

American Politics
Political Science 101
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This course introduces students to American politics and selected topics in political science. Like other sections of this course, I provide students with an overview of the American political system, including its structure, historical origins and operations at the national level. This will include analyses of group behavior, revolution, institutions, and legislative rules. These themes intersect with other topics you study in economics, environmental studies, philosophy and psychology. Upon completion of this course, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of the historical and philosophical foundations of American democracy, as well as an understanding of contemporary American governmental institutions. Students will also develop detailed perspectives on contemporary policy issues.

Course Objectives

As potential leaders, your job will be to interpret principles of democracy to help solve problems in public policy. To help you accomplish this, you are introduced to basic principles of democracy and the workings of our political system. As you learn basic facts and principles about American government and politics, you will be expected to apply these facts and principles to recent policy problems that interest you. The course will develop your understanding of American government, American politics, democracy and public policy through individual in-class learning, in-class group learning, outside readings and class debates. The format of this course is intended to achieve four basic learning objectives.

1. *To give you an opportunity to understand how the American political system really works.*

To accomplish this, we need to study facts about the political system, its history and development. This class will help you link facts together, to understand general tendencies in democratic politics. When we review how a bill becomes law, for example, you will learn a particular set of facts. Yet when these facts are linked to more theoretical understandings of democratic institutions, you will begin to understand why the *status quo* is difficult to change, or why people become cynical about politics and politicians. This class allows students to develop a systematic understanding of the American political system, using facts within a theoretical perspective.

2. *To give you an opportunity to understand and debate important issues in American politics.*

Although many current political issues may seem new to you (such as U. S. intervention abroad, ethics in government, reducing the size of government), similar issues were discussed and debated throughout this century. Policy problems arise continually in new forms, because our political system is often unable to solve issues in permanent ways. Part of the genius of our system of governance is that it was designed to allow evolving answers to difficult questions by different coalitions of people. In this class you will be expected to study, debate and write about

contemporary political issues.

3. To provide you with hands-on experience for analyzing conflicts in democratic policy and politics.

One of the most interesting aspects about the famous political documents you will read in this class is the degree of conflict contained in them. They do not provide a perfectly clear set of rules to help us solve current political problems. In fact political conflict in the United States is focused on how to interpret, apply and prioritize different principles built into the Constitution. You will have a chance to do this throughout the semester and to think about improvements in our democratic system.

4. To further develop your writing skills, your oral and verbal abilities and research techniques.

Democracy depends on effective communication. This course seeks to improve your abilities to communicate with others through in-class debates and discussions, as well as various writing assignments. Although you will be evaluated on your performance and effectiveness, the goal is to improve and have fun while learning. Remember evaluations in this class are not a one-way street. Now and throughout the semester, I invite you to evaluate my abilities to communicate the substance and excitement of democratic politics to you.

Office Hours and Other Contact

Discussions outside of class (with other students or your professors) are an important part of learning at St. Mary's College. I strongly encourage you to speak with me outside of class (who knows, maybe you will have fun, besides getting useful suggestions on the material). My office hours are Monday and Wednesday 4:30-5:30p. *If you cannot make these office hours, you can always make an appointment with me for another time!!* You can also reach me by e-mail during the week if you need some quick feedback. We can discuss your work, your research ideas, my work, or your ideas about politics.

I. GRADE REQUIREMENTS

Lectures, Discussions and Participation

Although there is a lecture component to this class, individual participation is critical for developing collective perspectives on the topics covered in the course. As an incentive to complete the reading assignments and participate in class discussions, you will be graded for your class contributions. This grade will include attendance, quizzes and short written assignments. Quizzes in this class will be announced one class period in advance, and will normally cover announced topics or questions. (I reserve the right to give unannounced quizzes.) Class participation, including quizzes, is worth **30%** of your grade.

Class Debates

An important part of training in the liberal arts is for students to master both independent thinking and public speaking. This component of your education is built into this course directly through weekly debates. Some debates will feature specific groups of students who receive credit for their preparation and presentations.

Assignment	Percent of Grade
Class Participation	30%
Class Debates	10%
Final Debate Paper	10%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Exam	30%

Although you will find the debates interesting and entertaining, they serve essential academic purposes. Students will be graded on their in-class presentation and on their written assignment. The class presentation and written assignment are both worth **10%** of your final grade.

Final Debate Paper

Students will be responsible for completing a final research project on a debate they discuss in the class. Although you will have the freedom to choose any topic in contemporary public policy or political science, the purpose of this paper is for you to build on a specific feature of your debate topic. A two-page draft is due for your debate presentation. You will be asked to redraft this paper and present additional research for the final draft near the end of the semester. Exact guidelines for your research project will be provided during the semester. The final research project for most people will be due Wednesday, December 3rd. It is worth **10%** of your final grade.

If you need help with any essays or papers you are encouraged to use the Writing Center. The Writing Center, located in room 115 in the Library, has peer tutors trained to discuss your writing with you. No matter where you are in the writing process (brainstorming ideas, understanding assignments, or revising rough and final drafts), the tutors in the Writing Center can assist you. These tutors are your peers—they do not grade or proofread your paper, but instead offer an opportunity to work with others on becoming a stronger writer.

