The objective of this course is to introduce you to the institutions, processes, and actors that comprise the American political system at the national level, as well as to engage you in empirical and critical thinking regarding the nature and quality of American democracy. Our semester is broken up into six parts: (1) Principles of Politics, (2) Structure, (3) Legislative and Executive Government, (4) Democratic Activity, (5) Public Policy, and (6) Courts and Rights.

In the Principles of Politics section we will review the ways that we can systematically examine American politics. From there, we turn to a section on the Structure of American government with an emphasis on the divisions of power between levels of government and branches of government. The Legislative and Executive Government section examines the workings of the Congress, Presidency, and Bureaucracy. The emphasis in this section will be on the complexities of policy-making and policy-execution. In the Democratic Activity section of the course we will take a look at American elections, political parties, and groups: What role do these entities play and of what consequence are they? In the Public Policy section of the course we discuss the combination of forces that lead to policy change. The final section of the course, Courts and Rights, focuses on the American judicial system and the origins of civil rights and civil liberties in American law.

Though this is an introductory course, the reading load is substantial. We will be using the Lowi, Ginsberg, Shepsle, and Ansolabehere American Government: Power and Purpose (Core 12th Edition) textbook to establish and ensure basic understanding of major concepts. Most class meetings also have at least one additional required reading. These additional readings are generally more difficult than the textbook readings and will serve to bring depth, debate, and complexity to the class. The course meets twice per week plus each student is required to attend her discussion section (remember to register for your sections via the registrar). Students can expect our Tuesday and Thursday meetings to take the form of an interactive lecture. Even though the class is large, students will be expected to participate by asking questions and offering comments.

As we will be regularly discussing current events in the course, students are strongly encouraged to read a major newspaper on a daily basis. Students will be evaluated based on their performance on written assignments, exams, and their work in discussion section.
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students who complete this course successfully will be able to:

- Demonstrate a broad yet sophisticated understanding of the institutional and behavioral underpinnings of the American political system.
- Demonstrate a broad yet sophisticated understanding of the complexities of contemporary American policy-making and political activity.
- Thoughtfully apply their acquired understanding of the American political system to contemporary questions about political issues in writing and in discussion.

REQUIRED BOOK

The course has one required book. It is available at the Columbia University bookstore.


All other readings will be made available on CourseWorks. Additionally, it strongly recommended that students read a major newspaper (*Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, etc.) on a daily basis.

ASSESSMENT

Your grade in the course is broken down as follows:

Midterm Examination: 20%
Final Examination: 25%
Theory or Policy Assignment: 20%
Empirical Reasoning Assignment: 20%
Discussion Section: 15%

Students must perform at a C- level or better in each of the components of the course in order to receive a passing grade. For example, a student who does not attend their discussion section meetings and, consequently, receives an F for the discussion section grade, will not pass the course no matter how she performs in the other components. While grading is done by TAs, it is closely supervised by Professor Minkoff who will set common guidelines and review assessments.

Examinations: There will be a midterm exam (20%) on Thursday, March 13, 2013 and a final exam (25%) during the scheduled exam period. The final exam will cover the entire course but will strongly emphasize the material covered after the midterm. Both examinations will require you to draw on material from lecture and readings (including material that was not explicitly mentioned in lecture). Details about the format of the exams will be given out as the test dates approach.
Theory or Policy Assignment (20%): Students will select between completing a theory assignment on a federalism dilemma or a policy assignment on congressional lawmaking. The course schedule indicates the day that each assignment will be posted on CourseWorks and the day that each assignment is due. Students that do not complete the Theory Assignment must complete the Policy Assignment.

Theory Assignment: Federalism Dilemma (Distributed: January 31, 2013; Due: February 21, 2013)
Policy Assignment: Legislative Memo (Distributed: February 19, 2013; Due: March 11, 2013)

Empirical Reasoning Assignment (20%): In conjunction with Barnard’s Empirical Reasoning Lab (ERL), students are required to sign-up for and attend one out-of-class session on using Excel for empirical analysis and then complete an assignment that involves analyzing public opinion data. This assignment is required.

