

**Politics 172—American Politics
Cornell College
Block 1 (2018 – 2019)**

Instructor

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office hours: Held immediately after class, or by email appointment

Room and Meeting Times

College Hall 102
9:00 – 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 – 3:00 p.m. (MTuWThF)

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 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 final 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 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 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 often caustic 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 reason about their purposes and effects.
- Can demonstrate knowledge about how socialization, polarization, and collective-action problems clarify the exercise of political behavior.

Politics 172—American Politics
Cornell College
Block 1 (2018 – 2019)

- 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*, 14th ed. New York: Norton.

Canon, David et al. 2018. *Fault Lines: Debating the Issues in American Politics*, 5th 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).

Quizzes

There are four reading quizzes that are given without advance notice. Each quiz is worth 3.3% of your semester grade, and the lowest quiz grade is dropped.

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

Politics 172—American Politics
Cornell College
Block 1 (2018 – 2019)

time will be allocated to fielding questions. Exams will be worth 20% (student's highest scoring exam) and 15% (student's lowest scoring exams).

Discussion Leadership

Students will serve as discussion leaders twice, once for an "Analyzing the Evidence" section in Lowi et al. and once for a selection of readings from Canon et al. Discussion leaders must email me at least two open-ended questions before class that they are prepared to pose to their classmates in order to stimulate substantive conversation. Each turn as leader is worth 5% of the semester grade. Note: Leader assignments will be made on Day 4.

Revision memo

In groups of 3 or 4, 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 the following: what should be included, but is not; what should be downplayed or eliminated; and how should conclusions be revised to account for additional evidence. Students will meet occasionally with their groups during class time to offer peer feedback on drafts. Each group will give a short oral presentation summarizing the substance of their proposed revisions on Day 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 4.

Policies

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

Politics 172—American Politics
Cornell College
Block 1 (2018 – 2019)

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.

Calendar

Day 1

- No reading assignments; Introductions and Course Preliminaries

Day 2—The Constitution

- Read Chs. 1-2 in Lowi et al.

Day 3—Federalism

- Read Ch. 3 in Lowi et al.

Day 4—Civil Rights

- Read Ch. 4 in Lowi et al.
- No class in afternoon (APSA conference in Boston, MA)

Day 5—No class (APSA conference in Boston, MA)

Day 6—Civil Liberties

- Read Ch. 5 in Lowi et al.

Day 7—Exam #1

- In-class film during afternoon session

Day 8—Congress

- Read Ch. 6 in Lowi et al.; *Federalist* #51; Ch. 5 in Canon et al.

Day 9—The Presidency

- Read Ch. 7 in Lowi et al.

Day 10—The Bureaucracy

- Read Ch. 8 in Lowi et al.; Ch. 7 in Canon et al.

Day 11—The Judiciary

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

Day 12—Exam #2

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Politics 172—American Politics
Cornell College
Block 1 (2018 – 2019)

Day 13—Public Opinion

- Read Ch. 10 in Lowi et al.; “The Urban-Rural Divide More Pronounced Than Ever” *The American Conservative*

Day 14—Campaigns and Elections

- Read Ch. 11 in Lowi et al.; *Federalist* #10; Ch. 10 in Canon et al.; “Maine is Trying Out a New Way to Run Elections. But Will it Survive the Night?” 538

Day 15—Political Parties

- Read Ch. 12 in Lowi et al.

Day 16—Interest Groups

- Read Ch. 13 in Lowi et al.; Ch. 12 in Canon et al.

Day 17—Exam #3

- Work on group presentations during afternoon session

Day 18—Group Presentations