

**POLS 100: American Politics (Section: 001)  
Spring 2017: MWF 1-1:53 p.m., MOLN 107  
Department of Politics, Philosophy, and Law  
University of Wisconsin-Parkside**

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Office Hours: MWF 10 a.m. - noon., M 4 p.m. - 5 p.m., and by appointment

**Course Description**

Politics and government, whether at the national, state, or local level, affects each of us on a daily basis. It affects not only how government makes decisions, but also the choices we have in political candidates and what options are available to solve policy problems.

This course provides a broad introduction as to why American government is structured the way it is and how it functions in the present day. A second objective of this course is understanding how federalism, civil liberties, civil rights, and political ideology shape government and how it affects each of us. A third objective is learning how we, as individuals, can understand complex ideas and issues, and the processes in which politicians and other policymakers in government make decisions.

**Course Objectives**

This course satisfies a Social and Behavioral Sciences (SS) General Education requirement. At the conclusion of this course, you will be able to:

1. Identify and explain important institutions in American politics, and explain how they operate.
2. Recognize important events related to American history, such as independence, developing the Constitution, and evolution of civil rights that shape American politics today.
3. Provide examples of how various actors and institutions have influenced events in contemporary American politics.
4. Critically analyze course readings to answer questions regarding the American political system.

This course also fulfills the university's general education requirements in the following areas:

- Communication/literacy: Reading is important in order to succeed in the class. Students can expect around eight hours of reading a week. Written communication is achieved through in-class essays, exams, and final project.
- Reasoned judgment: Students will be able to recognize a problem, analyze information, identify assumptions, and make conclusions based on a range of information.

- Social and personal responsibility: Students will understand and question values and beliefs about social, political, economic, and historical contexts that construct diversity and inequality.

### **Required Text**

Ginsburg, Benjamin, Theodore J. Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline J. Tobert. 2017. *We The People*. 11<sup>th</sup> Core Edition. New York.: W.W. Norton & Company. ISBN (978-0393639957).

The textbook is available at the University Bookstore as well as online retailers (e.g., amazon.com, barnesandnobles.com, half.com, etc.). It is also available as an e-book.

The university offers a free digital subscription to the New York Times for as long as you are a student. You have to re-register every year, but it is a great way to know what is going on in the world. Visit <http://libguides.uwp.edu/nytimes> and follow the instructions. As a student, you can also receive a discounted subscription to the Wall Street Journal. A 15-week subscription is only \$15 (\$1 per week). Visit <http://r.wsj.net/j8wrm> to sign up.

### **Student Responsibilities**

Please come to class prepared. This means you need to **read** and **take notes** on the assigned readings beforehand. Attending class and participating is important, as there will be material discussed only in lectures that will be tested on exams and quizzes. We will be discussing controversial issues throughout the semester, with some of you holding passionate opinions on these issues. Please treat your fellow classmates with respect, We, each, come to this course with diverse backgrounds and different ideas regarding various issues and how government should work. Please respect your classmates by not talking or interrupting when I or others are speaking.

### **Attendance**

Class attendance is important and affects your final grade as exams cannot be made up unless an absence is excused (e.g. approved university activity, funeral for immediate family, religious observance). Absences related to your academic workload, illness, work schedule, car problems, etc. are not usually excused absences. You are allowed up to three unexcused absences during the course. After four unexcused absences, your grade for the course being lowered by one-third a grade level (e.g. A- to B+, or B to B-), and will be lowered again after four more unexcused absences. If you miss a class, you are responsible for obtaining the missed material (e.g., notes) from another student, as my notes/PowerPoint slides will not be made available. Exams may be made-up if you have an approved excuse or an emergency. If you have an emergency that causes you to miss an exam, you must contact me as soon as possible (within 24 hours unless there is a **valid** reason why you could not contact me sooner) to arrange a make-up exam that will be given in an alternative format from the exam taken in class.

## **Technology Policy**

Cell phone use in class is inappropriate and distracting to both myself and other students. If you use a laptop or tablet to take notes, please do not surf the Internet during class or use social media. If you need to call or text someone in an urgent situation, quietly leave the room. I reserve the right to ask students to leave if you are using your cell phone or clearly not using a laptop/tablet for note-taking.

