

# THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

POLS 21c  
The University of Vermont  
Fall 2017  
MWF 10:50-11:40 AM  
Lafayette Hall, Room 302

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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Dr. Deborah L. Guber  
Associate Professor of Political Science  
519 Old Mill

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Office hours: MW 1:00-3:00 PM (and by appointment)

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

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Political Science 21, "The American Political System," is an introductory class that surveys the vast arena of American politics from the 1780s to the present—a formidable task to be sure, but one guided by several specific goals:

### **GOAL #1. Mastery of the subject matter**

First and foremost, the successful completion of this course will lead to your mastery of the subject matter. Important topics include (among others) the constitutional foundations of American government, the basic structure and operation of government institutions, and the relationship between average citizens and their elected officials.

### **GOAL #2. The development of critical thinking skills**

In addition to mastering the material matter at hand, this course will also help you to develop broader skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving strategies. Our goal is to use a solid foundation of factual knowledge to probe deeper questions about the American political system, including the nature of democracy, representation, liberty, and equality.

### **GOAL #3. Civic engagement and responsibility**

Finally, this class encourages an active and informed interest in politics by demonstrating the relevance of the topics we study to contemporary political events, ranging from the Trump administration to the ongoing war on terror.

## CLASS REQUIREMENTS

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Our emphasis throughout the term will be on the development of strong analytical thinking and writing skills. Graded assignments are designed to evaluate your growth in these areas. Assignments are also designed to give you many opportunities, using different skills, to build a strong grade in this course.

1. The bulk of your grade will be determined by two examinations, the first given in class on Friday, October 20, and the second on Friday, December 15 from 10:30-11:20 AM in our usual classroom, Lafayette Hall, room 302.

Each exam is weighted as 35% of your final grade.

The content of exams will be drawn from class lectures, discussions, and reading assignments, and will consist of a combination of fill-in-the-blank, true/false, matching, and short essay questions.

2. Five short, multiple-choice quizzes will be administered this term. The dates for these quizzes are:
  - Friday, September 8
  - Friday, September 22
  - Monday, October 16
  - Monday, November 13
  - Wednesday, December 6

The single lowest score you receive on these quizzes will be dropped, while the four remaining scores will be averaged to determine 20% of your final grade.

3. Finally, your active participation and attendance is essential to the effectiveness of this class. It will account for the remaining 10% of your grade.

The following rules regarding assigned work are important. Please study this syllabus carefully before deciding to enroll in class. All students are expected to read, understand, and abide by these policies:

In fairness to others, students are *not* permitted to do "extra credit," either to compensate for a poor grade or a missed class. Since a total of eight grades cumulate to determine your final grade (and no one assignment dominates), there are plenty of opportunities to improve your standing.

A score of "0" will be given for any quiz that is not taken on the scheduled day in class and no make-ups will be offered. In most cases, a missed quiz will simply become the score that is dropped at the end of term, as described above.

If a student misses the midterm exam for reasons that are both serious and outside of their control, they may make up that work, but only on a set day and time. During the Fall 2017 term, the make-up exam is scheduled for Wednesday, December 6, between 1:00-3:00 PM. Please note that makeup exams are administered at my discretion and may use a different format than that described above.

Dates for final exams are set by the Registrar's Office and *will not* be rescheduled, except under the limited conditions described in the course catalog. Written documentation of need must be provided.

Please note that forgetting about the time and place of an exam is NOT an adequate excuse for missing it!

## REQUIRED READING

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The following textbook is required reading for this course and may be purchased at the UVM bookstore:

- Ken Kollman (2017). The American Political System, 3rd edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

ISBN# 978-0-393-28357-0

A number of short articles are also required in this class. The full-text of each is provided on our class website at:

[http://www.uvm.edu/~dguber/POLS21/Fall\\_2017/](http://www.uvm.edu/~dguber/POLS21/Fall_2017/)

To view each article, direct your web browser to the URL above, use the menu to select "Calendar," then click the title any article. A new window will open, from which you can either print or read online.

## CLASS ATTENDANCE

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Attendance accounts for 10% of your final grade in this class. It is recorded by your signature on the attendance sheets passed around in class each day. All students receive two excused absences to cover minor illnesses and family emergencies, but 10 points will be deducted from your attendance grade for every class you miss after the first two. In other words, if you miss class frequently it is possible for your score to fall into negative numbers.

Please note that you may NOT use excused absences for frivolous events first (e.g., oversleeping, skiing, a shopping trip to Montreal, etc.) and then request more later when serious circumstances develop.

