

Political Science 111: Introduction to American Politics

Instructor: Sara Morell (she/her/hers)

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Class Time: TBD

Office Hours: TBD

You: If you would like me to refer to you by a name or pronouns other than those on the class roster, please let me know.

Course Overview:

The purpose of this course is to provide a comprehensive overview of the structures and processes of the American Political System. This course is guided by a fundamental question: “How democratic is the U.S. political system?” and each week of the course will challenge students to think about how the development of American political institutions and the ways that people operate within political systems reflect democratic ideals. This course incorporates historic, primary-source documents, political theory, and social science texts to challenge students to think critically about their political world, while also helping them to develop critical thinking skills. More specifically this course aims to introduce students to methods of analysis common in the political science discipline in the following ways:

1. Develop the ability to form and evaluate arguments about U.S. politics. It is important to emphasize that this course is **not** about whether specific political opinions are good or bad, but rather will encourage students to evaluate claims about our political structure. Examples include: “What are the benefits and drawbacks of a federal system?” and “How influential are political parties in determining who runs for office?”
2. Evaluate the contemporary U.S. political system within the contexts of the stated goals of those who developed its structures, within contemporary debates about the effects of our political institutions and individuals, and in comparison with the politics of other political systems.
3. Learn the foundational methodological approaches to the study of political science. This course is carefully scaffolded such that students will be challenged each week with material that reflects how contemporary political scientists think about the field, while also building the toolkit overtime to discuss and analyze these materials. The course also introduces students to some of the basic principles of how we can evaluate political science texts, across a range of methodological approaches.

Course Format:

This course is meant to give you a broad introduction to the various ways that we study the American Political System. While it is an introductory course, it comes with a difficult reading load. The purpose of this class is to introduce you to college-level reading, discussion, and writing, and so you are expected to come to class having done the readings and ready with questions and ideas based on what they said. This course will be discussion-heavy, and while I will likely start each week with some lecture, the expectation is that your thoughts and opinions will guide the broader direction of the lesson.

I do want to emphasize that some of the readings are challenging! I do not expect you to get/remember every detail. Still, you should come to class with an understanding of the major takeaways from each reading, the questions you had after reading the piece, and some initial thoughts on where you agree/disagree.

I realize that adjusting to college is difficult. I also realize that you don't stop being people simply because you are students, and personal and extenuating circumstances may arise that will mean you need additional accommodations. I am willing to grant extensions when those circumstances arise. However, you must ask for an extension at least 24 hours before the assignment is due. Though I'll be flexible on deadlines if something extreme happens, I cannot ignore the University's deadlines for turning in grades at the end of the semester and so I will aim to be flexible where I can.

Grade Breakdown:

Class Attendance + Participation: 30% (Attendance – 10%, Participation 20%)

This class is discussion-based, which means you have to contribute to get credit! Participation can mean many things, from asking substantive questions about the material to summarizing small group discussions for the class. When participating in class discussions, I expect everyone to listen to previous comments and actively respond to each other's points. Everyone comes into this classroom with a different background and set of experiences, and I hope to create a learning environment where everyone can grow their critical thinking skills and can discuss each other's ideas in a constructive manner.

I'm not going to do reading quizzes or use Perusall to track whether you're doing readings. However, if it becomes clear that readings aren't being done consistently (and there aren't extenuating circumstances), I may randomly start doing reading quizzes as part of your participation grade.

Part of participation is coming to class. **You have one unexcused; no questions asked absence that you can use at any time without notifying me.** After that, if you are unable to attend a class, you must email me the day before. Unless it's medical, a personal/family emergency, or a UM recognized excused absence, you should assume that your absence is unexcused. I will not expect a doctor's note for medical absences.

Three Analytical Essays: 30%

Three times during the semester you will be asked to write and submit an essay about the readings from the previous week. This essay should be five paragraphs in length and should be 2-3 pages long, with an introduction and conclusion. Topics for the analytical essays will be released at the start of class on the Thursday before they are due, which will then be the following Tuesday.

The first essay will be about representation, the second essay will be about balance of power in our political institutions, and the third essay will be about the role of political parties in our elections. Each essay is worth 10% of your final grade and will be evaluated for how clearly you

incorporate the ideas from the readings, how carefully and thoughtfully you construct your argument, and the quality of the writing.

