



THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

POLS 21C
The University of Vermont
Spring 2016
Tu Th 10:05–11:20 AM
Lafayette Hall, Room 302

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays from 1:00-2:30 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 Tuesday, March 22, and the second on Thursday, May 12 from 1:30-2:45 PM. Each of these exams are weighted as 35% of your final grade.
2. Five short, multiple-choice quizzes will be administered this term. The dates for these quizzes are:
 - Thursday, January 28
 - Thursday, February 11
 - Thursday, March 17
 - Tuesday, April 12
 - Thursday, April 28

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 typically no make-up 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 2016 term, the make-up exam is scheduled for Thursday, April 28, between 1:00-2:15 PM.

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 (2015). Government by the People, 2014 election edition, national version. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

ISBN# 0133914682

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_2016/

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.

ESSAY EXAMINATIONS

Your midterm and final exams will consist of two parts:

1. Three "short answer" questions worth 30% of your total score;
2. One "essay" question worth 70% of your total score;

You will be held responsible for *all* reading assignments, lecture materials, and class discussions that take place prior to each exam. To help focus your studying, however, I have posted a comprehensive list of questions on our class website under the "Assignments" tab. That list is subject to change until one week prior to each test, at which point it will be locked in. A random draw on exam day will determine which subset of questions you will answer. Any student who elects to answer a question different from the one that was drawn will receive a score of zero. Those taking makeup exams at a later point will use an identical format.

Exams will be judged by the extent to which you support your answers with specific evidence drawn from class lectures, discussions, and reading assignments.

The grades I assign to written work are based on the following criteria:

- **Excellent (A range):** Grades in the "A" range are reserved for work that is *superior* in quality. "A" essays are lively, interesting, and intellectually sophisticated. The writer develops a clear and creative thesis, and supports their argument with solid and persuasive evidence. The paper itself is polished and beautifully written, free of grammatical and typographical errors. Above all, "A" essays reflect originality. The writer's own voice and logic are present on the page.
- **Good (B range):** Grades in the "B" range reflect work that is *good* to *very good* in quality. The essay completes all of the requirements of the assignment at hand. It may have minor errors and flaws, but the foundation of the work is solid, clear, and reasonably well-organized. "B" essays address topics in a thoughtful way, but offer less insight and originality than "A" essays.

- **Fair (C range):** A “C” essay represents work that is *satisfactory* in quality. The writer offers a thesis, but it is usually too broad, or too vague. The essay tends to make assertions without offering specific examples or supporting evidence from class lectures, discussions, and reading assignments. The overall impression of the paper is that of a rough draft. More effort at revision is encouraged and spelling and grammatical errors often require correction.
- **Poor (D range):** “D” work is *unsatisfactory*. It is sloppy, incoherent and poorly written, marred by mechanical faults (e.g., errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling), and/or factual errors. The writer has difficulty developing an idea, and holding a paragraph together. The thesis of the paper—that is, what the paper is arguing—is usually absent or incomplete.
- **Failing (F):** A *failing* grade is given for work that is exceedingly poor, cannot be understood, or has little relevance to the course.
- **No Credit (O):** A grade of “zero” is given for any work that is not completed in full.

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 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.

If either (or both) of your excused absences remain unused at the end of term, I will apply those to your attendance score, but please note that you may NOT use them for frivolous events first (e.g., oversleeping, skiing, a shopping trip to Montreal, etc.) and then request more later when serious circumstances develop.

You need 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 will 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 the circumstances are exceptional, or you travel out of town as a member of a UVM-sanctioned club or sports team. If you are a member of a sports 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

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

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. Attendance will be taken and will count toward your final grade.
- 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>).
- 5) Behavior that departs from these guidelines as well as any additional guidelines specific to the individual course is not acceptable and may be cause for disciplinary action.

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 1:00-2:30 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 19: *American Politics Appraised*

- No reading assignment.

