

POLS 155
American Politics
Spring 2014
Tuesday and Thursday 12:30-1:45
Cleveland 110

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Course Description

This course is a journey through the continuing evolution of American politics. We will be investigating the foundations of American politics, the major institutions of American government, the institutions that give voice to the people and the process by which policy is made. American politics is a dynamic subject – one that continues to adapt to our changing world. It is an exciting subject that touches each of our lives whether we know it or not. With that in mind, it is important to try to understand it rather than to stick our heads in the sand and assume that we are safe in our ignorance. To act or to be acted upon, this is the choice laid out before us. The goal of this course is to give you the tools to act in the political arena, to understand American politics and to critically assess your political environment. The structures of the rules that govern that environment are not benign. Our journey will expose their design, their intentions and their consequences and in doing so will provide you with an appreciation of the importance of American politics for your world.

Course Objectives

Four overarching goals will guide our work in this course:

- American Politics: learn the basic structure, history and practice of American government and politics
- Political Analysis: assess case studies, seek nomological explanations, ask research questions and methodically analyze evidence
- Current Events: consider course topics in the context of current events and gain the skills necessary to stay informed
- Critical Assessment: evaluate the above, particularly considering democratic criteria

Objectives (how we will complete our goals) for this course include:

- Understanding basic structures and processes of American Government
- Understanding political relationships between institutions, leaders and

citizens in American democracy [G1](#)

- Understanding historical and contemporary relevance of core concepts such as liberty, equality, justice, democracy and representation [G1](#)
- Development of critical reasoning skills
- Development of reading skills
- Development of writing skills including citation methods in political science and avoidance of plagiarism
- Enhancement of confidence in class debates
- Development of research skills and information literacy

Course Materials

Evans, Jocelyn and Kristy Michaud. 2013. Central Ideas in American Government, 5th Edition. Soomo Publishing: Asheville, NC. <http://soomopublishing.com/>

The book for this course is an online resource. Details for how to order it are posted on the Moodle page for the course and will be reviewed during our first meeting. Do not hesitate to ask if you have questions or concerns about the text. Because the assignments for the course are embedded in the text and all assignments are submitted via the online platform, it is not possible to share a textbook with another student.

In addition to this textbook, we will be using various readings and webpages, detailed in the course schedule below.

You should get in the habit of attending to a major daily news source on a regular basis (print, radio, television, online). One note of caution: you should do your best to restrict the sources you use for this course to legitimate news outlets. There is a lot of pseudo-news out there: entertainment, opinion, blogs by some guy in the cellar in his underwear - you get the point. If you are unsure (it isn't always easy to tell), don't hesitate to ask and we'll try to sort this out together.

Moodle: This course uses Moodle as our online course learning management platform. The syllabus and all assignments will be posted on the Moodle site for our class. Your assignments will be submitted via the Moodle site so please be familiar with it before you hand in your first paper (to minimize any technology snafus). To access our materials, you will need to sign in to Moodle using your email username and Moodle password at: <http://moodle.wells.edu/login/index.php>

From the Wells Moodle site: "Your username is the same as you use to log in to your email. If your email address is astudent13@wells.edu, then your username is just astudent13. Please note: Student passwords for moodle have now been set to "the first 3 letters of your last name lower case plus your student ID"."

I will add materials and assignments to the Moodle site over the course of the

semester.

Methods of Evaluation G5 (Objective A)

Your grade in this course is based upon the following components:

