

POLI 101-1: US Government

Fall 2019

Tuesday & Thursday 8:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.
Founders Hall 140B

Instructor: Ryan Williams

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Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday from 11:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m. and Wednesday from 1 p.m.–2 p.m.

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Course Overview and Objectives

Our class meets at a dramatic and pivotal point in American political history. Donald Trump stunned many through winning the electoral college vote and the presidency. In Congress, the two parties are now more ideologically divided than they have been in over a century. The Supreme Court, meanwhile, is an institution in flux, as the influence of its two newest members, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, is yet to be fully felt. The American public is increasingly distressed about the sharp divisions between the two parties and is becoming more and more frustrated with many of the nation's political and social institutions.

Indeed, the American political system has been especially tumultuous lately. Fortunately for us, there is perhaps no better time than now to learn about and gain an understanding of American government and politics. With numerous challenges confronting the American political system, it is especially important for us to understand both the underlying logic of this system and the ways in which we can effectively participate in the democratic process.

Thus, a crucial goal of our class is to explain why the American political system is the way it is. We will do so through discussing the origins of the current governmental system in America, the structure of the United States government, and the ways in which different types of political actors (such as politicians and the public) behave within the institutions of American democracy. We will also be attentive to how theories of American government apply to current events and the problems that government and citizens face today. Along the way, we will develop practical skills that will be beneficial in our future coursework and beyond.

By the end of this class, students will:

- Understand the major analytical and theoretical approaches that political scientists use to study government and politics in the United States.
- Acquire the necessary knowledge about the origins and functioning of the American political system to explain and analyze political processes within American government and politics.
- Gain an increased awareness of how they can be civically engaged and develop the necessary skills to be effective lifelong participants in civic life.
- Improve their ability to formulate and defend ideas through critical analysis of evidence and communicate these ideas through speaking and writing.

Required Text

- Kollman, Ken. 2017. *The American Political System*. 3rd core edition. W.W. Norton & Company. ISBN: 978-0-393-28358-7.

The above text is required and can be purchased at the Francis Marion Bookstore or at <https://www.bkstr.com/francismarionstore/home>. In addition to the required text, students will frequently read articles from news publications or scholars on contemporary topics in criminal justice. These book chapters, news articles, or excerpts assigned during the semester will be made available to students on Blackboard through our site or will be available online. **Please note that this is a rigorous and demanding course that requires a fair amount of reading. Students should complete all readings prior to class time and be prepared to discuss.**

Course Requirements

- **Please note that students must complete all assignments to receive a passing grade for the course.**
- **Papers (2) 35%** Two short papers will be assigned during the class. Both papers should be between 850-1000 words in length (double-spaced in Times New Roman font with 1 inch margins). Paper 1 is worth 15% of the final course grade, and Paper 2 is worth 20%. Paper topics will be made available to students approximately two weeks prior to the due date. Students may use any citation style they choose on papers so long as they remain consistent throughout that paper. Papers turned in late will be penalized five points for each day late. (For example, an 85 paper would become an 80 if turned in within 24 hours after it was due.) Moreover, papers that are under or exceed the word limit will be penalized ten points. In addition, written assignments that do not follow the guidelines of the assignment and/or have poor grammar and spelling will be penalized. I am happy to assist students with any questions about the paper. However, I will only read and provide comments on outlines, thesis statements, or a brief paragraph in advance of the paper's due date.
- **Quizzes 20%** Throughout the semester, approximately twenty reading quizzes will be given at the beginning of class. These reading quizzes will assess whether students are doing the assigned readings and will consist of multiple choice, true/false, and fill-in-the blank questions. Make up quizzes will not be given. Students who miss quizzes due to instructor-approved excused absences will have their final quiz average substituted for the missed quiz.
- **Final Exam 30%** A final exam will be given in the normal classroom during the period set by the Office of the Registrar. **For our class, the final exam is scheduled for Thursday, December 5 at 8:30 a.m..** The exam is cumulative and will consist of multiple choice, true/false, and fill-in-the blank questions.
- **Discussion Questions 5% Twice** during the semester, each student will be responsible for submitting **two** discussion questions about the readings for their selected class day. You might disagree with something an author says, or you might point out an interesting part of the readings for our class to consider during discussion. Discussion questions may also be broader questions that link the issues raised in the readings with other topics already considered in the course or with events from the real political world. These questions will help to structure and

