

PSC 100-01: American Politics
313 Graham Building
MWF, 10:00-10:50
Spring 2008

Professor David B. Holian

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Office Hours: W 3:15-4:45, Th 1:30-3:00, and by appointment

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Course Description

Politics is all around us.

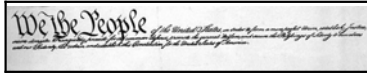
Whether we like it or not – and increasingly, it seems, we do not – politicians and bureaucrats at all levels of government make decisions that influence our lives for better and worse.

The president is the instantly recognizable symbol of our country, and in many ways the most powerful person in the world. **Members of Congress** vote on arcane amendments to bills that can have wide-reaching implications in our society for who gains ground and who loses it.

Supreme Court justices, residing in what the Founders assumed to be the “least dangerous branch” of government, write opinions that define the rights the Constitution recognizes, and that interpret the liberties it grants. **Bureaucrats** at all levels of government implement the rules and regulations that impose order on society, but that also make us furious about inefficiency and delays in receiving the benefits for which we qualify.

Whether our futures, or those of our friends and neighbors, take us into the business world, the court room, the state assembly, the school house, or the unemployment line, politics will certainly affect us. Because we’re all going to have to deal with the political process, we should come to a better understanding of how it works. To do this, we will consider the **founding documents** that outline our fundamental liberties and delineate our jealously held rights; the **institutions**, including the executive branch, the Congress, the courts, and the bureaucracy, that share power in Washington; the **behavior of citizens** like ourselves who hold these institutions accountable for their actions; and the **linkage institutions** – political parties, interest groups, and elections – that connect citizens to their government.

The questions we will consider are the same questions that political scientists ask every day. Why do citizens have such a low opinion of the U.S. Congress, yet continue to re-elect their incumbent representatives every two years? Can the president, mustering all of his or her formal and informal powers, possibly live up to our high expectations of the office? Can the president ignore the law in the name of national security? Does public opinion constrain the actions of members of Congress, or do our representatives act as they please? How do individuals organize themselves and express their interests in such a way that those in power will pay attention? Does the democratic process work for the few or for the many? Are citizens’ voting decisions “rational”? Is it even rational to vote in the first place? The goal of this course is to understand and begin to answer these questions – and many others.



Course Goals

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- identify and critique the compromises made at the American founding;
- discuss the various institutions that form our government;
- appreciate the problems associated with democratic government, including the low level of political participation by American citizens;
- critically analyze information – including public opinion poll results – presented in a variety of ways, including in tables, charts, and graphs.

Course Requirements

The overall grade for the course will be determined as follows:

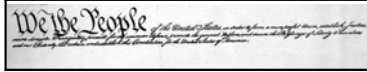
Assignments	20%
Exam #1 - Exam #4 (20% each)	<u>80</u>
	100%

All exams will be graded on a 100-point scale. When calculating final course grades, I will calculate each student’s overall numerical average, including that for the in-class and homework assignments, and use the following table to convert these averages to letter grades:

Letter scale	Numerical ranges for final grades	Letter scale	Numerical ranges for final grades
A+	>=98	C	>=72, <77
A	>=92, <98	C-	>=70, <72
A-	>=90, <92	D+	>=67, <70
B+	>=87, <90	D	>=62, <67
B	>=82, <87	D-	>=60, <62
B-	>=80, <82	F	>=60
C+	>=77, <80		

• Attendance

Skipping class and reading someone else’s notes will not teach you enough about American politics, even if you manage to pass the exams. Moreover, the classroom is the place where you absorb lecture material, ask questions, and discuss concepts with classmates. If you plan



on getting anything out of the class, be here. I've designed the assignments to reward those who prepare for and show up in class. Full credit for these exercises will be rewarded for satisfactorily completing simple assignments based on readings and lectures.

Note that I have based 20% of your grade on completing a variety of assignments. Consistent attendance can turn a B average on exams into an A for the class. On the other hand, consistent absences can turn a C into a D or worse. If you don't like coming to class, do yourself a favor: Drop this one.

- **Exams**

The exams will be held in class on February 11, March 19, April 14, and during finals week. The last exam is *not* comprehensive.

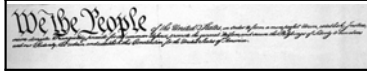
These exams will include multiple-choice, short-answer, and comparative-identification questions drawn from the readings, the lectures, and current events in American politics discussed in class. The exams are designed to keep you current in the reading and to help you keep track of the detailed material that you will learn in this class. Exam questions will be descriptive and analytic. That is, they may ask something as simply descriptive as how many members are in the House of Representatives, or they may ask you to draw some conclusions about the respective functions of the House and the Senate, given their formal and informal modes of operation. Memorization alone will not suffice for these exams. You will have to think about the material, particularly how the various concepts that we discuss relate to each other.

- **Exam Make-Up Policy**

There is a very specific make-up policy for these exams. *Read this section carefully as students are responsible for knowing and following this policy.* If you cannot take an exam at the assigned time because of health or personal reasons, you may take one make-up exam, subject to the following conditions.

