

**POLS W 1201: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS**  
**BARNARD COLLEGE | DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE**

Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:10pm to 2:25pm  
Milbank 405

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Office Hours:  
Tuesdays and Thursdays: 2:45pm to 4:15pm (and by appointment)

**COURSE OVERVIEW**

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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 12<sup>th</sup> 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

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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

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

LGSA: Lowi, Theodore J., Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere. 2012. *American Government: Power and Purpose* (Core 12<sup>th</sup> Edition). New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

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

## ASSESSMENT

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

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**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

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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>.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

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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.

LGSA: = Lowi, Theodore J., Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere. 2012. *American Government: Power and Purpose* (Core 12<sup>th</sup> Edition). New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

### 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:

- Hardin, G. 1968. The Tragedy of the Commons. *Science* 162: 1243-48.
- Olson, M. 1965. *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups*. Boston: Harvard University Press. Excerpt.

### 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
- *Recommended:* Amar, Akhil. The Constitution: A Biography. National Constitution Center. Podcast.

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:

- Peterson, Paul E. 1995. *The Price of Federalism*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution. 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)
- Swers, Michele L. 2002. *The Difference Women Make: The Policy Impact of Women in Congress*. Vol. 4. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 1.

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)
- Sinclair, B. 2011. *Unorthodox Lawmaking: New legislative processes in the US Congress*. Washington, DC: CQ Press. Chapter 8.
- *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)
- Mann, T.E., and N.J. Ornstein. 2006. *The Broken Branch: How Congress is failing America and how to get it back on track*. New York: Oxford University Press Ch 1.
- Weigel, David. 2012. Why the House of Representatives Is Even Worse Than You Think. *Slate*, Dec 27, 2012.
- *Recommended*: Packer, George. 2010. “The Empty Chamber.” *The New Yorker*, August 9, 2010.”

Tuesday: 2/26/2013

Topic: Congress – Influence, Legislative Research

Questions: How are members influenced? How do you do legislative research?

Reading:

- Hall, R. L., and F. W. Wayman. 1990. Buying Time: Moneyed Interests and the Mobilization of Bias in Congressional Committees. *American Political Science Review* 84 (3): 797-820.

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)
- Pious, R.M. 2002. Why Do Presidents Fail? *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 32 (4): 724-742.

Thursday: 3/6/2013

Topic: Bureaucratic Organization

Question: What is a bureaucracy and how is organized?

Reading:

- LGSA Chapter 8 (290-307)
- Riley, D.D., and B.E. Brophy-Baermann. 2005. *Bureaucracy and the Policy Process: Keeping the Promises*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield. Chapter 1.

Tuesday: 3/11/2013 – Policy Assignment Due

Topic: Bureaucratic Control

Question: How can we ensure a responsive bureaucracy?

Reading:

- LGSA Chapter 8 (307-329)
- McCubbins, M. D., and T. Schwartz. 1984. Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms. *American Journal of Political Science* 28 (1): 165-179.

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)

Thursday: 3/27/2013 – Empirical Reasoning Assignment Distributed

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)
- Dubner, Stephen J., and Steven D Levitt. 2005. "Why Vote?" *New York Times Magazine*. November 6, 2005, 30-31.

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Thursday: 4/3/2013

Topic: Mass Behavior and Social Capital

Question: Do Americans have what it takes to participate in American politics?

Reading:

- Putnam, R.D. 1995. Tuning in, tuning out: The strange disappearance of social capital in America. *PS*. 28: 664-664.
- Bartels, L.M. 2005. Homer gets a tax cut: Inequality and public policy in the American mind. *Perspectives on Politics* 3 (01): 15-31.
- *Recommended*: Lupia, A., A.S. Levine, JO Manning, and G. Sin. 2007. Were Bush Tax Cut Supporters "Simply Ignorant?" A Second Look at Conservatives and Liberals in "Homer Gets a Tax Cut". *Perspectives on Politics* 5 (4): 773.

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](http://www.opensecrets.org)

Tuesday: 4/15/2013

Topic: Interest Groups

Question:

Reading:

- LGSA Chapter 13 (all)

## PART V. PUBLIC POLICY

Thursday: 4/17/2013

Topic: Policy Change – The Kingdon Framework

Question: What drives policy change in the American political system?

Reading:

- Kingdon, John W. 1984. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. Boston: Little, Brown. Chap 1.

Tuesday: 4/22/2013

Topic: Health Care Policy

Question: What is Obamacare? How did it happen?

Reading:

- Cohn, Jonathan. 2010. "How They Did It." *The New Republic*, May 21, 2010.
- *Recommended*: Obama, Barack. 2009. "Health Care Speech to Congress." September 10, 2009. (Text available on CourseWorks. Video available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSJugLU5M58>)
- *Recommended*: Levin, Yuval. 2010. "Repeal: Why and How Obamacare must be Undone." *The Weekly Standard*, April 5-April 12, 2010.

Thursday: 4/24/2013

Topic: Gun Control Policy

Question: What can the federal government reasonably do to stop violent crime?

Reading:

- Corn, David. 2012. What the Fight Over Clinton's 1994 Assault Weapons Ban Can Teach Obama. *Mother Jones*, December 12, 2012.
- Polsby, Daniel D. The False Promise of Gun Control. *The Atlantic Monthly*, March, 1994.
- Additional reading TBD.
- *Recommended*: Federal Assault Weapons Ban Expires. The PBS NewsHour with Jim Lehrer. [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/july-dec04/ban\\_9-13.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/politics/july-dec04/ban_9-13.html)

## 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)
- Rauch, J. 1995. "In Defense of Prejudice." *Harper's Magazine*. May 1995, 37-44.

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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:

- Toobin, J. 2008. *The Nine: Inside the Secret World of the Supreme Court*. New York: Anchor.  
Excerpt.

Thursday: 5/8/2013

Topic: To Be Determined

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