

**POLITICS & LAW 380: VOTING  
RHODES COLLEGE, FALL 2021  
SYLLABUS**

Dr. Erin Dolgoy  
Email: [dolgoye@rhodes.edu](mailto:dolgoye@rhodes.edu)  
Colloquium: MWF 9:00am - 9:50am  
Location: Buckman 222  
LMS: Canvas  
Office Hours: MWF 12:00pm - 1:30pm, by appointment

**Course Overview**

Voting is the fundamental practice of democratic politics. The efficacy of a political system is contingent on the ability of the will of the people to be expressed politically. This course examines voting in the United States. We will consider the formal laws, regulations, and legal precedents that influence voting at the national level in the United States. We will consider how voter participation and voting practice has changed over time. Topics include voting systems, voter efficacy, suffrage, voter suppression, gerrymandering, voter participation, voter turnout, and voting behavior.

**Course Objectives and Expectations:** (1) to gain factual knowledge of the primary voting laws, legal precedents, theories of voting behavior, and electoral systems that affect elections in the United States (2) to develop skills in oral and written communication; (3) to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view; (4) and to practice asking questions and seeking answers.

This course offers you the opportunity to become a more skilled reader, thinker, communicator, and writer. Many of the skills and much of the knowledge that you gain in this class is applicable to your other classes and to your activities outside the college. The class is designed to be a guided dialogue amongst your colleagues of the assigned materials; together we create an intellectual community dedicated to learning. You are expected to attend each class, on time, prepared to ask and answer questions, and honestly discuss the material.

It is highly likely that each of you has an opinion or belief or “hot take” concerning the electoral system in the United States. How can we not care: there is no more fundamental aspect of a democracy than electoral form, practice, efficacy, and trust. There is a reflexive aspect to this course as it offers you the opportunity to examine your own political expectations and preconceptions, and, where relevant, apply the skills and knowledge that you acquire in our class outside of the classroom as a relative, friend, citizen, employee, or dinner conversationalist. From the outset, to be clear, there is no perfect electoral system; rather, each electoral system has tradeoffs; there are also different (perhaps more and less ethical) ways to determine who is and is not eligible to vote. This course will likely challenge our regnant opinions and beliefs about how and for whom the political system in the United States works, and what possibilities exist for more effective, “fair” electoral politics.

Since our political beliefs are very personal and often reflect our distinct experiences and identities, discussions may become heated. You should feel comfortable speaking in class. However, be prepared: anything you say may be questioned; you may be asked to offer evidence to support your assertions, answer questions that are frustrating, or offer a stronger argument. Asking our colleagues to clarify their arguments is an act of generosity and kindness, since it helps them to be more rigorous thinkers and more precise communicators. Since the free exchange of ideas is reciprocal: feel free to challenge anything suggested in the texts and anything said by anyone in the class (especially me!). This is an excellent opportunity to practice engaging in free political discourse. In order to create a mutually respectful, inclusive dialogic community, I ask that you remain receptive, open-minded, courageous, and always respectful of your colleagues, of me, and of yourselves. We are all responsible for creating a dialogic community that fosters mutual respect, the free-exchange of ideas, and intellectual growth.

**Warning:** Some of the topics that we cover in class may be upsetting or disturbing. Electoral practice, American political history, and contemporary disputes concerning electoral suppression and fraud are very personal to many of us. You may disagree with the readings, your colleagues, or me. If we all agreed on everything, college (and life) would be pretty boring. Disagreement is a sign of active engagement. Confronting ideas, arguments, and perspectives that we each personally may find upsetting, frustrating, incorrect, or incomplete is an essential life skill. Further, honestly engaging with divergent opinions and arguments forces each of us to consider why we disagree, helping us to (1) more effectively understand and discuss our discomfort; (2) develop skills and mechanism to mitigate our discomfort; (3) overcome our discomfort; (4) learn about the opinions and experiences of other individuals; and (5), in the process, understand more clearly our own political perspectives and those of other people. Hopefully, we will each learn more about ourselves, politics, and the dynamics of power.

Please note, disrespectful, violent, or incendiary comments or behavior will not be tolerated. We are all responsible for cultivating the type of intellectual community of which we strive to be a part.

If there is anything that you believe I should know about you before class begins that will help me to support your learning experience, please send me an email or set up a ZOOM appointment.

**Required Texts:** These four texts are available in the College Bookstore, from online retailers, in brick and mortar stores, or online. For your convenience, I have also made arrangements for the course books to be available for short-term signout as course reserves in **BURROW LIBRARY**, in case you are unable to get the assigned texts.

*Behind the Ballot Box: A Citizen's Guide to Voting Systems.* Douglas J. Amy (2000). Praeger.

