

**PS 0200: American Politics**  
University of Pittsburgh  
Summer II 2016  
Tuesday/Thursday, 8:30am – 11:45am  
5401 Wesley W. Posvar Hall

**Course Syllabus**

**Instructor Information:**

Instructor: Shane Redman  
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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 12:00 – 1:30, and by appointment

**Course Description:**

This survey course will provide students with an opportunity to explore the institutional and behavioral underpinnings of the American political system. The course will be broken into three segments: (1) Principles of American Politics, (2) Political Institutions, and (3) Elite and Mass Political Behavior. While the course will focus on the American political system, there will also be a comparative component within each segment to provide an opportunity for students to compare and contrast the strengths and weaknesses of the American system to those of other countries. The goal of the course is to provide students with a basic understanding of American political processes and an opportunity to critically think about how these processes affect the policy outcomes that touch their everyday lives.

**Course Objectives:**

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

- Demonstrate their understanding of the goals underlying the design and organization of the U.S. political system, and compare/contrast how alternative forms of government produce different outcomes.
- Explain what the functions of various political institutions are, why the institutions were designed the way that they are, and how the institutions interact with each other.
- Identify behaviors of political elites and the mass public, and explain the motivations behind, and possible consequences of, these behaviors.
- Apply their knowledge and understanding of U.S. institutions and political behavior to contemporary political issues.
- Critically evaluate scholarly work in political science and recommend areas for further exploration.

**Course Organization:**

Principles of American Politics

*What events led to the writing of the Constitution? How and why is power divided between different levels and different branches of government?* The first segment of the course will

examine the historical underpinnings and the subsequent development of the American political system. We will explore the cultural and constitutional foundations of the American system, the development of the role of interest groups and political parties in the political process, and the division of powers between the different levels and different branches of government.

### Political Institutions

*How are the actors in each institution chosen and what impact does this have on accountability? How does each institution affect policy? How is each institution constrained in the policy-making process?* The second segment will examine four political institutions: the presidency, the bureaucracy, the Congress, and the judiciary. Within each of these topics, we will discuss how these institutions differ between the national and subnational levels, and how they interact with each other. We will also examine how each of these institutions influence the policy-making and policy-implementation processes. This segment will also include a session on interbranch relations.

### Elite and Mass Political Behavior

*Who participates in politics and how (and why) does political participation differ between various groups? What are the consequences of having different minority groups participate differently? How do political elites respond to the needs and demands of the electorate, if at all? How have innovations in mass media affected political participation?* The third and final segment will examine political behavior of both elites and the mass public. Here, we will look at how individuals participate in government, as well as how elites in each of the branches of government respond to the public. We will examine the influence of the mass media on public opinion, and how this affects participation. We will also revisit political parties, how party identification in the electorate has changed over time, and how this impacts the political process. Throughout this segment, we will pay special attention to minority groups in the electorate, and how and why their participation might differ from that of other groups.

### **Required Readings:**

1. Required Purchase: Instead of a traditional textbook, we will be using an online (and cheaper) alternative. This is a brand new product that has not yet been made available to the masses. As such, you are able to purchase online access at a discounted rate of \$50.

To purchase, go to [cengagebrain.com](http://cengagebrain.com) and enter the following ISBN: 1305672631. This should pull up the following product:

*MindTap in Action: American Government, 1 term (6 months) Instant Access, 1<sup>st</sup> Ed.*

When you click “Add to Cart”, you can enter the following access key: **MTPQ-338P-X7LQ**. This should bring up my name and the name of the course to verify that you have the correct product. From there, just follow the steps on the website to create an account and pay for the product. If you have any questions, please let me know immediately.

**Your grade depends on completing assignments within this online system immediately upon the start of the course. This means you should have your account set up and ready to go prior to the first day of the course.** Again, if you need assistance, email me immediately so I can help you get set up.

2. Other required readings will be posted on CourseWeb.

**Evaluation** (100 points total):

1. Attendance (10 points) – On-time attendance is mandatory for all scheduled classes. You may miss one class session (unexcused) with no penalty. After your first unexcused absence, I will deduct 3 points from your overall course grade at the end of the semester for each additional unexcused absence. I will only excuse an absence under exceptional circumstances, such as a serious illness (doctor's note required), family emergency (documentation required), or school-sponsored event (documentation required). Excuse documentation must be provided to the instructor within one week of the missed class session (but preferably before the session). Note that repeated tardiness can also result in a lower attendance grade.
2. Participation/Preparation (15 points: 10 for reading checks and 5 for in-class participation) – Students should come to class with the weekly reading completed for that session and be ready to discuss the reading and actively participate in discussions and activities. In order to incentivize reading, you will complete a short reading check after each section in the reading required for each class session. Each reading check will consist of a series of multiple choice, true/false, or fill-in-the-blank questions related to that section's reading. You may use any materials to answer these questions. If you are not happy with your score on the first set of questions, you can attempt to answer a new set of questions for a better score. You have a total of 3 attempts to improve your score. Note that the questions change with each new attempt.
3. Short Essays (30 points) – You will write 2 short essays throughout the course of the term (each worth 15 points: 10 for initial papers and 5 for revisions). In the first class session, each student will be assigned 2 dates/topics for which he or she will write short essays. For each session to which the student is assigned, the student will complete the required reading for that week, plus two or three additional readings assigned by the instructor that relates to that topic (available on CourseWeb). After completing the required readings, the student will write a short (2-4 pages, typed, double-spaced, 12-point, Times New Roman, 1-inch margins) paper that summarizes the readings, connects them to each other, and presents lingering questions on the topic that the readings do not answer. While these are not formal research essays, they should conform to stylistic standards set out in the Chicago Manual of Style (examples available on CourseWeb). A more detailed description of these assignments, as well as a grading rubric, will be posted on CourseWeb prior to the start of the course. Additionally, the students who read additional articles and write essays should come to that class session prepared to answer questions about those articles as part of the class discussion.

