

WHAT THIS COURSE IS ABOUT

This is a first college course in American government and politics. I know many of you are cynical about politics. You feel that it doesn't matter. That it is corrupt. That it is not worthy of your time and energy. Based on recent events you might be thinking: "how can you NOT be cynical and pessimistic?"

Suspend this belief. Hard? Maybe, but politics matters. Politics affects you every minute of every day and you will be well served to better understand how and why. I hope that taking this class seriously will show you why politics matters and why it can be so frustrating at times. I have three main goals in teaching this course. First, I hope you will leave this class with more knowledge about the workings of the American political system than you started with. For many of you, this will be your only college-level political science class and as citizens of the United States and as future educators, business leaders, lawyers, government officials, scientists, dietitians the knowledge that you gain will assist you in meeting your responsibilities as voters and professionals. Second, and equally important, I hope that you will improve your ability to think about political subjects by investigating some serious and critical issues of American politics and government and be able to evaluate for yourself how well it works. Finally, some of you will go on to be political science majors. For you, this course will introduce basic concepts and methods that are central to the study of American politics and political science in general.

To meet these goals we will investigate the current state of American government and at the end of the semester we will examine the events and ideas surrounding the founding of the American republic. The textbook I have chosen emphasizes the contemporary politics and I will supplement this with history to help you connect the two together. The text revolves around three themes: 1) politics is conflictual, 2) process matters, and 3) politics is everywhere. We will weave these through our discussions semester. In addition to reading a text, we will read a variety of historical and contemporary texts and view some video.

My goal in recent years has been to try to talk less in class and have students do more. This will be a work in progress and is challenging for two reasons: I like to talk; and this is a largish class with 35 students. If we work together, we can make it happen. There will be some lecture, but I hope to keep the class active through discussion, group work, individual work, and the use of video and other resources when possible. I will do my best to vary what happens in class to keep things interesting. I am interested in your ideas and questions; your input is desired and encouraged.

WHAT I WILL HELP YOU LEARN THIS SEMESTER

By the end of the semester, I hope that you—my students—can:

- Understand key issues and concepts of the American political founding;
- Understand key issues and concepts in modern American government;
- Understand arguments made about American government;
- Write clearly about American government, using appropriate language, developing a clear thesis, and supporting that thesis with evidence.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Classroom Schumacher 109, MWF 1:00pm–1:50pm

In Person Location: Schumacher 14J. Office Hours: M Noon-12:50pm, W 2:00pm-4:00pm, F 2:00pm–3:00pm, and by appointment

Electronic bill.wilkerson@oneonta.edu (Please include a subject in all email!)
<https://blackboard.oneonta.edu>
Sign up for remind.com as noted in class for text messages.
607-436-3272

Department Schumacher 10. -3522. Secretary: Moira Rouggy. Hours: 8:00am–4:30pm M–F.

BOOKS TO PURCHASE

The book has been ordered through the campus bookstore. It is also available online. Please buy this edition.

Bianco, William T. and David T. Canon. *American Politics Today, 5th ed, essentials*. W. W. Norton, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-393-28361-7.

Coby, John Patrick. *The Constitutional Convention of 1787: Constructing the American Republic*. W. W. Norton, 2018. ISBN: 978-0-393-64090-8.

Note: Other reading is required and will be distributed in class or through Blackboard.

TOPIC OUTLINE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS

The course outline lists dates, general topics, and textbook reading for the semester. Details for each of the four sections of the course will be placed on Blackboard and handed out in class if there is interest. *Two notes: 1) Additional readings will be assigned for many topics and will be added as we move along during the semester. 2) I reserve the right to alter this outline if necessary.*