II. THE FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Thursday, January 21: *"A More Perfect Union"*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): 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 26: *How (Not) to Read the Constitution*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): 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 Worshipers," [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 28: *American Federalism*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Chapter 3.
- Emma Roller and David Weigel (2013), "Give Me Amendments or Give Me Death," [Slate](#) (December 10) [online].



QUIZ #1: Thursday, January 28

Tuesday, February 2: *Freedom of Speech and Dissent*

- [The Bill of Rights](#) [online].

- Magleby, et al. (2015): 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, February 4: *Religion and the Separation of Church and State*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Chapter 14 (continued).
- Edward F. Harrington (2005), "The Metaphorical Wall," America, 192 (January 17): 10 [online].

Tuesday, February 9: *The Right to Privacy*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Chapter 14 (continued).
- Mark R. Levin (2005), "Death by Privacy," National Review, March 14 [online].

Thursday, February 11: *Capital Punishment*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Chapter 14 (continued).
- John Paul Stevens (2010), "On the Death Sentence," New York Times Review of Books (December 23) [online].



QUIZ #2: Thursday, February 11

III. LINKAGE INSTITUTIONS

Tuesday, February 16: *Measuring Public Opinion*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): 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 18: *Voter Registration and Turnout*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Chapter 7.
- Jeff Jacoby (1996), "Making It Too Easy to Vote?" The Boston Globe, July 18: A15 [online].

Tuesday, February 23: *Voting Behavior*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Chapter 8.
- Matthew Robinson (2002), "Party On, Dudes," The American Spectator, March/April [online].

Thursday, February 25: *Political Parties, Part 1*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Chapter 6.
- Alex Zakaras (2013), "Market Radicals: The GOP's Betrayal of Conservatism," The Daily Beast (March 14) [online].



TOWN MEETING DAY RECESS: Tuesday, March 1

Thursday, March 3: *Political Parties, Part 2*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Chapter 6 (continued).
- Jon Favreau (2013), "The Tea Party, Not Democrats or Republicans, is the Problem," The Daily Beast (October 21) [online].



SPRING RECESS: March 7-11

Tuesday, March 15: *Interest Groups*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Chapter 5.
- Ann Reilly Dowd (1993), "How to Get Things Done in Washington," Fortune, 128 (3): 60-62 [online].

Thursday, March 17: *The News Media*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Chapter 9.
- Paul Starr (2010), "Governing in the Age of Fox News," The Atlantic, January/February [online].



QUIZ #3: Thursday, March 17



MIDTERM EXAM: Tuesday, March 22

IV. INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

Thursday, March 24: *Congress as a Representative Body*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): 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].

Tuesday, March 29: *Congress as a Lawmaking Body*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): 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 [online].

Thursday, March 31: *Presidential Powers*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): 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) [online].

Tuesday, April 5: *Electing the President*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): 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].

Thursday, April 7: *The Rise of the Bureaucratic State*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Chapter 12.
- Roberta Lynch (1994), "Can Markets Govern?" The American Prospect, December 1 [online].

Tuesday, April 12: *The Courts and Judicial Review*

- James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, The Federalist Papers: No. 78 [online].
- Magleby, et al. (2015): Chapter 13.
- 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 12

V. POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY

Thursday, April 14: *Social Welfare Policy, Part 1*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Chapter 17.

Tuesday, April 19: *Social Welfare Policy, Part 2*

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

Thursday, April 21: *Social Security*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Chapter 17 (continued).
- Jim Tankersley (2012), "Who Destroyed the Economy? The Case against the Baby Boomers," [The Atlantic](#) (October 5) [online].

Tuesday, April 26: *Health Care*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): 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 28: *Economic Policy and the Budget*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): 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 28**

VI. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Tuesday, May 3: *American Democracy Imperfectly Realized*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Conclusion: Sustaining Constitutional Democracy.

 **FINAL EXAM: Thursday, May 12 from 1:30-2:45 PM**