- *Textbook Chapter Assignments: 15%*. Complete short on-line assignments through your textbook and submit them *before class* on the day they are due (see course schedule for details). You may use your book as a reference. The point of the assignments is to give you practice with main concepts in the reading prior to our discussion. Short “get the gist” study questions are embedded in each chapter at various points along the way. These questions are not graded but they are a good check on your comprehension and you should take the time to complete them. **Be sure to save your answers to the assignments to the “notebook” or they will not be submitted.**
- *Opinion Essay: 10%* Write a short (2-3) page letter to President Obama reacting to his State of the Union Address. What did you hear that you liked? What did you not hear that you wish he had mentioned? Why? Papers must be submitted online through Moodle. Please name your file with your last name and the assignment name: lastname POLS 155 Obama Letter. Papers are due before class on January 30. Late papers will be penalized by one letter grade and will not be accepted after 24 hours. PDF files are not accepted.
- *Normative Essay: 15%* Political scientists are interested in what happened and why but they are also interested in evaluations about the normative implications of events (the “should” questions). In this paper, you will offer a 3-4 page persuasive argument that takes a stand on some aspect of an issue that is currently in the news. You should be sure to explain why this is an important issue, identify the underlying values or principles at stake, defend your position, directly confront the counter-arguments and explain why we should care about the issue. You may expand upon the topic that you used when you wrote to President Obama at the beginning of the semester but this should be a new and much more detailed paper. This paper should include a minimum of 4 information sources (we will discuss this in class). Papers must be submitted online through Moodle. Please name your file with your last name and the assignment name: lastname POLS 155 Normative Paper. Papers are due before class on March 7. Late papers will be penalized by one letter grade and will not be accepted after 24 hours. PDF files are not accepted.
- *Empirical Analysis: 20%* Political scientists do more than just describe what happened in politics, they try to explain why and they look for patterns that can help explain similar events. In scientific language, this is called the search for nomological (or law-governed) explanation. For this paper, you are going to adopt the perspective of a political scientist. You will choose a current political event to be the focus of your analysis. Your job is to ask an empirical research question (how, why), review the relevant background and

- current state of the issue and offer potential answers to your research question (explanations). You will be using newspapers, news-magazines, political journals, television, web and radio sources for this paper. This is a 4-6 page paper with a minimum of 5 sources. Papers must be submitted online through Moodle. Please name your file with your last name and the assignment name: lastname POLS 155 Empirical Paper. Papers are due before class on May 1. Late papers will be penalized by one letter grade and will not be accepted after 24 hours. PDF files are not accepted.
- Midterm Quiz 15% This is a short, take-home quiz that tests your knowledge of concepts and relationships that we have covered up to mid-term. This is a take home quiz to be completed during class time and is due online through Moodle by the end of the class period. Quiz date is February 18. Monitor your time as Moodle will not accept late quizzes.
 - Final Quiz: 15% As with the midterm, the final quiz tests your knowledge of concepts and relationships but this time the material covers the entire semester, with an emphasis on the latter part of the course. This is a take home quiz due online through Moodle on the date and time of the final exam, tba. Be sure to monitor your time as Moodle will not accept late quizzes.
 - *Participation: 10%* Regular attendance and thoughtful class participation are expected. To participate fully in class you will need to complete the assigned reading and any written assignments before the class meeting. You will also need to keep up with the news. The class participation component of your grade is not a "gift". We will be doing a lot of in-class interactive work so you have to be present and engaged. Please note the following *general guidelines* for participation grades:
 - A: regularly attends class (no more than 3 absences) and participates thoughtfully on a regular basis.
 - C: regularly attends class (no more than 3 absences) but participates rarely.
 - F: multiple absences (+3) regardless of participation level.

It is your responsibility to keep track of your absences and your participation.

Do not be shy and do not think that everyone knows more than you do.

Questions and comments are welcome in this class; I want to hear your voice. If you are concerned about your participation grade do not wait until the end of the semester to see me.

Please note: All textbook assignments are to be completed online and all papers are to be handed in via Moodle on the day they are due. Filenames should follow the following format: lastname POLS 155 DocumentName. For example, the first paper should come to me as: lastname POLS 155 Obama Letter, the second paper should come to me as lastname POLS 155 Normative Paper and the third should come to me as lastname POLS 155 Empirical Paper. Items that do not conform to this format will be returned to you for correction (yes, I am that picky).

*Assignments are due as indicated in the syllabus schedule. Papers handed in after the scheduled due date and time will be considered late and will be penalized by one letter grade (i.e. cannot receive higher than a B). Papers handed in more than 24 hours late **will not be accepted** and will receive a failing grade. Paper extensions are granted rarely and only in the case of unavoidable and extreme circumstances. Extension requests must be made before the paper is due and may require consultation with the Provost's office.*

