

Syllabus for POLS 101
American Government and Politics

Class times Monday, Wednesday, and Friday 10:00am-10:50am

Location Behavioral Sciences Building A 101

Professor Anna Mikkelsen, Ph.D.

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Student hours Monday and Friday 11:00am-12:30pm, Clark C330

GTAs

Erin Fitz

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Student hours Wednesday 12:00pm-3:00pm, Clark C347

Course Description

This course is an introduction to the principles, structures, and processes of American national government. It is designed to be useful and engaging for students with varying degrees of familiarity with American government and politics; no prior knowledge is assumed. By the end of the semester, you will be equipped to engage critically with a range of political science concepts and with political news.

In the first of three major units, we will consider the rules of the game: the innovations and compromises that went into the country's founding documents, the relationships between branches and levels of government, and the rights and liberties guaranteed to individuals. The second unit covers how individuals form political beliefs and engage with the state, both individually and collectively through mediating institutions like parties and interest groups. Finally, in the third unit, we will spend a week discussing each of four elements of American government — Congress, the Presidency, the Courts, and the federal bureaucracy — and learning about how these elements interact with one another, mediating institutions, and individuals.

Learning Objectives

Per the description above, we will cover a lot of ground, but all the readings, lectures, and assignments are designed to help you meet the following three goals:

1. Deepen thinking about how power flows between individuals and political structures and institutions in American government
2. Understand the central cleavages of political conflict in the United States throughout its history
3. Gain comfort participating in political discussions where differences of opinion may arise

You will spend time over the course of the semester setting and reflecting on your own goals as well.

Course Overview

Getting Situated

1	Introduction	August 19	By Wednesday: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Take the start-of-semester survey By Friday: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Olson, The Logic of Collective Action pp. 5-16 (This might be the toughest reading all semester. Do not panic if it's challenging. Take some time with it and then watch this.)Wike et al., "What People Around the World Like — and Dislike — About American Society and Politics" <i>New York Times</i>
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Unit 1: The Rules

2	The Founding	August 26	By Monday: <ul style="list-style-type: none">AG3e Chapter 2 By Wednesday: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Excerpts from Dahl, <i>How Democratic Is the American Constitution?</i> (Part 1) (Part 2)
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NO CLASS Monday, September 2

3	Federalism	September 2	By Wednesday: <ul style="list-style-type: none">AG3e Chapter 3 By Monday 9/9: <ul style="list-style-type: none">SoRelle and Walker, "Both Democrats and Republicans Care about States' Rights — When It Suits Them" <i>Good Authority</i>Gabriel, "Two Families Got Fed Up with Their States' Politics. So They Moved Out." <i>New York Times</i>
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NO CLASS Friday, September 6

4	Civil liberties	September 9	By Wednesday: <ul style="list-style-type: none">AG3e Chapter 4 By Friday: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Senat, Description of Healy v James, <i>Free Speech Center</i>ACLU Q&A, "Speech on Campus" <i>ACLU</i>CSU Free Speech Policy (skim)Meyn, "How Campus Protests Flip-Flopped America's Free Speech Debate" <i>The Hill</i>
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5	Civil rights	September 16	By Monday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AG3e Chapter 5 <p>No additional readings this week. Prepare for your exam!</p>
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Unit 1 exam in class on Friday, September 20

Unit 2: The Formation and Aggregation of Political Beliefs

6	Public opinion	September 23	By Monday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AG3e Chapter 6 <p>By Wednesday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Menand, "The Unpolitical Animal" <i>The New Yorker</i> (PDF on Canvas) </p>
7	Voting and elections	September 30	By Monday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AG3e Chapter 7 <p>By Wednesday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Illing, "Two Eminent Political Scientists: The Problem with Democracy is Voters" <i>Vox</i> Additional reading TBA </p>

One-pager on plan for political activity paper due 5:00pm on Thursday, October 3

8	Political parties	October 7	By Monday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AG3e Chapter 9 <p>By Wednesday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Take the mid-semester survey</i> Azari, "Weak Parties and Strong Partisanship Are a Bad Combination" <i>Vox</i> You might want to start looking over Bawn et al. (assigned for next week) </p>
9	Interest groups	October 14	By Monday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AG3e Chapter 10 <p>By Wednesday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bawn et al., "A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics" <i>Perspectives on Politics</i> (PDF on Canvas) </p>
10	Polarization	October 21	By Monday: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pierson and Schickler, "Madison's Constitution Under Stress: A Developmental Analysis of Political Polarization" <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i> <p>No additional readings this week. Prepare for your exam!</p>

