

GOV 1100

Introduction to American Government

Fall 2022
Druckenmiller 016
Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 9:05am-10:00am

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Office Hours:

Tuesday, 1pm-2pm
Thursday, 9:30am-11am
And by appointment

This course is an introduction to the workings of American government. For many, politics and government are uninteresting, unimportant, and even dreadfully boring. For others, political and partisan struggles are off-putting and uncomfortably confrontational. As such, it is en vogue to lament the state of American politics, often without thought or reflection, as either too base to warrant participation or too dull to bother. This course is not intended to make you politicians nor convince you that one partisan or ideological perspective is best. It is, however, designed to teach and inform you about the American democratic system and give you the tools to make reasoned and thoughtful assessments about politics and political struggles. Should you come to believe – because of this course – that American democracy is doomed, or (for that matter) that it is superior to all other alternatives, it will ideally come from having read carefully and reflected deeply about all viewpoints and alternatives. It is my hope that you leave this class with a stronger understanding of American politics, and a keener sense of the complex debates that characterize our democratic development.

Learning Goals

The learning goals of the course are as follows:

1. To learn about the institutions of American government, to include the three branches making up the federal government along with the roles and responsibilities of state/local governments.
2. To consider the pros and cons of these institutions—how they facilitate consensus-building but also often lead to gridlock.
3. To learn about the reasons why Americans do or do not participate in politics, along with the influences of the media, interest groups, and political parties in encouraging active participation in elections and policymaking.
4. To consider the history of exclusion in American politics, along with efforts to create more inclusive and fair democratic institutions and processes. See the statement below for an introduction to this goal.

Statement on Difference, Power, and Inequity

The story of American politics is fundamentally a story about power, inequity, and difference. The inequity is embedded in the original draft of the Constitution, and the country's attempt to overcome these historic patterns of discrimination is, in many ways, the storyline of American political development. Political scientists have stressed "the centrality of race" to American politics generally; less formally, but rather more eloquently, recent Bowdoin honorand Janet Langhart Cohen analogized being Black in the U.S. to being a fish in the ocean: "for a fish in the ocean, everything is wet. And being Black in this country, everything is race." Beyond even this, though, many other groups of all races have also striven to make real the promise of e pluribus unum – from the many, one.

As a country, we continue to wrestle with these questions, making clear that while the country has evolved toward the goal of full inclusion and fair treatment for all, there remains many sources of division and much energy for exclusion. "Democracy is never a thing done. Democracy is always something that a nation must be doing," as noted by Archibald MacLeish, poet and Librarian of Congress.

The course covers all of this in significant detail, starting with the Constitution and its drafting and moving through the many dimensions of American politics, from the institutions of American government (the levers of power) to the actions and attitudes of the American people (demonstrating the differences across communities), with attention to the enduring debates over the rules of participation and the rights and liberties of citizens.

Course Requirements

There are 4 major components to your grade:

1. **Three Exams** (22 points each) – Two midterm exams and a final exam. The exams will test students' abilities to understand and process course concepts, and the exams will consist of multiple-choice questions, short answers, and a longer essay. These will be in-class exams, and so students will be required to read and review the material in advance of the tests and recall and understand both facts and concepts. More information will be provided as we approach the exam.

How should you study? You should read/watch all the assigned material and make notes about key concepts and ideas. Do not wait to read or watch this material until right before the exams; there is too much information to take in and process. Identify in the assigned material the topics that were also covered in the class discussions/lectures—these are clues to what I consider important to know. Look at the list of terms at the end of each chapter in the textbook and review these. Come and talk with me in office hours about concepts and ideas that you find confusing.

2. **Participation** (10 points)—this includes attendance AND class participation. Attendance is REQUIRED. Participation will also include two other components:
 - a. A journaling exercise described at the end of the syllabus.
 - b. Discussions in small groups on the dates indicated on the syllabus. After the add/drop period, you will be assigned to a group of five that will meet in class on the specified dates. For each class, someone will be assigned a discussion leader, and someone will be assigned a note-taker. The group leader will kick off and lead the conversation in the small group, and the note-taker will document the conversation in a shared document. More details will be provided in advance of our first discussion class, which is 10/7.
3. **Election Paper** (14 points)— See the end of the syllabus for more detail.
4. **Weekly Quizzes** (10 points)—There will be one quiz every week, starting on the week of September 5th. The quiz will happen randomly and will focus on the readings for that day. It will consist of 2-3 very short questions on the readings.

