**Introduction to American Politics**

**Spring 2016**

**Political Science 215**

**118 Business School, Rutgers University, Camden**

**Tuesday/Thursday 9:30-10:50**

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday   
11am-12pm and By Appointment

**OVERVIEW**

This class introduces and explores the complexity of US government in both a modern and historic context, critically examining the idea of democracy and the ways it has developed and transformed over time. The course focuses heavily on the distribution of power and how this distribution promotes or inhibits the goals of democracy. We will look at the ways that institutions and policy structure and reinforce the rights, privileges, and opportunities that individuals have access to, examining institutions (the executive, congress, courts, bureaucracy), non-state actors (media, parties, interest groups, social movements, the public), and political behavior (campaigning, voting, public opinion). We will pay particular attention to how different ideas about the role of government influence the social and economic environment we live in. The course is appropriate for students of all majors and does not assume any prior knowledge of the US political system. This is a discussion-heavy class and requires students to critically evaluate and discuss the readings, taking an active role in their own learning process.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

By the end of the course students should be able to:

1. Explain and critically analyze the idea of democracy in the US context
2. Identify US government institutions and articulate their relationship with each other, as well as with policy, and political behavior
3. Understand and be able to articulate the difference between government and governance
4. Understand and be able to discuss the role of power in US politics
5. Critically assess the ways that politics and policy create and reinforce social systems and stratification
6. Critically analyze political arguments, including the strength of supporting evidence, dimensions of bias, and reliability of source information
7. Practice and improve written and verbal communication skills

**DISABILITIES**

Students with disabilities are welcome in this class.  If you have a disability or suspect you might have a disability but do not yet have documentation, please contact the Coordinator of Disability Services immediately: [(856) 225-6442](tel:%28856%29%20225-6442), Armitage Hall, Room 231 (in the Rutgers-Camden Learning Center).  No accommodations may be made without the explicit approval of the Office of Disability Service.  If you already have documentation of a disability, please present it to me within the first week of class so I may work with you to ensure you can properly access and complete the work for this course.

**INCLUSIVITY AND NAMES**

This is an inclusive classroom that is welcoming of all people and perspectives, including those of diverse races, religions, ethnicities, ages, gender identities and sexual orientations. If you go by a name or gender that is different from the one on official Rutgers documents, please let me know so that I can use the proper name and pronouns.

**EXPECTATIONS AND ATTENDANCE**

In this class we will create a learning community where we will discuss ideas, apply new concepts and begin to understand the relationship between economic development and urban politics. To do this, attendance and preparation are necessary. As your teacher, I expect you to complete the reading and show up to class, ready to actively engage in your own learning process. In return, you can expect me to be prepared, present the material enthusiastically, respond to your questions and concerns in a timely fashion, and lead you in a learning experience that will help you understand both urban politics and your own interests as learners.

**Class Attendance is Mandatory.** You may miss no more than three classes without providing documentation of an extenuating circumstance. After the first three absences, you will lose 10% of your participation grade for each unexcused absence. Legitimate reasons for additional absences include severe illness, death, family emergencies, and other issues evaluated at my discretion.

**Tardiness:** Even though this is a morning class, you are expected to be in class on time. Being late is disruptive, impedes others’ ability to learn and limits your access to valuable information and class time. I will take attendance at the beginning of class. If you are late you will be marked tardy. Every three tardies will convert to an absence and will be subject to the attendance policy. For example, if you are late 6 times it will count as 2 absences (6/3=2).

To reiterate:

1-3 absences: no penalty

4+ absences: -10% of participation grade for each absence after the initial 3

Tardies: Every 3 tardies = 1 absence and will count against your 3 allowable absences

**LATE POLICY**

Except for in emergency/extenuating circumstances, late work will only be accepted up to three days after the established due-date. You will lose 10% of your grade for each day that it is late. For example, if the assignment is due on Tuesday, you would lose 10% if you submitted it on Wednesday, 20% if you submitted it on Thursday, and 30% if you submitted it on Friday. It would not be accepted after Friday. All work must be submitted in the manner identified in the syllabus (either paper or in Sakai’s Dropbox). I WILL NOT ACCEPT ASSIGNMENTS BY EMAIL.

**ASSIGNMENTS**

There are 1000 possible points.