DATES	TOPICS WE WILL COVER	TEXTBOOK READING
SECTION 1: FOUNDATIONS		
M 8/27 & W 8/29	What have I gotten myself into?	
F 8/31 & W 9/5	1. Understanding American politics	ch. 1
M 9/3	No class: Labor Day	
F 9/7 & M 9/10	2. The US Constitution	pp 42-52, the Articles of Confederation; the Constitution
W 9/12 & F 9/14	3. Federalism	ch. 3
M 9/17 & W 9/19	4. Civil liberties	ch. 4
F 9/21 & M 9/24	5. Civil Rights	ch. 5
W 9/26	Section 1 examlet	
SECTION 2: INSTITUTIONS		
M 10/1 — F 10/5	6. Congress	ch. 10
M 10/8	No class: mid-semester break	
W 10/10 & F 10/12	7. The presidency and the executive branch	ch. 11
M 10/15 & W 10/17	8. The Courts	ch. 13
F 10/19	Section 2 examlet	
SECTION 3: POLITICS & PROCESSES		
M 10/22 & W 10/24	8. Public opinion: How do Americans form ideas about politics?	pgs. 160-182
F 10/26	9. The media	pgs. 182-186
M 10/29 & W 10/31	10. Elections: money and politics, how do elections work	ch. 8; pgs. 233-237
F 11/2 & M 11/5	11. Political parties	ch. 7
W 11/7 & F 11/9	12. Interest groups	ch. 9
M 11/12	Section 3 examlet	
SECTION 4: REACTING TO THE PAST: THE CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION OF 1787		
W 11/14 — M 11/19	Introduction to the founding period and RttP	pgs. 28-42; Coby, entire (see specific assignments in early November)
W 11/21 & F 11/23	No class: Thanksgiving break	
M 11/26 — M 12/10, W 12/12 11:00AM-1:30PM	RttP	

GRADING

In POLS 121 US Government you can choose the grade you want to aspire to, and within limits, earn it doing the work that you want to do. Everyone in this class starts with zero points. Every assignment successfully completed will add to your point total, you can never lose points. Also, there are many opportunities throughout the semester to earn points, and these opportunities come from different kinds of assignments. To do well in POLS 121 US Government—to earn a B or above—you will need to do multiple things well. Below are the point totals required for each grade level.

Point total requirements

A	27,500 or more total points
A-	25,825 (note: to earn a grade of A- or above you must earn at least 19,000 combined core and RTTP points)
B+	24,100
B	23,250
B-	21,900
C+	19,400
C	18,500
C-	17,400
D+	14,300
D	13,500
E	13,499 or fewer total points

ASSIGNMENTS (WAYS TO EARN POINTS)

Core assignments

Blackboard quizzes. There will be 10 multiple choice quizzes posted on Blackboard during the semester on topics or groups of topics. One hundred forty-eight questions worth 55 points each will be asked during the semester for 8,000 available points. Questions will primarily come from the textbook, but will also be drawn from lectures and other materials used in the section such as additional readings, films, or web sites. Each quiz will be opened after class on the last day of a section and remain open for 48 hours unless otherwise noted. There is no maximum on the points you can earn through quizzes.

Class preparation assignments. Students should prepare for class by doing reading and other assigned activities before they are covered. To facilitate preparation there will be a minimum of 12 class preparation assignments worth 400 points each for a minimum total of 4,800 points. The assignments will take a variety of forms. Class attendance is also required to earn credit.

By the numbers. You can answer questions in Blackboard on the By the Numbers feature in each chapter of the textbook that we will cover. You must get each question correct to get any credit. Each BtN is worth 125 points. Earn credit for 10 and you will earn 500 bonus points.

Attendance. Earn 50 points for each class attended through the third examlet.

Extension assignments

Examlets. On three dates noted in the topic outline optional in-class exams, made up of short essay questions, examlets. Each examlet is worth 750 points. Questions will be distributed in advance. At least two examlets will be given for each section. Examlets will be graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis using guidelines distributed in advance. You can earn up to 5,250 points through examlets.

Explorations. Extend your learning by exploring concepts from the course by leaving the classroom. Visiting a government meeting and interviewing people are examples. These assignments, graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis, are worth 2,500 points each. You can earn up to 5,000 points on explorations.

Traditional essays. Would you rather just write a paper? There will also be some essay options as well. These assignments, graded on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory basis are worth 2,500 points each. You can earn up to 5,000 points on traditional essays.

Reacting to the Past: The Constitutional Convention of 1787

Over the last several weeks of class we will be examining the US Constitution in significant detail by taking on the roles of the founders and creating a constitution. While you will learn about the goals and motivations of the founders, we may not end up with the same constitution they did! You will be assessed in a series of assignments including a survey, a character investigation worksheet, a readings worksheet, a writing assignment, participation (including speaking in front of the class), and an end of activity reflection.

GRADING OF ASSIGNMENTS

With the exception of the chapter quizzes and some elements of the Reacting to the Past, assignments noted above will be assessed on an all-or-nothing—satisfactory or unsatisfactory—basis using a rubric that will be posted in advance. Bonus points may be available for especially well done work.