stimulate the day's discussion. Submitted questions should be brief (one or two sentences in length). These questions will be graded on quality, so students should not submit questions that require only factual explanation or ask what the author says.. On the first day of class, students will sign up for the two different days they will be responsible for discussion questions. Discussion questions should be emailed to the instructor by **11:59 p.m.** the night before class.

- **Attendance and Participation 10%** Attendance in this class is **mandatory** and will be taken each class period. Students cannot expect to earn high participation scores without being in class to engage in class discussion and ask questions during lecture. I recognize that emergencies and unexpected events arise which require students to miss class. Thus, students are afforded two unexcused absences from class, after which every additional unexcused absence will result in a five point drop in your participation grade. Legitimate excuses are required for all absences, and I reserve the right to ask for documentation. Francis Marion University permits absences for only twice the number of times the class meets per week. In keeping with this attendance policy, students who miss more than **four** classes will be dropped from the course. I will post attendance records after each class on Blackboard. If you think you have been unfairly marked absent, please address this with me sooner rather than later in the semester. If you desire to drop this class, please bring me the appropriate drop/add form to sign.

Because learning is a collaborative process, students will be evaluated based on their engagement in class. Students who would like to receive a high grade for this portion of the course grade should actively and consistently participate in all aspects of class discussion, including discussion about the class readings, in-class group activities, simulations, and debates. Participation is more than just attending class. Participation means engagement in class discussion and activities and can take the form of asking questions to spur class discussion, stopping by office hours to discuss course readings and materials, sharing thoughts about the course material with me via email, contributing ideas for topics I could cover in class, and sending me videos, articles, websites, etc. that could be used for class. I want you to demonstrate that you are engaging with the material. While these out of class forms of participation will help your score, students who do not speak in class cannot expect a high participation grade. I expect both quality and quantity with respect to class participation, and I will be taking note of your participation during our class meetings. Midway through the semester, I will provide estimates of where students are in terms of participation, and I will also ask students to evaluate aspects of the class.

Grading Scale

- A (90%-100%);
- B+ (85%-89.9%); B (80%-84.9%);
- C+ (75%-79.9%); C (70%-74.9%);
- D+ (65%-69.9%); D (60%-64.9%)
- F (0%-59.9%)

A final grade of “incomplete” will only be given in this course under exceptional circumstances. An “incomplete” is solely at the discretion of the instructor. If a student needs to withdraw from the

class, students should follow the rules specified in the University Catalog under “Dropping Courses” at <https://www.fmarion.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/FMU-Catalog-2019-for-web.pdf>. In addition, information on student academic and support resources are available at <https://www.fmarion.edu/academics/academicresources/>.

Office Hours and Communication

Outside of class or office hours, please communicate with me through my campus email account, which I have provided at the top of the first page of this syllabus. I will respond to email communication as promptly as possible.

My office hours are listed at the beginning of this syllabus, and I strongly encourage students to make use of office hours for help with any and all class questions and assignments. I really enjoy talking with students, whether it be about class discussions, assignments, obscure movies and books, places to eat in Florence, etc. Office hours are for your benefit, so please make the most of them. If you are not able to make it to office hours during the times listed, please email me to schedule a more convenient appointment time. I am also available whenever my door is open. Email is reserved for brief communications. Please come to office hours if you have lengthy or complicated questions. Moreover, following the return of graded assignments, I will not answer questions about the assignment for twenty-four hours. Please use those twenty-four hours to reflect on the comments given before contacting me with questions.

Poll Everywhere

I love finding interactive, educational, and enjoyable uses for technology in the classroom. One such use of classroom technology for us this semester will be Poll Everywhere, which enables me to poll the class about a particular topic and then instantly collect and display the results. You can respond to in-class polls through sending a text message, accessing our Poll Everywhere webpage, or downloading and using the Poll Everywhere app. I encourage you to bring your phone, tablet, laptop, etc. to class for this purpose.