Turning in Essays: Short essays should be uploaded on CourseWeb by 8:00pm the night before the class session in which the topic is being covered. Essays submitted after 8:00pm, but before class the next day will receive a 10% penalty. Essays submitted after the beginning of class, but before 8:00pm that night will receive a 20% penalty. Essays

submitted after this 24-hour mark, but before 48 hours from the original deadline will receive a 30% penalty. Any short essay submitted more than 48 hours late will receive a zero. I will grade these essays as quickly as possible and provide you with comments. Upon receiving my comments, you will have exactly 1 week to revise your paper to address the issues I bring up in my comments. The same penalties for late submission also apply to the revised draft. Revised drafts should also be uploaded to CourseWeb.

4. Quizzes (45 points) – There will be 4 quizzes given throughout the term. Quizzes will be given in class and will consist of a combination of any of the following: multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, true/false, and short answer questions. Only your best 3 quiz scores will count toward your overall quiz grade. This means that I will drop your lowest quiz score so that your top 3 scores will be worth 1/3 each of your overall quiz grade for the course. If you are absent (excused or unexcused) during a session in which a quiz is given, this will count as your lowest score and be dropped. As such, ***no make-up quizzes will be given under any circumstances.***

**Grading Scale** – Letter grades will be determined as follow:

A = 93 points or higher  
A- = 90-92 points  
B+ = 87-89 points  
B = 83-86 points  
B- = 80-82 points  
C+ = 77-79 points  
C = 73-76 points  
C- = 70-72 points  
D+ = 67-69 points  
D = 63-66 points  
D- = 60-62 points  
F = 59 points or lower

### **Expectations**

Students are expected to arrive on time and to actively engage in class discussions. Additionally, students are expected to not engage in disruptive behavior, including texting, surfing the web, or any other practice that could disrupt the learning process of any student. Moreover, an environment of mutual respect will be maintained during every class session. We all come to the class with different political ideologies and we can respectfully disagree about many political issues. In fact, this often makes for an effective and healthy class discussion. However, I will not tolerate any language that shows disrespect toward another individual in the classroom based on race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, political affiliation, class, or any other personal preferences.

## **Email Policy**

The best way to communicate with the instructor is through email ([smr105@pitt.edu](mailto:smr105@pitt.edu)). In most cases, I will respond within 24 hours. If, however, you do not hear from me after 36 hours, please send a follow-up email as it is possible that your message went to my spam folder.

## **Grade Changes**

If you disagree with a grade you received, I will allow you the opportunity to challenge your grade, including on quizzes, short essays, and participation. However, all requests must be made in writing within 1 week of receiving your grade on any given assignment. After this point, no alterations to your grade will be made.

## **Academic Integrity Statement**

Cheating/plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students suspected of violating the University of Pittsburgh Policy on Academic Integrity, from the February 1974 Senate Committee on Tenure and Academic Freedom reported to the Senate Council, will be required to participate in the outlined procedural process as initiated by the instructor. A minimum sanction of a zero score for the quiz or exam will be imposed. View the complete policy at: [www.cfo.pitt.edu/policies/policy/02/02-03-02.html](http://www.cfo.pitt.edu/policies/policy/02/02-03-02.html).

## **Disability Resources**

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Resources and Services, 140 William Pitt Union, 412-648-7890/412-624-3346 (Fax), as early as possible in the term. Disability Resources and Services will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course. For more information, visit: [www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/drsabout](http://www.studentaffairs.pitt.edu/drsabout).

## Course Schedule

Session	Class Date	Topic(s)	Unit Covered
1	6/28/16	Syllabus; The Constitution; Federalism	Unit 1 and Unit 2
2	6/30/16	Federalism; Civil Liberties/Rights	Unit 3 and Unit 4
3	7/5/16	Review previous sessions; <b>QUIZ 1 (in class);</b> Legislative Branch	Unit 5
4	7/7/16	Legislative Branch; Presidency and Bureaucracy	Unit 6 and Unit 7
5	7/12/16	Judicial Branch; Interbranch Relations	Unit 8
6	7/14/16	Review previous sessions; <b>QUIZ 2 (in class)</b> State Institutions	Other
7	7/19/16	Parties and Interest Groups	Unit 9 and Unit 10
8	7/21/16	Public Opinion and the Media	Unit 11 and Unit 12
9	7/26/16	Review previous sessions; <b>QUIZ 3 (in class);</b> Campaigns and Elections	Unit 13
10	7/28/16	Political Participation	Unit 14
11	8/2/16	Representation	Other
12	8/4/16	Review previous sessions; <b>QUIZ 4 (in class)</b> Election 2016	Other

\*Note that the instructor may change the course schedule at any time throughout the term. You will be given sufficient notification of any changes.