Empirical Reasoning Assignment: Empirical Analysis of Presidential and Congressional Approval (Due: May 1, 2013)

Discussion Section (15%): Attendance and participation in discussion section meetings is mandatory. In order for these discussion sections to be of use to students, everybody needs to participate on a regular basis. Participation involves asking questions and offering comments during your discussions. Because discussion sections meet at different times, TAs may require students to complete specific weekly readings (that are already on the schedule) by a different date than that indicated on the course schedule so that they can be discussed in class—these changes are binding. TAs may also require their sections to do short readings (e.g. newspaper articles) in addition to the readings on the schedule. Students cannot participate unless they are present in their discussion sections and have completed required reading. To ensure this, discussion grades will be based on attendance, discussion participation, and quizzes/mini-assignments (given at the TA’s discretion). TAs will evaluate each student’s overall participation at the end of the term based on the following criteria:

Discussion Section Grade:
Attendance: 5% of Course Grade
Participation, Quizzes, and Mini-Assignments: 10% of Course Grade

Discussion Section attendance grades will be based on the following standard:

1 Absence = A
2 Absences = B+
3 Absences = B-
4 Absences = C+
5 Absences = C-
6+ Absences = D

Computer Policy

Students are allowed to use their computers during class. However, those who do should be aware that when they are not taking notes or reviewing course material (for example, when they are browsing the internet) it is a distraction to other students in the class who are trying to focus. All students who know that they will be using their laptop for activities unrelated to the course should sit in the back of the classroom with no one behind them. Students not sitting in the back and found to be using their laptop for activities unrelated to the course will
be asked to move to the back of the classroom. *If you believe (or have found) that using a laptop in class will be a distraction to your own learning and participation, be proactive and take notes the old-fashioned way.*

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

In an academic community our ideas and language are our capital. The taking of ideas or of the language used to communicate those ideas without proper attribution is theft and it hinders the intellectual, professional, and personal advancement of those to whom the ideas or language rightfully belong. I take issues of academic integrity very seriously. Plagiarism, cheating, and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. In keeping with the Barnard College Honor Code, all work is expected to be original and not previously or simultaneously turned in for credit in another course. All references to outside sources (direct or indirect) should be appropriately cited. All forms of academic dishonesty will result in an F for the course and referral to the Barnard College Honor Board. For more information on the Honor Code and Honor Board, students can visit: [http://barnard.edu/dos/honor-code](http://barnard.edu/dos/honor-code).
COURSE SCHEDULE

The following course schedule is subject to change. (And, in all likelihood, will change.) All changes will be communicated via email and posted on CourseWorks. All non-LGSA readings are available on CourseWorks. Readings should be completed before coming to class.


PART I. PRINCIPLES OF POLITICS

Tuesday: 1/22/2013
Topic: Introduction to the Course
Question: What do we expect from government?

Thursday: 1/24/2013
Topic: Principles for Understanding Politics
Question: How can we structure our understanding of politics?
Reading:
- LGSA Chapter 1 (all) [This chapter is available on CourseWorks.]

Tuesday: 1/29/2013
Topic: Principles for Understanding Politics
Questions: What is collective action? What are its causes? What are its consequences?
Reading:

PART II. STRUCTURE

Thursday: 1/31/2013 – Theory Assignment Distributed
Topic: The United States Constitution
Question: Why this Constitution?
Reading:
- LGSA Chapter 2 (all)
- United States Constitution
Tuesday: 2/5/2013  
Topic: The Structure of American Federalism  
Question: How are powers divided between states and the national government?  
Reading:  
- LGSA Chapter 3 (72-93)  
- Federalist 10  

Thursday: 2/7/2013  
Topic: Rethinking American Federalism  
Question: How ought powers be divided between states and the national government?  
Reading:  
  Chapter 2.  
- Federalist 46  

Tuesday: 2/12/2013  
Topic: Separation of Powers, Checks and Balances  
Question: How do the branches of government check and balance one another?  
Reading:  
- LGSA Chapter 3 (94-103)  
- Federalist 51  