This is an introductory course and so the goal of this class is to help you develop your writing and critical thinking skills, particularly for those of you who may be new to college. Therefore, you will each be given the opportunity to revise one of your analytical essays for a higher grade. You are required to meet with me in office hours in the week following the release of grades and will have one week from the office hours meeting in order to revise. **You must show me that you have a class conflict in order to schedule one of these meetings outside of office hours, and you will not be able to schedule a meeting to discuss your paper more than one week after grades are released.** Finally, because this is an introductory course, we will spend considerable class time on the Thursday before the first essay discussing expectations in more detail.

Final Paper: 40%

The final paper for this course will encourage you to evaluate the state of American democracy, given the topics discussed throughout the semester. It should be 10 pages long and will be worth 40% of your final grade. You will be evaluated on how clearly you explained the concepts from the course that you are incorporating, how well articulated and supported your argument is with evidence, whether you have clearly answered the essay question, and the quality of the writing itself. This essay will be due one week after the last day of classes. **It is not possible to revise the final essay for this course, but you are strongly encouraged to meet with me in office hours in advance of the due date to discuss your paper.**

Your goal with this paper is to use the readings, as well as class discussion, to make a carefully constructed argument about how democratic the U.S. is, where you see its strengths and weaknesses, when it became a democracy, and what reforms you would propose in order to improve the lasting health of American democracy. You must select three topics from throughout the course and make an argument about each of them separately, but a particularly strong essay will build a central argument that each of the topics ultimately supports.

A Note About Grading:

The final grade breakdowns for this class are as follows: A (94-100), A- (90-93), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D+ (67-69), D (63-66), D- (60-62), F (Below a 60)

You are always welcome to speak with me to get more information about why you received the grade you did and what you can do to improve on future assignments.

Schedule for Lecture and Readings:

WEEK ONE: Introduction to the Course

- **August 30: Introduction to the Course – No readings due**
- **September 1: What is Democracy? How Democratic is the U.S.?**
 - o Robert Dahl: Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition, Chapter 1
 - o Robert Mickey, Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, Foreign Affairs: [Is America still safe for democracy? Why the United States is in danger of backsliding](#)

WEEK TWO: Foundations of U.S. Political System

- **September 6: Our Founding Documents**
 - o The United States Constitution
 - o James Madison: Federalist Papers 10 and 51
- **September 8: How Democratic is the U.S. Constitution?**
 - o Robert Dahl's How Democratic Is the American Constitution?, Chapters 1-3
 - o Nikole Hannah-Jones, The New York Times: [Our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written. Black Americans have fought to make them true.](#)

WEEK THREE: Federalism

- **September 13: Understanding Federalism**
 - o William H Riker: Federalism: Origin, Operation, Significance
 - o Pamela McCann, Charles Shipan and Craig Volden: Top-Down Federalism: State Policy Responses to National Government Discussions
- **September 15: Federalism's Challenges and Opportunities**
 - o Jacob Grumbach: Laboratories against Democracy: How National Parties Transformed State Politics
 - o Jamila Michener: Fragmented Democracy Medicaid, Federalism, and Unequal Politics
 - o Charles Shipan and Craig Volden, Washington Post: [Coronavirus policies spread quickly across the U.S. Are cities and states learning — or just copying?](#)

WEEK FOUR: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

- **September 20: Civil Rights Movement + Black Lives Matter**
 - o Omar Wasow: Agenda Seeding: How 1960s Black Protests Moved Elites, Public Opinion and Voting
 - o Jelani Cobb, The New Yorker: [The Matter of Black Lives](#)
- **September 22: Suffrage and Voting Rights**
 - o Corrine McConaughy: The Woman Suffrage Movement in America: A Reassessment
 - o Alexander Keyssar: The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States
 - o Jeff Manza and Christopher Uggen: Locked Out: Felon Disenfranchisement and American Democracy

WEEK FIVE: Representation

- **September 27: Theories of Representation**
 - o Jane Mansbridge: Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent "Yes"
 - o Nadia Brown: Sisters in the Statehouse: Black Women and Legislative Decision Making
- **September 29: Territories and Indigenous Nations**
 - o Erin Blakemore, National Geographic: [Why Puerto Rico has debated U.S. statehood since its colonization](#)
 - o Yarimar Bonilla, New York Times: [For Puerto Ricans, Another Reminder That We Are Second-Class Citizens](#)
 - o National Geographic: [The United States Government's Relationship With Native Americans](#)