*Voting Rights in America: Primary Documents*, edited by Bridgett A. King (2020). ABC-Clio, LLC.

*The Embattled Vote in America: From the Founding to the Present.* Allan J. Lichtman (2018). Harvard University Press.

*Gerrymandering: The Politics of Redistricting in the United States.* Stephen K. Medvic (2021). Polity Press.

All other readings and course materials will be available on Canvas.

### **Course Evaluation and Requirements**

<b>Engagement:</b>	<b>15%</b>
Check Ins	10%
Participation	5%

<b>Exams:</b>	<b>25%</b>
Midterm	10%
Final	15%

<b>Written Assignments:</b>	<b>30%</b>
#1	10%
#2	10%
#3	10%

<b>Final Project and presentation:</b>	<b>30%</b>
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**Grading Scale:** In order to pass the course, you must submit the written assignments, complete both exams, and submit the final project (including the written portion and the presentation). All assignments will be graded numerically. Final grades will be assigned on this scale:

93+: A	87-89: B+	77-79: C+	67-69: D+	59 and below: F
90-92: A-	83-86: B	73-76: C	63-66: D	
80-82: B-	70-72: C-	60-62: D-		

**In-class attendance and participation:** Since we are building an intellectual community in this class, attendance and participation are critical to your success, but also the success of your classmates. Our class is scheduled to meet in person. You are expected to attend each class session, and participate in each class session. You are permitted three no-questions-asked absences in this course (for any reason including, but not limited to, religious observances; personal illness or injury; or family illness, injury, or bereavement). Each additional absence will result in a 2.5% deduction in your final grade. Of course, if there are extenuating circumstances, we can make arrangements.

Given the pandemic, we should all be prepared for uncertainty and willing to adapt. In the event that we are required to move the entire class to ZOOM, we will continue to meet at our regularly scheduled time (unless otherwise indicated). We will move the class online if there is a change in College policy, if a critical number of us are required to remotely access the class, or if I am required to remotely access the class. To the best of our ability, if we are remote we will attempt to emulate the in-person experience. General ZOOM protocols will apply: cameras on, fully clothed (please!), try to find a quiet place to sign on, engaged participation, and thorough course preparation.

For purposes of privacy, I will not be recording or reproducing any part of our class discussion. You are also not permitted to record or reproduce any part of our class discussion. As a consequence, ZOOM access is synchronous.

In the event that you are ill or isolated due to Covid, you will be able to attend class through ZOOM. This option will only be available if it is arranged in advance. A permanent link to the ZOOM classroom is posted on Canvas. All requests for ZOOM access must be made through email at least one hour before class begins, so that I can prepare and set up the technology.

We will have a conversation about ZOOM protocol in class when we create our **Community Guidelines**.

Participation requires preparation. You will be evaluated on your class participation and the quality of your engagement. In order to participate, you are expected to complete and think about the readings before class. You should be able to discuss the readings (this includes asking and answering questions about the readings, situating the readings in their respective contexts, recognizing the author (and their perspective), comparing different readings, and drawing parallels between the readings and your own experiences). It is often helpful to look over your reading notes right before class (in order to refresh your memory). I encourage you to check with me regularly throughout the semester to get feedback on the quality of your participation and engagement.

**Check Ins:** In order to ensure that you stay on top of the assigned materials and have an opportunity to ask any questions, and I have formal opportunities to solicit feedback on your classroom experience there will be regular check ins. Each of these check-ins will be evaluated for completion. Detailed instructions will be available on Canvas.

**Exams:** Exams ensure that you are keeping up with the assigned readings and have mastered the material before moving on to new material. This course has a midterm and a cumulative final. Both exams will be taken on Canvas. You will be given a detailed study guide with clear instructions prior to each exam in order to help focus your preparation, and maximize your opportunities for success. We will go over exam expectations in class, and I will be available to answer any questions that you may have prior to the exam. This exam format rewards preparation.

**Written Assignments:** The best way to improve your writing is to practice. You will have three short writing assignments this semester. As part of this writing assignment, you will be expected to present and share your work with the class. Detailed instructions will be available on Canvas.

**Final Project:** The course culminates in a project, which includes a written assignment and a presentation. The project will allow you to practice oral and written communication skills, presentation skills, and knowledge transfer skills. It is intended to be a culmination of this semester's work. Detailed instructions will be available on Canvas.

### **Additional Concerns**

**Academic Honesty:** I will adhere to and I expect that each of you will adhere to the Rhodes College Honor Code. It is incumbent on each of you to submit original work that is your own. Plagiarism, cheating, or any

other form of academic dishonesty is unacceptable (even if you do not personally benefit). It is not my responsibility to inform you how not to commit an academic infringement. Each of you signed the Honor Code when you arrived. You should familiarize yourself with the document you signed and the specifics of the Honor Council Constitution. If you witness an academic infringement and do not report it you are in violation of the Honor Code. All work submitted for this course is regarded as “pledged.”

