

# **POLS 1100: United States Government and Politics**

## **Utah State University**

Spring 2018  
Professor Josh M. Ryan

**Contact Info:** 330B Old Main, [josh.ryan@usu.edu](mailto:josh.ryan@usu.edu)

**Office Hours:** Monday and Wednesday, 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. and by appointment. If you cannot make those times please email me and we can setup a meeting.

**Class Time and Location:** 10:30-11:20 a.m. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, Old Main 225.

### **Course Description**

This course is meant to provide an introduction to American Politics. We will be examining political actors and the rules and institutions which govern their behavior. We will also discuss and analyze some of the important contemporary debates in American politics including political polarization, participation and deliberation, and majoritarian democracy versus republicanism. This course will examine politics from a scientific perspective—we will characterize political action and behavior in a systematic and empirical manner.

I have two goals for this class. The first is to introduce you to basic concepts about our system of government and how it works. While I realize most of you will pursue careers in areas other than political science, understanding the basic processes of American government is critical to being an active and informed citizen. I will emphasize how our institutions constrain political actors, the role of the American public in government, and why political actors (legislators, bureaucrats, interest groups, parties) behave the way they do.

The second goal of the class is to develop a greater understanding of important political issues. Not only should you have a basic understanding of how American government works, you should also be informed about the major policy and ideological debates within the country today. To this end, we will often discuss some of today's important political issues with the purpose of helping you understand why these issues foster disagreement and how these disagreements may affect political outcomes. My hope is that by examining issues critically you will form your own opinions and develop the tools which allow you to evaluate future policy debates.

At the end of this course, students should understand the basics of American government. You will be prepared for more advanced classes in political science and related disciplines. Students will also have a basic understanding of the major policy debates within the country today. This will allow you to engage with other citizens and evaluate future policy disagreements from a more critical perspective.

The class will consist of both lectures and discussions. My lecture style is less informal than other professors but more interactive. This means I sometimes depend on class participation to drive the lecture. It is critical that you come to lecture prepared and willing to engage with myself and your classmates. Readings should be done before class. While I am always happy to clarify the readings, I will assume, if there are no questions, that everyone has completed the assigned reading.

This class, like many in political science, often deals with subjects that are controversial. Engaging with these issues is an important part of being an informed citizen and as such, we will not shy away from discussing controversial current events. This also means you should never feel embarrassed or afraid to share your opinion, even if it means disagreeing with other students in the class. However, each of us should remember that we have different experiences and different viewpoints. We must always be respectful of

other students and other opinions. I take this policy very seriously and have **zero tolerance** for inappropriate, crude, disrespectful, or demeaning comments. I reserve the right to use an appropriate punishment for any student who engages in disrespectful behavior. This may include removal from the class, receiving a zero on participation for the semester, or being reported to university officials. Please speak with me promptly if you feel there is a civility problem in the classroom. See the USU Student Code of Conduct at <http://www.usu.edu/student-services/student-code/article5.cfm#secV3>.

If you need to contact me or set up a time to meet outside of my regularly scheduled office hours, don't hesitate to speak to me after class or send me an email. I check my email at least once daily and usually multiple times per day. If you have questions or do not understand the material please come to my office hours prior to the day before the midterm, final, etc. I will make every effort to respond to your email as soon as possible. During the normal work week, I promise to respond to an email within 24 hours. On the weekends, and during breaks, vacations, or holidays, I may not respond as quickly. In other words, if you email me Friday night, it is entirely possible I won't respond until sometime Monday. If 24 hours have gone by during a normal work week and I haven't responded, please email me again. It's possible I lost/forgot about/never received the message.

I do not take attendance *per se*, so if you miss a class it is not necessary to tell me. However, there are some substantial costs to missing class. First, you will miss items that are discussed in class that will be on the test and homeworks. This class moves very quickly and if you miss a number of classes it will be almost impossible for you to catch up and do well. I also encourage students to be active learners, asking questions in class of me, and engaging in discussion with your fellow students.

