

Political Science 100

Introduction to American Politics

Section 001

Class time: MWF 12:30PM to 1:20PM
Location: 203 Oldfather Hall
Instructor: Jonathan Andrew Jackson
Office: 517 Oldfather Hall
Office hours: MTWF 1:30PM to 2:30PM or by appointment
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Introduction

2017 is shaping up to be a fascinating year in American politics. We have just experienced the most polarizing presidential election in at least a generation. We can expect protests on the streets and struggles in Congress as the Democrats try to weaken the Trump administration with an eye towards winning the 2018 midterm elections. Satisfaction with the direction of the country remains historically low, but with levels increasing among Republicans and decreasing among Democrats since the election. In short, this is a great time to study American politics, find out how our systems and institutions have developed and weathered crises, and discuss how they could or should be reformed or strengthened as our democracy continues to develop.

The textbook for the course is **Analyzing American Democracy** by Kevin Smith and Jon Bond. Be sure to buy the second edition. It is available at the Union Bookstore. I will post other reading materials under “Course Documents” on Blackboard.

This course meets ACE Learning Outcome #6 (*that students are able to use knowledge, theories, methods, and historical perspectives appropriate to the social sciences to understand and evaluate human behavior*) and Ace Learning Outcome 8 (*that students be able to explain ethical principles, civics, and stewardship, and their importance to society*). Through the readings in the textbook and other assigned readings, lectures, and in-class discussions, students will become more informed citizens who will better be able to navigate our sometimes confusing political system. They will also be made aware of political science methods and findings.

Elements of this syllabus may be changed if needed to improve the class. You will be notified of any changes.

Course Requirements

All students are expected to do the assigned readings and work, attend class, and participate in class discussions. The themes of those assignments will be a major part of our quizzes and the

final exam. Therefore attendance and class participation are vital.

There will be a total of 1000 points for the course. Grades will be made up of class participation, a research paper, two quizzes, and a final exam. They will be weighed as follows:

- Participation: 200 points
- Research paper 200 points
- Quizzes 300 points (150 points each)
- Final exam: 300 points

The points for each assignment will added together and the decimal point shifted one to the left to get the final grade. For example, a total of 756 points for all assignments represents a final grade of 75.6. Regular rounding applies, so a 79.1 is a C+ while a 79.5 is a B-.

Participation

The bulk of the participation grade will be for attendance. Every student starts the semester with 200 participation points, but loses 10 points for each unexcused absence. An attendance sheet will be passed around at the beginning of each class. If you come to class late, it is your responsibility to sign in at the end of class.

Participation in class discussions will be periodically noted and points added to your participation grade. Since participation will be noted periodically, the only way to assure that your participation will be credited will be to participate consistently. Any participation points over 200 will be counted. That is the only extra credit that will be given in the course.

Additionally, you will lose 20 points for failing to participate in in an online practice quiz on Blackboard that is designed to familiarize you with the testing system before you take your first quiz.

Research paper

The research paper will be 8-10 full pages (Times New Roman, 12-point font, double spaced, 1-inch margins). You are to make a case for any reform to the US government system or US government policy. The paper should include a brief overview of the system or policy you propose to reform, the specifics of your proposed reform, and how your proposed reform would be an improvement over the current system.

You will be expected to use (and properly cite) at least ten sources to support your paper. As this is a freshman level course, I do not expect you to use academic journals, although you are welcome to do so. Dictionaries and Wikipedia are not acceptable sources, although you are free to use sources linked in a Wikipedia post.

You should present your topic to your instructor by March 7. The paper is due by Friday, April 7 at 11:59 PM. You will submit your paper via SafeAssign on Blackboard.

The paper will be in APA (American Psychological Association) style. It is the most common format for research papers in the social sciences, so it is one to which you should become familiar. The class on January 27 will be dedicated to teaching you the basics of writing a

political science research paper; part of that class will be a review of APA formatting. You should also become familiar with the Purdue Owl's APA page (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/>), which is a better source than I am for particular questions on APA.

