

PSC 100-02: American Politics
424 Graham Building
Tuesdays & Thursdays, 9:30-10:45
Spring 2007

Professor David B. Holian

Office: 229 Graham Building

Office Hours: M 1-2:30, R 3:15-4:45, and by appointment

Telephone: 256-0514

Email: dbholian@uncg.edu

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.

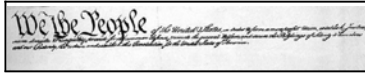
The president is the instantly recognizable symbol of our country, and in many ways the most powerful person in the world. **Members of Congress** vote on arcane amendments to bills that have wide-reaching implications in our society for who gains ground and who loses it.

Supreme Court justices, supposedly residing in the “least dangerous branch” of government, write opinions that define the rights we recognize, and interpret the liberties we grant.

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? 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

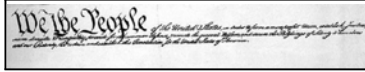
Grades in the course will be based on in-class assignments, announced and unannounced (worth 25% of the final grade), and three exams (worth 25% each).

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

| | |
|----------------------|-----------|
| In-class assignments | 25% |
| Exam #1 | 25 |
| Exam #2 | 25 |
| Exam #3 | <u>25</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 those for the in-class 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 in-class 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 25% of your grade on completing a variety of in-class assignments. Consistent attendance can turn a B average on exams into an A for the class. On the other hand, consistent non-attendance 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 Tuesday, February 13, Tuesday, March 27, and during finals week. The last exam is *not* comprehensive.

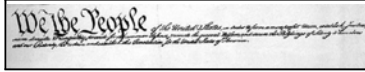
These exams will include multiple-choice, short-answer, and comparative-identification questions drawn from the readings, the lectures, and current events in American politics discussed in class. The exams are designed to keep you current in the reading and to help you keep track of the detailed material 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. 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 13 and their left on March 27, 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 third 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.

- **Cheating & Plagiarism**

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

<http://www.uncg.edu:80/reg/Policy/HonorPolicy.html>

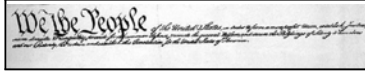
The Honor Policy defines cheating as: "Intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise." The policy defines plagiarism as: "Intentionally or knowingly representing the words of another as one's own in any academic exercise."

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

Required Text

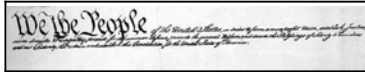
The following text is available at the university bookstore.

Barbour, Christine, Gerald C. Wright, Matthew J. Streb, and Michael R. Wolf. 2005. *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics*, Third Edition, Essentials. Washington, DC: CQ Press.



Course Outline

| Date | Topic | Key Points | Reading |
|---|-------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| January 9 January 11 | Introduction | What is Politics? | Syllabus KTR, ch. 1 |
| January 16 January 18 | Political Culture & Ideology | Conflict & Consensus in Democracy Culture: Ideas That Unite Americans Ideology: Ideas That Divide Americans | KTR, ch. 2, |
| January 23 January 25 | Politics of the Founding | Articles of Confederation Separation of Powers Checks & Balances Compromises: Large vs. Small and Northern vs. Southern States | KTR, ch. 3 |
| January 30 | Federalism & the Constitution | Compromise: National vs. State Governments | KTR, ch. 4 |
| February 1 February 6 | Civil Liberties | The Bill of Rights The Right to Privacy | KTR, ch. 5 |
| February 8 | Civil Rights | Political Inequality | KTR, ch. 6 |
| February 13 | EXAM #1 | | |
| February 15 February 20 February 22 | The Congress | First Among Equals Representation & Lawmaking Congressional Elections Reapportionment & Redistricting | KTR, ch. 7 |
| February 27 | The Presidency | Expectations vs. Reality | KTR, ch. 8 |
| March 1 | No Class | | |
| March 6 March 8 | Spring Break | | |
| March 13 | The Presidency | The Modern Presidency | |
| March 15 | The Bureaucracy | Policy Making & Implementation Iron Triangles | KTR, ch. 9 |
| March 20 March 22 | The Judiciary | The Least Dangerous Branch Independence vs. Accountability Politics & the Supreme Court | KTR, ch. 10 |



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| March 27 | EXAM #2 | | |
| March 29 April 3 | Public Opinion | Holding Leaders Accountable What Public Opinion Polls Tell Us - And What They Don't | KTR, ch. 11 |
| April 5 | Political Parties | The Two-Party System A Choice or an Echo? | KTR, ch. 12 |
| April 10 | Interest Groups | Lobbying The Collective-Action Problem Free Riders | KTR, ch. 13 |
| April 12 | No Class | | |
| April 17 April 19 April 24 April 26 | Voting & Elections | Voting in America How Do Voters Decide? Presidential Elections Low-Information Rationality Do Elections Matter? | KTR, ch. 14 |
| May 2 | Reading Day | | |
| May 3 | EXAM #3 (Noon) | | |