

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

POLS 101, Section 3 – Fall 2015; Colorado State University, Engineering 100; TR, 12:30-1:45

Professor Kyle Saunders

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OH: T: 11:30-12:30; R: 1:45-2:30

(& appt)

TA Mike Angstadt, ABD

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OH: T: 9:30-11:30; R: 9:30-10:30

TA Megan Ruxton, ABD

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OH: M & W 11-12:30

REQUIRED TEXT AND EQUIPMENT

- Patterson, Thomas. *The American Democracy* (Alternate Edition, 11th edition ONLY, McGraw-Hill). USED OK.
- Also, please purchase an **iClicker** if you do not have one already.

Expectations: The expectations for homework or other work outside of instructional time for this course are equivalent to the federal credit hour definition of 2 hours of outside work for each contact hour. This is a three credit course. That means that the average student should work six hours per week on this course to earn a grade of a C.

Intended Learning Outcomes: 1. Understand and apply the key debates/theories about the roles and possibilities surrounding the American political system; 2. Understand key actors and their roles/interactions in contemporary debates; 3. Understand those contemporary debates, current trends, and issues in our political system, as well as the tradeoffs and problems inherent in the system; 4. Students should be able to critically evaluate the different components of the American political system, are they effective in what they do, and why or why not?

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Grading System and Rounding Conventions:

A:92.5 and up; A-:89.5-92.4; B+:87.5-89.4; B:82.5-87.4; B-:79.5-82.4; C+:77.5-79.4; C:72.5-77.4; etc.

Student grades will be determined by his/her performance on examinations, short essays/current events journals, and iClicker/attendance quizzes.

- **Examinations (75%).** There will be three examinations. The final will **not** be comprehensive. The readings to be covered in each examination are detailed below in the course outline. Students are responsible for all assigned readings whether or not those readings are covered in the lectures and/or discussions. Examinations will be both essay and objective in format. **The best way to succeed on the exams in this course is to read the appropriate chapter/section of the book BEFORE I talk about it and use the resources at your disposal, including your instructor and your TAs. If you don't put effort in, you will get little out of this.**

Important note: Requests to take examinations other than at scheduled times must be made at least one week in advance and will be granted only at the discretion of the instructor. If a student fails to take an examination, the decision to allow makeups, and the penalty associated with that makeup, are completely at the discretion of the instructor. Only with documentation and collaboration with student services will accommodations be made.

- **Short Essays/Current Events (15%).** This portion of your grade will reflect five brief written assignments conducted throughout the semester. In Section I, you will enhance your ability to evaluate current events by preparing

three (3) brief analyses (250-300 words each; 5% total). Each will require you to link a provided news article to issues and themes discussed in class. In Sections II and III, you will prepare brief essays (750 words each; 5% each), both of which will foster the technical writing skills you will use throughout your college career. Additional guidance for each written assignment will be provided in class and via Canvas at least one week before it is due.

- **iClicker/Attendance Quizzes (10%).** There will be iClicker quizzes on the material we have covered that day and reading that was assigned. Just by answering the questions asked, you get 70% credit (the “attendance” component). We will drop students’ lowest three scores. These are meant to be “easy” points, but you will have to read!

Important note: Knowledge of current events will also be part of examinations; the whole goal of this course is to help you better understand the American political context in which you live, the only way you can do that is by paying attention and learning about it. Who knows, you might actually learn something!

Enrollment on RamCT. Students are expected to get to know Canvas (<http://info.canvas.colostate.edu/login.aspx>) as soon as possible. I will be using this site to post class notes, outlines, review questions, and other materials pertinent to the class. Enrollment is easy: go to the website above and login as with any other computer on campus, it is that easy. Each time you enter WebCT, you should have a link to this course if you are enrolled. If this is not the case, contact me as soon as possible. There’s also a great set of resources and links on that page for your information.

Class Email list. On occasion, announcements to the class will be made through email messages. I will use your university listed email address for those messages, not Canvas, unless I let you know otherwise. It is your responsibility to see to it that you receive email from that account.