You should also to be aware of the following:

- You are solely responsible for making sure you sign the attendance sheet before leaving class. If you do not, your name *cannot* be added at a later point.
- Any student involved in the forgery of signatures—either on the "giving" or "receiving" end—will receive an automatic *zero* for that entire portion of their grade, and may in addition be subject to the university's policy on academic honesty.

Beyond the two absences described above, I do not grant excused absences unless you travel out of town as a member of an official UVM club or sports team. If you are the

member of a team, please be sure to forward a copy of your schedule to me in writing as soon as it becomes available so that attendance sheets can be marked accordingly on those days when your team travels out of town.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

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Students are expected to be familiar with the UVM "Code of Academic Integrity" and with its standards, in particular. For instance:

1. Students may not plagiarize. All ideas, arguments, and phrases, submitted without attribution to other sources must be the creative product of the student. Thus, all text passages taken from the works of other authors (published or unpublished) must be properly cited. The same applies to paraphrased text, opinions, data, examples, illustrations, and all other creative work. Violations of this standard constitute plagiarism.
2. Students may not fabricate. All experimental data, observations, interviews, statistical surveys, and other information collected and reported as part of academic work must be authentic. Any alteration, e.g., the removal of statistical outliers, must be clearly documented. Data must not be falsified in any way. Violations of this standard constitute fabrication.
3. Students may work cooperatively, but not collude. Students are encouraged to collaborate on academic work within any limits that may be prescribed by their instructors. Students may only provide, seek or accept information about any academic work that will be submitted for a grade, to or from another student, with the authorization of the instructor. Violations of this standard constitute collusion.
4. Students may not cheat. Students must adhere to the guidelines provided by their instructors for completing academic work. Students may not claim as their own work any portion of academic work that was completed by another student. Students may only use materials approved by their instructor when completing an assignment or exam. Students may not present the same (or substantially the same) work for more than one course or within the same course without obtaining approval from the instructor of each course. Students must adhere to all course reserves regulations. Students may not act dishonestly or convey information that the student knows or should know to be false, by actions such as lying, forging or altering any document or record in order to gain an unfair academic advantage. Violations of this standard constitute cheating.

Offenses against this code are deemed serious and insult the integrity of the entire academic community. Suspected violations will be reported immediately to the Center for Student Ethics & Standards for further investigation and may result in sanctions as serious as an automatic "F" in the course, or even expulsion from the university.

## RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

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Students have the right to practice the religion of their choice. Please submit your documented religious holiday schedule for the semester to me by the end of the second full

week of classes. Students who miss work for the purpose of religious observance will be permitted either a make-up exam or a penalty-free extension.

## ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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In keeping with University policy, any student with a documented disability interested in utilizing accommodations should contact ACCESS, the office of Disability Services on campus. ACCESS works with students and faculty in an interactive process to explore reasonable and appropriate accommodations via an accommodation letter to faculty with recommended accommodations as early as possible each semester.

*Location:* A170 Living/Learning Center  
*Telephone:* (802) 656-7753  
*E-mail:* [access@uvm.edu](mailto:access@uvm.edu)  
*Website:* <http://www.uvm.edu/access>

## CLASSROOM PROTOCOL

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In coordination with the Department of Political Science, I have adopted the following protocol for classroom behavior:

1. Students are expected to attend and be prepared for *all* regularly scheduled classes.
2. Students are expected to arrive on time and remain in class until the class period ends. If a student knows in advance that he or she will need to leave early, he or she must notify the instructor before the class period begins.
3. Students are expected to treat faculty and fellow students with respect. For example, students must not disrupt class by leaving the room and reentering during class, must not distract class by making noise, and must be attentive to comments being made by the instructors and by peers.
4. Students must turn off and stow *all* electronic devices (e.g., laptops, iPads, cell phones, etc.) before class begins. Why don't I allow such devices for taking notes? This post from Buzzfeed says it all: "11 Things You're Actually Doing on Your Laptop During a Lecture" (<http://tinyurl.com/kqpdbmh>).

Students in serious violation of any of these rules may be subject to whatever *grade penalty* I deem appropriate.

## ASKING FOR HELP

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Please be sure to ask questions whenever you need to. Here is how:

- I am generally available to answer quick questions after class.
- I hold office hours on a first-come, first-serve basis every Monday and Wednesday from 1:00-3:00 PM. If those hours are not compatible with your schedule, please do not

hesitate to ask for an appointment. My office is located on the 5th floor of Old Mill, room 519.

- While you can reach me by telephone at (802) 656-4062, e-mail is generally faster. I check e-mail on a regular basis, but please understand that I may not be able to respond immediately to messages sent in the evening or on weekends. My e-mail address is: Deborah.Guber@uvm.edu

## CLASS CALENDAR

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*Note: All reading assignments marked [online] can be found on the POLS 21 website under the heading "Calendar."*

*Occasionally, current events may dictate a slight change in plans. If one reading assignment is substituted for another, I will make an announcement to that effect in class and place the new article online.*

### I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

**Monday, August 28:** *Trump's America*

- Paul Krugman (2017), "How Republics End," The New York Times (April 19) [online].

