

Politics in the U.S. (Govt 110)

FALL 2018

Instructor: Prof. Elizabeth Suhay, PhD

Time and Location: Mon & Thurs 4:05–5:20, Kerwin 3

Email: suhay@american.edu

Office Hours: Mon & Thurs 5:30–6:30 & by appointment, Kerwin 217

Course Description

Govt 110 offers a broad introduction to U.S. politics, examining the structure of the national government as well as the methods by which citizens influence it. Students will learn about the following specific topics: the nation's founding; federalism and the separation of powers; the principle institutions of the U.S. government, including the Presidency, federal bureaucracy, Congress, and Judiciary; civil rights and civil liberties; and democratic politics, including elections, political parties, public opinion, and media. The course will proceed with an eye to current events, particularly the 2016 and 2018 elections and the current Presidential administration. This is a foundational course in Area 4 (Social Sciences) of the General Education program.

Intended Student Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of the course, it is expected that students will be able to:

1. Explain the purpose of government.
2. Demonstrate a basic understanding of the structure of our government, including its federal nature, the powers of each branch of government, the process of electing representatives, and the protections for civil rights and liberties in the Constitution.
3. Use this understanding of the formal and informal institutions of American politics to explain how individuals, with and without authority, affect outcomes to their liking.
4. Apply an understanding of politics to a controversial decision, election, or policy.
5. Convey coherent analytical arguments about politics in the US in writing and in speech. (Gen Ed Critical Inquiry – assessed via exam essays and in-class discussion panels.)
6. Create and deliver a high quality research presentation. (Gen Ed Communication Skills – assessed via government reform project.)

Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism or cheating, is a violation of University policy and may result in a failing grade in the course and/or other disciplinary measures. It is important that you familiarize yourself with AU's Academic Integrity Code, located here:

<https://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm>

Policies for a Digital Age

No computers or cell phones unless instructed. (Some exceptions permitted for individuals on a case-by-case basis—please see instructor.) No recording of lectures or discussions without permission.

Required Texts

Textbook (available at campus bookstore website and on reserve at library)

- *American Government: Power and Purpose FULL 14th Edition* (2017).
Lowi, Ginsberg, Shepsle, and Ansolabehere. Norton.

BE SURE TO GET CORRECT EDITION. HARD COPY (NOT DIGITAL) RECOMMENDED.

The News

Students must read *The Washington Post* most days of the week. Access via the AU library or subscribe (\$16 for the semester). <https://subscribe.washingtonpost.com/acqlite/edu-offer>

Politico's "Playbook" highly recommended (free!).

<https://www.politico.com/playbook>

Course Expectations and Assignments

Exams — 45% of grade

Exams are in-class and will contain a mix of multiple choice and essay questions.

- *Exam 1* (15% of grade).
- *Exam 2* (15% of grade).
- *Exam 3* (15% of grade).

Quizzes & Panels — 10% of grade

Students will complete a number of in-class pop quizzes and appear on at least one in-class discussion panel to gauge their mastery of course content.

Participation — 10% of grade

This grade is made up of two parts: Students' contribution to classroom discussions and activities, and class attendance. Students are first graded in terms of the quality and quantity of their in-class participation. At that point, the participation grade stands unless the student has more than one unexcused absence. With each additional unexcused absence (beyond one), the participation grade falls by one letter-grade unit (e.g., B to B-).

Policy Project — 15% of grade

Students will work in small groups to research and analyze a current political problem (cultural, electoral, institutional, policy) and propose a solution. Students will prepare and deliver a 10-15 minute presentation to the class.

Wednesday Lab — 20% of grade

Please see separate syllabus.

Course Schedule

UNIT 1: FOUNDATIONS

Monday, August 27: Introduction to Course

- Syllabus; reading & note-taking best practices
- Discussion: What has Trump era taught you about government & politics? How does Trump compare to Obama? What comes to mind when you compare President to Congress?

