

THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

POLS 21B
The University of Vermont
Spring 2015
Tu Th 11:30 AM - 12:45 PM
Lafayette Hall, Room 207

CONTACT INFORMATION

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

Phone: 656-4062
E-mail: Deborah.Guber@uvm.edu
Internet: <http://www.uvm.edu/~dguber/>

Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:15-11:15 AM, again from 1:15-2:15 PM, and by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

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 health care reform to the ongoing war on terror.

CLASS REQUIREMENTS

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 essay examinations, the first given in class on Thursday, March 12, and the second on Tuesday, May 5 from 10:30-11:45 AM. Each of these exams are weighted as 35% of your final grade.

The content of these 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:

- Thursday, January 22
- Thursday, February 5
- Tuesday, March 10
- Tuesday, April 7
- Thursday, April 23

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 Spring 2015 term, the make-up exam is scheduled for Tuesday, April 28, between 1:00-2:15 p.m.

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

REQUIRED READING

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

- David B. Magleby, Paul C. Light, and Christine L. Nemacheck (2014). Government by the People, 2012 election edition, national version. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

ISBN# 0-205-86578-X

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/Spring_2015/

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

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 "free" absences to use as they see fit (without need for excuse), but these absences are intended for illnesses and family emergencies and should be saved for such. Once they are gone, they are gone. Note that 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.

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 "free" 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 a member of a university 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.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

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

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
Website: <http://www.uvm.edu/access>

CLASSROOM PROTOCOL

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 stay 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 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

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 Tuesday and Thursday from 10:15-11:15 AM and again from 1:15-2:15 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

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

Tuesday, January 13: *American Politics Appraised*

- No reading assignment.

II. THE FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Thursday, January 15: *"A More Perfect Union"*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Introduction and Chapter 1.
- [The Constitution of the United States](#) [online].
- James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, [The Federalist Papers: Nos. 10 & 51](#) [online].

Tuesday, January 20: *How (Not) to Read the Constitution*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 2.
- Howard Zinn (1987), "A People's Constitution: Some Truths are Not Self-Evident," [The Nation](#), 245: 87-88 [online].
- Jill Lepore (2011), "The Commandments: The Constitution and its Worshippers," [The New Yorker](#) (January 17) [online].
- Sanford Levinson (2006), "It Is Time to Repair the Constitution's Flaws," [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#), 53: B10 [online].

Thursday, January 22: *American Federalism*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 3.
- Emma Roller and David Weigel (2013), "Give Me Amendments or Give Me Death," [Slate](#) (December 10) [online].



QUIZ #1: Thursday, January 22

Tuesday, January 27: *Freedom of Speech and Dissent*

- [The Bill of Rights](#) [online].
- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 14.
- Robyn E. Blumner (2005), "Free Speech is Bad Words, Too," [St. Petersburg Times](#), January 23 [online].
- 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].

Thursday, January 29: *Religion and the Separation of Church and State*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 14 (continued).
- Edward F. Harrington (2005), "The Metaphorical Wall," [America](#), 192 (January 17): 10 [online].

Tuesday, February 3: *The Right to Privacy*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 14 (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].

Thursday, February 5: *Capital Punishment*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 14 (continued).
- John Paul Stevens (2010), "On the Death Sentence," [New York Times Review of Books](#) (December 23) [online].



QUIZ #2: Thursday, February 5

III. LINKAGE INSTITUTIONS

Tuesday, February 10: *Measuring Public Opinion*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 4.
- Sheldon R. Gawiser and G. Evans Witt, "20 Questions A Journalist Should Ask About Poll Results," National Council on Public Polls [online].

Thursday, February 12: *Voter Registration and Turnout*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 7.
- Jeff Jacoby (1996), "Making It Too Easy to Vote?" [The Boston Globe](#), July 18: A15 [online].

Tuesday, February 17: *Voting Behavior*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 8.
- Matthew Robinson (2002), "Party On, Dudes," The American Spectator, March/April [online].

Thursday, February 19: *Political Parties, Part 1*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 6.
- Alex Zakaras (2013), "Market Radicals: The GOP's Betrayal of Conservatism," The Daily Beast (March 14) [online].

Tuesday, February 24: *Political Parties, Part 2*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 6 (continued).
- Jon Favreau (2013), "The Tea Party, Not Democrats or Republicans, is the Problem," The Daily Beast (October 21) [online].

Thursday, February 26: *Interest Groups*


- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 5.
- Ann Reilly Dowd (1993), "How to Get Things Done in Washington," Fortune, 128 (3): 60-62 [online].

 **SPRING RECESS: March 2-6**

Tuesday, March 10: *The News Media*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 9.
- Paul Starr (2010), "Governing in the Age of Fox News," The Atlantic, January/February [online].

 **QUIZ #3: Thursday, March 10**

 **MIDTERM EXAM: Thursday, March 12**

IV. INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

Tuesday, March 17: *Congress as a Representative Body*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 10.
- 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].

Thursday, March 19: *Congress as a Lawmaking Body*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 10 (continued).
- Todd S. Purdum (2010), "The Audacity of Nope," Vanity Fair (October) [online].
- Lee H. Hamilton (2004), "The Case for Congress," The Wilson Quarterly, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Spring): 12-17

Tuesday, March 24: *Presidential Powers*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 11.
- 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)

Thursday, March 26: *Electing the President*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 11 (continued).
- Carolyn Jefferson-Jenkins (2001), "Who Should Elect the President? The Case Against the Electoral College," National Civic Review, Summer 2001: 173 [online].

Tuesday, March 31: *The Rise of the Bureaucratic State*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 12.
- Roberta Lynch (1994), "Can Markets Govern?" The American Prospect, December 1 [online].

Thursday, April 2: *The Courts and Judicial Review*

- James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, The Federalist Papers: No. 78 [online].
- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 13.

Tuesday, April 7: *The Least Dangerous Branch?*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 13 (continued).
- Howard Bashman (2002), "Poll-Tergeist: Why the Supreme Court Shouldn't Care What You Think," Slate [online].
- Laurence Tribe (2012), "Chief Justice John Roberts's Ruling Restores Faith in the Court's Neutrality," The Daily Beast, June 28 [online].



QUIZ #4: Tuesday, April 7

V. POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY

Thursday, April 9: *Social Welfare Policy, Part 1*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 17.

Tuesday, April 14: *Social Welfare Policy, Part 2*

- Christopher Jencks (2005), "Whatever Happened to Welfare?" [The New York Times Review of Books](#), December 15 [online].

Thursday, April 16: *Social Security*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 17 (continued).
- Jim Tankersley (2012), "Generational Warfare: The Case against Parasitic Baby Boomers," [National Journal](#) (October 10) [online].

Tuesday, April 21: *Health Care*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 17 (continued).
- Amy Goldstein and Juliet Eilperin (2013), "HealthCare.gov: How Political Fear was Pitted against Technical Needs," [The Washington Post](#) (November 2) [online].

Thursday, April 23: *Economic Policy and the Budget*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Chapter 16 (continued).
- 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].

 **QUIZ #5: Thursday, April 23**

VI. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Tuesday, April 28: *American Democracy Imperfectly Realized*

- Magleby, et al. (2014): Conclusion: Sustaining Constitutional Democracy.

 **FINAL EXAM: Tuesday, May 5 from 10:30-11:45 AM**