

# US Federal Government and Politics

POLS 110-01 // Fall 2017 // Morse-Ingersoll Hall 10 // MWF 2:45 – 3:50 PM

Professor Philip Chen // [chenp@beloit.edu](mailto:chenp@beloit.edu) //

Office: Morse-Ingersoll 7 // Office Hours: Tu 10:00 – 11:30 AM

## Course Description

U.S. Federal Government and Politics (1). Introduction to U.S. government and politics at the national and state levels. Provides background on guiding principles, constitutional guarantees, the federal system, major institutions, and mechanisms that link citizens to officials. Covers both federal and state levels and their interaction in topics such as elections and political executives, which include the president and governors. Illustrative use of public policy materials, as well as current events and issues. Serves as a basic course for any student wishing to gain a foundation in U.S. politics and as the prerequisite for many courses in the American politics subfield.

## Course Objectives

By the end of this semester, you should be able to:

- Understand and describe the basic structure of American government
- Analyze and explain how this structure enables or constrains policy making in America
- Compare the strengths and weaknesses of the American system with other democratic institutions

In addition to these specific learning goals, there are several skills that I believe are especially important for this course. By the end of the semester, you should have:

- Gained basic factual knowledge about the American political system
- Developed writing and oral presentation skills
- Learned to analyze and critically evaluate different arguments and theories

## Structure of the Class

As an introductory class in American politics, some classes will be devoted heavily to me lecturing. However, while I will lecture on new topics or extensions of the readings, I will not simply regurgitate the readings because a) you are expected to have read them already and b) I'm not witty or interesting enough to lecture about this type of material.

In addition to lecture days, we will also spend a good portion of class on discussion and activities designed to help you integrate the readings and materials. Please come to class prepared to discuss the day's readings, as this is a key component of this course.

## **Office Hours and Help**

I strive to make this course understandable and accessible for all students. If you have any questions about the content or structure of the course or about specific assignments, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am always happy to help if you come to me before assignments or exams are due. Please do not wait to ask for help until after the due date, come talk to me before if you are struggling.

## **Required Texts**

This class will feature mostly academic books and articles. The required books are listed below and are available at the college bookstore or from Amazon or other places online. Readings are available on the class Moodle site at:

<https://moodle1718.beloit.edu/course/view.php?id=349>

There are three required books for this class:

Cramer, Katherine. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment*. (Referred to as Cramer)

Poloni-Staudinger, Lori & Michael Wolf. 2016. *American Difference*. (Referred to as P-S & W)

Smith, Raymond. 2014. *The American Anomaly*. (Referred to as Smith)

## **Grading**

Grades are based on four different components, described in more detail below. 45% of your grade will come from a final issue paper (1) on a topic of your choosing. An additional 20% of your grade will come from debate participation and position papers (2) written by your group. 5% of your grade consists of participation in class (3). Finally, 30% of your grade consists of weekly reading quizzes (4).

Reading Quizzes (Top 10)	30%
Debate Preparation, Writing, and Participation	
Participation	5%
Position Papers (500-750 words each)	15% (5% each)
Final Issue Paper	
List of Potential Issues	Required for Grade
Issue Description (500-750 words)	Required for Grade
Institutional Analysis (1000-1250 words)	Required for Grade
Public Opinion Analysis (1000-1250 words)	Required for Grade
Rough Draft with Recommendation (3000-3500 words)	Required for Grade
Paper Conference Attendance	Required for Grade
Final Draft (3000-3500 words)	45%
Participation	5%

**Issue Paper (45%)** – As part of the course, you will be required to pick an issue of personal interest that would be decided at the federal level. Using the readings from class as well as additional scholarly readings that you locate, you will complete a variety of different assignments meant to build towards a final issue analysis.

The final paper contains four components: a description of the issue and the current laws and legislation surrounding the issue (1), an analysis of the institutional constraints and where the issue is likely to be decided (2), and an analysis of the public's beliefs and attitudes surrounding the issue (3), and a policy recommendation based on the institutional and public opinion context (4). More information about this assignment will be provided later in the semester.