Unit 2 exam in class on Friday, October 25

Unit 3: Formal Institutions of American Government

11	Congress	October 28	<p>By Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AG3E Chapter 11 <p>By Wednesday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rudalevige, “Why Does Congress Have Such a Hard Time Passing Laws? Let’s Blame the Constitution,” <i>Good Authority</i> (read and watch) Schaefer, “The Changing Face of Congress in 8 Charts,” <i>Pew Research Center</i>
12	The Presidency	November 4	<p>By Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AG3E Chapter 12 <p>By Wednesday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No reading. Watch, read, or listen to some coverage of the election. <p>By Friday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elkins, “How Powerful is the US President?” <i>Vox/Mischief of Faction</i>
13	The Courts	November 11	<p>By Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> AG3E Chapter 13 <p>By Wednesday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jessee, Malhotra, and Sen, “A Decade-Long Longitudinal Survey Shows that the Supreme Court is Now Much More Conservative than the Public,” <i>Proceedings of the National Academy of Science</i> (This is a relatively technical reading intended to give you further practice with academic articles. This <i>Politico</i> piece by the authors covers many of the same points and may help you follow the PNAS article.) Choose an issue area on Justia’s “Supreme Court Cases By Topic” page and read through the selection of Supreme Court cases on that issue
14	The Federal Bureaucracy	November 18	<p>By Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rudalevige, “Writing a Constitution Is the Easy Part. Here’s How the Bureaucracy Puts It into Action,” <i>Good Authority</i> (read and watch) Covert, “This Is the Difference Between a Family Surviving and a Family Sinking,” <i>New York Times</i> Harris, “Eat Your Spinach — If You Dare,” <i>Politico</i> <p>No additional readings for Wednesday. Prepare for your final unit exam!</p>

Unit 3 exam in class on Friday, November 22

Wrapping up

15	Fall recess	November 25	No readings. Enjoy the time off and get ready to finish strong!
16	Review and special topics	December 2	No readings. Finish the political activity paper and prepare for the final!

Political activity paper due 5:00pm on Thursday, December 5

17	Finals week	December 9
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Final exam 11:50-1:50 on Tuesday, December 10 in Behavioral Sciences Building A 101

Final grades will be submitted no later than Monday, December 16.

Materials, Assignments, and Grading

Textbook / Course Readings

You should expect to read approximately one textbook chapter and one to three news articles and other supplemental readings for this course each week. Particularly later in the course, there will be a higher proportion of technical academic readings to prepare you for upper-division POLS courses. We will discuss strategies for reading these more technical pieces in class.

We will spend class on Monday and the first half of Wednesday covering broad concepts, and you will get the most out of this if you have already read the textbook chapter for that week. Except where indicated otherwise, you should come to class on Wednesday having completed the additional readings for the week.

The reading load for this course is relatively light, but this comes with a catch: You are responsible for learning all of the material in the readings, regardless of whether I cover it again in lecture. You should set aside three to four hours each week to complete the readings. You could skim everything in much less time than that, but skimming will not really help you to meet the learning objectives for this course. I expect you to read them deeply, taking time to reflect, consider connections between readings within and across weeks, and highlight questions you have after completing the readings.

The textbook is [*American Government 3e*](#). It is available for free online, and you can access it through the Canvas site for this course. You can also [order a hard copy](#) for about \$40 if you prefer. The [student resources](#) tab on the textbook website has some great material on how to use the textbook, as well as links to access the textbook as a free audiobook on YouTube, Spotify, and Apple Podcasts.

Links to other assigned readings are available in this syllabus and on the course website. CSU students have access to a free *New York Times* subscription, which you will need to activate in order to access some of the readings for this course. You can find instructions on how to do so [here](#).

Assignments

Start-of-semester and mid-semester surveys

A small part of your grade will be based on the completion of two surveys: one in the first week of class and one in the eighth week of class. These surveys serve a few purposes. They enable me to learn more about you and your interests, which will help me make the course more interesting and enriching. They will encourage you to set your own goals for our time together and to reflect on your progress. Finally, they will invite you to consider the feedback you have received on your work in the first half of the course and consider how you can apply this feedback in the second half. We will talk about these two surveys more on the first day of class.

iClicker Cloud polls

We will be using iClicker Cloud, a polling platform that is covered by the University Technology Fee and available to you at no additional cost. For this course, you can use your laptop or mobile device to answer iClicker questions. You do not need to buy an iClicker remote. Instructions on how to set up your iClicker account are available [here](#).