A Note to Students with Disabilities

If you have a physical, sensory, health, cognitive, or mental health disability that could limit your ability to fully participate in this class, you are encouraged to contact the Coordinator of Student Achievement, Megan Riedl, to discuss accommodations that will help you succeed. Your conversations with her are confidential, and she will not supply details to anyone without your permission. Please understand that Ms. Riedl will need to notify your faculty about accommodations you might need. Her offices are on the middle/main floor of the library, near the Writing Center and the 822s of the stacks. An appointment sign-up sheet is on the desk in the central reception area. Contact: Megan Riedl, Coordinator of Student Achievement, mriedl@wells.edu; phone: (315)364-3432

Student Achievement

The Office of Student Achievement assists all Wells students in developing their academic potential by working with them to enhance their learning strategies. You should not hesitate to contact Megan Reidl to learn about how to improve your skills in areas such as studying, time management, organization, test taking, and note taking.

Email Communication Guidelines

You and I are involved in a business relationship. As such, our email communications should reflect the formal nature of our interaction. When you send me an email, it should:

- Include a greeting (Professor Tabrizi, Dear Professor, Hello Professor, etc. Hey, is for horses)
- Use proper sentence structure. (I am not your roommate or your mom. The notes you write to me don't need to be a work of fine literature but they do need to be in proper form. What you write in an email is analogous to what you would say in person and the impression it makes is important. You should take care to write business email in a professional manner)
- Include capital letters where appropriate (and not all capital letters)
- Include a salutation (Thank you, Sincerely, See you in class, Have a good day, etc. This part is not essential, but it is a nice touch and is a good habit to get into for your future professional life)

If you send me an email that fails to conform to the first three bullet-points, I will disregard it and refer you back to this section of the syllabus guide so that you can revise it for a second shot. If you continue to send improperly formatted email, I will disregard it entirely. Yes, I'm serious.

Classroom Etiquette: Please do your best to arrive for class on time. If you must be late, do your best to be as least disruptive as possible (be quiet, don't walk in front of the projection or the instructor, don't make a production of getting settled, etc.). The same goes for if you must leave class early or step out for any reason (again, you should avoid this as much as possible). Eating in class is strongly discouraged unless you bring something tasty for all of us. Professor Tabrizi likes non-fat vanilla latte and black tea.

Using Your Phone in Class:

No. No texting, no facebook, no Tweeting, no Instagram, no nothing.

Using Your Laptop in Class

Violations of the above are distracting. So is doing other work on your laptop and somehow believing others don't notice. We can see you. Laptops are not necessary in class (you should have the reading and assignments done before you arrive). Unless you can make a serious case for why you need it to take notes, your laptop should remain in your bag. Even then, one infraction will result in the loss of your privilege.

I disagree with what you have to say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.
-Voltaire

Politics is a subject that often involves disagreement. In this class you are free to disagree with me and with one another; but if we are to have productive discussions about politics in class, we must limit ourselves to respectful disagreement. At no time is it acceptable to engage in mean-spirited or personal attacks. Each member of the class must be treated with respect at all times no matter how strongly you may disagree with their political perspective.

Course Schedule*

*Schedule subject to change at the discretion of the instructor

January 21	Course Introduction
January 23	What do we WANT? Why? G4 (Objectives b and c) Begin reading Chapter 1 "What is the Purpose of Government" Assignment due before class
January 28	Revolution, Politics and Compromise *Read Chapter 1 *Remaining Chapter 1 Assignments due before class
January 30	Did Somebody Say Compromise? Power and Rules (make the latter, get the former)

*Read Madison, *Federalist 10* and *Federalist 51* available through Library of Congress:

<http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html>

These are difficult essays to read so do your best to get the main points: how does and why does the structure of institutions set forth in the Constitution serve the underlying goals of the political system?

If it helps, you can listen to audiobooks of #10 and #51 offered free from LibriVox (<https://librivox.org/>) and found on YouTube at:

Federalist # 10: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VA-7vQsEEyQ>

Federalist #51: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UA_MRzpaBx0

***Opinion Essay: Letter to Obama due today before class through Moodle**

February 4

Federalism: From the Founders to the Framers to the Front Page

*Read Chapter 2

*Chapter 2 Assignments due before class

| February 6

Civil Liberties (you are FREE, except...) G1; G4 (Objectives b and c)

*Read Chapter 3

*Chapter 3 Assignments due before class

*Read Hamilton, *Federalist 84* available through Library of

Congress: <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html>

As with Madison's essays above, Hamilton's essay requires some effort to work through. Your task is to try to understand Hamilton's stance on the idea of a bill of rights (where does he stand and how does he justify his position).