Readings

There are two books for this course, and both are available through the campus virtual bookstore (<https://bowdoin.ecampus.com/>).

1. Robert Dahl. *How Democratic is the American Constitution*. 2nd Edition. Yale University Press. 978-0300095241

2. Paula D. McClain and Steven C. Tauber. *American Government in Black and White: Diversity and Democracy* (5th edition). Oxford University Press.

Other Issues

1. I expect all students to abide by the Bowdoin Academic Honor Code, which can be accessed online at: <https://www.bowdoin.edu/dean-of-students/student-handbook/the-academic-honor-code-and-social-code.html>. If you have any concerns or questions about how to cite work appropriately, please consult a reference librarian or me.
2. If you have chosen to take the class as Credit/D/F, I will only grant a Credit grade if the student has completed all of the work for the class.

Course Outline

August 31—Introductions and Expectations

September 2—Origins of the American Idea

- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 1

*Readings/videos beyond the textbook are loaded as a Module on our Canvas homepage.

September 5—Origins of the American Idea, cont.

- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 2
- “What to the Slave is 4th of July?” by Frederick Douglass (1852)

*For classes where the Chapter is assigned across more than one date, I have provided page numbers from the printed version of the textbook. I have also indicated the corresponding chapter section headings for those using the e-book.

**If we have a quiz on a particular day, it will only be on the assigned pages for that day.

September 7—Federalism

- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 3 (read to page 76, up to “The Evolution of American Federalism: 1790-1932”)

September 9—Federalism, cont.

- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 3 (rest of chapter)
- “Dobbs, Federalism, And Green Day,” Micah P. Veillon, *The American Conservative*.
- “Federalism Worsens Divisions Over Abortion in America,” Jamal Greene, *The Economist*.
- “Abortion Laws after *Dobbs*,” Center for Reproductive Rights

September 12—Congress

- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 6 (read to page 192, up to “Congressional Organization and Leadership”)

September 14 and 16—no class

- I’d recommend watching or starting: “American Insurrection,” Frontline Documentary (90 minutes). You should complete that by 9/23

September 19—Congress, cont.

- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 6 (rest of chapter)

- “A Century of Women in Congress,” visit the Site and click on “Representatives” to watch some video testimonials of women who served in Congress.
- Visit from Karlyn Bowman, American Enterprise Institute. Bowman will also give a formal talk that evening, at 7:30pm in Kresge. Attendance at the talk is mandatory unless you have a prior conflict. I rarely make such talks mandatory, but her topic is relevant to the course, and she is coming to Bowdoin at my invitation.

September 21—How Democratic is the American Constitution

- Dahl, Chapters 1-3

September 23—How Democratic is the American Constitution

- Dahl, Chapters 4-5
- “American Insurrection,” Frontline Documentary (90 minutes)

September 26—How Democratic is the American Constitution

- Dahl, Chapters 6-8

September 28—*First Mid-term Exam*

September 30—Presidency

- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 7 (read to page 235, up to “Executive Branch Organization”)

October 3—Presidency, cont.

- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 7 (rest of chapter)

October 5—Bureaucracy

- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 8

October 7—Discussion class

October 10—no-class (fall break)

October 12— Courts and the Justice System

- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 9 (read to page 308, up to “Decision-Making on the Supreme Court”)

October 14— Courts, cont.

- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 9 (rest of chapter)

October 17— Bill of Rights, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights

- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 4 (read to page 125, up to “The Right to Privacy”)
- Senator Tim Scott (R-SC) on Police Reform, June 17, 2020 [C-SPAN link]
- Skim Scott’s bill, the JUSTICE Act

October 19— Bill of Rights, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights, cont.

- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 4 (rest of chapter)
- "How *Dobbs* Threatens to Torpedo Privacy Rights in the US," Amy Gajda, Wired.com

October 21—Discussion class

- October 24**— Bill of Rights, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights, cont.
- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 5 (to page 166, up to “Nonracial Struggles for Civil Rights”)
 - Barack Obama, "A More Perfect Union," March 18, 2008

- October 26**— Bill of Rights, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights, cont.
- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 5 (rest of chapter)
 - "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," by Peggy McIntosh

October 28—Discussion class

October 31—*Second Mid-term Exam*

- November 2**— Public Opinion and the Media
- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 10

November 4—Discussion class

November 7 and 9—no class

November 11—Election Debrief

- November 14**— Public Opinion and the Media, cont.
- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 11
 - *Election Assessment due, by 5pm*

- November 16**— Elections and Voting
- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 15 (to page 525, up to “Winning the Election: How Elections are Decided”)
 - PBS News, “Black women politicians discuss experiences with racist and sexist attacks”

November 18—Discussion class

- November 21**— Elections and Voting, cont.
- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 15 (rest of chapter)

November 23 and 25—no class (Thanksgiving)

- November 28**—Social Movements
- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 12
 - DeRay Mckesson: "Protests are a Means of Telling the Truth in Public"

- November 30**— Interest Groups
- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 13

- December 2**— Political Parties
- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 14 (to page 479, up to “Party Organization”)

- December 5**—Political Parties, cont.
- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 14 (rest of chapter)

December 7—Summing Up

- McClain and Tauber, Chapter 16

December 9—no class

Final Exam: Sunday, December 18, 8:30am

Additional Info on Assignments

Journaling Exercise

You will keep a journal of reactions to course readings and class discussions. The link to the online form is on Canvas. This is an ungraded assignment, but your completion of it will be included as part of your participation assessment. You should add your thoughts and reactions when you have them over the course of the semester.

I would recommend adding 1-2 paragraphs at least 12 times over the course of the semester. I will regularly remind you of this assignment, but it is up to you to schedule time to add any reactions. Some advice:

1. Schedule a time each week to add some thoughts and comments (i.e., Sunday nights).
2. Spent about 20 minutes on each entry. More than that is not needed. I'm looking for 1-2 paragraphs per entry.
3. I will not comprehensively read these and return comments, but I will look at them and reach out with any comments/reactions as needed.
4. Do not wait until the end to "blitz" the journal with comments. Comments added largely at the end of the semester will not be viewed favorably.
5. Comments/entries can be on anything you like, as it relates to the course and course readings. These can be personal reactions to what you liked or disliked, thoughts about current events as it relates to concepts we've discussed in class, and so. This is intended as a semester-long journal that allows you to express your reactions as you have them. First-person ("I thought...") is encouraged. Relating the course material to your personal experience is encouraged.

Come and chat with me about any questions you have about this.

Election Assessment Memo

You will be assigned an election campaign to follow. These will be assigned at the end of the add/drop period. Your task is to follow the race throughout the fall and consider the election as it relates to concepts covered in the class. To follow the election, I recommend doing some (or all) of the following:

1. Follow the candidates on Twitter, or visit their Twitter page regularly. Follow the Twitter accounts of reporters covering the race in the major papers of the state.
2. Subscribe to receive the candidates' emails.
3. Look for an online, local media source that is open-access.
4. Look for the candidates' YouTube pages to see their uploaded videos and ads (I'll have more to add on this later in the semester).
5. Look up the candidates' ads on Facebook Political Ad Library.
6. Find out what date, if any, the candidates will debate, and see if you can find an open-access link to watch the debate.

Follow the campaign throughout the semester, documenting the key themes and debates. What are the candidates talking about in their campaigns? What key themes emerge from the campaign that relate to concepts we discussed in class? For example, if abortion rights are a key theme in the campaign, this relates to the civil rights we discuss around the right to privacy. It might also have to do with issues of federalism, in terms of state's rights or state variations in laws.

Good papers will make as many connections as seem relevant, and you will be assessed on how thoughtful and clearly you make these connections.

The paper should be 5-7 pages double-spaced.

Cite your sources. Talk with me about proper citation if you have any questions. I'm open to any approach you take, so long as it is consistent and generally well-regarded. Consider [the Chicago Style](#), as I'm partial to that one.

The paper is due on November 14, and you will upload the paper to Canvas.

Come and chat with me about any questions you have about this.