Electronics Policy

When we’re not taking a poll through Poll Everywhere or doing another activity that involves using electronic devices, I ask that you keep these devices put away. Research has shown that students take better and more effective notes in longhand than when they type their notes on laptops. Laptop usage has also been shown to hinder the learning of both the student using the laptop as well as students sitting near the laptop user. Cell phones should be silenced and put away before class begins and should not be used for the duration of the class period, except for answering Poll Everywhere questions or in case of emergency. If you have a documented disability that requires you to use a laptop, please provide documentation from the Office of Counseling and Testing within the first two weeks of the semester.

Classroom Decorum

This class is an environment where students should feel free and safe to offer their own thoughts and feelings on the issues and topics we discuss. All viewpoints are welcome in this classroom, but comments meant to intimidate, ridicule, or dismiss the contributions of others will not be tolerated. I expect all students to behave courteously to one another and to refrain from offering rude and insensitive remarks.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty means violating the standards of integrity all students pledge to adhere to as a condition of enrollment at FMU. These requirements are discussed in the 2019-2020 Student Handbook. Academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade on that assignment and will also result in a referral to the Provost. Students with questions about what qualifies as academic dishonesty should contact me and can also consult the student handbook at <https://www.fmarion.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Student-Handbook-2018.pdf>.

Student Accessibility

Any student with a documented condition who needs to arrange reasonable accommodations should contact the Office of Counseling and Testing (<https://www.fmarion.edu/counselingandtesting/>). Counseling and Testing resources can be reached by phone at 843-661-1840. Please present the paperwork to me within the first two weeks of the semester. We should also meet to discuss the ways in which I can best accommodate your learning needs

Schedule of Topics and Required Readings

Note: Readings should be completed by the date listed on the syllabus. The readings listed below are subject to change. Depending on the pace of the class and the interests of the students, I might add, remove, or swap readings as the semester progresses. I will notify everyone in advance if and when such changes occur. **All readings not in the Kollman textbook will be available on our class Blackboard site under the “Resources” tab.**

August 20: Introduction

August 22: Concepts

- Chapter 1 of Kollman
- Dylan Matthews, “Obama suggested making it illegal not to vote. Here’s how that’s worked in Australia,” article from *Vox*

August 27: Articles, Constitution, Founding

- Chapter 2 of Kollman, pages 33-46
- Joseph J. Ellis, Chapter 3: “The Argument” from *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic*. Read pages 87-107

- *The Constitution and Bill of Rights*, available in the appendix of Kollman from A-12 to A-25.

August 29: Articles, Constitution, Founding

- Chapter 2 of Kollman, pages 46-63
- Joseph J. Ellis, Chapter 3: “The Argument” from *American Creation: Triumphs and Tragedies at the Founding of the Republic*. Read pages 107-126

September 3: Constitutional Convention

- Prepare for mock convention!

September 5: Federalism

- Chapter 3 of Kollman, pages 73-90 and 99-104
- German Lopez, “Marijuana is illegal under federal law even in states that legalize it,” article from *Vox*
- Libby Nelson, “Everything you need to know about the Common Core,” article from *Vox*

September 10: Congress-Institutions

- Chapter 5 of Kollman, pages 147-151, 165-196
- Lee Drutman, “Can Congress Fix Itself?” article from *Vox*

September 12: Congress-Representation

- Chapter 5 of Kollman, pages 151-165
- John Sides, “Don’t blame our polarized politics on voters. Blame it on who runs for office in the first place,” article from *The Monkey Cage*

September 17: Presidency I

- Chapter 6 of Kollman, pages 199-218
- Robert Dallek, “Power and the Presidency, Kennedy to Obama,” article from *Smithsonian.com*
- Ezra Klein, “The Green Lantern Theory of the Presidency, explained,” article from *Vox*

September 19: Presidency II

- Chapter 6 of Kollman, pages 218-240.
- David A. Graham, “The Strangest Thing About Trump’s Approach to Presidential Power,” article from *The Atlantic*
- Greg Farrell and Tom Schoenberg, “Presidential Power Gets a Booster Shot, No Matter Mueller’s View,” article from *Bloomberg*

September 24: The Federal Budget

- Paper 1 Due!

