

THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

POLS 21C
The University of Vermont
Spring 2017
Tu Th 2:50–4:05 PM
Lafayette Hall, Room 208

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 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 the incoming Trump administration to health care reform and 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 examinations, the first given in class on Thursday, March 23, and the second on Tuesday, May 9 from 1:30-2:45 PM in our usual classroom, Lafayette Hall, room 207. 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 26
- Thursday, February 9
- Thursday, March 9
- Tuesday, April 11
- Thursday, April 27

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 2017 term, the make-up exam is scheduled for Thursday, May 4, between 1:00-2:30 PM.

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 or place of an exam is NOT an adequate excuse for missing it!

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 (2016). *Government by the People*, 2014 elections and updates, national version, 25th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

ISBN# 0-13-391468-2

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_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

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, short excursions out of town, and/or 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 these 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.
- Students who are late to class may only add their name at my discretion.
- 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 described above, I do not grant additional excused absences unless you travel out of town as a member of an officially sanctioned UVM club or sports team, or unless serious medical or personal circumstances develop. 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

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, and will not be marked as absent from class.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

In keeping with University policy, any student with a documented disability interested in utilizing accommodations should contact office of Student Accessibility Services on campus. SAS 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 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/kqpdmbh>).
5. Students may not videotape or otherwise record class sessions without prior approval.

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 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 know that I only respond during normal business hours (e.g., not during 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 17: *American Politics Appraised*

- Thomas E. Mann (2014). "Admit It, Political Scientists: Politics Really is More Broken Than Ever." [The Atlantic](#) (May 26) [online].

II. THE FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

Thursday, January 19: *"A More Perfect Union"*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): 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 24: *How (Not) to Read the Constitution*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 2.
- Michael Tomasky (2014). "Who Are the Judicial Activists Now?" [The Daily Beast](#) (October 7).
- Howard Zinn (1987), "A People's Constitution: Some Truths are Not Self-Evident," [The Nation](#), 245: 87-88 [online].
- Sanford Levinson (2006), "It Is Time to Repair the Constitution's Flaws," [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#), 53: B10 [online].

Thursday, January 26: *American Federalism*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 3.
- Emma Roller and David Weigel (2013), "Give Me Amendments or Give Me Death," [Slate](#) (December 10) [online].



QUIZ #1: Thursday, January 26

Tuesday, January 31: *Freedom of Speech and Dissent*

- [The Bill of Rights](#) [online].
- Magleby, et al. (2016): 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 2: *Religion and the Separation of Church and State*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 14 (continued).
- Edward F. Harrington (2005), "The Metaphorical Wall," America, 192 (January 17): 10 [online].

Tuesday, February 7: *The Right to Privacy*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): 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 9: *Capital Punishment*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 14 (continued).
- John Paul Stevens (2010), "On the Death Sentence," New York Times Review of Books (December 23) [online].



QUIZ #2: Thursday, February 9

III. LINKAGE INSTITUTIONS

Tuesday, February 14: *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 16: *Voter Registration and Turnout*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 7.
- Jeff Jacoby (1996), "Making It Too Easy to Vote?" The Boston Globe, July 18: A15 [online].

Tuesday, February 21: *Voting Behavior*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 8.
- Matthew Robinson (2002), "Party On, Dudes," The American Spectator, March/April [online].

Thursday, February 23: *Political Parties, Part 1*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 6.
- Michael Lind (2016), "This is What the Future of American Politics Looks Like," [Politico](#) (May 22) [online].

Tuesday, February 28: *Political Parties, Part 2*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 6 (continued).
- Ezra Klein (2014), "A Third Party Won't Fix What's Broken in American Politics," [Vox](#) (December 8) [online].

Thursday, March 2: *Interest Groups*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 5.
- Lee Drutman (2015), "How Corporate Lobbyists Conquered American Democracy," [The Atlantic](#) (April 20) [online].



TOWN MEETING DAY RECESS: Tuesday, March 7

Thursday, March 9: *The News Media*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 9.
- Paul Starr (2010), "Governing in the Age of Fox News," [The Atlantic](#), January/February [online].



QUIZ #3: Thursday, March 9




SPRING RECESS: March 13-17

IV. INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

Tuesday, March 21: *Congress as a Representative Body*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): 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].

 **MIDTERM EXAM: Thursday, March 23**

Tuesday, March 28: *Congress as a Lawmaking Body*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): 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 30: *Presidential Powers*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): 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 4: *Electing the President*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): 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 6: *The Rise of the Bureaucratic State*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 12.
- Roberta Lynch (1994), "Can Markets Govern?" The American Prospect, December 1 [online].

Tuesday, April 11: *The Courts and Judicial Review*

- James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, The Federalist Papers: No. 78 [online].
- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 13.
- Geoffrey R. Stone (2014). "Do We Need a Supreme Court?" The Huffington Post (May 22) [online].
- Howard Bashman (2002), "Poll-Tergeist: Why the Supreme Court Shouldn't Care What You Think," Slate [online].

 **QUIZ #4: Tuesday, April 11**

V. POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY

Thursday, April 13: *Social Welfare Policy, Part 1*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 17.

Tuesday, April 18: *Social Welfare Policy, Part 2*

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

Thursday, April 20: *Social Security*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 17 (continued).
- Jim Tankersley (2012), "Who Destroyed the Economy? The Case against the Baby Boomers," [The Atlantic](#) (October 5) [online].

Tuesday, April 25: *Health Care*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): Chapter 17 (continued).
- Margot Sanger Katz (2015), "No, Giving More People Health Insurance Doesn't Save Money," [The New York Times](#) (August 5) [online].
- Sarah Kliff (2016), "Is Obamacare Failing?" [Vox](#) (August 24) [online].

Thursday, April 27: *Economic Policy and the Budget*

- Magleby, et al. (2016): 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 27

VI. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Tuesday, May 2: *American Democracy Imperfectly Realized*

- Magleby, et al. (2015): Conclusion: Sustaining Constitutional Democracy.
- Paul Krugman (2014). "When Government Succeeds." [The New York Times](#) (November 16) [online].

Thursday, May 4: *Review session*

- No reading assignment.



FINAL EXAM: Tuesday, May 9 from 1:30-2:45 PM