Thursday, August 30: Principles of Politics

- Reading: *Power & Purpose* Ch. 1—Five Principles of Politics, pp. 2–29
- Online activity & discussion

Monday, September 3

HAPPY LABOR DAY

Thursday, September 6: Political Science

- Reading: Jane Mansbridge, APSA Presidential Address: “What Is Political Science For?” *Perspectives on Politics*, March 2014, pp. 8–17
- Panel discussion

Monday, September 10: The Nation’s Founding & the Constitution

- Reading: *Power & Purpose* Ch. 2—Constructing a Government: The Founding and the Constitution, pp. 30–71
- Reading: The Constitution (inc. amendments)
- Announced Constitution quiz

Thursday, September 13: Federalism & the Separation of Powers

- Reading: *Power & Purpose* Ch. 3—Federalism and the Separation of Powers, pp. 72–101

Monday, September 17: Civil Liberties

- Reading: *Power & Purpose* Ch. 4—Civil Liberties, pp. 102-143
- Reading: David Cole, “The Angry New Frontier: Gay Rights vs. Religious Liberty.” In Canon, Coleman, and Mayer, *Fault Lines: Debating the Issues in American Politics, Fifth Ed.*, 2017, pp. 51–58
- Reading: Tara Helfman, “The Religious-Liberty War.” In Canon, Coleman, and Mayer, *Fault Lines: Debating the Issues in American Politics, Fifth Ed.*, 2017, pp. 58–63
- Panel discussion

Thursday, September 20: Civil Rights

- Reading: *Power & Purpose* Ch. 5—Civil Rights, pp. 144–181

Monday, September 24: Civil Rights

- Reading: Ta-nehisi Coates, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy* (excerpts)
- Panel discussion

Thursday, September 27: EXAM 1**UNIT 2: INSTITUTIONS****Monday, October 1: Congress**

- Reading: *Power & Purpose* Ch. 6—Congress: The First Branch, pp. 182–239
- Reading: “Letter to the U.S. House of Representatives on Congressional Capacity from the New America Foundation, R Street Institute, Brookings Institution, American Enterprise Institute, and Campaign Legal Center,” 2016
- Panel discussion
- Government reform project introduced

Thursday, October 4: Congress

- Reading: Mark Leibovich, “Three Senators for Our Times,” *This Town*, 2014, pp. 69–92
- Reading: Mark Leibovich, “This is the Way Paul Ryan’s Speakership Ends,” *The New York Times*, August 7, 2018
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/07/magazine/paul-ryan-speakership-end-trump.html>
- Panel discussion

Monday, October 8: The Presidency

- Reading: *Power & Purpose* Ch. 7—The Presidency as an Institution, pp. 240–289

Thursday, October 11: The Presidency

- Reading: Aziz Huq and Tom Ginsburg, “How to Lose a Constitutional Democracy,” *UCLA Law Review*, 2017, Vol. 65 (78 pp.)
- Class-wide discussion

Monday, October 15: The Federal Bureaucracy

- Reading: *Power & Purpose* Ch. 8—The Executive Branch: Bureaucracy in a Democracy, pp. 290–327
- Reading: Jonathan Blitzer, “How the D.H.S. Secretary, Kirstjen Nielsen, Became One of President Trump’s Fiercest Loyalists,” *The New Yorker*, March 1, 2018 <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-dhs-secretary-kirstjen-nielsen-became-one-of-president-trumps-fiercest-loyalists>
- Panel discussion

Thursday, October 18: The Federal Courts

- Reading: *Power & Purpose* Ch. 9—The Federal Courts, pp. 328–375
- Project group meetings

Monday, October 22: The Federal Courts

- Reading: Antonin Scalia, “Constitutional Interpretation the Old-Fashioned Way.” In Canon, Coleman, and Mayer, *Fault Lines: Debating the Issues in American Politics, Fifth Ed.*, 2017, pp. 117–125
- Reading: Stephen Breyer, “Our Democratic Constitution.” In Canon, Coleman, and Mayer, *Fault Lines: Debating the Issues in American Politics, Fifth Ed.*, 2017, pp. 126–138
- Constitutional interpretation debates

Thursday, October 25: EXAM 2**UNIT 3: DEMOCRATIC POLITICS****Monday, October 29: Political Parties**

- Reading: *Power & Purpose* Ch. 12—Political Parties, pp. 490–537
- Discussion: Should we make the nomination system more or less democratic?
- Group presentations begin

Thursday, November 1: Political Parties

- Reading: Theda Skocpol and Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, “The Koch Network and Republican Party Extremism,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 2016, Vol. 14, pp. 681–699
- Panel discussion

Monday, November 5: Elections

- Reading: *Power & Purpose* Ch. 11—Elections, pp. 426–489
- Activity & discussion: How do you register and vote in your state/DC?