1. Short Papers 300 points (30%)
2. Midterm Question Submission 25 points (2.5%)
3. Midterm Exam 150 points (15%)
4. Final Exam Question Submission 25 points total (2.5%)
5. Final Exam 250 points (25%)
6. Attendance and Participation 250 points (25%)

**GRADE SCALE**A= 90-100  
B+= 87.5-89.9   
B= 80-87.4   
C+= 77.5-79.9  
C= 70-77.4  
D= 60-69.5  
F= 0-59.5

**PARTICIPATION**

This is a discussion-based seminar. Because of this, I expect you to participate in class on a regular basis. This includes asking and answering questions, discussing core concepts with fellow students, and offering your own insights and understandings of class readings. I understand that many people are uncomfortable speaking in class and we will work as a class to develop a safe environment. That said, I expect students to step out of their comfort zones and be active members of the classroom community.

In order to earn a high grade for participation, students should:

● Attend class

● Arrive on time and stay for the entire class

● Read all assigned readings and come to class with questions and thoughts on the readings

● Consistently take an active part in class discussions

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

*The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity, 5th Edition.* Ann G. Serow and Everett C. Ladd, eds. Baltimore: Lanahan Publishers, Inc. (*American Polity*)  
  
**ACADEMIC HONESTY**

PLAGARISM AND CHEATING OF ANY KIND WILL NOT BE TOLERATED. Blatant plagiarism and cheating will be reported to the Dean of Students. I don’t want to do this, so don’t cheat. I have software that checks for plagiarism and I will use it if I feel this is becoming a problem.

It is your responsibility to be familiar with Rutgers’ academic honesty statement. This statement is available at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>.

**COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PROFESSOR AND STUDENTS**

Email is an essential communication tool between our class meetings. It is up to you to ensure that you are receiving the email updates I regularly send in a class. This includes letting me know the email address you prefer if it is not your Rutgers one! I may need to change the readings around a bit sometimes or make an important announcement to all students between classes. You need you to be regularly checking your email and reading the emails from me in full. Failure to do so could affect your grade and your preparation for our class meetings (and also you’ll miss all of my excellent email jokes and puns).

You are also welcome to talk with me in person, before or after class or during my office hours (listed at top, along with office location information). If my office hours are inconvenient for you, I will happily meet you at a mutually-agreeable time and place – you may email me or talk with me before/after class to set up an time, or (if you are suitably bold) there is a breakthrough technological marvel that will allow us to speak when I am in my office and you are somewhere else (856-225-2974).

**Email Response Policy***:* I promise to respond to all emails within 24 hours during the week, or by Monday if you write after Friday at noon. If I can reply more quickly, I will – but do not expect an immediate response. If you wait until the last day to email me about a project, I may not respond to your email in time for the project deadline. Please plan ahead.

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS**

# Week 1: Introduction

## Tuesday January 19: Introduction

READING: No Reading

## Thursday January 21: Foundations of US Government

## \*\*\*NO CLASS, COMPLETE ASSIGNMENT ON YOUR OWN\*\*\* READING: US Declaration of Independence (Sakai) US Constitution (Sakai) US Bill of Rights (Sakai)

## ASSIGNMENT: In lieu of class watch the following videos and write 1-2 paragraphs identifying the three things you thought were the most interesting and why. You will submit these paragraphs on Tuesday 1/26 for participation points.

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## Crash Course US History: The Constitution, the Articles and Federalism <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bO7FQsCcbD8> (On Sakai)

## Ted Ed, US Constitution

## <http://ed.ted.com/lessons/who-made-the-american-constitution-judy-walton> (On Sakai)

## Constitutional Ideology

## <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rZ0dAaW19M> (On Sakai)

# Week 2: Power and Equality in the US

## Tuesday January 26: Democracy and Equality READINGS: American Polity: 1. Chapter 1 Democracy in America 2. Chapter 3 Dinner with Democracy 3. Chapter 7 Habits of the Heart

## Thursday January 28: Pluralism vs. Elitism

READING:*American Polity*: 1. Chapter 12 The Power Elite **2**. Chapter 13 Diversity in the Power Elite **3.**  14. Who Governs? And A Preface to Democratic Theory

# Week 3: Basis of US Political Institutions: Federalism and Separation of Powers

## Tuesday February 2: Separation of Powers READING: American Polity: 1. Chapter 15 The Federalist 51 2. Chapter 16 The Constitution and America's Destiny 3. Chapter 17 The Washington Community: 1800-1828

## Thursday February 4: Federalism

READING: *American Polity*: **1.** Chapter 18 Federalist 39 and 46 **2.** Chapter 19 American Federalism **3.** Chapter 20 Democratic Laboratories

# Week 4: Congress

## Tuesday February 9: Congress in Practice READING: No New Reading, Watch Documentary Immigration Battle ASSIGNMENT: Submit Paper 1 in class. Paper 1: Argue for or Against the following Statement: In the US people have equal access to political power and opportunity.