**Diversity Statement:** I am committed to providing an open learning environment. Freedom of thought, a free exchange of ideas, and an appreciation of diverse perspectives are fundamental characteristics of a community that is committed to critical inquiry. To promote such an academic and social environment I expect integrity and honesty in our relationships with each other and openness to learning about and experiencing cultural diversity. I believe that these qualities are crucial to fostering social and intellectual maturity and personal growth (<http://www.rhodes.edu/collegehandbook/10309.asp>).

**Sexual Assault and Mandatory Reporting:** I will do my best to help any student who comes to me with non-course-related concerns. Please keep in mind, however, that all faculty members are mandated to report any incidents of sexual misconduct that comes to their attention, including in class discussion. That means that I cannot keep information about sexual misconduct confidential from the College if you share that information with me, but the College has specific confidentiality and anti-retaliation protections in place.

Rhodes is committed to ensuring a safe learning environment that supports the dignity of all members of the Rhodes community. Rhodes prohibits and will not tolerate sexual misconduct, which includes, but is not limited to, dating/domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, stalking, sexual harassment and sex/gender discrimination. Rhodes strongly encourages members of the Rhodes community to report instances of sexual misconduct immediately. All Rhodes faculty, staff, Peer Advocates, and Resident Assistants are Mandatory Reporters (exceptions are confidential resources: Counseling Center- 901-843-3128, Chaplain Beatrix Weil- 901-843-3822, and Student Health Center- 901-843-3895) and are required by the College to report any knowledge they receive of possible violations of this policy to the Title IX Coordinator, Inez Warner ([warneri@rhodes.edu](mailto:warneri@rhodes.edu)). If you choose to share information related to sexual misconduct with me I will report it to the Title IX Coordinator; however, you will control how your report is handled and you are not required to pursue a formal claim. The goal is to make you aware of the range of options and resources that are available to you. For more information about Rhodes’ sexual misconduct policy or to make a report please see [www.rhodes.edu/titleix](http://www.rhodes.edu/titleix).

**Contact:** I am available by appointment and by email. Please reach out if you would like to speak with me, or have concerns, questions, or are interested in exploring a particular topic more deeply. I am not (yet) a mind-reader, so I can only support you if I know that there is a concern. I will actively reach out to all of you throughout the semester to check-in and remind you that I am available to meet. I try to respond to all emails within 24 hours, except on the weekend and during holidays. I consider email formal communication; please treat it as such.

Appointments can be booked during my regularly scheduled office hours using the Canvas Appointment Application; if you are unable to meet during my regularly scheduled office hours, please send me an email to arrange an alternate meeting time.

**Email and Canvas:** In order to stay up-to-date on course information, you should regularly check both your Rhodes email and Canvas. You are responsible for the information that I send and post. I consider email formal communication; please treat it as such. Make sure that your email includes (1) a formal salutation (Dear Dr./Professor Dolgoy, Hello, etc.); (2) a clear indication of your name and the course that you are registered in; (3) a valediction (Sincerely, All the best, Many thanks, etc.). If your email requires more than a four sentence response, you are emailing about something that requires an in-person meeting.

**Technology:** It is essential that you have reliable access to the necessary technologies: webcam (or a camera), mic, internet, computer, in the event that we move online or to attend ZOOM office hours. If you have any concerns regarding your technology accessibility, please send me an email and I can put you in touch with IT. Please note that ZOOM and Canvas do not always work well on cell phones (and the exams will not work on cell phones and have trouble with iPads also).

Even though we require technology for the course management, while our class is in session I ask that you not use your laptops, turn off your cell phone ringers and leave them in your bag. **Our class is a technology limited zone.** I know that many of us use technology all of the time, especially for class preparation; however, since this is a discussion seminar, technology impedes conversation and take us to places outside of the classroom; by giving us access to the entire internet, we often prepare less well and rely more on google than on our own cognitive capacities. I know that going technology free may be a challenge (and is certainly not possible if we are required to move to ZOOM) but it is essential to our learning community that we all dedicate ourselves to our learning and commit to be active, engaged, and entirely present during our class discussions.

Of course, in the event that you have technology related accommodation, that accommodation will be respected.

**Submission of Assignments:** All written assignments must be handed in at the time indicated on Canvas. If you are uploading, you must use .pdf, .doc., or .docx for all assignments (if you choose to use a different document format, your document will be considered late). Late assignments and late exams are deducted 5% per day.

