

POL 241: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
Patten University at San Quentin
Fall 2013

Course Schedule: Thursday and Sunday 3:00 PM-5:00 PM
Instructor: Vanessa Williamson

Course Overview: This course is an overview of America's political institutions and processes. Over the course of the semester, we examine the big questions of American democracy.

- *The Rules of the Game:* How do the different institutions of American government function, how have they changed over time, and how do they shape our political life today?
- *The Players:* Who can participate in American politics, and how has that changed over time? Who does participate, and how are they organized?

By examining these two questions in historical context, you will be able to better understand the contemporary political system and the political dilemmas facing Americans today.

Textbook:

Ginsberg, Lowi, and Weir: *We The People: An Introduction to American Politics*

Grading: Your grade will be calculated as follows. Remember, students should include the following information on all assignments and exams: Name, CDC#, housing, date, name of course, name of instructor, name of assignment. Name and CDC# should be included on every page.

1) In-Class Exam: 30%. The in-class midterm exam will be held during Class 10 (currently scheduled for October 13th), and will include identification of terms and short answers. Prior to the exam, you will receive review sheets to help you prepare.

2) Persuasive Essay: 40%. On the last day of class, you must turn in an essay of approximately 1200-1500 words, which is about 4-5 pages whether it is typed (double-spaced), or handwritten (not double-spaced). To help you improve your paper, you will submit an outline and then a draft, which I will review and comment on. You will lose 1/3 of a letter grade on the final paper if you fail to submit either an outline or a draft. For both the outline and the draft I will give you comments and suggestions, but not a grade.

3) In class participation: 30%. This part of your grade will comprise both your participation in class and your reading responses. For most classes, I will provide a couple of questions to guide your reading. For the following class, write a paragraph (of at least 5 sentences) responding to one or more of the questions. I will collect and read these paragraphs, and grade them with a check mark (✓) if they are good, a plus (+) if

they are exceptionally good, or a minus (-) if they do not adequately engage with the material. In class, be ready to discuss the material thoughtfully and by citing evidence, not just your own opinion. The course will be covering controversial topics in this class, and people will likely disagree with one another. All disagreements must be handled respectfully. And remember, I am looking for quality of participation, not simply quantity.

Attendance: Attendance at all class meetings is required. Attendance includes arriving on time and staying to the end of the class. Absences due to the following will be considered excused. However, no student who misses more than five classes, for any reason, will be able to pass the class. Excused absences include:

- Institutional lockdowns
- Medical lay-ins or hospitalizations
- Court dates
- Administrative segregation
- Religious holidays
- Package pick-up (one per semester)

Any unexcused absence, late arrival [not due to an institutional hold-up], or early departure will result in a grade drop of 1/3 of a letter grade (i.e., from an “A” to an “A-“, or a “B+” to a “B”). Students are responsible for catching up on material covered during classes they’ve missed, and for completing all assignments. An explanation of any absence, late arrival, or early departure (whether excused or not) should be submitted in writing.

Late Work: Late work will not be accepted unless you have received permission in advance for an extension. Extensions will only be granted for extremely compelling reasons.

Academic Honesty: You are required to do your own work in this class. Do not collaborate with other students unless the assignment explicitly asks you to do so. When you use outside sources, be sure to cite those sources. (I will discuss citation format when you receive your essay prompts.) Do not pass off the work of others as your own. Violation of this policy will result in penalties up to and including failing the class.

Important Dates:

Please note that for certain classes, a substitute teacher will be covering the material. These dates are September 26th, September 29th, November 21st, November 24th, and December 1st.

Final Day to Add/Drop (any class)	Monday, September 23rd
Midterm Exam	CLASS 10: Sunday, October 13th
Final Paper Outline Due	CLASS 14: Sunday, October 27th
Final Paper Draft Due	CLASS 18: Sunday, November 10th
Final Day to Withdraw (any class)	Monday, November 11th
Thanksgiving: NO CLASS	Thursday, November 28th
Final Paper Due	CLASS 25: Sunday, December 8th

Course Schedule

Please note that this schedule is subject to change in the event of institutional lockdowns, etc.

Class 1 (Thursday, September 12th):

In class: Introduction to the course and to the study of politics. Why democracy?
Optional: From the “Additional Readings” handout, read John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville.

CLASSES 2 - 3: THE AMERICAN CONSTITUTION

Class 2 (Sunday, September 15th):

In class: Introductory survey. Introduction to the federal government: three branches of government, how a bill becomes a law, the separation of powers.
Homework: Read *WTP*, p. 69-88, 92-94; Federalist 51 (*WTP* p. A27-A29).

Class 3 (Thursday, September 19th):

In class: America at its founding, the history and structure of the 1789 Constitution.
Homework: Read the Constitution’s Preamble and Article 1 (*WTP* A10-A13), and *WTP*, p. 480-508.

CLASSES 4 - 10: AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS

Class 4 (Sunday, September 22nd):

In class: Article 1. The structure of Congress.