You'll notice a number of components marked "Required for Grade." These pieces of the issue paper can be thought of as low stakes requirements. In order to receive full credit on your final paper, you must turn in all of these components, even though your performance on these assignments does not factor into your grade. Failing to turn in these assignments will lower your final project grade by 1/3 of a letter grade for each missing piece. For instance, if your grade for the entire issue paper project was a B+, but you failed to turn in your list of potential issues, your final grade for the project would be a B. If you were missing both the list of potential issues and issue description, your B+ would become a B-.

**Weekly Reading Quizzes (30%)** – Over the past couple years, I've come to dislike the concept of midterm and final exams because they place a premium on memorization and intense study rather than a cohesive synthesis of the material we read. In essence, finals and midterms seem to encourage students to memorize minutiae instead of substance.

However, the readings for this class were chosen with intention and I believe they are important for students to get the most out of the class. I will not lecture much on the readings, as I believe classroom discussions are both more enjoyable and a better way for students to learn the ability to critique and challenge the works we read. In order for you to be prepared for these discussions, you will need to do the readings.

While I would love to be able to simply ask "did you do the reading?" and grade you on this, it seems unrealistic. On Wednesday of each week we will have a short, graded reading quiz. These quizzes will consist of a few multiple choice or short answer questions, as well as one or two longer (2-3 paragraph) questions that ask you to synthesize the readings in some way. I understand that sometimes things come up and readings don't get done. Over the course of the semester, there are 11 Wednesdays when I will administer quizzes. This makes for an odd division of 30% of your grade. Out of these 11 quizzes, I will drop your lowest score. Of the remaining 10 quizzes, each will be worth 3% of your grade. While no one quiz will make or break your final grade, failing to do any of the readings will severely limit your potential in this class.

At the end of the semester, I will simply take your highest 10 quiz grades, dropping the lowest grade, and average them. Because you have a quiz that is not counted, you cannot make up quizzes for unexcused absences. However, if you are going to miss a Wednesday class and let me know ahead of time, we can make arrangements for you to take the quiz at a different time. If

you are sick or have an approved absence, just make sure to send me an email or talk to me before the quiz.

**Debate Preparation, Writing, and Participation (20%)** – Throughout the course, we will have three debate days and three debate prep days. Each of you will be assigned one of four groups and will research and prepare for these short debates. Your group will be assigned a position on the debate resolution. 5% of your grade is based on your participation in the debates, which includes speaking and interacting with your fellow debaters as well as assisting with the preparation of your group’s argument and position paper.

For each of the three debates, your group is also responsible for a position paper, each of which is worth 5% of your grade (15% in total). These 500-750 word position papers should lay out your group’s debate strategy, the position on the resolution your group is taking, and the evidence you plan to use to support your position.

**Participation (5%)** – The participation portion of your grade includes regular attendance in class, completion of in-class activities, participation in class discussions, and asking questions during lectures, as well as being an active participant in the debates.

I’ll advise you that I take the participation portion of the class seriously. I give very few A grades for participation. Thus, you shouldn’t assume that simply attending class regularly is enough to get full participation. I grade participation holistically. If you are attentive in class, offer opinions and reactions to readings, and are engaged in discussion, you will do fine. But these are not simply “free” points for the class.

**Grade Scale:**

A	93-100	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	<60

**Grading** – On some assignments, you may receive a grade of B+/A- or something like that. This is just my shorthand way of assigning a number grade between two letter grades. Thus, an A grade is recorded in the grade book as 100 points while an A- grade is recorded as 92 points. If I think your work fell between these points, you may get an A-/A, which would be recorded as 96 points. So a A-/A is technically an A grade, but in the middle of the A range instead of the high end.

When calculating final grades, I always round up. So an 88.7% in the class becomes an 89% (B+), but an 89.1% would be rounded up to a 90% (A-).