Please see [http://www.usu.edu/provost/faculty/teaching/syllabus\\_resources.cfm](http://www.usu.edu/provost/faculty/teaching/syllabus_resources.cfm) for additional USU and course policies on academic freedom, the grievance process, sexual harassment, and the withdrawal and incomplete process.

## Reading

The course has one required textbook which is available in the bookstore in electronic format.

The Struggle for Democracy. Greenberg and Page. 12th Edition, 2016.

New York, NY: Pearson Press. Referred to as TXT in the schedule below.

This is an e-book that can be purchased in the bookstore with a loose leaf companion, or from an online retailer. You must buy the 12th edition in the e-book version as we will use it for quizzes and other assignments.

There may also be additional reading that will either be emailed to you or given out in class. Finally, I request that you read either the Washington Post or New York Times (both can be read online). Other good sources of information include Politico.com or RealClearPolitics.com. You have access to 10 free articles in a month at the Times; for the Post, you can use your email to register for free unlimited access.

## Course Requirements and Other Information

As mentioned, readings should be completed by the start of class. This ensures that you will fully understand the lecture topics, and that you are able to engage with other students and myself. There are many things I will not cover that will be in the reading that I will build on. Because there is a relatively light amount of reading, you will be expected to complete all of it on time. If any supplemental readings are assigned, they will be emailed ahead of time. Falling behind on the reading is the single easiest way to do poorly in this class. It is very difficult to catch up on the reading in the week before the test. Trust me on this.

I have a no cell phone policy. If there is too much cell phone use in the class, I may assign a pop quiz on the spot for the entire class which will count toward the quiz portion of your grade. I also request that

you not use laptops or screens of any kind. There is substantial research that indicates active computer and cell phone users in class receive about a grade lower than they would have otherwise. They also distract other students. If you must use a laptop, please sit in the last row of class.

There will be three tests (see below). The tests will cover both the readings and lectures. Anything mentioned in class or in the readings is fair game. This includes policy discussions, current events, and any other topics discussed in class but not mentioned in the reading. If you cannot take one of the tests at the normal time, you should drop the class. Make-up exams will be allowed at my discretion, and only under the most unusual extenuating circumstances. The make-up exams will be essay format and will be given only in the week immediately after the test. If you miss more than one test you will not be allowed to make-up both. I will require documentation for any missed exam.

I will periodically send out emails to the class list. You are automatically subscribed to the list if you are enrolled in the class through your campus email account or other email you specify. The list will allow me to inform you of changes in assignments, the schedule or to attach additional reading. I cannot send emails out to an email account not recorded by the University. The USU preferred email listed is an official means of communication between myself and the students. If you have any questions, please see USU's Email Communications Policy at <http://catalog.usu.edu/content.php?catoid=12&navoid=3142> and/or talk to me.

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary. The most likely changes will be to the dates on the course schedule. This syllabus is not a contract and is subject to change at the sole discretion of the instructor as announced in class.

The tape recording of lectures is not permitted, though exceptions may be made for students with a documented disability.

This class, like many in political science, often deals with subjects that are controversial. Engaging with these issues is an important part of being an informed citizen and as such, we will not shy away from discussing controversial current events. This also means you should never feel embarrassed or afraid to share your opinion, even if it means disagreeing with other students in the class. However, each of us should remember that we have different experiences and different viewpoints. We must always be respectful of other students and other opinions. I take this policy very seriously and have **zero tolerance** for inappropriate, crude, disrespectful, or demeaning comments. I reserve the right to use an appropriate punishment for any student who engages in disrespectful behavior. This may include removal from the class, receiving a zero on an assignment, or being reported to university officials. Please speak with me promptly if you feel there is a civility problem in the classroom. See the USU Student Code of Conduct at <https://studentconduct.usu.edu/studentcode/article5>.

If you need to contact me or set up a time to meet outside of my regularly scheduled office hours, don't hesitate to speak to me after class or send me an email. I check my email at least once daily and usually multiple times per day. If you have questions or do not understand the material please come to my office hours prior to the day before the midterm, final, etc. I will make every effort to respond to your email as soon as possible. During the normal work week, I promise to respond to an email within 24 hours. On the weekends, and during breaks, vacations, or holidays, I may not respond as quickly. In other words, if you email me Friday night, it is entirely possible I won't respond until sometime Monday. If 24 hours have gone by during a normal work week and I haven't responded, please email me again. It's possible I lost/forgot about/never received the message.

