

PS 101
Introduction to American Government and Politics
Spring, 2023
T, Th 8:00-9:20am
HB 325

Professor Clinton Jenkins
Harbert 315
Office Hours: T 4:30-5:30, Th 12:00-1:00, or by appointment
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Course Overview and Goals

This course provides a survey of the political processes and institutions of American government.

That sounds boring, right? Actually, this course will be anything but boring. U.S. political history, the processes by which citizen preferences are converted into policy, and the political institutions of this nation are all characterized by drama and conflict. We will answer questions such as: why did over 96% of members of Congress who ran for re-election win when public opinion polls consistently find that Americans rate Congress lower than cockroaches, root canals, traffic jams, and Genghis Kong? We will focus on topics like the civil rights movement, the war on terrorism, polarization in Congress, the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections and 2018 mid-term elections, and debates over gun control just to name a few. You will learn what Ludacris can teach us about public opinion. You will learn how to become a more engaged citizen.

Each of these questions or political issues can be understood most clearly through the lens of the historical and institutional developments of the American political system. In this course our lectures, readings, discussions, and assignments will focus on the fundamental ideas and structures of government that create the arena in which political events occur and ideas are discussed. We will focus on the political struggles during this nation's founding that continue to impact politics today; the Constitution; political parties; Congress; the presidency; the judiciary; voting, campaigns, and elections; public opinion; the news media; among other topics.

This course has four objectives:

- To provide you with an understanding of the United States' political development, its institutions, its political systems, and its current politics.
- To help you learn how social scientists ask and answer interesting questions about politics, including providing you with a basic familiarity with various theories of political science and how political scientists use them to understand politics.
- To help you become a savvy consumer of political news and current events, both in this class and beyond. This will include gaining the ability to interpret basic quantitative or qualitative data to understand and assess political debates, the behavior of political actors, and America's governmental institutions.

- To provide you with a foundation in what you need to know to be an engaged American citizen in your communities.

In addition, this is a community interest (CI) course, and as such, has the following objectives as well. By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Examine how community is shaped by multiple contexts
- Assess competing interests in community decision-making
- Analyze a societal problem from multiple angles or methodologies

COVID-19 Mask Policy – Spring 2023

Beginning at the start of the semester, our classroom will be “mask optional.” That means you are welcome to wear a face covering/mask/shield to class, as I likely will do, but you are not required to. I reserve the right to change this policy as the semester progresses should case numbers, deaths, hospitalizations, or other metrics of Covid-19’s spread or severity change. This may mean requiring mandatory face masks at a later date. Of course, it is also possible that college policy will change, in which case we will comply with whatever guidance that is.

Readings

Most readings will come from the two texts assigned for the course. Occasionally, I will assign additional readings. These will usually be posted on Moodle at least one week prior to the class you need them for. It is your responsibility to obtain the readings listed for the class period if they are not posted on Moodle.

There are two texts assigned for the class. They are available at the bookstore.

Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck, and Timothy Johnson. 2021. *The Logic of American Politics*, 10th Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. (Noted as “Logic” in the course calendar below).

Kernell, Samuel and Steven S. Smith. 2019. *Principles and Practice of American Politics: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, 7th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. (Noted as “Principles” in the course calendar below).

It should not be surprising for a political science course on American government, that in addition to the assigned readings each week it is expected that you will keep up with the daily news. Reading a newspaper is the best way to do this. If you are not one to read the newspaper there are many other good alternatives online, on the radio, and on television (I, for example, prefer to listen to NPR as my main source of the day’s news). The only requirement is that your chosen news source must have frequent coverage of national politics. Our discussions will frequently touch on current events, often as a way to illustrate concepts from lecture or readings. Regularly consuming the news will not only bring course material to life, but it will also make the class more interesting.