Midterm and Final Examinations

The midterm exam is worth **20%** of your final grade. The exam is scheduled before spring break, on Wednesday, March 10th. I will provide students with an overview of the material on the midterm exam before the exam date. The final exam will be a cumulative two-hour test that is worth **30%** of your final grade. The final exam is scheduled for Monday, May 10th at 7:00p. A study guide with topics and questions will be available for the final exam a week before the exam.

II. REQUIRED TEXTS AND READINGS

The following texts are available at ST. MARY'S CAMPUS STORE. There will also be an *e-reserve* course packet.

1. Lowi, Theodore J., Benjamin Ginsberg and Kenneth Shepsle, ***American Government: Freedom and Power and Purpose***, Core seventh edition, WW. Norton and Co., 2002.
2. Miroff, Bruce, Raymond Seidelman and Todd Swanstrom, ***Debating Democracy***, Houghton Mifflin Co.
3. *e-reserves*, St. Mary's College of Maryland, POSC 101, 2003. (Indicated by *e-r* below.)

Reading Assignments

1. Introduction To Politics

- a. Facts and Values in the study of Political Science: *What Difference?*
 - i. Miroff et al., *Debating Democracy*, Introduction.
- b. Why do we Need Government?
 - i. Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action*, e-r.
 - ii. Hardin, G. "[The Tragedy of the Commons](#)" *Science* 162 (December 13, 1968) pp.

- 1243-48. e-r
- iii. Lowi and Ginsberg, *American Government*, Chapter 1.

- c. How does Government Emerge?
 - i. Mancur Olson, "Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development," *American Political Science Review* September 1993. e-r*

2. Early American History and Rebellion

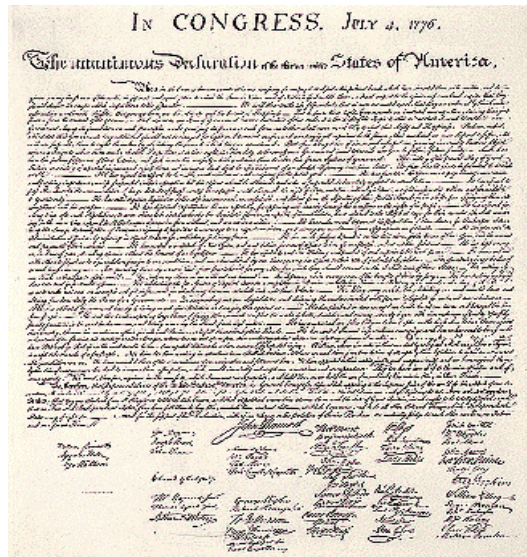
- a. Is it Right to Rebel?
 - i. John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, selections. e-r*
 - ii. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, selections. e-r*
- b. Why Rebel?
 - i. Lowi and Ginsberg, *American Government*, Chapter 2.
 - ii. The Declaration of Independence. *Web*
 - iii. Kuran, Timur "Now out of Never: The Element of Surprise in Eastern Europe in 1989" *World Politics*, vol. 44, No. 1, Oct., 1991. e-r



Film: *Liberty! Reluctant Revolutionaries*

3. Federalism: What is the American System?

- a. Miroff et al., *Debating Democracy*, Chapter 1.
- b. *The Federalist Papers*, 51. *Web*
- c. The Constitution of the United States. *Web*
- d. Lowi and Ginsberg, *American Government*, Chapter 3.
- e. Miroff et al., *Debating Democracy*, Chapter 2-3.



Midterm Examination

Wednesday, March 10th

4. The Bill of Rights: How has the American System Evolved?

- a. Lowi and Ginsberg, *American Government*, Chapter 4.
- b. Miroff et al., *Debating Democracy*, Chapter 6-7.

5. Congress: How does it function?

- a. Fenno, Richard F., *The United States Senate: A Bicameral Perspective*, e-r.
- b. Lowi and Ginsberg, *American Government*, Chapter 5.
- c. Miroff et al., *Debating Democracy*, Chapter 13.
- d. [How a Bill becomes a Law](http://thomas.loc.gov/home/lawsmade.toc.html). *Web* <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/lawsmade.toc.html>

6. On the Connection between Voters and their Representatives

- a. What kind of the Connection should exist between voters and Representatives?
 - i. Riker, William, *Liberalism versus Populism*, pp. 8-14. e-r.
 - ii. Shepsle and Bonchek, *Analyzing Politics*, Chapter 3, pp.39-47. e-r.
- b. What connection can be observed between voters and Representatives?
 - i. Lowi and Ginsberg, *American Government*, Chapter 9.
 - ii. Miller and Stokes, "Constituency Influence in Congress," *American Political Science Review*, March, 1963. e-r*
- c. Is there a Connection between Attitudes and Policies?



Final Examination

Monday May 10th