November 3            Read: Smith Ch. 9

November 6            Read: Fowler 2008\*  
                             Gilens and Page 2014\*  
                             Bartels Blog Post\*

November 8 (RQ)      Read: Lawless & Fox\* (Ch. 3)  
                             Lawless & Fox\* (Ch. 3)

November 10           NO CLASS (Professor Out of Town)  
                             Read: Green & Gerber\*

November 13           Debate Prep (In Class)  
                             Read: Debating Reform Ch. 9\*  
                             Debating Reform Ch. 10\*

November 15           NO CLASS (International Symposium Day)

November 17           **DUE: Position Paper #3**  
                             In Class Debates – No Readings

### Policymaking

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November 20            **DUE: Public Opinion Analysis**  
                             Read: Smith Ch. 12  
                             Smith Ch. 13

November 22 (RQ)      **NOTE: Reading quiz will be replaced by a short writing assignment.**  
                             Read: Mettler Introduction\*  
                             Mettler Ch. 1\*

November 24            NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)

### Political Science Applied

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November 27            Read: Cramer Ch. 1  
                             Cramer Ch. 2

November 29 (RQ)      Read: Cramer Ch. 3

December 1             **DUE: Rough Draft with Policy Recommendation**  
                             Read: Cramer Ch. 4

December 4             NO CLASS (Paper Conferences, Meet with Professor)  
                             Read: Cramer Ch. 5

December 6            NO CLASS (Paper Conferences, Meet with Professor)  
Read: Cramer Ch. 6

December 8            NO CLASS (Paper Conferences, Meet with Professor)  
Read: Cramer Ch. 7

December 11           Read: Cramer Ch. 8

December 13           Last Day of Class! – No Readings

December 16           **DUE: Final Draft, by 5:00 PM**

## Course Policies

Attendance: Regular attendance is vital for your success in this course. I understand, however, that sometimes circumstances prevent you from coming to class. Missing one class will not destroy your participation grade; missing several will.

Late Work: Assignments are due at the **beginning of class** on the day they are listed as due. Any assignments turned in after this time will be subject to the following late penalty: For each day late, I will deduct a third of a letter grade. So if an assignment is due Friday and you turn it in after class on Friday, a B+ paper would receive a B. If you turn it in Saturday, it would be a B-, Monday would be a C.

Assignments should be turned in using the Moodle system unless otherwise noted.

Grade Changes: Any appeals of a grade must be made at least **24 hours after** I hand back an assignment or exam. If you would like to appeal the grade you got on an assignment, prior to meeting with me you must submit a written statement detailing why you think your grade should be changed. I will then meet with you to discuss your statement and why you think your grade should be changed.

If I make a mistake in totaling your grade for an exam or assignment (e.g. I added the points up incorrectly) then you do not need to write a statement or wait 24 hours. Just talk to me after class or during office hours and I'll double check and fix the mistake.

Contacting the Professor: I encourage you to contact me with questions and concerns about the course, readings, and assignments. In general, quick clarification questions can be handled over email. More in-depth questions are best discussed in person during my office hours, where we can have an actual conversation. If my office hours conflict with your class or work schedule, I am available by appointment as well.

Please allow a full 24 hours for an email response. Often, my responses will be quicker than this, but do not send multiple emails about the same request until 24 hours have passed. I cannot guarantee that if you email me right before an assignment or exam that I will be able to answer your question in time, so please make sure and email me early if you have a time-specific question.

Extra Credit and Retakes: There is no scheduled extra credit in this course. You may not retake quizzes. There may be opportunities for extra credit, however.

Disability Services and Accommodations: If you have a disability and need accommodations, contact Learning Enrichment and Disability Services (LEADS) located on 2nd floor Pearsons (north side), [608-363-2572](tel:608-363-2572), [learning@beloit.edu](mailto:learning@beloit.edu), or make an appointment through [joydeleon.youcanbook.me](http://joydeleon.youcanbook.me). For accommodations in my class, you must bring me an Access Letter from the Director of LEADS and then we will discuss how to implement the accommodations. Contact that office promptly; accommodations are not retroactive. Free peer tutoring is available for most classes. For a tutor, apply by going to your Portal, to the Student Life tab, and then apply using the Tutoring Forms (on left) and Request a Tutor. If you have any questions, contact LEADS.

Inclusivity: **Inclusivity** is a demonstration of equity and social justice through awareness, understanding, and respect for the differences in identity, culture, background, experience, and socialization, and the ways in which these forms of difference impact how we live and learn. Inclusivity requires equitable, institution-wide representation and access to resources. In practice, this manifests itself by each individual being aware of, committed to, and responsible for the well-being and care of all students, staff, and faculty.