If it helps, you can listen to audiobooks of #84 offered free from LibriVox (<https://librivox.org/>) and found at:

http://ia600208.us.archive.org/14/items/federalist_papers_librivox/federalist-papers_84.mp3

February 11

Civil Liberties (you are FREE, except...)

*Read Chapter 3

*Chapter 3 Assignments due before class

*Read Hamilton, *Federalist 84* available through Library of

Congress: <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fedpapers.html>

As with Madison's essays above, Hamilton's essay requires some effort to work through. Your task is to try to understand Hamilton's stance on the idea of a bill of rights (where does he stand and how does he justify his position).

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http://ia600208.us.archive.org/14/items/federalist_papers_librivox/federalist-papers_84.mp3

- | February 13 Civil Rights (YOU are free, except...) G1, G4 (objectives b and c)
*Read Chapter 4
*Chapter 4 Assignments due before class
*Watch: CNN Presents: Unwelcome: The Muslims Next Door
available on YouTube at:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRlqz3e9OrA>
- February 18 Midterm Quiz Through Moodle – No class meeting
- February 20 Paper 1 Workshop: Come to class ready to discuss your paper topic
(see description above).
- February 25 Congress: All Together Now...
Read Chapter 5
*Chapter 5 Assignments due before class
- | February 27 Congress: You Better Represent! G1
*Find out who represents you in the Senate and the House.
Choose one issue that is important to you and determine whether
you and your representatives share the same position.
- March 4 Presidency: Who the Man (at least so far)?
*Read Chapter 6
*Chapter 6 Assignments due before class
- March 6 Presidency on Trial: Assaulting or Protecting the People’s Rights?
*Watch President Obama’s January 2014 NSA Speech available on
Youtube from The Wall Street Journal at:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4MKm2uFqVQ>
What claims does Obama make about the NSA, civil liberties and
presidential power? What is controversial? What are the limits of
presidential power?
- March 7 Normative Paper due via Moodle by noon as: lastname
POL5 155 Normative**

SPRING BREAK March 10-14

- March 18 The Bureaucracy: The Who? The What?
 *Read Chapter 7
 *Chapter 7 Assignments due before class
- March 20 Spooky Black Robes? The Supreme Court and YOU
 *Read Chapter 8
 *Chapter 8 Assignments due before class
- March 25 The Supreme Court, Pot and Sex (oh my!) [G1, G4 \(objectives b and c\)](#)
 Assignment: TBA
- March 27 Public Opinion: What the People Want (how do we know and why should we care?)
 *Read Chapter 9
 *Chapter 9 Assignments due before class
 Today we will design a short public opinion poll for you to administer to your fellow Wells Students. Results will be due on 4/1.
- March 28 Activism Symposium: "Where Do We Go From Here? Identity, Culture, Climate." Classes are in session but you should try to attend a few events.
- April 1 Voting and Political Participation:
 Shoulda, Woulda Coulda (or maybe not)
 *Read Chapter 11 (We are skipping around)
 *Chapter 10 Assignments due before class
 Wells Opinion Poll Results discussion
- April 3 Political Parties: Where IS the Party (and am I invited?)
 *Read Chapter 12
 *Chapter 11 Assignments due before class
 *Read Madison, *Federalist 10* (yes, again)
- April 8 Interest Groups
 *Read Chapter 13
 *Chapter 13 Assignments due before class
- April 9 Celebrating Scholarship and Engagement Day
 (that you should attend)

April 10

April 15

April 17 Empirical Research Paper Workshop

*You should have your research paper topic set and your research plan in place (what am I going to write about and how will I find information?) If you do not, see me ASAP

April 22 Media: The Daily Show (does that mean EVERY day?)

*Read Chapter 14

*Chapter 14 Assignments due **before class**

April 24 Media: The Many Faces of Anderson Cooper

April 29 Public Policy

May 1 Last day of class – that you should not skip or you won't know about the final and that will not be good for you (and don't listen to other students because there will be a final quiz).

Empirical research paper due through Moodle before class as lastname POLS 155 Empirical.

Final Quiz Take-Home Through Moodle – due TBA