Evaluation

Your grade will be determined based on the following (weights in parentheses):

- Communities Blogging Assignment (35%)

- Mid-term Exam (15%)
- Final Exam (15%)
- Class Preparation Activities (20%)
- Attendance and Participation (15%)

Communities Project – Throughout the course of this semester, you will be required to assist in maintaining a class blog. The goal of this blog is to document various political and social issues facing communities around the United States and abroad. You will select a community of importance to you and write at least once a month March through April about local or national issues affecting the community. You will be expected to complete four blog posts during these months. In each blog post, you should select an issue affecting your community and then: 1) provide a detailed overview of the issue/problem, 2) how it affects your community, 2) engage with multiple perspectives on the issue, making sure to provide the perspective of various members of the community, 4) offer up evidence-based solutions for solving or resolving the issue or problem. This may take substantial research into the local news of the community you select as well as into various policy problems and their solutions. Each blog post is expected to be at least 750 words. Finally, you will be required to write a 3 to 4 page reflection paper about your experience of thinking and writing about local issues, including what challenges or surprises you encountered, how you learned to engage with multiple perspectives on issues, what you learned about American politics, and how it made you more aware of the communities that you reside in and your place and identity within the various communities. This will be due on the final class period. I will provide a prompt with more specific information about the paper as the date gets closer.

We will dedicate a day of class to setting up the class blog, discussing logistics, and discussing the assignment in greater detail.

Your grade for this project will be distributed as follows: 80% of your grade for the Communities project will come from completing the four blog posts. Your final paper will be worth the other 20% of your grade for this project.

Mid-term Exam – This exam may include a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions focusing on material from the readings, lecture, and discussions. I will provide more information as we get closer.

Final Exam – There will be a final exam during finals period. The final will not be cumulative. The exam may include a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions focusing on material from the readings, lecture, and discussions. I will provide more information as we get closer. Because the final is not cumulative, but instead an assessment about the second part of the semester, I am unable to exempt individuals with an “A” in the course from the final, graduating seniors or not.

Class Preparation Activities – Throughout the schedule below you will see a series of “Class Preparation Activities” listed along with the readings. These assignments are designed to get you engage with the reading and come prepared to class. We will often use these activities to get discussion going. You should type-up your responses to the preparation activities and upload them to Moodle using the correct assignment upload. The assignment upload for

each class prep is located in the folder for the week the class prep is due. These should be between about 250 to 500 words. Throughout the course there will be 10 of these, each will be worth 2% of your final course grade. They will be graded as either unsatisfactory – earning you half of the possible credit – or satisfactory, earning you all of the possible credit for that activity. I do read all of your preps, but I often will not offer comments back on them if you have sufficiently replied to the prompt.

Class preparation activities are due on the first class of each week, unless other noted in the course schedule. Class preparation activities should be turned in by 8am on the date that they are due. If you do not turn them in prior to the start of class, you will receive a “0” for that class prep.

Attendance and Participation – Your attendance and participation grade will be based on my subjective estimate of how frequently you participate actively and respectfully in class discussion and your completion of weekly in-class reflections and small group discussions. You needn’t talk in every class, nor do you need to speak for long. But you should be respectful, engaged, and participate frequently and substantively. I will speak more about how I grade participation during the first day of class.

Katy Perry is attributed as having said 80% of success is showing up.¹ I believe this is true. Part of being a good colleague and college citizen is showing up to do your part. This means showing up to class, listening respectfully to what your fellow students have to share, and offering your own perspectives on the subject matter. We all benefit by having robust discussions surrounding the topics we cover in class. Not only will participating in discussions help reinforce material from class, but it will also help you think about the world in different ways. But, in order to participate you must be there. You are allowed three absences per-semester. Every absence after that will see your final participation and attendance grade reduced by five percentage-points. I do not excuse absences – it is your responsibility to decide when it is appropriate or inappropriate to use one of your “free” absences or to take the grade reduction. If you have a unique situation, such as an extreme illness or other circumstance, that will cause you to miss a large number of classes during the semester come speak with me.