- “Policy Basics: Introduction to the Federal Budget Process,” article from *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*
- “Policy Basics: Deficits, Debt, and Interest,” article from *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*
- Please look over the Center for a Responsible Federal Budget Simulator in Preparation for an in-class activity. (Available online at <http://crfb.org/stabilizethedebt/>.)

September 26: Interest Groups

- Chapter 11 of Kollman, pages 411-432.
- Drutman, Lee, “What we get wrong about lobbying and corruption,” article from *The Monkey Cage*

October 1: Courts Part I

- Chapter 8 of Kollman, pages 285-303 and 318-324
- Molly Ball and Tessa Berenson, “Brett Kavanaugh’s Confirmation Fight Exposes Major Problems with the Nation’s Most Powerful Court,” article from *Time*

October 3: Courts Part II

- Chapter 8 of Kollman, pages 303-318
- Jeffrey Toobin, from *The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court*
- Joan Biskupic, “John Roberts Faces Another Test with Census Case,” article from *CNN*

October 8: Fall Break

- No Class!

October 10: Courts-Simulation

- Materials for the Supreme Court Simulation

October 15: Rights and Liberties

- Chapter 4 of Kollman
- Pete Williams, “The Supreme Court and abortion: Will Roe v. Wade survive the new onslaught?” article from *NBC News*

October 17: Bureaucracy

- Chapter 7 of Kollman

October 22: Public Opinion I

- Chapter 9 of Kollman, pages 327-341.
- Nate Silver, “The Polls are All Right,” article from *FiveThirtyEight*

October 24: Public Opinion II

- Chapter 9 of Kollman, pages 341-370.
- John Zaller and Stanley Feldman, “A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences,” article from *American Journal of Political Science*
 - Read pages 579-589, 606 (“Summary”) -612

October 29: Political Participation

- Chapter 10 of Kollman, pages 375-401 and 406-409
- Heller, Nathan, “Is There Any Point to Protesting?” article from *The New Yorker*

October 31: Political Parties

- Chapter 12 of Kollman, pages 447-478
- Ezra Klein, “The single most important fact about American politics,” article from *Vox*

November 5: Campaigns and Elections I

- Chapter 13 of Kollman, pages 493-515
- John G. Geer, “Those Negative Ads Are a Positive Thing,” article from the *Washington Post*

November 7: Campaigns and Elections II

- Chapter 13 of Kollman, pages 515-531
- Zach Beauchamp, “The midterm elections revealed that America is in a cold civil war,” article from *Vox*

November 12: Media

- Chapter 14 of Kollman, pages 535-551 and 556-557
- Dylan Matthews, “2 political scientists have found a key reason Republicans and Democrats see politics so differently,” article from *Vox*

November 14: Economic Policy

- Bruce Bartlett, “How Supply-Side Economics Trickled Down,” article from *The New York Times*
- John Cassidy, “The High-Stakes Battle Between Donald Trump and the Federal Reserve,” article from *The New Yorker*

November 19: Social Policy

- Alana Semuels, “The End of Welfare as We Know It,” article from *The Atlantic*
- “Taxing Hard-Up Americans at 95 ” article from *The Economist*
- Paper 2 Due!

November 21: Race and Politics

- Michelle Alexander, “The New Jim Crow,” article from *The Nation*
- Bertrand, Marianne, and Sendhil Mullainathan, “Are Emily and Greg more employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A field experiment on labor market discrimination.” *The American Economic Review*. 94.4 (2004): 991-1013.

November 26: Make Up and Exam Review

- If no classes cancelled, read Chapter 3 of Kollman, pages 90-93, 96-97

November 28: Thanksgiving

- No Class!

Dec 5: Final Exam

- 8:30 am -10:30 am