effort to teach you how to be a political scientist. We'll go use this guide in class to learn how to write a research paper: <https://politicalscienceguide.com/home/research-papers/>. This project will be completed in the following 3 stages:
 - Project Proposal: you will submit a project proposal that explains what question you will be researching and what you think the answer is in **about 250 words.** An essential aspect of any research project is identifying what puzzle you want to solve (the research question), as well as a prediction about the answer based on your knowledge of the topic (a hypothesis). **This is due in-class on November 18th.**
 - Project Outline: In a **maximum of 2 double-spaced pages,** you will create an outline of your paper. This outline should contain your research question, your argument, and how each paragraph will be used to support your argument. What evidence will you

use? How will you convince your fellow political scientists that you are right? **Your project proposal will be submitted via iLearn on December 2nd.**

- **Final Project:** Write your most convincing case for why your answer to your research question is the right one in a **maximum of 4 double-spaced pages**. If you have done the previous stages correctly, this will involve transforming your outline into a complete paper. **The final paper will be submitted via iLearn on December 16th.**

In addition to these assignments, you will also be evaluated based on your participation in class activities. This involves being engaged during partner or group work, contributing to class discussions, and completing in-class participation assignments. You will also be asked to complete a short self-assessment of your participation in class at the end of the quarter. **This assessment will be completed online and is due on December 16th.**

These assignments will constitute your grade in the course and the weight of each of assignment are as follows:



The letter grades will be assigned according to these percentages:

A+	97-100%	B+	87-89%	C+	77-79%	D+	67-69%	F	0-59%
A	93-96%	B	83-86%	C	73-76%	D	63-66%		
A-	90-92%	B-	80-82%	C-	70-72%	D-	60-62%		

Classroom Decorum and Academic Discourse

I believe very strongly that the classroom is a place to expand our knowledge and experiences safely, while being respected and valued. I support the values of UCR to the urgent, sustained,

and comprehensive work of creating a campus climate of mutual respect and communal vision at the University of California, Riverside. I strive to uphold the values articulated by the Office of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: We value a deep, collective understanding that an institutional and personal commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion is a true commitment to meaningful, lifelong learning. Not only are these values vital for building a better society, they extend into every aspect of our political life. For more information, please visit: <https://diversity.ucr.edu>.

For everyone to have the best possible learning experience, we will strive to create a classroom environment that supports respectful, critical inquiry through the free exchange of ideas. As part of learning, it is essential to discuss topics with individual who have different viewpoints than your own and the only way we can better understand one another is if we can carry on a collegial discussion of the topic. Remember, the goal is to become better critical thinkers. To do so we must learn to listen to others and articulate our views in respectful ways. As such, the following principles will guide our discussions:

- Treat every member of the class with respect, even if you disagree with their opinion;
- Bring light, not heat;
- Reasonable minds can differ on any number of perspectives, opinions, and conclusions;
- Because constructive disagreement sharpens thinking, deepens understanding, and reveals novel insights, it is not just encouraged, it is expected;
- No ideas are immune from scrutiny and debate;
- You will not be graded on your opinions;
- Arguments and evidence should be judged *independently* of who offers such arguments and evidence.

Additionally, to build a classroom environment that maximizes everyone's ability to master the course material please be mindful to not distract your fellow learners with your phone, tablet, or computer. It's perfectly fine if you would like to use these devices to take notes during class, but don't use them to distract yourself or your peers! Similarly, if you come late (or must leave early) please to enter/depart the classroom in the least disruptive manner possible. This includes sitting near the door if you anticipate leaving early or taking a seat as near to the door as possible if you arrive late.

Academic Honesty

I expect that all work you produce for this course will be your own. If you plagiarize any material from outside sources for your written work or presentation in this course, or on the final exam, **it will result in a failure of the entire course.** There are no exceptions to this, and no second chances. Please refer to the university's [Academic Integrity Policies & Procedures](#) if you have questions about these standards.

Special Accommodations

If you need particular accommodations to help you succeed in mastering this course's material, please contact the [Student Disability Resource Center](#) on campus in Costo Hall 125 to get a personalized accommodation plan.