## Thursday February 11: Congress in Practice

READING: No New Reading***,*** Watch Documentary *Immigration Battle*

**Week 5: Congress and Parties**

## Tuesday February 16: Is Congress Doing its Job? READING: American Polity: 1. Chapter 22 Congress: The Electoral Connection 2. Chapter 24 Stalemate 3, 28 Pork A Time Honored Tradition Lives On 4. Chapter 29 In Praise of Pork

## Thursday February 18: Parties READING: American Polity: 1. Chapter 75 The Second Civil War 2. Chapter 76: Boiling Mad

**Week 6: Interest Groups and The Presidency**

## Tuesday February 23: Party Polarization

## Thursday February 25: Interest Groups READING: American Polity: 1. Chapter 10 Federalist 10 2. Chapter 62 the Semisovereign People 3. Chapter 63 More than Money

## Week 7: Presidency and the Bureaucracy

## Tuesday March 1: Presidential Imperialism READING: American Polity 1. Chapter 32 Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents 2. Chapter 36 The Rise of the Plebiscitary Presidency 3. 35 The Paradoxes of the American Presidency ASSIGNMENT: SUBMIT MIDTERM QUESTIONS to Dropbox

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## Thursday March 3: Bureaucracy READING: American Polity: 1. Chapter 33 The Imperial Presidency 2. Chapter 34 The Imperial Presidency Triumphant 3. New York Times "The Making of the Imperial President" available on Sakai and at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/23/opinion/sunday/ross-douthat-the-making-of-an-imperial-president.html?_r=0>

**Week 8**: **Midterm**

## Tuesday March 8: Midterm Review

## READING: NO NEW READING ASSIGNMENT: Be prepared to actively engage in review

## Thursday March 10: Midterm Exam

FORMAT: Multiple Choice, Short Answer, Essay

**Week 9: Spring Break**

## Tuesday March 15: NO CLASS, ENJOY SPRING BREAK!

## Thursday March 17: NO CLASS, ENJOY SPRING BREAK!

# Week 10: Bureaucracy and the Judiciary

## Tuesday March 22: The Bureaucracy

## READING: American Polity: 1. Chapter 42 Bureaucracy 2. 40 A Government Ill Executed

## Thursday March 24: Independent Courts, a Radical Idea? READING: American Polity: 1. Chapter 43 The Federalist 78 2. Chapter 44: The Democratic Character of Judicial Review 3. Chapter 46: Pursuit of Justice

**Week 11: Judiciary and Civil Rights and Liberties**

## Tuesday March 29: What Drives Courts Decisions and Legitimacy?

READING: Amcerican Polity: **1.** Chapter 45: Storm Center **2.** Chapter 47 The Dynamic Constitution

## Thursday March 31: What happens when one person’s rights violate another’s?

## READING: American Polity 1. Chapter 53: The Lesbian and Gay Movement 2. Chapter 55: Rights Talk 3. The Atlantic “Gay Rights May Come at the Cost of Religious Freedom: Anti Discrimination Statutes are Coming into Conflict with Laws Designed to Preserve Freedom of Conscience, Especially in the Private Sector” ` and at <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/07/legal-rights-lgbt-discrimination-religious-freedom-claims/399278/>

## ASSIGNMENT: Submit Paper 2 in class. Paper 2: Make a clear argument about which of the following is the strongest branch of government: the president, congress, the judiciary or the bureaucracy?

**Week 12: Political Representation and Participation**

## Tuesday April 5: Representation, Delegation and Everything in Between READING: 1. American Polity: Chapter 26 The Difference Women Make 2. Manesbridge “Should blacks represent blacks and women represent women, the conditional answer: yes. Read 2-4 and 17-22 skim 5-16 (Available on Sakai)

## Thursday April 7: Who Votes? Why is Voting all we Talk about?

READING: **1.** "Your vote doesn't count: Why Almost Everyone Should Stay Home on Election Day" on Reason.com Available on Sakai and at <http://reason.com/archives/2012/10/03/your-vote-doesnt-count> **2.** "Is it Irrational to vote?” In *The Economist* <http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2012/10/presidential-election-0>   
**3.** American Polity: Chapter 69 Why We Vote  
ASSIGNMENT

