

**Politics 172—American Politics**  
**Cornell College**  
**Block 7 (2018 – 2019)**

**Instructor**

Dr. Chris Kromphardt  
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office: South Hall 304  
office hours: Held immediately after class, or by email appointment

**Room and Meeting Times**

South Hall 302  
9:30 – 11:00 a.m.; 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. (M, Tu, Th)  
9:30 – 11:30 a.m. (W, F)

**Course Description and Learning Objectives**

The catalog's description for POL 172 is as follows: "Survey of process and institutions of politics in the United States. Addresses topics in political behavior such as individual political attitudes, political participation in the U.S. context as well as discussing American political institutions such as the presidency, Congress, the judicial system, the bureaucracy, political parties, and interested groups."

This course will cover three units, which are organized topically. The first unit covers the U.S. Constitution, which is the source of fundamental law in the U.S. While any systematic approach to understanding American politics should not end with the text of the Constitution, understanding what it requires, allows, and prohibits, its organizing principles, and how it has been interpreted and amended is an important place to start. The second unit emphasizes political behavior, which includes the myriad ways people and groups engage in politics, American-style, and the causes and effects of these activities. The final unit focuses on major institutions of the federal government contained within the three branches. We will explore the purpose and function of institutional design, much of which comes from the Constitution, although institutions evolve over time.

The learning objectives for this course align with its status as a political science course. Civics courses focus on knowledge of the Constitution, but may stop short of using the scientific method as a tool for understanding political phenomena. Careful use of the scientific method provides reliable knowledge about the causes and effects of observable outcomes. For instance, what factors influence who votes in presidential and congressional elections, and how does the turnout rate, which is often less than 50% of the eligible population, affect legislative priorities? The methods of political science are well suited for answering complex questions of the sort that dominate American politics today. Many people living in the U.S. are turned off by the adversarial nature of politics, but we will work to separate the reality from the myth, the empirical knowledge from the fake news.

- Can demonstrate knowledge of how government organization, distribution of power, civil rights, and civil liberties reflect constitutional principles of federalism and separation of powers
- Can identify features of federal institutions and use logical reasoning to think about their purposes and effects

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- Can demonstrate knowledge about how socialization, polarization, and collective-action problems clarify the exercise of political behavior
- Can model an empirical approach to analyzing evidence about political phenomena through oral and written communication

This course meets the Knowledge Educational Priority and Objective (EPO) by integrating and applying knowledge from a focused area of study, that of American political institutions and behavior, and by broadening knowledge for general education in other courses, especially the social sciences. It meets the Inquiry and Reasoning EPOs by modeling best social-science practices for evaluating and reasoning about contemporary questions from evidence. Finally, it meets the Communication and Citizenship EPOs through its emphasis on class discussion and group collaboration, including offering peer feedback.

### **Readings and Resources**

Students should stay abreast of current events, which will often provide fodder for discussion and further application of course material. I recommend seeking out news from a variety of sources, including those that you may not consult otherwise. We will discuss good practices for being a discerning consumer of information.

#### *Moodle*

I post course materials on Moodle, including the syllabus, assignments, and presentations (after they have been given in class).

#### *Required texts*

Lowi, Theodore et al. 2017. *American Government: Power and Purpose*, 14<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Norton.

Canon, David et al. 2018. *Fault Lines: Debating the Issues in American Politics*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Norton.

### **Grading and Graded Material**

#### *Grading scale*

All assignments will be graded on a 100-point scale. Letter grades will be assessed on the following scale: A (93-100); A- (90-92); 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 (59 and below).

#### *Participation*

Participation consists of attending class and asking and answering questions. I will keep a daily tally of participation, with a maximum of three points available per day. Students who earn 25 participation points will receive full credit; partial credit will be awarded as a proportion of participation points earned. Participation is worth 7.5% of the block grade.

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*Experience essay*

Students will submit one 750-word essay in which they reflect on an out-of-class experience concerning a presidential candidate's campaign event. Essays must be typed and turned in to the instructor in hard-copy form no more than 2 class days after completion of the event. This essay is worth 5% of the overall grade. Note: Students should see me as soon as possible if they foresee difficulties attending a campaign event. See the following for an up-to-date list of events: <http://data.desmoinesregister.com/iowa-caucus/candidate-tracker/index.php>

*Discussion leadership*

Students will serve as a discussion leader for a selection of readings from Canon et al. Leaders will be called upon during class to answer basic factual questions about the passages and to offer their opinion. Discussion leaders are required to email the instructor their notes for the readings, highlighting at least two points of contrast among each passage, prior to class. Students' turn as leader is worth 5% of the semester grade. Note: Leader assignments will be made on Day 5.