**Access and Accommodations:** Your experience in this class is important to me. If you have already established accommodations with Student Accessibility Services (SAS), please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course. I am unable to retroactively apply accommodations. If you do not have a formal accommodation but believe there are things about your learning that I should know, please send me an email to set up an appointment.

If you have not yet established services through SAS, but have a condition that requires accommodations (conditions include but not limited to mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or chronic health), please contact SAS at 901-843-3885: [www.rhodes.edu/accessibility](http://www.rhodes.edu/accessibility).

**Unauthorized Recording or Distribution of Classroom Proceedings:** You are not permitted to record or distribute classroom lectures or discussions without the express written approval of the faculty member teaching the course and all of the students enrolled in the section. The classroom experience is strictly for your personal education. You MAY NOT share anything from class (pictures, text, voice recording, PowerPoint slides, etc.) to any website or social media vehicle whatsoever without written permission from the instructor. Sharing notes and materials with fellow classmates for study purposes only, however, is very much encouraged. Unauthorized recording or dissemination of recorded classroom proceedings, including distribution for compensation, is strictly prohibited and is a violation of the Rhodes Honor Code.

**Preliminary Protocols and Expectations:** While we will be establishing **Community Guidelines** together, there are some things that are essential to us starting our course well.

1. Please arrive on time.
2. Please ensure that all of your technologies (laptop, tablet, cell phone, fancy watch, etc.) are turned off, on mute, and not on your desk or the table.
3. Please bring writing implements and paper.
4. Please refrain from eating or drinking during the class session.
5. Please ensure that you are fully masked (above the nose and under the chin).
6. Please respect the boundaries and space of the other people in class.

In the event that we are required to move to ZOOM or that you are required to use ZOOM for a remote class, please respect the norms and practices of the class.

1. In order to set up the ZOOM link, you are required to notify me at least one hour in advance of the start of class so that I can set up the technology (8:00 am). ZOOM access is only available for a legitimate medical reason.
2. Please ensure that your camera is on and your volume is muted. Since this is a discussion, we need to be able to see each other; however, ZOOM picks up ambient noise, so if we keep our mics muted while we are not speaking it helps to maintain good audio quality for the rest of the room.
3. Please arrive on time. The ZOOM room will be set to open 5 minutes before our class begins, so that you have time to get settled before we begin. There is a permanent link to the class ZOOM room on Canvas.
4. Please try to emulate conventional classroom behavior. Please make sure you are fully clothed, in a quiet, private location, and not moving around (movement is dizzying for other participants).
5. Please ensure that you are comfortable with your background (please avoid ZOOMING from your bed or other equally intimate location).
6. You are not permitted to record or reproduce any part of our ZOOM sessions; this includes recording the audio, video, or taking screenshots (or pictures of the screen with your phone), as outlined in the **Unauthorized Recording or Distribution of Classroom Proceedings** section of this syllabus
7. Our goal should be to avoid going viral (for all the wrong reasons) or becoming a meme.

**Schedule:** A detailed, up-to-date reading schedule is available on Canvas.<sup>1</sup>

**Important Dates:**

**Wednesday, August 25:** First Class (9:00am -9:50am): Introductions (please be prepared to introduce yourself to the class), Syllabus overview, course expectations.

**Friday, August 27:** Complete pre-class check in on Canvas (due by 8:00 am before class); complete assigned reading as posted on Canvas.

All subsequent readings and assignments will be posted on Canvas.

**Monday, September 6:** Labor Day: University Holiday, Class is Canceled

**Wednesday, September 8:** Rosh Hashanah, Class is Canceled

**Monday, September 27: Written Assignment #1 due**

**Friday, October 8 at 4:00pm - Monday, October 11 at 11:59pm: Midterm Exam**

**Monday, October 11:** Midterm Exam, Class is Canceled

**Monday, October 18:** Fall Break: University Holiday, Class is Canceled

**Monday, October 25 : Written Assignment #2 due**

**Wednesday, November 10:** Professor is at a Conference, Class is Canceled

**Friday, November 12:** Professor is at a Conference, Class is Canceled

**Monday, November 22: Written Assignment #3 due**

**Wednesday, November 24:** Thanksgiving: University Holiday, Class is Canceled

**Friday, November 26:** Thanksgiving: University Holiday, Class is Canceled

**Wednesday, December 8:** Last Day of Classes; **Final Projects due**

**Friday, December 10 at 9:00 am - Monday, October 13 at 9:00am: Final Exam**

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<sup>1</sup> I reserve the right to alter the reading schedule and assignment due dates at my discretion in the event that we fall behind, want to spend more time on a specific topic, find ourselves on a fascinating tangent, or choose to discuss a relevant political event. I will never make a major assignment due earlier in the semester.