Spring 2023 Covid Attendance Policy:

Being subject to quarantine or self-isolation measures due to suspected, diagnosed COVID-19 or novel coronavirus infection, or contact with someone who has been diagnosed with it, will count as a unique situation, for which you will not be penalized. We will work out a plan for how to handle this situation should it arise. If you’re sick, don’t come to class. Email me and we’ll figure it out.

At the end of the semester your final grade will be calculated using your grades on each of the metrics above and their respective weights, and you will receive a letter grade based on the following grading scale:

A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76),

¹ Katy Perry didn’t say this. Woody Allen is attributed as saying this, but students got tired of seeing the same person in all my syllabi. Also, Woody Allen’s creep level has increased with time.

C- (70-72), D (60-69), and F (0-59).

Here are some final notes about grading in the class:

- If you have questions about the grade you received on an assignment, please come see me during office hours or send me an e-mail to schedule an appointment to meet in person. I do not discuss grades over e-mail but am more than happy to sit down with you in person and help you understand why you earned the grade you did and help you get the grade you wish next time.
- If you do not believe that the grade you received is not indicative of your work, I will regrade your assignment for you. You must contact me in writing, sending a memo about why you believe you did not deserve the grade that you received. You must contact me within one week of receiving back your work, if you do not you waive the right for me to reconsider your grade for that assignment. Once I receive your petition in writing I will regrade your work, and the resulting grade, whether higher or lower than your original, will be your final grade for that assignment.
- Late assignments will be penalized by 10-points per business-day that it is late (Monday through Friday).
- The only acceptable excuses for not completing an assignment on time are illness or family emergency. If either circumstance arises, I will give you extra time, but only if you (1) communicate with me before the assignment is due, and (2) provide documentation of the circumstance. After that is completed we will discuss a new due date.
- If you fail to complete an assignment, you will receive a 0 for that assignment.
- There is no extra credit

Religious Observances

Birmingham-Southern College is committed to the spiritual development of a diverse student body. The College makes every reasonable effort to allow students to observe religious holidays of obligation without academic penalty. Holidays of obligation are those holidays during which the observant person, according to religious practice, cannot work. Within the first 15 days of the term, students should review course syllabi for potential religious conflicts and notify me of potential conflicts. I will then work with you to make arrangements concerning missed work. Should you fail to alert me of this during the first 15 days of the term you forfeit your right to reschedule.

Scholastic Dishonesty and Academic Integrity

Please don't cheat. Seriously, do not do it. It's not worth it and will be a big headache for both of us. It's really just easier, and far more beneficial, to do the work.

Every BSC student has agreed under the Honor Code, "not to give or receive aid unfairly or dishonestly in any academic work or in any way act dishonestly in any student activity." Academic dishonesty is a violation of the Honor Code and will not be tolerated. If you are unsure as to whether a particular act will violate the Honor Code and be in any way academically dishonest, do not hesitate to ask me for clarification. Should an act of academic dishonesty take place, everyone involved will receive a zero on the assignment. In addition, depending on the severity, the act of academic dishonesty may be taken before the Honors Council and additional sanctions pursued.

Office of Accessibility/Accommodations

Students with a disability that qualify under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and/or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and require accommodations should be registered with BSC's Accessibility Office. If you are registered for academic accommodations, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible to discuss any accommodations that may be necessary. During this discussion you are not expected to disclose any details concerning your disability though you may do so at your discretion. If you have a disability but have not yet registered, please contact Dr. Sandra Foster, Assistant Director of Accessibility Services and Resources, at 205-226-7909 or smfoster@bsc.edu, or visit Olin 210. Keep in mind that no accommodation will be made unless and until the instructor receives official notification from the College.