Homework: Read WTP p. 508-527 and p. 451-454, and the Class 5 Readings from the “Additional Readings” handout.

** NOTE: September 23rd is the last day to add or drop classes. **

Class 5 (Thursday, September 26th):

In class: How does Congress work today? Lobbying and partisan polarization.

Homework: Read the Constitution, Article 2 (*WTP* p. A13-A14). Read *WTP* p. 531-567.

Class 6 (Sunday, September 29th):

In class: Reviewing Article 2. The role of the President.

Homework: Read the Class 7 readings from the “Additional Readings” handout.

Class 7 (Thursday, October 3rd):

In class: Hand out second additional readings packet. The President and the power of persuasion. Which is more democratic, the Presidency or Congress?

Homework: Read the Constitution Articles 3 and 4 (*WTP* p. A14-A15), *WTP* Ch. 16, and *WTP* p. 113-133, and the Class 8 readings from the “Additional Readings” packet.

Class 8 (Sunday, October 6th):

In class: Article 3, the role of the Supreme Court, and a review of controversial cases. Review of federalism. Discussion: Is the Supreme Court undemocratic? Hand out review sheets for exam.

Homework: Class 9 “Additional Readings.”

Class 9 (Thursday, October 10th):

In class: Where do taxes go? Understanding the U.S. government by following the money.

Homework: Review for exam.

Class 10 (Sunday, October 13):

In Class: ***MIDTERM EXAM***

Homework: Read Declaration of Independence (*WTP* p. A3-A5).

Classes 11 - 18: CITIZENSHIP, RIGHTS AND PARTICIPATION

Class 11 (Thursday, October 17th):

In class: The Declaration of Independence. What are rights and where do they come from? In what sense are people equal?

Homework: Read the Amendments to the Constitution (*WTP* p. A17-A21), and *WTP* p. 97-104, and Ch. 5.

Class 12 (Sunday, October 20th):

In class: The Bill of Rights and additional constitutional Amendments. Hand out final paper topics.

Homework: *WTP* Ch. 7, and the Class 13 “Additional Readings.”

Class 13 (Thursday, October 24th):

In class: Public Opinion. How do you form your opinions about political issues? How do we measure what “the public” thinks?

Homework: *WTP* Ch. 8 and the Class 14 “Additional Readings.”

Class 14 (Sunday, October 27th):

In class: ***PAPER OUTLINE DUE*** Media. What is the role of media in a democracy? What media do you receive? Do you participate in the media? How does the media you receive influence the kind of news you get?

Homework: *WTP* Ch. 9 and the Class 15 “Additional Readings.”

Class 15 (Thursday, October 31st):

In class: Return paper outlines. Voting and voting systems. Discuss: People with the right to vote have an obligation to do so. Agree or disagree.

Homework: Read the Class 16 “Additional Readings.”

Class 16 (Sunday, November 3rd):

In class: Modern voting rights restrictions in America: limited suffrage for felons, new voting requirements since 2008, and the overturn of the Voting Rights Act.

Homework: *WTP* Ch. 10, Federalist 10, p. A24-A27.

Class 17 (Thursday, November 7th):

In class: Political parties. Why do we have a two party system? Why did the Founding Fathers object to political parties? What are the advantages of parties for voters? How do voters know which party they are in? Discuss: The Founding Fathers were right – parties are bad for democracy.

Homework: *WTP* Ch. 11. Class 18 “Additional Readings.”

Class 18 (Sunday, November 10th):

In class: ***FIRST DRAFT DUE*** Campaigns and Elections. Campaign finance. Is money speech?

Homework: Class 19 “Additional Readings.”

** NOTE: November 11th is the last day to withdraw from classes. **

Classes 19 - 26: AN UNFINISHED DEMOCRACY

Class 19 (Thursday, November 14th):

In class: Unequal democracy. The effect of economic inequality on democracy. Who is represented in Washington?

Homework: Class 20 “Additional Readings”

Class 20 (Sunday, November 17th):

In class: Return first drafts. Race, ethnicity, and immigration. How has ethnic diversity shaped American democracy?

Homework: *WTP* Ch. 18. Class 21 “Additional Readings”

Class 21 (Thursday, November 21st):

In class: GUEST LECTURE by Prof. Amy Lerman. Social policy.

Class 22 (Sunday, November 24th):

In class: GUEST LECTURE by Prof. Amy Lerman. Social policy, part 2.

Homework: *WTP* Ch. 19.

Class 23 (Sunday, December 1st):

In class: Foreign policy and democracy.

Homework: Class 24 “Additional Readings.”

Class 24 (Thursday, December 5th):

In class: The coercive state. Understanding the unique dimensions of the U.S. military, police and incarceration in comparative perspective.

Homework: Reread the Constitution, Article 5, and read Class 25 “Additional Readings.”

Class 25: Sunday, December 8th

In class: ***FINAL PAPER DUE*** Constitutional Convention! You have all been named delegates at a newly called constitutional convention, as outlined in Article 5 of the Constitution. Today we propose amendments, discuss their implications, and then vote.