The Americans with Disabilities Act states: "Reasonable accommodation will be provided for all persons

with disabilities in order to ensure equal participation within the program.” If a student has a disability that will likely require some accommodation by the instructor, the student must contact the instructor and document the disability through the Disability Resource Center (797-2444), preferably during the first week of the course. Any request for special consideration relating to attendance, pedagogy, taking of examinations, etc., must be discussed with and approved by the instructor. In cooperation with the Disability Resource Center, course materials can be provided in alternative format, large print, audio, diskette, or Braille.

Please see <http://www.usu.edu/provost/faculty-life/syllabus.cfm> for additional USU and course policies on academic freedom, the grievance process, sexual harassment, and the withdrawal and incomplete process.

## **Grading**

There are four grades for this class: quizzes, and three midterms.

### **Quizzes 25%**

There will be a quiz at least once a week. Though quizzes will be given at least once a week there may be additional pop-quizzes given at my discretion based on the participation level of the class. Quizzes will be completed online and students are responsible for completing them within the allotted time period. There will be no makeup quizzes given if you cannot take a quiz for any reason. However, I will curve the quiz scores by taking the highest quiz score in the class as equal to 100% and dividing each student's score by that. The material on the quiz will mostly consist of material from the reading so it is absolutely critical you keep up with the reading.

### **Three Midterms, @ 25% each**

The format of the midterms will be multiple choice and short answer/identification. The last test is not a final and will not be cumulative (in the strict sense). There will be constrained choice on the short answer (meaning you will have to answer 3 of 4, for example). The multiple choice portion will be worth 75% of the test grade and the short answer/identification will be worth 25%. The date of the tests are listed in the schedule below.

### **Misc. Grading Information**

I will be happy to regrade anything with the understanding that the grade could be higher or lower than the original grade. In order to have me regrade something, you need to give me a written explanation of your specific concerns within one week. There will be no review sheet for the tests, but we will review in class.

There will be no extra credit assignments given or accepted.

Plagiarism and/or cheating will not be tolerated under any circumstances. Anyone caught plagiarizing or cheating will receive a grade of zero on the assignment and/or the course, and may be reported to the Vice President of Student Services. Please see the Student Code of Conduct at <http://www.usu.edu/studentservices/studentcode/article6.cfm> for USU's policies on plagiarism.

You must complete all assignments to pass the class.

## Schedule

Please note this schedule is tentative. I reserve the right to change it or add or subtract readings or assignments.

*Jan. 8-12: The syllabus, Introduction to collective action problems and the prisoner's dilemma.*

*Reading: The syllabus, TXT Chapter 1*

*Jan. 15: No class, MLK Day*

*Jan. 16-22: The Articles of Confederation and the Constitution*

*Reading: TXT Chapter 2, Federalist 10 and 51; The Declaration of Independence; The Constitution*

*Jan. 26-Feb 2.: Federalism and State and local government*

*Reading: TXT Chapter 3*

*Feb. 5-Feb. 14: Congress and Redistricting*

*Reading: TXT Chapter 11*

*Feb. 16-21: The Presidency*

*Reading: TXT Chapter 12*

*Feb. 23: Midterm 1*

*Reading: None*

*Feb. 26- March 2: The Executive Branch*

*Reading: TXT Chapter 13*

*March 12-21: The Supreme Court*

*Reading: TXT Chapter 14*

*March 23: Midterm 2*

*Reading: None*

*March 26-30: Civil Liberties*

*Reading: TXT Chapter 15*

*April 2-4: Public Opinion and Polling*

*Reading: TXT Chapter 5*

*April 6: No class*

*April 9-13: Public Opinion and Polling (continued)*

*Reading: TXT Chapter 5*

*April 16-20: Voting, Campaigns and Elections*

*Reading: TXT Chapter 10*

*April 23-27: Domestic Policies*

*Reading: TXT Chapter 17*

***Final on Wednesday, May 2 at 11:30 am***