

# US Politics

POLI 100-01 // Spring 2016 // Carnegie 206 // MWF 1:10-2:10 PM

Professor Philip Chen // [pchen@macalester.edu](mailto:pchen@macalester.edu) // Carnegie 205

Professor Chen's Office Hours: Thursdays, 1:30 – 2:30 PM

Preceptor: Darwin Forsyth, 202-253-5810, [dforsyth@macalester.edu](mailto:dforsyth@macalester.edu)

Darwin's Office Hours: Mondays 7:30 – 9:30 PM and by appointment//

Darwin's Office Hours Location: Upstairs of the Campus Center (Red Chairs)

## **Course Description**

This course analyzes the major ideas, institutions, and actors in the American political system. The course focuses on hands-on learning and active engagement with politics and policy. During class, we focus on learning about the fundamental institutions of American government and analyzing how these institutions compare to democratic institutions in other countries. Key themes include federalism, public opinion, policy making, and institutional structure. By the end of the semester, students should be able to interpret and understand contemporary politics in a broad historical and structural context.

## **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://moodle.macalester.edu/course/view.php?id=438>

Lowi, Theodore, Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere. 2015. *American Government: Power and Purpose Brief 13<sup>th</sup> Edition*. (NOTE: This is the BRIEF 13<sup>th</sup> edition, which is cheaper than the full edition) Referred to as LGS&A.

Smith, Raymond. 2014. *The American Anomaly*.

A subscription to Netflix, necessary for watching episode of *The West Wing*

## **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 9)	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 Analysis and Recommendation (1000-1250 words)	Required for Grade
Rough Draft (2750-3500 words)	Required for Grade
Final Draft (2750-3500 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 three 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 and a policy recommendation based on the institutional and public opinion context. 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 a final grade on your 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 Friday 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 Friday 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 two lowest scores. Of the remaining 9 quizzes, each will be worth 3% of your grade except for your highest quiz score, which will be worth 6% (for a total of 30%). 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 9 quiz grades, dropping the 2 lowest grades, and double counting the highest quiz. Because you have 2 quizzes that are not counted, you cannot make up quizzes for unexcused absences. However, if you are going to miss a Friday

class and let me know ahead of time, we can make arrangements for you to take the quiz at a different time.

**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 electoral simulation exercise.

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-).



## Week Five – Federalism

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- February 15           Lecture and Discussion  
                            Federalist #10\*  
                            Federalist #51\*
- February 17           Debate Prep  
                            Debating Reform Ch 1 (Groups A & B)  
                            Debating Reform Ch 2 (Groups C & D)
- February 19           Debate (RQ)  
                            **Position Paper #1 Due**

## Week Six – Civil Rights

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- February 22           Lecture  
                            LGS&A Ch 4
- February 24           Debate Prep  
                            Debating Reform Ch 3 (Groups A & C)  
                            Debating Reform Ch 4 (Groups B & D)  
                            Smith Ch 12
- February 26           Debate (RQ)  
                            **Position Paper #2 Due**

## Week Seven – Legislative Branch

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- February 29           Lecture  
                            LGS&A Ch 5  
                            Attend Mitau Lecture (If Possible)  
                                    “Trumpeting Racism: Race, Politics, and Economic  
                                    Jeopardy for All”  
                                    Ian Haney Lopez  
                                    4:45-6:15 PM, John B. Davis Lecture Hall
- March 2               Lecture and Discussion  
                            Mansbridge\*  
                            Banducci, Donovan, and Karp\*
- March 4               Discussion and Analysis (RQ)  
                            West Wing, Season 6, Episode 18 “La Palabra”  
                            Smith Ch 6  
                            **Issue Description Due**



Week Eleven – The Fourth Branch(es)

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April 4                    Debate Prep  
                                 Debating Reform Ch 7 (Groups A & D)  
                                 Debating Reform Ch 10 (Groups B & C)

April 6                    Debate  
                                 **Position Paper #3 Due**

April 8                    NO CLASS (PROFESSOR AT CONFERENCE)

Week Twelve - Elections

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April 11                  Lecture and Discussion  
                                 LGS&A Ch 10  
                                 Smith Ch 11

April 13                  Lecture and Discussion  
                                 LGS&A Ch 11  
                                 Smith Ch 10

April 15                  Discussion and Analysis (RQ)  
                                 West Wing, Season 7, Episode 2 “The Mommy Problem”  
                                 West Wing, Season 1, Episode 21 “Lies, Damn Lies, and  
                                 Statistics”  
                                 **Public Analysis and Recommendation Due**

Week Thirteen – Money in Politics

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April 18                  Lecture and Discussion  
                                 Fowler 2008\*  
                                 Gilens and Page 2014\*  
                                 Bartels Blog Post\*

April 20                  Big Sky, Big Money (In Class)  
                                 Angster Article\*

April 22                  Discussion and Activity (RQ)  
                                 <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/p9n4lk/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-exclusive---martin-gilens---benjamin-page-extended-interview-pt--1>  
                                 <http://www.cc.com/video-clips/o4gjz7/the-daily-show-with-jon-stewart-exclusive---martin-gilens---benjamin-page-extended-interview-pt--2>  
                                 **Discussion Questions Due**  
                                 **Rough Draft Due**



Week Fourteen – Paper Conferences

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April 25 NO CLASS (PAPER CONFERENCES)

April 27 NO CLASS (PAPER CONFERENCES)

April 29 NO CLASS

Week Fifteen

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May 2 Last Day of Class  
Smith Conclusion

Friday, April 6, 1:30 – 3:30 PM  
**Final Draft Due (Free cookies in my office)**

## Course Policies

Attendance: Regular attendance is vital for your success in this course. However, I understand 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.