Academic Freedom

Each student is strongly encouraged to participate in class discussions. In any classroom situation that involves discussion and critical thinking, particularly about political ideas, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. Students may not only disagree with each other at times, but the students and instructor may also find that they have disparate views on sensitive and volatile topics. It is my hope that these differences will enhance class discussion and create an atmosphere where all of us will be encouraged to think and learn from each other. Therefore, be assured that students' grades will not be affected by any beliefs or ideas expressed in class or in assignments. Rather, we will all respect the views of others when expressed in classroom discussions.

BSC Resources for Writers and Readers

Located in Humanities 102, the BSC Writing Center offers in-person and virtual peer-to-peer tutoring and quiet, supportive lab space to work on writing assignments. The Center's tutors are students from a wide variety of majors on campus and have the range to address student writing needs with discipline specificity. Supervised and assisted by BSC Writing Center directors, the tutors provide one-on-one consultations for any student at any point in the writing process. The BSC Writing Center is open Sunday-Thursday 2pm-8pm. To ensure a full 30-minute tutorial time slot, students are encouraged to be mindful of assignment-heavy weeks, keep track of due dates, and visit the Writing Center at their earliest availability during open hours. Please contact the writing center (writingcenter@bsc.edu) with any questions.

BSC's Academic Resource Center (ARC)

The Academic Resource Center (ARC), located on the ground floor of the Library, offers tutoring and one-on-one assistance for all BSC students. For more information or to make an appointment email arc@bsc.edu or visit the Academic Resource Center web page and submit a form. Reach out to us, we can help!

Title IX

Birmingham-Southern College is committed to the creation and maintenance of a safe learning environment for students and the campus community. The College forbids any type of sexual or gender-based misconduct among its students, faculty, and staff. The College encourages all members of the academic community to report suspected sexual and gender-based misconduct to the appropriate authorities so that it can be investigated, remedied, and

eliminated. BSC forbids retaliation against any person who has opposed, reported, or participated in an investigation concerning sexual or gender-based misconduct. See the BSC Title IX website (www.bsc.edu/titleix) for more information, including an online report form. If you or a peer have experienced such misconduct, there are faculty and staff members who are trained in supporting students by answering questions and helping them navigate this process. The list of advocates can be found along with other helpful resources on the Title IX website.

Technology

Technology's great. It has made us more efficient as a people and has provided humankind with more ability and power than we've ever had before. But the fact is that laptops, smart phones, and other electronic devices are a distraction to your classmates and to me. Not only that, but research has shown that we learn more when we take notes by hand:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/05/to-remember-a-lecture-better-take-notes-by-hand/361478/>

Thus, you may not use electronic devices in class, unless I have asked you to use them for the some aspect of the class. However, should you have a unique reason for needing a laptop to take notes, please contact me and we can make accommodations as necessary.

Course Schedule and Readings

(Note: This is subject to change at the will of the instructor as the semester progresses)

Logic: *Logic of American Politics*

Principles: *Principles and Practice of American Politics*

Week 1: Introduction; What is government, why do we have it, & what does it do?

Tuesday 1/31:

- Reading
 - No reading. Get a head start on Thursday's reading.
- Due
 - Nothing due this week

Part I: The Foundations of American Government and Politics

Thursday 2/2

- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 1 ("The Logic of American Politics")
 - Principles: Olson, "The Logic Of Collective Action," (1-1)
- Due
 - Class Preparation Activity 1 (due 2/2): What is a collective action problem? What are some collective action problems currently facing the nation? How might the government be used to overcome the collective action problems you identified?

Week 2: Founding of the United States and Writing of the Constitution; Communities

Blogging Assignment

Tuesday 2/7: Founding and Constitution

- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 2 ("The Constitution")
 - Principles: Madison, "Federalist 10 and 51," (2-1 and 2-2)
 - Brutus, "Anti-Federalist 3"*
- Due
 - Nothing due

Thursday 2/9: Virtual Class Today (Communities Blogging Assignment)

- Reading
 - Read through the Communities Project information posted online and view the video about the assignment.
- Due
 - By the end of today you should email to me the community you're going to blog about.