There will be two or three poll questions per class session. Some will be fact-based and others will be subjective. You will get 1 point for each question you answer. There is no penalty for incorrect answers to factual questions, but please do your best as this helps me gauge how the class is doing and adjust if needed. Note that your score for this component of the course will be taken out of 40 and there will be more than 40 questions over the course of the semester, meaning that if you attend every day and take all the polls, you will eventually earn extra credit. This also means that you can still get full credit for the polls even if you miss a class session here and there. It is therefore not possible to make up missed poll questions.

Midterm exams

There will be an exam after each of the three main units of the course on the Friday before we begin the next unit. The exams will be short-answer questions. They will be closed-note, handwritten, and 45 minutes in length. We will discuss the midterm exams in greater detail a week or so before the first exam.

Political activity reflection paper

A more thorough description of this assignment will be posted on Canvas.

For the term paper for this course, you will attend a “political activity” of your choice outside of campus activities and write about it. Your activity could be a campaign event, candidate debate, city or town meeting, information session, interest group meeting, rally, or protest. It can be sponsored or organized by a government agency or elected official, candidate for office, or interest group/social movement/political organization. The event must be open to the public and related to influencing politics or political outcomes in some way (the event should not merely be a social event or party). The event can be in-person or online (such as a Zoom city council meeting). If it is a Zoom event, you may attend live or watch a recording. Events need not be local, but to work for this assignment, they should be in the United States and relate to American politics.

You will submit a brief (no more than one page) description of the political event you plan to attend by 5:00pm on Thursday, October 3. The one-pager should include a brief explanation of what the event is, when and where it will take place, and why you believe it fits the criteria for this assignment. In addition, you should indicate which two weeks of course material you think you will draw upon in your paper (see next paragraph). It’s okay if we haven’t covered those weeks yet, and you can change which weeks you focus

on for the final paper — this is just to get you thinking about how the event might relate to course themes. The one-pager is worth 10 points.

The full paper (worth 40 points) is due at 5:00pm on Thursday, December 5. The paper should be 1,000 to 1,500 words (double spaced; Times New Roman, 12pt font, 1-inch margins, with page numbers). The first half of your paper should provide a summary of the political activity you observed. For the second half of your paper, you should describe how you think the event relates to concepts from two different weeks of the course. Your discussion should cite at least one reading from each of the two weeks of class you are referencing.

The political activity one-pager and reflection paper are the only two outside assignments for this course. To stay on track and enable the course graders to complete their work in a timely manner, please endeavor to turn them in on time. One-pagers submitted within one week of the due date will receive a maximum grade of 90 (*i.e.*, 5/50 points will be automatically deducted), those submitted 1-3 weeks late will receive a maximum grade of 80, and those submitted 3-4 weeks late will receive a maximum grade of 70. One-pagers submitted after 4 weeks will not receive credit. The same grade deductions apply to the final paper, but because the deadline for instructors to submit final grades is midday on December 17, final papers will not be accepted after 5:00pm on Friday, December 13.

Final exam

The final exam will be cumulative and similar in format to the midterm exams. You will answer a total of eight short-answer questions.

Grading

Assignment	Points	Course percentage
Start-of-semester survey	5	2.5%
Midterm exam 1	20	10%
Midterm exam 2	20	10%
Mid-semester survey	5	2.5%
Midterm exam 3	20	10%
Political activity paper	50	25%
Final exam	40	20%
iClicker Cloud polls	40	20%

Grade	Range
A	90-100%
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	0-59%

The tables above indicate the basis for your final grade. Please note that I do not offer extra credit on an individual basis. Remember that you can earn extra credit by attending class and completing all the polls.

Course Policies

Attendance

Attendance in this course is required, as is reflected by the component of your grade based in the completion of polls during lecture. I expect you to arrange other commitments in your life in such a way that you can attend each class session. At the same time, I recognize that life happens, and unforeseen circumstances may arise. Please email me as soon as possible if you need to miss class because of illness, a family emergency, or a religious observance.