Quizzes and Final Exam

There will be two quizzes, one about a third of the way through the semester and the other roughly two-thirds of the way through. They will mostly be a mixture of multiple-choice, true-false, fill-in-the-blank, and short answer (1-5 sentence) questions. They will be in-class and online. **Please bring your fully-charged laptop computer or other device to class on the day of the quiz.** If you bring a tablet to take the quiz, I recommend that you bring a keyboard attachment to facilitate typing. If you do not have a laptop, please see me well before the quiz date so arrangements can be made. The time limit for the quizzes will be 50 minutes and will automatically close at 1:20.

The final exam will be comprehensive. Half of it will come from the final third of the semester, and the other half will come from the earlier portions of the course. It will be in-class and online. Please bring your fully-charged laptop computer or other device to class on the day of the exam. The time limit for the final exam will be two hours.

The goals of the exams are to gauge the level of understanding the student has of the material covered. They are designed to encourage proper study skills, critical thinking, and analytical reasoning.

Grade Scale

The grade scale for this course will be:

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

As noted previously, the points for each assignment will added together and the decimal point shifted one to the left to get the final grade. For example, a total of 756 points for all assignments represents a final grade of 75.6: a C. Grades will be rounded to the nearest whole number.

Class Policies

Make-up assignments

Should you miss a scheduled quiz, you will be assigned zero points for that quiz unless you provide a valid excuse to the instructor. That would include a doctor's note/bill or a cast on a newly broken arm. Non-valid reasons include, but are not limited to, being busy or forgetting to take the quiz. You are also expected to submit your paper on time.

Incompletes and Withdrawals

Students will only be given an “I” (incomplete) for valid reasons, such as verified military deployment or illness, and only if the student has made substantial satisfactory progress in the course. To withdraw from a course, follow UNL procedures; your instructor will not do it for you.

Laptops and other electronic devices:

Please put away all electronic devices at the beginning of class except those being used for the class. Turn your phone off or put it on silent (not vibrate) mode. The inappropriate use of electronic devices is distracting to you and rude to the instructor and other students. Any student found to be inappropriately using an electronic device, or who refuses to show or turn off their electronic device when requested, will be dropped a full letter grade for the class.

We will start with allowing the use of laptops, but the instructor reserves the right to later ban their use except for those students with a documented disability. Even when laptops are used exclusively to take class notes, they virtually eliminate eye contact and limit students’ mental engagement with the material. You are a student, not a stenographer.

Disability Policy

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodations to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration. Their phone number is 472-3787.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and cheating, as defined by the UNL Student Code of Conduct, are not allowed. Plagiarism includes self-plagiarism (taking parts of a paper that you had previously written and using it in a current assignment without noting that it had come from the earlier work). The result of such acts may include a zero for the assignment or failure of the entire course. Major violations will also be reported to the student’s department chairperson and to the Judicial Office.

Respect

Please show respect for the opinions of your fellow students. Students should feel free to express their views without fear of condemnation or harassment inside or outside the classroom. Likewise, students should not seek to use the free and open exchange of ideas as a license to

provoke or denigrate others. Clearly, there is a balancing act involved, but it can be achieved if students engage each other and the instructor in a spirit of goodwill.

Schedule

The following is a basic schedule and is subject to change if needed. More details will be made available as needed.

Week	Topic	Readings & Notes
1-9	Introduction & the fundamentals of government and democracy	Chapter 1 & readings on Blackboard
1-16	The US Constitution	Chapter 2 No class on 1-16 (MLK day)
1-23	Federalism & the basics of writing a political science research paper	Chapter 3
1-30	Civil liberties	Chapter 4
2-6	Civil Rights & review	Chapter 5
2-13	Quiz 1 & Congress	Quiz 1 on February 13 Chapter 12
2-20	The Presidency	Chapter 13 Paper topics due by February 24
2-27	The Bureaucracy	Chapter 14 No class on 3-3 (Conference)
3-6	The Judiciary & review	Chapter 15
3-13	Quiz 2 & Interest groups	Quiz 2 on March 13 Chapter 6
3-20	Spring break	No classes
3-27	Political parties & paper preparation	Chapter 7 Bring your computer on March 31
4-3	The media	Chapter 8 Research papers due on April 7
4-10	Political opinion & Obama's Deal part 1	Chapter 9
4-17	Elections & Obama's Deal part 2	Chapter 10
4-24	Political participation & exam preview	Chapter 11
5-1	Exam week	3:30 PM, Wednesday, May 3