Week 3: Federalism: "We're all in this together"; Communities Blogging Assignment

Tuesday 2/14: Federalism Pt. I

- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 3 ("Federalism")
- Due

- Nothing due

Thursday 2/16: Federalism Pt. II

- Reading
 - Principles: Kettl, “Federalism: Sorting Out Who Does What,” (3-1)
 - Feldman, Noah. 2021. "Federalism shows its age fighting COVID-19, climate change," *Milford Daily News*.*
- Due
 - Nothing due.

Week 4: Civil Liberties

Tuesday 2/21:

- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 5 (“Civil Liberties”)
- Due
 - Class Preparation Activity 2 (Due 2/21): Read the *Bloomberg* article, “Secret Cameras Record Baltimore’s Every Move From Above” linked to in Moodle. In your opinion, where is the balance between privacy and security? How should decisions about these matters be made? Using your understanding from Chapter 5, what is the standard that the U.S. (Congress, Supreme Court) has typically used to make these decisions, or is there no set standard?

Thursday 2/23:

- Reading:
 - Principles: Supreme Court *Roe V. Wade* (5-2)
 - Listen to: *RadioLab* “Eye in the Sky”*
- Due:
 - Nothing due

Week 5: Civil Rights

Tuesday 2/28:

- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 4 (“Civil Rights”)
- Due
 - Class Preparation Activity 3 (Due 2/28): What are the differences between civil rights and civil liberties – both conceptually and in practice? What are the similarities?

Thursday 3/2:

- Reading
 - Principles: Levitt (4-2)
 - Menand (2013): “The Color of Law,” *The New Yorker**
- Due
 - Blog Post 1 due by 11:59pm

Part II: The Formal Institutions of American Government

Week 6: Congress

Tuesday 3/7: Congress Pt. I

- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 6 (“Congress”)
- Due
 - Class Preparation Activity 4 (Due 3/7): Would you rather serve in the House of Representatives or the Senate? If you were elected from your home district, or state, which committees would you like to serve on and why?

Thursday 3/9: Congress Pt. II

- Reading
 - Principles: Smith, “Congress, the Troubled Institution,” (6-1); Binder, “Legislating in Polarized Times,” (6-2)
- Due
 - Nothing due

Week 7: Congress & We Take an Exam

Tuesday 3/14: Congress Pt. III & Mid-Term Exam Review

- Reading
 - Review Chapter 6 of Logic, and the Smith and Binder readings from Principles.
- Due
 - Class Preparation Activity 5 (Due 3/14): What are you unclear about for the mid-term exam? Make a list and try to review those areas before class. Document your improvement in understanding and note anything you are still unclear on. Be prepared to discuss these in class.
 - Come to class with any questions you would like to ask about the mid-term exam.

Thursday 3/16: Mid-Term Exam (Online from home, library, or classroom)

- Complete the mid-term exam on Moodle. It will be available between 7:45 and 9:25am. You will have 85 minutes to complete the exam. This means you must begin it by 8:00am to have the full time to complete the exam.
- You do not need to come to class to take the exam. You may take it from the library, your housing, the computer lab, or wherever else is available and convenient. The exam is closed note, closed book. Please remember the honor code you have agreed to abide by.

Week 8: Spring Break

Tuesday 3/21:

- Reading
 - None, finally!
- Due

- Spring break

Thursday 3/23:

- Reading
 - None, whoohoo! (Now this we could get used to)
- Due
 - More spring break

Week 9: The Presidency; The Judiciary Pt. I (note class prep due Thurs this week)

Tuesday 3/28: The Presidency

- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 7 (“The Presidency”)
 - Principles: Neustadt, “From Presidential Power,” (7-1); Kernell, “Going Public,” (7-2)
- Due
 - Nothing due