*Political actor simulation*

Simulation enables students to learn about processes by assuming roles and thinking about what motivates a person's behavior. To learn about behavioral motivations in the context of American politics, students will simulate the decision making process of a real-life political actor.

Each student will be assigned a general class of political actor (e.g., federal judges, campaign managers). Students will choose a real person who has served in this role, and then write a 750-word paper in which they describe a time that this person achieved a significant political success. Students must cite credible journalistic sources as they describe the political success and at least two obstacles the person overcame to achieve it. Papers are due in hard-copy form on the morning that we cover the assigned topic. Role-players will be called upon during class to describe their success and obstacles overcome. Note: Role assignments will be made on Day 5.

*Exams*

There are three closed-book exams containing multiple-choice and short-answer questions. An exhaustive list of potential short-answer questions will be distributed before each exam, and class time will be allocated to fielding questions. Exams will be range from 20% of the block grade (student's highest scoring exam) to 15% to 12.5% (student's lowest scoring exam).

*Revision memo*

Students will write papers in which they propose substantive revisions to a chapter for the next edition of the Lowi et al. textbook. This assignment will involve conducting research and making proposals about a substantive addition and deletion to an assigned chapter. This assignment will involve elements of teamwork, although each student will be graded individually. In particular, students will meet periodically during the block with others assigned to the same chapter and offer

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each other peer feedback. Also, alongside their chapter mates, students will give short oral presentations on Days 17 and 18.

A more extensive assignment sheet will be distributed during Week 2. Memos are worth 25% of the semester grade. Presentations are worth 5%. Note: Group assignments will be made on Day 7.

**Policies**

*Cell phones and laptops*

Use of cell phones in the classroom is strictly prohibited. Violation of this policy will result in loss of participation points for the day. Use of laptops is permitted only for looking up information that pertains to class discussion, and should not be used as a tool for taking notes.

*Academic Honesty*

Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgement of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in The Catalogue, under the heading "Academic Honesty."

*Disabilities*

Cornell College makes reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. Students should notify the Coordinator of Academic Support and Advising and their course instructor of any disability related accommodations within the first three days of the term for which the accommodations are required, due to the fast pace of the block format. For more information on the documentation required to establish the need for accommodations and the process of requesting the accommodations, see <http://www.cornellcollege.edu/academic-support-and-advising/disabilities/index.shtml>

*Other Accommodations*

If you have any other needs for accommodation, please let me know and we can make necessary arrangements.

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**Calendar**

Day 1

- No reading assignments; Introductions and Course Preliminaries

Day 2—The Constitution

- Read Chs. 1-2 in Lowi et al.
- Read Ch. 2 in Canon et al. (for afternoon session)

Day 3—Federalism

- Read Ch. 3 in Lowi et al.

Day 4—Civil Rights; Civil Liberties

- Read Ch. 5 in Lowi et al.
- Read Ch. 4 in Lowi et al. (for afternoon session)
- Listen to oral argument for *Florida v. Jardines*, at <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2012/11-564> (under Media, on left-hand side) (for afternoon session)

Day 5—Civil Liberties

- Wrap-up; Review study guide

Day 6—Exam #1

Day 7—Public Opinion

- Read Ch. 10 in Lowi et al.
- Read Ch. 9 in Canon et al.
- Film during afternoon session

Day 8—Campaigns & Elections

- Read Ch. 11 in Lowi et al.
- Read Ch. 10 in Canon et al.

Day 9—Political Parties; The News Media

- Read Ch. 12 in Lowi et al.
- Read Ch. 11 in Canon et al.
- Read Ch. 14 in Lowi et al. (for afternoon session)

Day 10—The News Media

- Wrap-up; Review study guide

Day 11—Exam #2

Day 12—Congress

- Read Ch. 6 in Lowi et al.
- Read Ch. 5 in Canon et al.

Day 13—The Judiciary

- Read Ch. 9 in Lowi et al.
- Read Ch. 8 in Canon et al.

Day 14—The Presidency

- Read Ch. 7 in Lowi et al.
- Read Ch. 6 in Canon et al.
- Review study guide

Day 15—No class (MPSA conference in Chicago, IL)

Day 16—Exam #3

Day 17—Papers due; Group presentations

- Papers due at 1:00 p.m.
- Presentations start at 1:00 p.m.

Day 18—Group presentations