(a) You must notify me before the exam. Email is okay; phones are okay too. Advance notification is *not negotiable*. If you have to miss an exam, you will know ahead of time. If you do not get in touch with me before the exam, you may not take a make up. That is, you receive a non-negotiable zero for that exam. I want to accommodate those people who cannot take an exam on a certain date, not those who pick up the syllabus for the first time and discover they have missed an exam.

(b) No one may take more than one make up. This would create an administrative nightmare. I will accommodate people who break their right arm on February 11 and their left arm on March 19, if they have the doctor's note and the casts to confirm such bad luck. But anyone with less dramatic situations will have to settle for one make up and a zero on a second missed exam.



(c) All make-up exams will be given on the same day at the same time and place. I will announce the date, time, and place in class. Make-up exams will most likely be given on a Friday afternoon in April. *There is no make-up opportunity for the fourth exam.*

(d) A final word of warning: students tend to do poorly on make-up exams. Compared to regularly scheduled tests, make-up exams are difficult because you are forced to learn the material out of context. It is hard to go back and study material you first learned weeks before while you're also trying to prepare for the next exam. *Do not take the make-up option unless it is absolutely necessary.*

Finally, please note that incompletes are not available.

- **Special Needs**

If you have any special needs that will affect your ability to learn in this class, please inform me immediately and appropriate steps will be taken to assist you.

- **Classroom Demeanor**

Come to class on time. Turn off cell phones, pagers, and anything else that makes annoying noises. And note this helpful pet-peeve alert: *plan on remaining in class the full 50 minutes.* In other words, do what you have to do so that you don't have to leave during class without good reason. Sauntering in and out of class is disruptive to other students and disrespectful to me.

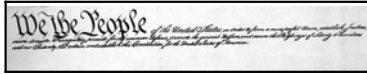
- **Cheating & Plagiarism**

The university's Academic Honor Policy, which addresses the consequences of cheating and plagiarism, is available via the web at:

http://www.uncg.edu/soe/documents/policy_manual/honorpolicy.htm

The Honor Policy defines cheating as including "unauthorized copying from the work of another student, using notes or other materials not authorized during an examination, giving or receiving information or assistance on work when it is expected that a student will do his/her own work, or engaging in any similar act that violates the concept of academic integrity."

Exams are closed book, closed notes. Collaborative work during the exams is considered cheating. You may study together if you like but think for yourselves.



• **Required Texts**

The following text is available at the university bookstore.

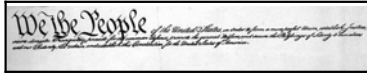
[KTR] Barbour, Christine and Gerald C. Wright. 2006. *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics*, Second Brief Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

[CQ] Giroux, Gregory. 2008. *Guide to the 2008 Elections*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

I will also assign supplementary readings, via Blackboard, throughout the semester.

Course Outline

Date	Topic	Key Points	Reading
January 14 January 16 January 18	Introduction	What is Politics?	Syllabus KTR, ch. 1, pp. 1-22
January 21	Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday		
January 23 January 25 January 28	Political Culture & Ideology	Conflict & Consensus in Democracy Culture: Ideas That Unite Americans	KTR, ch. 1, pp. 22-37
January 30 February 1 February 4	Politics of the Founding	Articles of Confederation Separation of Powers Checks & Balances Compromise: Large vs. Small states Compromise: Northern vs. Southern states	KTR, ch. 2
February 6 February 8	Federalism & the Constitution	Compromise: National vs. State governments	KTR, ch. 3
February 11	EXAM #1		
February 13 February 15 February 18	Civil Liberties	The Bill of Rights Fundamental liberties	KTR, ch. 4
February 20 February 22	Civil Rights	Political Inequality The Court & Civil Rights	KTR, ch. 5
February 25 February 27 February 29 March 3	The Congress	First Among Equals Representation & Lawmaking Congressional Elections Reapportionment & Redistricting	KTR, ch. 6



March 5 March 7	The Presidency	Expectations vs. Reality	KTR, ch. 7
March 10 March 12 March 14	Spring Break		
March 17	The Presidency	The Modern Presidency	KTR, ch. 7
March 19	EXAM #2		
March 21	Spring Holiday		
March 24 March 26	The Bureaucracy	Policy Making & Implementation Iron Triangles	KTR, ch. 8
March 28 March 31 April 2	The Judiciary	The Least Dangerous Branch Independence vs. Accountability Politics & the Supreme Court	KTR, ch. 9
April 4	No Class: Midwest Political Science Association Annual Meeting		
April 7 April 9 April 11	Public Opinion	Holding Leaders Accountable What Polls Tell Us - And What They Don't	KTR, ch. 10
April 14	EXAM #3		
April 16 April 18 April 21	Political Parties & Interest Groups	The Two-Party System A Choice or an Echo? The Collective Action Problem	KTR, ch. 11
April 23 April 25 April 28 April 30	Voting & Elections	Voting in America How Do Voters Decide? Presidential Elections Low-Information Rationality Do Elections Matter?	KTR, ch. 12 CQ, pp. 1-16, & pp. 26-45
May 2 May 5 May 6	The Media	The Fourth Branch Agenda Setting & Framing Infotainment	KTR, ch. 13
May 7	Reading Day		
May 9	EXAM #4 (Noon)		