

POLS-100 National Politics

Oxford College of Emory University

Spring 2015

Monday/Wednesday

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is intended for students interested in political science as a major (it fulfills a distribution requirement for the major). The course is designed to give a broad overview of politics in the American context. We begin with the theoretical basis of the American political system (democratic theory, the US Constitution, American political culture, and federalism), then move on to the linkages between that foundation and American political institutions, and lastly to Legislative and Executive Branches of our government.

Textbook

The primary textbook for this course is Wilson, Dilulio and Boise. *American Government: Institutions and Policies, 13th Edition* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2013). It can be purchased at the Oxford College bookstore or via online retailers such as Amazon and Barnes & Noble. Hereinafter references to the textbook are denoted as 'Wilson et al.'

A number of additional readings are also required. These will mostly be provided electronically, either via Blackboard (denoted 'Blackboard' in the syllabus) or via the hyperlinks embedded in this syllabus (denoted 'Internet'). A small number of other supplementary materials will also be distributed in print during class (denoted 'Handout').

Lastly, you are expected to keep abreast of current developments in American politics. I encourage you to regularly read a daily national newspaper such as the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, or another major paper that regularly covers American politics such as the *Guardian* or the *Financial Times*. The University maintains electronic subscriptions to all of these periodicals, and hard copies of the *New York Times* are also available on campus.

Electronic copies of the daily print editions of the newspapers mentioned above – and many, many more – can also be accessed via the [PressDisplay](#) archive, available via the library website.

GRADES

- 3 Non-Cumulative Exams (20% each)
- Fidelity Checks (15% total)
- Current Events Presentations (15%)
- Participation/Attendance (10%)

Exam Dates (All In Class!!!!) – All exams will contain a mixture of short answer & multiple-choice questions.

Exam 1: February 18

Exam 2: April 1

Exam 3: April 30 (2-5PM)

Fidelity Checks: Throughout the semester, there will be at least four but not more than six unannounced 'fidelity checks.' Each fidelity check will contain a number of multiple choice or short answer style questions about the assigned reading material as well as recent

developments in current events. There will be no make-ups for these fidelity checks except in extraordinary circumstances as provided for in the Oxford College Catalog. Your lowest fidelity check score will be dropped when calculating this component of your final grade.

Current Events Presentations: Each Monday (as well as on the Wednesdays denoted with asterisks* in the course outline below) we will begin the class period with a discussion of recent current events. There will be no current events presentations on exam days. Two student volunteers will facilitate each period's discussion. The duties of the facilitators will be as follows:

First, each student facilitator should select a single article from a major national newspaper that they believe is related to the topic assigned on the syllabus for that day (e.g. if you are a facilitator on February 4th – Federalism Part I you will select a newspaper article related to federalism).

Second, having selected an article, each facilitator will post a link to the article and two possible discussion questions to the 'Discussion' section of the course Blackboard site (available at <https://classes.emory.edu>). These items should be posted *no later than* 5:00 PM the day before you are serving as a facilitator (e.g. if you are serving as a facilitator on February 4th, you would be required to post your article & discussion questions by 5:00 PM on February 3rd.)

Finally, at the beginning of the class period each facilitator will introduce their article, describe its relevance to the topic being covered and raise questions for discussion in a short – not more than five minutes – presentation. At the conclusion of this presentation each facilitator will moderate a group discussion of their article. The discussion should last between five and ten minutes.

Participation and Attendance: Students must attend all lectures for this course. Attendance will be taken during every lecture by means of a sign-in sheet, which will be circulated at the beginning of class. Each unexcused absence in excess of the third unexcused absence will result in one 'minus' in the student's final grade (e.g. an A becomes an A-).

Students are expected to contribute actively to the debates and discussions in class. Discussion will focus on helping the students apply the concepts covered in lecture and will use activities such as simulations and debates to accomplish this goal. These activities will largely be based on the reading materials provided, but they may also require additional light reading, typically in the form of news items relevant to the issue being discussed, which will be forwarded to you by the instructor. It is vital that you arrive ready to talk about and debate the theoretical issues and questions that have been raised by the readings and during lectures.

Honor Code

All students are bound by the Oxford College Honor Code and the Honor Code will be strictly enforced in this course. The code can be accessed at:

<http://oxford.emory.edu/academics/student-services/student-honor-code/>

COURSE OUTLINE

January 15 – Introduction

January 19 – **No Class**, Martin Luther King holiday

January 21* – The *science* in Political Science

- Major Questions: What is the nature of the political world? What is scientific inquiry? Is it possible to study politics scientifically?
 - Selection from Almond & Genco “Clouds, Clocks and the Study of Politics” (Blackboard)
 - Selection from Collier, Seawright and Munk “The Quest for Standards”

PART I: FOUNDATIONS AND OVERVIEW OF THE AMERICAN SYSTEM

January 26 – Democratic Theory/How Democratic is the United States?