All assignments will have a due date. *Where noted on the assignment only*, late work will be allowed with the following penalties: 1) you will earn 80% of the possible points for a satisfactory assignment turned in within 72 hours of the due date/time; 2) satisfactory assignments after 72 hours earn 50% of the possible points; and, no exemplary bonus points can be earned.

SECOND CHANCES

All or nothing grading can be stressful, so to ease stress, and to encourage you to try out skills that are at the edge of your comfort zone, and most of all, to maximize opportunities for learning, every student starts the course with three (3) virtual tokens that can be “exchanged” for some leniency or opportunities for revision. Using a token will allow a student to do one of the following:

- resubmit an unsatisfactory assignment within the deadline agreed upon (usually within one week of a grade being assigned);
- earn full credit for an assignment turned in with 72 hours of due date/time; or
- resubmit a quiz.

You may earn more tokens by attending campus events and writing reflections. Note though that you must have a token available at the time the assignment is graded.

EXAMPLES OF PATHS TO AN A

The traditional:

Do well on quizzes, you earn 95% of the points (7600 points)

Successfully prepare for each of the 10 in class assignments (4000 points)

Complete five quizlet questions (4500)

Write two traditional essays (5000)

In class almost every day (1250)

Rock Reacting to the Past (7500)

$$7600 + 4000 + 4500 + 5000 + 1250 + 7500 = 29,850 \text{ total points}$$

I'm not that great at quizzes and I hate exams:

Prepare for class well (4800 points)

Do okay on the quizzes, earning 80% of the points (7200)

Complete two explorations (5000)

Come to class almost every day (1250)

Write a traditional essay (2500)

Really liked Reacting to the Past (8000)

$$7200 + 4800 + 5000 + 1250 + 2500 + 8000 = 28,750 \text{ total points}$$

Hopefully you get the idea. There are many possible paths to an A. You could supplement quiz grades or a missing course preparation assignment with By the Numbers assignments or outstanding attendance or some successful quizlets. It is up to you to decide. And there are similar variations if your goal is a B or a C. GradeCraft has a tool to help you plan how to move forward.

CLASS PREPARATION AND STUDY RESOURCES

Go to the class preparation and study resources folder for links.

A FEW RULES AND OTHER NOTES

1. Come to class and come to class prepared. Your presence and participation are important your success.
2. Keep up with the class using Blackboard, text messages, and other media as appropriate.
3. Be considerate of others. Be respectful in discussion. Please put away your cell phone unless asked to use it for class.
4. Make your work your own. Dishonest work will be punished to the full extent that the Student Handbook allows.
5. Technology fails sometimes. Servers go down, files corrupt. Start early and backup your work. You are responsible for getting work in on time and for sending me readable files in the manner required.
6. Please discuss your disability accommodations with me early in the semester. And you should use these accommodations until it is clear that you don't need them!

CATALOG DESCRIPTION

An introductory overview of American national government: constitutionalism, political institutions and processes, and political behavior. Recommended for students who want a basic course in American government or who plan to take 200-level POLS courses.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION/SHELTER-IN-PLACE PROCEDURES

In the event of an emergency evacuation (i.e., fire or other emergency), classes meeting in this building are directed to reassemble at the lobby of IRC so that all persons can be accounted for. Complete details of the College's emergency evacuation, shelter-in-place and other emergency procedures can be found at <http://www.oneonta.edu/security/>.

COLLEGE ADA (AMERICAN WITH DISABILITIES ACT) STATEMENT

Students Diagnosed with a Disability—All individuals who are diagnosed with a disability are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. As such, you may be entitled to certain accommodations within this class. If you are diagnosed with a disability, please make an appointment to meet with Student Disability Services (SDS), 209 Alumni Hall, ext. 2137. All students with the necessary supporting documentation will be provided appropriate accommodations as determined by the SDS Office. It is entirely your responsibility to contact SDS and concurrently supply me with your accommodation plan, which will inform me

exactly what accommodations you are entitled to. You will only receive accommodations once you provide me with an SDS accommodation plan. Any previously recorded grades will not be changed.

INTERESTED IN MAJORING OR MINORING IN POLITICAL SCIENCE, INTERNATIONAL STUDIES OR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STUDIES?

Come see me or go by the Department office. We would love to have you.

We also have excellent student run clubs in political science and pre-law. See Campus Connection for details.