Thursday, November 8: The 2018 Elections

- Elections analysis & discussion

Monday, November 12: Interest Groups

- Reading: *Power & Purpose* Ch. 13—Groups and Interests, pp. 538–577

Thursday, November 15: Interest Groups

- Debating interest group influence

Monday, November 19: Public Opinion

- Reading: *Power & Purpose* Ch. 10—Public Opinion, pp. 376–425

Thursday, November 22

HAPPY THANKSGIVING

Monday, November 26: Public Opinion

- Reading: Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (ch 3, 4)
- Panel discussion

Thursday, November 29: Public opinion

- Reading: Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (ch 5, 6)
- Panel discussion
- Activity: Create a survey

Monday, December 3: Media

- Reading: *Power & Purpose* Ch. 14—Media, pp. 578–609

Thursday, December 6: More media, course wrap-up

- Reading: Duncan J. Watts and David M. Rothschild, “Don’t blame the election on fake news. Blame it on the media,” *Columbia Journalism Review*, Dec 5, 2017 (20 pp.)
<https://www.cjr.org/analysis/fake-news-media-election-trump.php>
- Panel discussion
- Media reform discussion

Support for Students at AU

If you experience difficulty in this course for any reason, please do not hesitate to consult with me or the advisers in the Department of Government/School of Public Affairs. In addition, a wide range of AU services is available to support you:

- Academic Support & Access Center (MGC 243, 202-885-3360). All students may take advantage of the Academic Support and Access Center (ASAC) for individual academic skills, counseling, workshops, tutoring and writing assistance, as well as Supplemental Instruction. All services are free. The services include the Writing Center (first floor of Bender Library), which assists students with academic writing and assignments, and the Math/Stat Lab (Myers Building, 202-885-3154), which provides mathematics and statistics tutoring. Additional content tutoring is also available in the ASAC's Tutoring Lab.
 - Students with Disabilities: American University is committed to making learning and programming as accessible as possible. Students who wish to request accommodations for a disability must notify me with a letter of approved accommodations from the ASAC. As the process for registering and requesting accommodations can take some time, and as accommodations, if approved, are not retroactive, I strongly encourage students to contact the ASAC as early as possible. For more information about the process for registering and requesting disability-related accommodations, contact ASAC.
- Counseling Center (MGC 214, 202-885-3500) helps students make the most of their university experience, both personally and academically. They offer individual and group counseling, urgent care, self-help resources, referrals to private care, as well as programming to help students gain the skills and insights needed to overcome adversity and thrive in college. Contact the Counseling Center to make an appointment in person or by telephone, or visit the Counseling Center page on the AU website for additional information.
- Center for Diversity & Inclusion (MGC 201/202, 202-885-3651) is dedicated to enhancing LGBTQ, Multicultural, First Generation, and Women's experiences on campus and to advance AU's commitment to respecting & valuing diversity by serving as a resource and liaison to students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy.
- OASIS: The Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence (McCabe Hall 123, 202-885-7070, oasis@american.edu) provides free and confidential advocacy services for students who experience sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, sexual harassment, and/or stalking. Please email or call to schedule an appointment with one of the two victim advocates in OASIS.

American University expressly prohibits any form of discriminatory harassment including sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The university is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution that operates in compliance with applicable laws and regulations, and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, personal appearance, gender identity and expression, family responsibilities, political affiliation, source of income, veteran status, an individual's genetic information or any other bases under federal or local laws in its programs and activities.

If you experience any of the above, you have the option of filing a report with the AU Department of Public Safety (202-885-2527) or the Office of the Dean of Students (202-885-3300, dos@american.edu). To file a Title IX complaint, contact the Title IX Program

Officer (202-885-3373, TitleIX@american.edu). Please keep in mind that all faculty and staff - with exception of counselors in the Counseling Center, victim advocates in OASIS, medical providers in the Student Health Center, and ordained clergy in the Kay Spiritual Life Center - who are aware of or witness this conduct are required to report this information to the university, regardless of the location of the incident.

- International Student & Scholar Services (Butler Pavilion, Rm. 410, 202-885-3350, iss@american.edu). Resources to support academic success and participation in campus life including academic counseling, support for second language learners response to questions about visas, immigration status and employment and intercultural programs, clubs and resources.

Emergency Preparedness

In the event of a declared pandemic (influenza or other communicable disease), American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence due to illness. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of a declared pandemic or other emergency, students should refer to the AU Web site (american.edu/emergency) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective deans office for course and school/college-specific information.