### II. THE FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

**Wednesday, August 30:** *"A More Perfect Union"*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 1.
- The Constitution of the United States [online].
- James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, The Federalist Papers: Nos. 10 & 51 [online].

**Friday, September 1:** *How (Not) to Read the Constitution*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 2.
- Laurence H. Tribe and Michael C. Dorf (1993), On Reading the Constitution: Excerpt [online].

 **LABOR DAY HOLIDAY: Monday, September 4**

**Wednesday, September 6:** *A Legacy under Attack*

- Howard Zinn (1987), "A People's Constitution: Some Truths are Not Self-Evident," The Nation, 245: 87-88 [online].
- Seth Masket (2017), "Trump Has Already Crossed the Red Line. Now What?" Vox (August 8) [online].
- Aziz Huq and Tom Ginsberg (2017), "How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy," Vox (February 21) [online].

**Friday, September 8:** *American Federalism*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 3.
- Jelani Cobb (2016), "Post-Election, Liberals Invoke States' Rights," The New Yorker (November 28) [online].

 **QUIZ #1: Friday, September 8**

**Monday, September 11:** *Freedom of Speech and Dissent, part 1*

- The Bill of Rights [online].
- Kollman (2017): Chapter 4.
- Conor Friedersdorf (2017), "The Most Shortsighted Attack on Free Speech in Modern U.S. History," The Atlantic (August 23) [online].

**Wednesday, September 13:** *Freedom of Speech and Dissent, part 2*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 4 (continued).
- Sonja West (2013), "Censorship 101: What Schools are Really Teaching Students when we let them Censor their Speech," Slate (December 6) [online].
- "Code of Students Rights and Responsibilities," The University of Vermont [online].

**Friday, September 15:** *Religion and the Separation of Church and State, part 1*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 4 (continued).
- Edward F. Harrington (2005), "The Metaphorical Wall," America, 192 (January 17): 10 [online].

**Monday, September 18:** *Religion and the Separation of Church and State, part 2*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 4 (continued).
- Garrett Epps (2016), "The Strange Career of Free Exercise," *The Atlantic* (April 4) [online].

**Wednesday, September 20:** *The Right to Privacy*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 4 (continued).
- Mark R. Levin (2005), "Death by Privacy," [National Review](#), March 14 [online].
- Daniel J. Solove (2011), "Why Privacy Matters Even if You Have 'Nothing to Hide,'" [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#) (May 15) [online].

**Friday, September 22:** *Capital Punishment*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 4 (continued).
- John Paul Stevens (2010), "On the Death Sentence," [New York Times Review of Books](#) (December 23) [online].



**QUIZ #2: Friday, September 22**

### III. LINKAGE INSTITUTIONS

**Monday, September 25:** *Measuring Public Opinion*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 9.
- Sheldon R. Gawiser and G. Evans Witt, "20 Questions a Journalist Should Ask about Poll Results," [National Council on Public Polls](#) [online].
- Vann Newkirk, II (2016), "What Went Wrong with the 2016 Polls?" [The Atlantic](#) (November 9) [online].

**Wednesday, September 27:** *Governing by Public Opinion*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 9 (continued).
- Jill Lepore (2015), "Politics and the New Machine," [The New Yorker](#) (November 16) [online].

**Friday, September 29:** *Voter Registration and Turnout*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 10.
- Jeff Jacoby (1996), "Making It Too Easy to Vote?" [The Boston Globe](#), July 18: A15 [online].



**Monday, October 2:** *Voting Behavior*


- Kollman (2017): Chapter 10 (continued).
- Matthew Robinson (2002), "Party On, Dudes," [The American Spectator](#), March/April [online].

**Wednesday, October 4:** *Political Parties, Part 1*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 12.
- Michael Lind (2016), "This is What the Future of American Politics Looks Like," [Politico](#) (May 22) [online].

**Friday, October 6:** *Political Parties, Part 2*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 13.
- Ezra Klein (2014), "A Third Party Won't Fix What's Broken in American Politics," [Vox](#) (December 8) [online].

 **FALL RECESS: Monday, October 9**

**Wednesday, October 11:** *Interest Groups*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 11.
- Lee Drutman (2015), "How Corporate Lobbyists Conquered American Democracy," [The Atlantic](#) (April 20) [online].

**Friday, October 13:** *PACs and the Role of Money in Politics*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 11 (continued).
- Floyd Abrams and Burt Neuborne (2011), "Debating 'Citizens United,'" [The Nation](#), (January 13) [online].