FIRST SHORT ASSIGNMENT DUE OCTOBER 4 ABOUT THEORIES OF REPRESENTATION

WEEK SIX: Congress

- **October 4: Passing Legislation**
 - o Gary W. Cox and Mathew D McCubbins: Setting the Agenda: Responsible Party Government in the U.S. House of Representatives
 - o Mayhew: Congress: The Electoral Connection, Chapter 1
 - o Mike Gallagher, The Atlantic: [How to Salvage Congress](#)
- **October 6: Congressional Oversight**
 - o Mathew McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz: Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms
 - o Jamelle Bouie: Jan. 6 Was a 'War Scene,' and Trump Was the Director

WEEK SEVEN: Presidency

- **October 11: What Powers Does the President Have**
 - o Charles Cameron - Veto Bargaining Presidents and the Politics of Negative Power
 - o William Howell: Power without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action -- Chapter 1
- **October 13: Changes and Reforms to Presidential Power**
 - o Erin Peterson, Harvard Law Bulletin: [Presidential Power Surges](#)
 - o William Howell and Terry Moe, [American Prospect: America's antiquated constitution](#)

WEEK EIGHT: Judiciary Part One

- **October 18: NO CLASS ON TUESDAY FOR FALL BREAK**
- **October 20: How Powerful is the Judicial Branch**
 - o Jeffrey Segal and Harold Spaeth: The Supreme Court and the Attitudinal Model Revisited – Chapters 1-3
 - o Gerald Rosenberg: The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring about Social Change?
 - o [Joshua Zeitz, Politico: The Supreme Court Has Never Been Apolitical](#)

WEEK NINE: Judiciary Part Two and Bureaucracy

- **October 25: Court Powers in Contemporary Context**
 - o Dale Carpenter: *Flagrant Conduct: The Story of Lawrence v. Texas*
 - o [Bowers v Hardwick \(1986\)](#)
 - o [Lawrence v Texas \(2003\)](#)
- **October 27: Bureaucracy and Powers of Oversight**
 - o Sean Gilmard and John Patty: *Learning While Governing: Expertise and Accountability in the Executive Branch*
 - o Ali Watkins, The New York Times: [When Guns Are Sold Illegally, A.T.F. Is Lenient on Punishment](#)

SECOND SHORT ASSIGNMENT DUE NOVEMBER 1 ABOUT BALANCE OF POWER

WEEK TEN: Public Opinion

- **November 1: Attitude Formation and Change**
 - o John Zaller's *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*
 - o Arthur Lupia and Mathew McCubbins: *The Democratic Dilemma: Can Citizens Learn What They Need to Know?*
 - o [Nate Silver, FiveThirtyEight: Change Doesn't Usually Come This Fast](#)
- **November 3: Measuring Public Opinion**
 - o Nate Silver, FiveThirtyEight: [The Death Of Polling Is Greatly Exaggerated](#)
 - And [a Response](#) from Nate Cohn, New York Times (via Twitter)
 - o Anna North, Vox: [Do Americans support defunding police? It depends how you ask the question.](#)

WEEK ELEVEN: Identity and Political Behavior

- **November 8: Identities and social groups**
 - o Don Kinder and Cindy Kam: *Us against Them: Ethnocentric Foundations of American Opinion*
 - o Liliana Mason: *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*
- **November 10: Political Participation**
 - o Sidney Verba et al: *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*
 - o Vladimir Kogan et al, The Washington Post: [Do low-turnout elections make the electorate more conservative? Not that much.](#)

WEEK TWELVE: Interest Groups and Social Movements

- **November 15: Interest Groups**
 - o Ken Kollman: *Outside Lobbying: Public Opinion and Interest Group Strategies*
 - o Martin Gilens and Benjamin I Page: *Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens*
- **November 17: Social Movements**
 - o LaGina Gause: *The Advantage of Disadvantage: Costly Protest and Political Representation for Marginalized Groups*
 - o [Shom Mazumder, FiveThirtyEight: What Protests Can \(And Can't\) Do](#)

WEEK THIRTEEN: Political Parties

- **November 22: Political Parties**
 - o Marty Cohen et al: The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform
 - o Ken Kollman: Who Drives the Party Bus?
 - o Danielle Kurtzleben, NPR: [Celebrities, Lies And Outsiders: How This Election Surprised One Political Scientist](#)
- **NOVEMBER 24: NO CLASS ON THURSDAY FOR THANKSGIVING**