## **Instructor Responsibilities**

As part of being your instructor, I have responsibilities to you. I will help answer questions regarding the course, and help you understand the material. I will be available during office hours and also available by appointment if you cannot make office hours. I will also try to answer questions via email within 48 hours (does not include weekends). All questions regarding grades must be asked in person, either after class or during office hours.

I also aim to provide clear guidelines as to what is expected. I will be using D2L to communicate and post grades. Please check your campus email and D2L regularly to make sure you can view course announcements and review your grades as the semester progresses.

## **Grading**

Midterm exams: 40% (Two at 20% each)

Final exam: 30%

Letter to member of Congress: 15%

Quizzes: 15%

**Final grade scale:** A = 94% and above, A- = 90%-93%, B+ = 87%-89%, B = 83%-86%, B- = 80%-82%, C+ = 77%-79%, C = 73%-76%, C- = 70%-72%, D+ = 67%-69%, D = 60%-66%, F = 59% and below (Note: I do not round up final grades if you are just below the cutoff, such as having a 93.8%. I have to define the scale at some point, and some people are always going to fall on the other side of the divide).

*Final exam (30%):* A final exam will be given at the end of the course. This exam is cumulative, and will cover material from last third of the course, as well as material from throughout the course. The format of the exams will be multiple choice, short answer, and essay. Exams will be given in class and alternative exams are only allowed with an approved excuse.

*Midterm exams (Two at 20% each):* Two midterms will be given during the course. These exams will not be cumulative. The format of the exams will be multiple choice. Exams will be given in class and alternative exams are only allowed with an approved excuse.

*Letter to member of Congress/state legislator (15%):* There will be a writing exercise that consists of drafting a one-to-two-page letter to your local member of Congress (either your Senator or Representative) or state legislature regarding an issue of your choice. The issue must be one that Congress has power to address, or an issue that the state legislature has power to

address if you write a letter to your local member of the state legislature. You need to upload a Word document with the name of which lawmaker you will send your letter to and the issue by Wednesday, March 21, with this portion counting for 10 percent of the total for the letter assignment. Letters must be uploaded to D2L before class Friday, April 27. As part of this assignment, you must come to class on Friday, May 4, with a stamped envelope addressed to the member of Congress or state legislature to their office in Washington, D.C. or respective state capitol with a hard copy of the letter ready to mail. I will be responsible for mailing your letters.

*Quizzes (15%):* Several unannounced quizzes will be given throughout the semester. Quizzes will cover generally readings for that day and will measure how prepared you are for that day's lecture and activities. The lowest two quizzes will be dropped. Quizzes cannot be made up.

**Grading notes:** Proper spelling, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure will be part of your research paper grade. Students need to develop the ability to write clearly and in common political science style that includes a research question, literature review, methodology, and results section, as well as a conclusion. Students are expected to carefully read, edit, and proofread their written work. If English is not your native language, or even if it is and you would like further assistance, there are on-campus resources that are there to help you. The university offers assistance in various subjects through the Parkside Academic Resource Center (PARC). Assistance is free and is available in Wylie D180. If you need help with this course, please make an appointment. Help with writing assignments is available on a walk-in basis. Visit the PARC in-person or online at <https://www.uwp.edu/learn/academicsupport/parc/> for hours and more information.

### **Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty**

Use of the intellectual property of others without attributing it to them is considered a serious academic offense, and I will generally fail students from the course for academic misconduct. It can also lead to a disciplinary hearing where sanctions can suspension or expulsion from the university. The University of Wisconsin-Parkside's policy on academic misconduct can be found at <https://www.uwp.edu/live/offices/studentaffairs/upload/14.pdf>.

### **Student Accessibility**

Students with disabilities will be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact me the beginning of the semester with a copy of your accommodation letter so I can make the needed accommodations. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility and receive an accommodation letter from Disability Services. Please visit <https://www.uwp.edu/live/offices/disabilityservices/> for more information.

### **Registration Requirement**

The official registration deadline to add this course without a permission number is Friday, February 2. The deadline to add the course with a permission number is Friday, February 9. Course drops must be completed by Friday, February 23, to not receive a Grade "W", and the

last day to withdraw with a Grade “W” is Friday, March 16. Please refer to the university’s policies regarding pro-rated tuition refund dates. University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Please confirm enrollment in Solar. Registration errors must be corrected prior to the posted deadlines.