**Monday, October 16:** *The News Media*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 14.
- Nicholas Kristof, (2017), "We're Journalists, Mr. Trump, Not the Enemy," [The New York Times](#) (August 24) [online].

 **QUIZ #3: Monday, October 16**

**Wednesday, October 18:** *Exam Review*

- No reading assignment.

## MIDTERM EXAM: Friday, October 20

### IV. GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

#### **Monday, October 23:** *Congress as a Representative Body*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 5.
- John R. Hibbing and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse (1998), "Too Much of a Good Thing: More Representative is Not Necessarily Better," PS: Political Science & Politics, 31 (1): 28-31 [online].

#### **Wednesday, October 25:** *Congress as a Lawmaking Body*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 5 (continued).
- Todd S. Purdum (2010), "The Audacity of Nope," Vanity Fair (October) [online].

#### **Friday, October 27:** *Responsiveness without Responsibility?*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 5 (continued).
- Lee H. Hamilton (2004), "The Case for Congress," The Wilson Quarterly, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Spring): 12-17 [online].

#### **Monday, October 30:** *Presidential Powers*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 6.
- Garrett Epps (2009), "The Founder's Great Mistake," The Atlantic, January/February [online].
- Todd S. Purdum (2010), "Washington, We Have a Problem," Vanity Fair, September [online].

#### **Wednesday, November 1:** *Electing the President*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 6 (continued).
- Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins (2001), "Who Should Elect the President? The Case against the Electoral College," National Civic Review, Summer 2001: 173 [online].

#### **Friday, November 3:** *Campaigning vs. Governing*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 6 (continued).
- John Paul Rollert (2017), "Presidents Aren't CEOs," The Atlantic (January 20) [online].
- Matthew Yglesias (2017), "The Bullshitter-in-Chief," Vox (May 30) [online.]

**Monday, November 6:** *The Rise of the Bureaucratic State*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 7.
- Robert Lynch (1994), "Can Markets Govern?" [The American Prospect](#), December 1 [online].

**Wednesday, November 8:** *The Courts and Judicial Review*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 8.
- James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, [The Federalist Papers: No. 78](#) [online].
- Geoffrey R. Stone (2014), "Do We Need a Supreme Court?" [The Huffington Post](#) (May 22) [online].

**Friday, November 10:** *The Court as Politician*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 8 (continued).
- David S. Cohen (2016), "Grand Theft Judiciary: How Republicans Stole the Supreme Court," [Rolling Stone](#) (November 14) [online].

**Monday, November 13:** *The Least Dangerous Branch?*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 8 (continued).
- Laurence Tribe (2012), "Chief Justice John Roberts's Ruling Restores Faith in the Court's Neutrality," [The Daily Beast](#), June 28 [online].



**QUIZ #4: Monday, November 13**

**V. POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY**

**Wednesday, November 15:** *Social Welfare Policy, Part 1*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 16.

**Friday, November 17:** *Social Welfare Policy, Part 2*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 16 (continued).
- Alana Semuels (2016), "The End of Welfare as We Know It," [The Atlantic](#) (April 1) [online].



**THANKSGIVING RECESS: November 20-24**

**Monday, November 27:** *Social Security*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 16 (continued).
- Jim Tankersley (2012), "Who Destroyed the Economy? The Case against the Baby Boomers," [The Atlantic](#) (October 5) [online].

**Wednesday, November 29:** *Health Care, part 1*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 16 (continued).
- Margot Sanger Katz (2015). "No, Giving More People Health Insurance Doesn't Save Money." [The New York Times](#) (August 5) [online].

**Friday, December 1:** *Health Care, part 2*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 16 (continued).
- Sarah Kliff (2016), "Is Obamacare Failing?" [Vox](#) (August 24) [online].
- Dylan Matthews (2017), "A Political Scientist Explains the Real Reason Obamacare Repeal is so Hard," [Vox](#) (March 24) [online].

**Monday, December 4:** *Economic Policy and the Budget*

- Kollman (2017): Chapter 15.
- James K. Galbraith (2010), "In Defense of Deficits," [The Nation](#), March 4 [online].
- Fred Barbash (2011), "What They Don't Know about the Deficit," [CQ Weekly](#) (June 11) [online].

## **VI. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

**Wednesday, December 6:** *American Democracy Imperfectly Realized*

- Paul Krugman (2014). "When Government Succeeds." [The New York Times](#) (November 16) [online].



**QUIZ #5: Wednesday, December 6**

**Friday, December 8:** *Exam Review*

- No reading assignment.



**FINAL EXAM: Friday, December 15 from 10:30-11:20 AM  
in Lafayette Hall, room 302**