# Week 13: Public Opinion

## Tuesday April 12: What is Public Opinion and Where does it Come From? READING: 1. "What is Public Opinion Polling and What Does it Tell us?" Gallup Available on Sakai and at <http://media.gallup.com/muslimwestfacts/PDF/PollingAndHowToUseItR1drevENG.pdf> 2. "Polling and Public Opinion: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly" Brookings Institute Available on Sakai and at <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2003/06/summer-elections-mann> 3. "Assessing Public Opinin Polls" Constitutional Rights Foundation Available on Sakai and at <http://www.crf-usa.org/election-central/public-opinion-polls.html>

## Thursday April 14: Does Public Opinion Influence Policy and Government?

READING: American Polity: **1.** Chapter 57 Public Opinion and American Democracy   
 **2.** Chapter 59 Politicians Don't Pander **3.** Chapter 60 The Opinion Maker

**Week 14: Media and Minority Politics**

## Tuesday April 19: Media and Politics READING: American Polity 1. Chapter 80: How the mass Media Divide Us 2. Chapter 82 The White House Staff: The Advance Office 3. How Social Media is Ruining Politics Politico Available on Sakai and at <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/09/2016-election-social-media-ruining-politics-213104>

## Thursday April 21: Minority Politics READING: No New Reading ASSIGNMENT: Submit Paper 3 in class. Paper 3: Argue for or against the following statement: Government reflects what the people want.

**Week 15: Minority Politics and Wrap Up**

## Tuesday April 26: Identity Politics and Social Movements READING: 1. One Slogan, Many Methods: Black Lives Matter Enters Politics Available on Sakai and at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/19/us/one-slogan-many-methods-black-lives-matter-enters-politics.html?_r=0>

## 2. Latino Identities in the American Political World on the International Society of Political Psychology Available on Sakai and at <http://www.ispp.org/ecc/blog/latino-identities-in-the-american-political-world-by-angel-saavedra-cisnero> ASSIGNMENT: Submit questions for final

## Thursday April 28: Wrap up and Finals Review READING: No new reading ASSIGNMENT: Come to class prepared to participate in the review

**Week 16: Finals Week  
*Tuesday May 3: NO CLASS, READING DAY  
Thursday May 5: Final Exam, 8-11 am***

**EXPLANATION OF ASSIGNMENTS**

1. **Three Short Papers (Due in class 2/9, 3/29, 4/21)**
2. **Points/paper**You will write three evidence-based essays in response to the prompts provided below. These essays must have a clear argument and use evidence from class readings to make that argument. You must include at least one relevant quotation and must properly cite all included readings. You are strongly encouraged to use the resources provided to you on Sakai that explore what is required to produce a strong argumentative essay. Papers should be 1-1.5 pages, single spaced (not including citations). You must use 12 point Times New Roman font and 1” margins. You must pass all essays with a C or better in order to pass the class. If you do not get a C or better the first time you submit the paper, you will have an opportunity to rework the paper and resubmit it for a better grade. To reiterate:

**\*YOU MUST RECEIVE a C OR BETTER ON ALL PAPERS TO PASS THE CLASS\***

## Paper 1: Argue for or against the following statement: In the US people have equal access to political power and opportunity.

## Paper 2: Make a clear argument about which of the following is the strongest branch of government: The president, congress, the judiciary or the bureaucracy?

## Paper 3: Argue for or against the following statement: Government reflects what the people want.

**2. Midterm and Final Exam Question Development (Due in class 3/1 and 4/26)  
 25 points/question set**You will write and submit five questions and answers for both the midterm and final exams. These questions should reflect the topics and concepts you think are most important. You will submit 3 multiple choice questions, 1 short answer question and 1 essay question with their concomitant answers. For multiple choice questions, provide four answer options and indicate the correct answer. For short answer questions, provide the short, written answer you believe to be correct. A short answer is usually one to two sentences long. For the essay question, your answer does not need to be an essay. Instead it should be 3-5 bullet points indicating the points a correct essay should include. I will use the questions to build the exam; the better the question the more likely you are to see it on the exam (and have the advantage of knowing the answer). We will use these questions to review for the exams.

**Midterm Exam (3/10 in class)  
150 Points**The midterm exam will include multiple choice, short answer and essay questions. You will be tested on both lecture materials and readings, even if we did not discuss the reading in class. In order to be successful, you MUST keep up with the reading.

**Final Exam (May 5, 8-11 am)  
250 Points**The final exam will be CUMULATIVE and will include multiple choice, short answer and essay questions. You will be tested on both lecture materials and readings, even if we did not discuss the reading in class. In order to be successful, you MUST keep up with the reading.