Electronic devices

You will need to bring an electronic device to class in order to complete the iClicker polls. I strongly encourage you to put devices down at all other times during class. Decades of psychology research tell us that taking notes by hand improves understanding and recall. I will post my slides at the end of each module, so you will not need to copy down a lot of text. If you do decide to take notes on an electronic device, it is your responsibility to ensure that your device is not distracting to others. The GTAs and I retain the discretion to ask you to put away your device if it creates a distraction.

Academic honesty

This course will adhere to the Academic Integrity Policy of the [Colorado State University General Catalog](#) and the [Student Conduct Code](#).

Cheating is not only unethical, but also a waste of your own time and money. With few exceptions, your future employer will not care about your grade in POLS 101, but they will hire you on the basis of the critical thinking, reading, and writing skills that this course is designed to help you develop. The assignments aren't the point; the learning is. Take the time to do it right.

Email

Please refer to [these guidelines](#) when emailing me (and other instructors). I hope you will feel comfortable reaching out to me if you have a problem or question. That said, I am one person teaching over 200 students this semester! Accordingly, I request that you keep email to administrative matters only and instead come to student hours if your question relates to the substance of the course. Under most circumstances, I will respond to emails within 48 hours. If you have not received a response after 48 hours, please send a follow up message.

Guaranteed Transfer Pathways Program

The Colorado Commission on Higher Education has approved POLS 101 for inclusion in the Guaranteed Transfer (GT) Pathways program in the GT-SS1 Category. For transferring students, successful completion with a minimum C– grade guarantees transfer and application of credit in this GT Pathways category. More information on the GT Pathways program is available [here](#).

Pursuant to this certification, students will learn, in this class, to

1. Demonstrate knowledge of economic or political systems.
2. Use the social sciences to analyze and interpret issues.
3. Explain diverse perspectives and groups.

Furthermore, students will complete writing assignments that require reflection, analysis of key texts and concepts, making analytical distinctions, and evaluating evidence in support of claims. Such writing assignments will constitute at least 25% of the final grade in the course.

GTPathways Core Student Learning Outcomes

Civic Engagement

1. Civic Knowledge:
 - Connect disciplinary knowledge to civic engagement through one's own participation in civic life, politics, and/or government.

Critical Thinking

2. Explain an Issue:
 - Use information to describe a problem or issue and/or articulate a question related to the topic.
3. Utilize Context:
 - Evaluate the relevance of context when presenting a position.
 - Identify assumptions.
 - Analyze one's own and others' assumptions.
4. Understand Implications and Make Conclusions:
 - Establish a conclusion that is tied to the range of information presented.
 - Reflect on implications and consequences of stated conclusion.
 - Diversity & Global Learning
5. Build Self-Awareness:
 - Demonstrate how their own attitudes, behaviors, or beliefs compare or relate to those of other individuals, groups, communities, or cultures.
6. Examine Perspectives:
 - Examine diverse perspectives when investigating social and behavioral topics within natural or human systems.

Written/Oral Communication

7. Develop Content and Message
 - Create and develop ideas within the context of the situation and the assigned task(s).
8. Use Sources and Evidence
 - Critically read, evaluate, apply, and synthesize evidence and/or sources in support of a claim.
9. Use language appropriate to the audience

Class Community

CSU Principles of Community

Inclusion: We create and nurture inclusive environments and welcome, value and affirm all members of our community, including their various identities, skills, ideas, talents and contributions.

Integrity: We are accountable for our actions and will act ethically and honestly in all our interactions.

Respect: We honor the inherent dignity of all people within an environment where we are committed to freedom of expression, critical discourse, and the advancement of knowledge.

Service: We are responsible, individually and collectively, to give of our time, talents, and resources to promote the well-being of each other and the development of our local, regional, and global communities.

Social Justice: We have the right to be treated and the responsibility to treat others with fairness and equity, the duty to challenge prejudice, and to uphold the laws, policies and procedures that promote justice in all respects.

Student support

This link (<https://col.st/2FA2g>) and the QR code below provide policies relevant to your courses and resources to help with challenges you might encounter during the semester, including: information about Canvas, the course website platform; other technical support; accommodation of needs for learning; copyright policy; support for undocumented students; food insecurity; sexual harassment, misconduct, and violence; religious observances; student parents; student case management for those managing extenuating life circumstances; and mental health and wellness. If you need help and can't find the support you need here, please tell me and I will do my best to connect you with the right resource.