Course Outline

This syllabus is a working document. I reserve the right to make changes to the assigned readings (additions or deletions) or to the order of topics we cover as I deem necessary. Announcements regarding schedule changes will be made in class, in discussion sections, or on iLearn.

Also note that this schedule lists the topics of discussion for each class. To master the course material, you should finish each meeting's readings before we discuss them in class. This schedule also indicates which course promise(s) each class contributes to. They are listed as **CP** followed by the specific promise's number (listed above).

Tentative Schedule:

MONDAY	WEDNESDAY	FRIDAY
Sep 28th 1	30th 2	Oct 2nd 3 CP 3, 4, 5 Course Introduction; How can we make decisions?; Who are your representatives?

MONDAY	WEDNESDAY	FRIDAY
5th 4 CP 1 & 3 We the People Ch. 1: What is government and how do citizens participate?; Who are Americans?; What are their values?	7th 5 CP 1 & 5 We the People Ch. 2: Why declare independence?; Why a constitution?	9th 6 CP 3 & 5 We the People Ch. 2: Deciding on the constitution; Changing the constitution?
12th 7 CP 5 We the People Ch. 3: State governments vs. Federal government	14th 8 CP 5 We the People Ch. 3: State governments vs. Federal government cont.	16th 9 CP 2 We the People Ch. 4: What is participation and how do we ensure it?
19th 10 CP 2 & 5 We the People Ch. 5: Are you protected from the government and does it matter?	21st 11 CP 2 & 4 We the People Ch. 6: What is public opinion? What shapes political attitudes? How do we measure public opinion?	23rd 12 CP 2 & 4 We the People Ch. 6: Do elected officials respond to public opinion? Do elected officials influence our opinions?
26th 13 CP 2 & 3 We the People Ch. 7: Does the media help democracy? Does the media make us polarized?	28th 14 CP 2 & 3 We the People Ch. 7: How does the media influence the policy making process?	30th 15 Writing Assignment 1 (CP 3, 5, 6) Due CP 2 & 4 We the People Ch 8: Who participates? How do they participate?
Nov 2nd 16 CP 2 & 4 We the People Ch 8: State election laws and participation. <i>Last day of midterm content</i>	4th 17 CP 2 & 3 We the People Ch 9: Why do we have political parties? What do parties do?	6th 18 Midterm Essay (CP 3, 5, 6)

MONDAY	WEDNESDAY	FRIDAY
9th 19 CP 2 & 3 We the People Ch 9: Why only 2 parties? What do parties do in power?	11th Veterans Day - No Class :(13th 20 CP 2, 3, 4 We the People Ch 10: How do elections work? Election components. How do people decide who to vote for?
16th 21 CP 2, 3, 4 We the People Ch 10: Campaign contributions and raising money.	18th 22 Project Proposal Due In-class (CP 5 & 6) CP 2 & 4 We the People Ch 11: What is an interest group and what do they do?	20th 23 CP 2 & 4 We the People Ch 11: Do interest groups control politicians? Do interest groups affect policy?
23rd 24 CP 1 & 5 We the People Ch 12: What is Congress' job? How does Congress make decisions?	25th 25 CP 1 & 5 We the People Ch12: How does a bill become a law? How do they decide on bills? Special powers.	27th Thanksgiving! - No Class :(
30th 26 CP 1 & 5 We the People Ch 13: What power does the president have? How does the president make decisions?	Dec 2nd 27 Project Outline Due on iLearn (CP 5 & 6) CP 1 & 5 We the People Ch 13: Does the president participate in policy? How?	4th 28 CP 1 & 5 We the People Ch 14: What does the bureaucracy exist? How does the president control the bureaucracy?
7th 29 CP 1, 2, 3, 5 We the People Ch 14: Does the bureaucracy do what Congress wants or what the president wants? Does the bureaucracy represent the people?	9th 30 CP 1 & 5 We the People Ch 15: What do the courts do? How are the courts organized?	11th 31 CP 1, 2, 5 We the People Ch 15: How do you get your case to the supreme court? Is the court influenced by public opinion?

MONDAY	WEDNESDAY	FRIDAY
14th 32	16th 33 Final Project Due on iLearn (CP 5 & 6) Participation Self-assessment Due	18th 34