**PART III. LEGISLATIVE AND EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT**

Thursday: 2/14/2013  
Topic: Congress – Representation  
Question: What does it mean for a Congressperson to “represent”?  
Reading:  
- LGSA Chapter 5 (176-193)  

Tuesday: 2/19/2013 – Policy Assignment Distributed  
Topic: Congress – Organization and Lawmaking  
Question: How are our laws really made?  
Reading:  
- LGSA Chapter 5 (193-212)  
- Recommended: CRS Report to Congress: The Congressional Appropriations Process
Thursday: 2/21/2013 – **Theory Assignment Due**
Topic: Congress – Organization and Lawmaking
Question: Is the lawmaking system broken?
Reading:
- LGSA Chapter 5 (212-235)

Tuesday: 2/26/2013
Topic: Congress – Influence, Legislative Research
Questions: How are members influenced? How do you do legislative research?
Reading:

Thursday: 2/28/2013
Topic: Presidential Powers
Question: What can a President do?
Reading:
- LGSA Chapter (238-268)

Tuesday: 3/4/2013
Topic: Presidential Effectiveness
Question: Why do Presidents fail?
Reading:
- LGSA Chapter 7 (269-289)

Thursday: 3/6/2013
Topic: Bureaucratic Organization
Question: What is a bureaucracy and how is organized?
Reading:
- LGSA Chapter 8 (290-307)
Tuesday: 3/11/2013 – Policy Assignment Due
Topic: Bureaucratic Control
Question: How can we ensure a responsive bureaucracy?
Reading:
- LGSA Chapter 8 (307-329)

Thursday: 3/13/2013
Midterm Examination

SPRING BREAK

PART IV. DEMOCRATIC ACTIVITY

Tuesday: 3/25/2013
Topic: Empirical Reasoning
Question: How can we empirically analyze political phenomenon?
Reading:
- LGSA Chapter 10 (425-433)

Topic: Individual Political Attitudes
Question: What do Americans believe?
Reading:
- LGSA Chapter 10 (382-425, 433-439)

Tuesday: 4/1/2013
Topic: Voting
Question: Why do people vote?
Reading:
- LGSA: Chapter 11 (468-483), Chapter 12 (520-528)

[schedule continues on next page]
Thursday: 4/3/2013
Topic: Mass Behavior and Social Capital
Question: Do Americans have what it takes to participate in American politics?
Reading:

Tuesday: 4/8/2013
Topic: Electoral Institutions
Question: What structures American elections?
Reading:
- LGSA Chapter 11 (440-468), Chapter 12 (504-520, 528-533, 545-551)

Thursday: 4/10/2013
Topic: Campaign Finance
Question: Who pays for American campaigns?
Reading:
- LGSA Chapter 11 (484-503)
- Spend 30 minutes exploring www.opensecrets.org

Tuesday: 4/15/2013
Topic: Interest Groups
Question:
Reading:
- LGSA Chapter 13 (all)

Thursday: 4/17/2013
Topic: Policy Change – The Kingdon Framework
Question: What drives policy change in the American political system?
Reading:

**PART V. PUBLIC POLICY**
Tuesday: 4/22/2013
Topic: Health Care Policy
Question: What is Obamacare? How did it happen?
Reading:
  (Text available on CourseWorks. Video available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSJugLUsM58)

Thursday: 4/24/2013
Topic: Gun Control Policy
Question: What can the federal government reasonably do to stop violent crime?
Reading:
- Additional reading TBD.

PART VI. COURTS AND RIGHTS

Tuesday: 4/29/2013
Topic: The Judicial System
Question: How is the American judicial system structured?
Reading:
- LGSA Chapter 9 (330-380)

Thursday: 5/1/2013 – Empirical Reasoning Assignment Due
Topic: Civil Liberties
Question: What protects us from government? What protects us from each other?
Reading:
- LGSA Chapter 4 (104-144)

[schedule continues on next page]
Tuesday: 5/6/2013

Topic: The Inner-workings of the Supreme Court – *Roe v. Wade*

Question: How does the Supreme Court shape public policy?

Reading:

  Excerpt.

Thursday: 5/8/2013

Topic: To Be Determined

The final examination will be held during the scheduled exam period.