### **Class Schedule**

Readings will come from the *We The People* textbook. You should be prepared to discuss the assigned reading on the day listed below. I may make changes to the schedule as needed.

#### **Week 1 – Introduction, Citizenship (Jan. 29, 31, and Feb. 2)**

##### **Readings:**

- Ginsburg et al., chapter 1

#### **Week 2 –Founding and the Constitution (Feb. 5, 7, and 9)**

##### **Readings:**

- Ginsburg et al., chapter 2; Declaration of Independence; Articles of Confederation; Preamble of Constitution

#### **Week 3 - Federalism (Feb. 12, 14, and 16)**

##### **Readings:**

- Ginsburg et al., chapter 3; Constitution, 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment

#### **Week 4 – Civil liberties, Midterm Exam Review (Feb. 19, 21, and 23)**

##### **Readings:**

- Ginsburg et al., chapter 4; Constitution, Bill of Rights

##### **Important dates:**

- Midterm exam #1 review (Feb. 23)

#### **Week 5 – Midterm exam #1 and Civil Rights (Feb. 26, 28, and Mar. 2)**

##### **Readings:**

- Ginsburg et al., chapters 5; Constitution, 13<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> Amendments

##### **Important dates:**

- Midterm exam #1 (Feb. 26)

#### **Week 6 – Civil Rights, The Media (Mar. 5, 7, and 9)**

##### **Readings:**

- Ginsburg et al., chapters 5 and 7

#### **Week 7 – The Media, Political Participation and Voting (Mar. 12, 14, and 16)**

##### **Readings:**

- Ginsburg et al., chapters 7-8

#### **Week 8– Political Participation and Voting, Political Parties (Mar. 19, 21, and 23)**

**Readings:**

- Ginsburg et al., chapters 8--9

**Important dates:**

- Name of member of congress/state legislature and letter topic due (Wednesday, Mar. 21)

**Spring Break (No class March 26, 28, and 30)****Week 9 – Political Parties, Second Midterm Review and Exam (Apr. 2 and 4)****Readings:**

- Ginsburg et al., chapter 9

**Important dates:**

- Midterm review (Apr. 2)
- Second midterm exam (Apr. 4)
- **No class Friday, Apr. 6 (MPSA conference)**

**Week 10 – Campaigns and Elections (Apr. 9, 11, and 13)****Readings:**

- Ginsburg et al., chapters 10; Constitution, 17<sup>th</sup> Amendment

**Week 11 – Congress (Apr. 16, 18, and 20)****Readings:**

- Ginsburg et al., chapter 12; Constitution, Article I

**Week 12 – Presidency (Apr. 23, 25, and 27)****Readings:**

- Ginsburg et al., chapters 13; Constitution, Article II

**Important dates:**

- Letter to member of Congress/state legislature due (Apr. 27)

**Week 13 – Federal Courts (Apr 30, May 2 and 4)****Readings:**

- Ginsburg et al., chapter 15, Constitution, Article III

**Important dates:**

- Bring hard-copy of letter in stamped and addressed envelope (May 4)

**Week 14 –Final review and exam (May 7 and 11)****Important dates:**

- Final review (May 7)
- Final exam (1 p.m. - 3 p.m., May 11)

**Grading Standards for Written Assignments**

- A – OUTSTANDING.** An "A" essay or test is clearly written and contains no grammatical errors. It demonstrates mastery of the relevant material and offers significant insight into the topic at hand.
- B – GOOD.** A "B" essay or test is clearly written but may contain a very few grammatical errors. It clearly relates the facts, gives sound analysis, and provides some interesting insight.
- C – MEDIOCRE.** A "C" essay or test is clearly written but may contain some grammatical mistakes. It adequately relates the facts and offers some analysis, although it probably does not offer much insight.
- D – POOR.** A "D" essay or test is intelligible but probably contains some serious grammatical errors. It often relates the facts poorly, offers little analysis, and provides no real insight.
- F – UNACCEPTABLE.** An "F" essay or test is poorly written and makes no coherent argument. It struggles to relate the facts and offers little or no analysis. It often creates confusion instead of providing insight.