Pol 102: Introduction to American Government – Syllabus

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Office Hours: By appointment
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Fall 2017
Tuesday/Thursday 4:00-5:30 PM
Frey Hall 105

Course Overview

This is a core course (Social and Behavioral Sciences, Category F) that will take the class through a comprehensive review of the structure of American government from the nation’s founding to the present day. The essential topics to be covered include: the evolving constitutional design that undergirds American government’s day-to-day functioning; the evolving nature of federalism and the separation of powers among branches of American government; the protection of American civil liberties and civil rights; the evolving nature of American politics and political parties; the role of public opinion and the media; and the domestic and foreign policy outcomes generated by the American governmental system.

The materials we will read and discuss include: 1) a textbook that presents a comprehensive descriptive and analytical presentation of all the topics that we will cover; 2) news articles and opinion pieces in The New York Times and policy magazines that report on the current functioning of American government and present arguments for and against specific policies – and the politicians that favor them.

By the end of this course, students will:
- Have a thorough understanding of American government today, and how it got that way
- Understand how changing underlying demographic, cultural, technological and economic trends have resulted in adjustments to the design and functioning of American governmental institutions
- Understand the evolving way in which the American governmental design and progressive legislation have protected American civil liberties and civil rights.
- Understand the American partisan political system, how it has changed over the years, and the consequences arising from the intersection of the American constitutional design with increased partisan polarization
- Understand the arguments for and against specific policies – from both sides of the polarized spectrum
- Be able to evaluate the likely consequences of specific policy and electoral choices
- Be able to read/hear and objectively understand news accounts of policy disputes and politicians’ appeals, understand their American governmental context, and determine their validity.

The course’s class time will consist of lectures on each curricular topic and vigorous in-class discussions.

Course Requirements

1) Reading assigned materials: Students will follow the syllabus in reading recommended sections of the course text; students will read the news and opinion sections of the recommended newspapers daily

2) Mid-term examination: October 19

3) Final examination: December 12
**Required Readings**

Required text (available through the bookstore):


Students must also read *The New York Times, Wall Street Journal* or *Washington Post* (online or print) **every day**, especially all editorials and op-ed articles – and be prepared to discuss in class how issues that are being covered relate to the course topics.

**Course Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topics and Readings (Lowi et. al. text unless otherwise indicated):</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 29, 31</td>
<td>Historical and philosophical antecedents to American government; The American Constitution and how it came to be; Chapters 1, 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 7, 12</td>
<td>American federalism: the original design, the new delegated federalism; Chapter 3</td>
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<td>Sept. 14</td>
<td>The U.S. Congress and its evolution; Chapter 5</td>
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<td>Sept. 26, 28</td>
<td>The U.S. Presidency and its evolution; American bureaucracy and the administrative state; Chapters 6, 7</td>
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<td>Oct. 3, 5</td>
<td>U.S. civil liberties; from the Bill of Rights to the present; U.S. civil rights from slavery to the present; Chapter 4</td>
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<td>Oct. 10, 12</td>
<td>The U.S. Judiciary and its role in enforcing civil liberties and rights; Chapter 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 17</td>
<td>American political parties and their evolution; Chapter 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 19</td>
<td>Midterm examination</td>
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<td>Oct. 24, 26</td>
<td>American elections: who votes and why; Electing the president: the rise of populism; Chapter 10</td>
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<td>Oct. 31, Nov. 2</td>
<td>American interest groups; American social movements; Role of the media; Mobilization of public opinion; Chapter 12</td>
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<td>Nov. 7, 9</td>
<td>Public policy in a democratic market economy; Chapter 13</td>
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<td>Nov. 14, 16</td>
<td>The American policy dialectic; The roots of ideological polarization; Readings to be assigned</td>
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Nov. 21:  Policy gridlock: just what the framers wanted; How to evaluate the worth of public policies  
Readings to be assigned

Nov. 28, 30:  Issues of domestic policy: economic prosperity and redistribution; mitigating externalities through regulation and taxation  
Readings to be assigned

Dec. 5:  Issues of defense and foreign policy: Pax Americana or Fortress America  
Chapter 14

Dec. 7:  American democracy: then and now  
Readings to be assigned

Dec. 12:  Final Examination.

Class Expectations

All students are expected to attend every class; attendance will be taken. In the event that you cannot attend class because of illness or other reasonable concern, please inform Professor Salins through Blackboard.

There can be no cell phone use during class; that includes texting.

Laptop computers are permitted, but only to take notes, access Blackboard or, if asked by the professor, to check specific facts.

American with Disabilities Act

If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, 128 ECC Building (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information go to the following web site: http://www.ehs.sunysb.edu and search Fire safety and Evacuation and Disabilities.

Computer use

Students are expected to check their e-mail account and Blackboard for information and correspondence with the instructors. BLACKBOARD SYSTEM:

The University has some computer software – BLACKBOARD – that will be used to maintain a website for our course. Blackboard will allow students to access course videos and readings. The Blackboard system is available from any computer with access to the Internet. The Blackboard address is http://blackboard.stonybrook.edu

Logging into Blackboard requires a NET ID and a Password:

You can check (or change) your Net ID by logging into the SOLAR system and entering the “Security and Personal Data” Folder. Initially the password is the SOLAR ID number: this should be changed for security purposes.
For additional assistance in using Blackboard, see the student consultants in the Main Library SINC site (S1460 Library).

Critical Incident Management

Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn. Faculty in the HSC Schools and the School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures.

Academic Integrity

Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Faculty are required to report any suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. Faculty in the Health Sciences Center (School of Health Technology & Management, Nursing, Social Welfare, Dental Medicine) and School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/