- Major Questions: What is democracy? How democratic is the United States?
 - Chapter 1 (Wilson et al)
 - Selection from Gilens and Page “Testing Theories of American Politics” (Blackboard)
 - Sahil Kapur “Scholar Behind Viral ‘Oligarchy’ Study Tells You What It Means” (Internet - <http://bit.ly/1i6ic5i>)

January 28 – The Articles of Confederation (AoC) & the Problem of Collective Action

- Major Questions: What is the problem of collective action? What were the key weaknesses of the AoC as a solution to this problem for the states? How are these weaknesses illustrated by the national government’s response to Shays’ Rebellion?
 - Chapter 2 (Wilson et al)
 - Selection from Keith L. Dougherty *Collective Action Under the Articles of Confederation* (Blackboard)
 - Background materials on Shays’ Rebellion (Handout)

February 2 & February 4 – The Constitution

- Major Questions: What are the key strengths & weaknesses of the Constitution as compared to the AoC? What were the main arguments for/against ratifying the constitution?
 - Chapter 2 (Wilson et al)
 - Selection from Pauline Maier “Chapter 3: A War of Printed Words” (Blackboard)
 - Federalists No. 10 (Wilson et al)
 - Centinel No. 1 (Blackboard)

February 9 – Federalism Part I: Fundamentals

- Major Questions: What is ‘federalism,’ anyway? How does the federal nature of the Constitution influence policymaking in the United States?
 - Chapter 3 (Wilson et al)
 - Selection from Pickerill & Bowling “Polarized Parties, Politics, and Policies: Fragmented Federalism in 2013 – 2014” (Blackboard)

February 11 – Federalism Part II: A ‘federalist’ amendment to the Constitution?

- Major Question: Should our class ‘ratify’ the ‘Federalism Amendment’ proposed by Randy E. Barnett?
 - Review Chapter 3 (Wilson et al) & Pickerill & Bowling
 - Randy E. Barnett “The Case for a Federalism Amendment” (Blackboard)
 - Federalists No. 45 (Blackboard)
 - Sydney “Powers of National Government” (Blackboard)

February 16 – American Political Culture & Civic Engagement

- Major Questions: What are the defining characteristics of ‘American political culture?’ Has the nature of American political culture changed since Bellah et al published in the mid-1980s?
 - Chapter 4 (Wilson et al) pp. 79 – 82 & 88 – 94
 - Bellah et al *Habits of the Heart*, Chapter 2: Culture and Character: The Historical Conversation (Blackboard)

February 18

EXAM 1

PART II: CONNECTING THE GOVERNMENT TO THE PEOPLE:
PUBLIC OPINION & THE MEDIA, POLITICAL PARTIES & INTEREST GROUPS, AND
CAMPAIGNS & ELECTIONS

February 23 & February 25 – Public Opinion

- Major Questions: What does the public know about politics? How do we know what the public knows? How does public opinion affect public policy at the state & federal level?
 - Chapter 7 (Wilson et al)
 - Link & Oldendick “Good” Polls/“Bad” Polls: How Can You Tell? (Internet - <http://bit.ly/1xgrYEx>).
 - Ariel Edwards-Levy “America’s Record Number of Independents Aren’t as Independent as You Might Think” (Internet - <http://huff.to/1BbSeq5>)
 - Selection from Shapiro “Public Opinion and American Democracy” (Blackboard)

March 2 & March 4 – Political Participation

- Major Questions: Who participates in politics? How does participation translate into influence? How has political participation in the United States changed in the past 50 years?
 - Review Bellah et al, Chapter 2
 - Selection from Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (Blackboard)
 - Sander & Putnam “Still Bowling Alone” (Blackboard)
 - Hibbing & Theiss-Morse “Citizenship & Civic Engagement” (Blackboard)

March 9 – 11

OFF SPRING RECESS

March 16 & March 18 – Political Parties

- Major Questions: Why do politicians form political parties? Are American parties fundamentally different from parties in other democracies? How? Why?
 - Chapter 9 (Wilson et al) pp. 204 – 216, 220 – 225 & 229
 - John Aldrich *Why Parties?* Chapter 1: Politics and Parties in America (Blackboard)
 - Richard Pildes “How to Fix Our Polarized Politics? Strengthen Political Parties” (Internet - <http://wapo.st/14PB98B>)
 - Jenkins & Stewart “Boehner’s Dissidents” (Internet - <http://wapo.st/1tZDMLo>)

March 23 & 25 – Elections and Campaigns

- Major Questions: What purpose do elections serve? How does the nature of our electoral system influence political competition & policymaking?
 - Chapter 10 (Wilson et al)
 - John B. Anderson “Let the Most Popular Candidate Win” (Internet - <http://bit.ly/1A1rOKU>)
 - Steve Brandt “New Voting Not as Simple as 1-2-3” (Internet - <http://strib.mn/1wPLpVG>)

March 30 – Interest Groups

- Major Questions: What is pluralism? How do interest groups influence policymaking? Do different types of interest groups exert different levels of influence on the policymaking process?
 - Chapter 11 (Wilson et al)
 - Review Gilens & Page
 - Jane Ridgeway “The Airport Scanner Scam” (Internet - <http://bit.ly/1A81yqv>)

April 1

EXAM II

PART III: INSTITUTIONS & PUBLIC POLICY

April 6 & April 8 – Congress

- Chapter 13 (Wilson et al)
- Additional reading TBD

April 13 – The Judiciary

- Major Questions: Are Supreme Court Justices *political* actors? How does the US Supreme Court influence the behavior of lawmakers? How does the power/influence of the US Supreme Court compare to the power/influence of high courts in other democracies?
 - Chapter 16 (Wilson et al)
 - Gallagher et al “Constitutions, Judges and Politics”

April 15 & April 20 – The Presidency

- Chapter 14 (Wilson et al)
- Additional reading TBD

April 22 & April 27 – The Bureaucracy

- Major Questions: What is the purpose of the federal bureaucracy? How does the federal bureaucracy influence your life? Why do politicians delegate authority to bureaucrats?
 - Chapter 15 (Wilson et al)
 - Jake Miller “Obama Urged to Reclassify ‘Less Dangerous’ Marijuana” (Internet - <http://cbsn.ws/1DQbNnb>)

April 30

EXAM 3 (2-5PM)

(Final-Non Cumulative)