THIRD SHORT ASSIGNMENT DUE NOVEMBER 29 ABOUT POLITICAL PARTIES

WEEK FOURTEEN: Elections and Campaigns

- **November 29: Voting Rights and Money in Politics**
 - o Martin Gilens: Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America
 - o German Lopez, Vox: [A new study finds voter ID laws don't reduce voter fraud — or voter turnout](#)
 - o Vann R. Newkirk II, The Atlantic: [Voter Suppression Is Warping Democracy](#)
- **December 1: Campaign Effects**
 - o Alan Gerber et al: How Large and Long-lasting Are the Persuasive Effects of Televised Campaign Ads? Results from a Randomized Field Experiment
 - o Ted Brader: Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade Voters by Appealing to Emotions

WEEK FIFTEEN: Media and Wrap-Up

- **December 6: Role of the Media**
 - o Sean Iyengar and Don Kinder: News that Matters: Television and American Opinion
 - o Joshua Clinton and Ted Enamorado: The National News Media's Effect on Congress: How Fox News Affected Elites in Congress
 - o [Ezra Klein, Vox: Something is breaking American politics, but it's not social media](#)
- **December 8: So How Democratic is the U.S.?**
 - o *Final Class Discussion – No Readings Required*

END OF SEMESTER ESSAY DUE DECEMBER 15

Additional Information:

Arrangements for Students with Disabilities: If you think you will need accommodation(s) for a disability, please let me know immediately. Once I'm made aware of your needs, I can work with you or Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) to determine appropriate accommodations. Some aspects of this course, including the assignments, the in-class activities, and how the course is taught, might be modified to facilitate your participation and progress. SSD (734-763-3000; <https://ssd.umich.edu/>) typically recommends accommodations through a Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form. Any information you provide is private and confidential and will be treated as such.

Attendance: Each student will be responsible for all announcements and materials covered in class. If you miss class for any reason, you should set up a time to meet with me during office hours to catch up.

Canvas: I will post a Canvas announcement on Friday of each week, going over the material for the following week, along with any updates or announcements you will need before class on Monday. It is your responsibility to set up your Canvas notifications so that you receive these in your inbox, or make sure you check the Canvas announcements page each week on Friday after 5:00 PM.

Email policy: I will reply to emails that I receive during regular working hours (i.e., Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM) as soon as possible, often the same day. For emails received outside of those working hours, I will generally reply during the next working day. **This policy also applies to emails sent the day an assignment is due. If you have a question about an assignment, it is always best to ask it at least one day in advance.**

Plagiarism and Cheating: My experience at the University of Michigan has been that plagiarism is extremely rare. However, out of fairness to all students behaving ethically, I have absolutely no tolerance for any type of cheating, including plagiarism. This class is new, and I made all of the assignments myself, so I doubt this will be an issue. But know that any student who is found to have cheated on any assignment will **fail this course**. The best way to ensure you are not plagiarizing is to cite all of your sources. Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism or cheating does not provide an excuse or justification for engaging in such behavior. To familiarize yourself with these issues, you should read LSA's webpage on academic misconduct: <https://lsa.umich.edu/lsa/academics/academic-integrity/academic-misconduct.html>.

Religious and Academic Conflicts: In keeping with the University of Michigan's policy of respecting students' religious commitments, all attempts will be made to accommodate conflicts arising out of religious observances. For example, I am happy to move assignment deadlines that conflict with a religious holiday or to set up a time to meet during office hours to talk about topics covered in class that were missed because of a religious holiday. However, you must give me **considerable** advanced notice if you need to miss class or move an assignment because of a religious holiday.

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing: **More than any other year, I know that many of you may be struggling with issues of mental health and wellbeing.** Please also know that if you

are having difficulties, you should feel free to contact me to figure out what steps to take to address these issues.

If you or someone you know feels overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, here is some information about the available resources. You can contact **Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)** at (734) 764-8312 and <https://caps.umich.edu/> during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselors physically located in schools on both North and Central Campus. You can also consult **University Health Service (UHS)** at (734) 764-8320 and <https://www.uhs.umich.edu/mentalhealthsvcs>, or for alcohol or drug concerns, see www.uhs.umich.edu/aodresources.

For a listing of other mental health resources available on and off campus, visit <http://umich.edu/~mhealth/>.