Academic Integrity. Students are expected to complete their assignments with due regard to academic integrity. In order to do so they should familiarize themselves with the relevant sections of the student code of conduct. By signing all work submitted on paper, or by identifying themselves in work submitted electronically, students affirm that they neither gave nor received unauthorized aid. Collaboration on assignments among students may only occur when explicitly authorized by an instructor. In particular the Department of Political Science takes plagiarism very seriously. Plagiarism is “the representation of another’s works or ideas as one’s own; it includes the unacknowledged word for word use and/or paraphrasing of another person’s work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person’s ideas.” Students found guilty of academic misconduct will at a minimum receive a 0 for the assignment and have their conduct reported to the office of student affairs. Depending on the severity of the infraction, it is possible that a student could automatically fail the course. In sum, this course adheres to the Academic Integrity Policy of the Colorado State University General Catalog and the Student Conduct Code.

Statement Concerning Students with Disabilities. Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Colorado State University is committed to making reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Those students with disabilities that may have some impact on their coursework and for which they may require accommodations should notify the Learning Assistance Program: <http://health.colostate.edu/services/counseling-services> or Resources for Disabled Students: <http://rds.colostate.edu>. The LAP/RDS will assist students in making appropriate accommodations with course instructors. It is important that the LAP/RDS and instructors be informed of any disability-related needs during the first two weeks of the semester.

Department of Political Science Web Site. Undergraduates are strongly encouraged to consult the Department of Political Science web site on a regular basis. This up-to-date, central source of information will assist students in contacting faculty and staff, reviewing course requirements and syllabi, exploring graduate study, researching career options, tracking department events, and accessing important details related to undergraduate programs and activities. To reach the site, go to <http://polisci.colostate.edu>.

COURSE OUTLINE

Section 1

Tentative Exam Date: September 24
Chapters 1-5 of Patterson

Order of Lecture Topics

- Introduction: Who Gets What, When, and How?
- The Attitudinal Foundations of American Politics: American Political Culture (ch. 1)
- Approaches to Democracy/Democratic Theory (ch. 1 & 2)
- The Fundamentals of American Government: The Then and Now of Federalism and Politics (ch. 3)
- Civil Liberties and Civil Rights (chs. 4 & 5)

Section 1 Example Discussion Topics

- What are the principles that this government is founded on? How important is trust in the government? Do you think the increase in the mistrust of government is a positive or negative development? Can the government function effectively without the trust of the citizens? What are the inherent conflicts/tensions that any democratic society must face?
- Is Democracy always a good thing? What interests were represented at the Constitutional Convention, and how are these interests reflected in the Constitution? Does it get any better than this?
- Should laws vary across states? Does it really matter to you? How does Federalism actually affect your life?
- Which is more important to protect: democratic principles/majority rule or civil liberties/minority rights)?

Section 2

Tentative Exam Date: October 29
Chapters 6-10 of Patterson

Order of Lecture Topics

- Public Opinion, Socialization, and Attitudes in America (ch. 6)
- The Expansion of Democracy in the U.S.: Suffrage (ch. 7)
- Understanding Electoral Participation (ch. 7)
- The History and Structure of Elections and the American Party System (chs. 6, 7, and 8)
- How "Groups" Affect You in a Democracy (ch. 9)
- Public Opinion & Media (ch. 10)

Section 2 Example Discussion Topics

- What do people know and feel about politics? What social characteristics play an important role in the

attitudes that people feel about politics? Are there patterns in how people identify with political actors and entities?

- What would universal participation in our elections yield? How much participation is too little? Why isn't there more?
- Why do we have two parties? Would having many parties in the American system be better than having just two? Why do we hate parties so much?
- Is our campaign finance system a reflection of our values? What can we do to change the narrow influence of the wealthy or corporate interests in our politics?
- What role do interest groups/organized interests play in a pluralistic system? Is it really the voice of the people that matters in a democracy? What role do the media play as a linkage?

Section 3

Final Exam: 12:30 TR, December 16, 9:40-11:40am.
Chapters 11-14 of Patterson as well as a policy chapter assignment

Order of Lecture Topics

- Understanding Congress and Policy (ch. 11)
- The Politics of the Presidency, the Congress and the Courts (chs. 11, 12, and 14)
- Bureaucracy: The Good and The Bad (ch. 13)
- Policy chapter/assignment

Section 3 Example Discussion Topics

- Should members of Congress act according to the wishes of their constituencies or to the directives of their individual consciences? How does Congress function? What exactly does Congress represent?
- Does it really matter who is president? What is "gridlock?" Is it the product of divided party control of government or can it be induced by other factors?
- What does the bureaucracy actually do? Why do we hate it so? What about the good things it does?
- Should the Courts make public policy? What of judicial activism and restraint?
- How does one learn about particular policy/issue areas? What information do you need to know to understand both sides of the argument?