Thursday 3/30: The Judiciary Pt. I

- Reading
 - Logic Chapter 9 (“The Federal Judiciary”)
- Due
 - Class Preparation Activity 6 (due 3/30): Where does the legitimacy of the Supreme Court and the decisions it makes come from? Is it the people? The Constitution? Something else? Does it matter whether or not the Court is viewed as legitimate by the people and that the people respect it?
 - Blog Post 2 due

Week 10: The Judiciary Pt. II; Political Parties Pt. I

Tuesday 4/4:

- Reading
 - Principles: Hamilton, “Federalist 78,” (9-3)
 - Yee (2017): “Judge Blocks Trump Effort to Withhold Money From Sanctuary Cities,” *Washington Post*.*
- Due
 - Nothing due

Part III: Connections Between the Government and the Public

Thursday 4/6: Political Parties I

- Reading:
 - Logic: Chapter 12 (“Political Parties”)
- Due
 - Nothing due

Week 11: Political Parties Pt. II; Campaigns and Elections

Tuesday 4/11: Political Parties II

- Reading
 - Principles: Fiorina, “Parties as Problem-Solvers,” (12-3)
 - Masket (2016): “Why Parties Never Die,” *Politico*.*
- Due
 - Class Preparation Activity 7 (Due 4/11): Are parties still problem solvers, as Morris Fiorina claims? What sort of problems do parties solve in Fiorina’s view, and is that true today? Thinking about the 2016 and 2020 election and politics since, have parties become better or worse problem-solvers?

Thursday 4/13: Campaigns and Elections (Virtual Class, videos posted in Week 11 folder on Moodle)

- Reading:
 - Logic: Chapter 11 (“Voting, Campaigns, and Elections”)
 - Popkin, “From The Reasoning Voter,” (11-1)
- Due
 - Third blog post due by 11:59pm

Week 12: Interest Groups

Tuesday 4/18:

- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 13 (“Interest Groups”)
- Due
 - Class Preparation Activity 8 (Due 4/18): Think of groups that you are a member of or that you encounter frequently. Do they try to lobby the government, or are they members of a larger group that lobbies the government (such as a trade organization or broader religious organization)? Pick one of these groups and investigate the strategies and tactics they use to lobby members of the government at either the federal or the state level.

Thursday 4/20:

- Reading
 - Principles: Schattschneider, “The Scope and Bias of the Pressure System,” (13-1)
 - Principles: Noll, “Gridlock Lobbying: Breaking, Creating, and Maintaining Legislative Stalemate,” (13-2).
- Due
 - Nothing due

Week 13: The Media – Our Window to the World

Tuesday 4/25:

- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 14 (“The News Media”)
- Due
 - Class Preparation Activity 9 (Due 4/25): For a 24-hour period, pay careful attention to your use of the media. Note where you get information about current events from, how frequently, and what other sorts of media you use for non-news use. Make a log of you media consumption and usage for a

whole 24-hour period. Reflect upon this log. What do your media habits say about you and your politics?

Thursday 4/27:

- Reading
 - Hamilton, “The Market and the Media”*
 - Principles: Allcott and Gentzkow, “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election” (14-1)
- Due
 - Fourth blog post due by 11:59pm
 - Remember, final reflection paper due May 8th at 11:59pm.

Week 14: Public Opinion

Tuesday 5/2:

- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 10 (“Public Opinion”)
- Due
 - Class Preparation Activity 10 (Due 5/2): Go on to Moodle and in the folder for this week find the “Understanding and Using Polls Activity.” First, watch the video, “The Poll Dance.” Then, read through, complete the assignment, and upload it in the appropriate assignment spot on Moodle. Make sure to respond to the discussion questions at the end.

Thursday 5/4: No Class, Honors Day

- Reading
 - Nothing
- Due
 - Nothing

Final: The final exam will be offered during the final exam period. It will be offered on Moodle much like the mid-term. Our final exam period is Wednesday, May 10th from 1:00pm to 4:00pm.