

Introduction to American Politics (POL 100), Fall 2018

Section G1
Mon & Weds 1:10-2:40pm
Memorial Hall Room 310

Instructor: Adam M. McMahon
amcmahon@rider.edu
Office hours: Mon 4-5pm, Fine Arts 269

Course description

This course is an introduction to American politics with a focus on the historical development of its government, institutions, and processes. Students will learn about the founding of the nation, the debates that went into the crafting of the constitution, and how power was to be divided and distributed between the layers of government. We will discuss ideas about democracy, power, and how politics manifest themselves in the United States in the past and today.

The course is divided into three parts: the introduction will focus on the debates of the founding fathers and how their construction of the American constitution impacted the establishment of our government. We will cover the constitution, the Federalist versus Anti-Federalist debates, federalism, civil rights, and civil liberties. The second section will cover political processes (or linkage institutions): voting, participation, elections, political parties, interest groups, media, and public opinion. The third and final section will cover the institutions that make up the three co-equal branches of the federal government: the presidency, Congress, and the Supreme Court.

Student learning outcomes

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- Describe the development of American government (We will trace the nation's history through our discussion in class each week).
- Identify contemporary issues within American politics (In discussion we will connect these to our own lives and the communities we live in).
- Utilize political science terminology to develop an argument (To be achieved through the completion of response papers and essay examinations).
- Assess strengths and weaknesses in scholarly arguments (Through reading, writing about, and discussion of primary sources and political science research).

Accessibility

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Rider University is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (emotional, medical, physical and/or learning) consult [Student Accessibility and Support Services \(SASS\)](#) located in Vona Annex Room 8 to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance please call (609) 895-5492 or email accessibility@rider.edu.

Statement on Academic Honesty

Rider University students are expected to do their own work and give attribution to works that are not their own or acknowledge any help received from others. I am committed to the principle of academic honesty and will pursue suspected violations in all written assignments through the university's formal mechanisms. Plagiarism and cheating are serious issues and students are expected to do their own work. As the instructor, I reserve the right to request students to provide digital copies of any and all written assignments for submission on Turnitin.com, the plagiarism checking software the political science department utilizes, before a grade can be assigned. If a student is caught plagiarizing or cheating, I will

follow the process [outlined in the Code of Academic Integrity](#), which includes the possibility of failing the course and/or being referred to the Academic Integrity Committee.

Course Requirements

- 1) **Attend class** regularly and on time. Please do not arrive late and/or disrupt the class. I take attendance at the beginning of class. You are permitted to be late once and everyone gets a free absence that will not count against them, after that however, lateness and unexcused absences will count against you. If you miss more than 3 class meetings you are required to meet with me in office hours in order to receive a passing grade.
- 2) Complete the required **weekly reading assignments** listed below. It is crucial that students come to class prepared to discuss the week's readings.
- 3) **Handouts.** Every other week there will be a handout based on the readings (both textbook and supplementary readings) due at the beginning of class. The first week of class we'll do a practice handout that won't count towards your final grade. For the remainder of the semester you will be required to turn these in. There will be six handouts total (not counting the practice one) and I will take the top five scores for your final grade automatically. See due dates below.
- 4) **Response papers.** Complete all written assignments. This is a writing intensive course. Your final grade, as outlined in the section below, is calculated by the completion of the writing assignments based on your readings. You are required to write four 2-3 page response papers after having completed the reading assignments (two papers from section A, one from section B, and one from section C). The essay prompts are posted on Canvas. Papers are due on Sundays by 11:59pm via Turnitin.com (the link to submit the assignment is in each week's module on Canvas). No late response papers will be accepted. Email or hard copy versions of these assignments will not be accepted. It is incumbent upon you to make sure your paper is uploaded through TurnItIn on time. Technical difficulties with your computer, not being able to access the lab before class, etc. will not be considered a valid excuse for late assignments.
- 5) **Examinations.** The midterm and final will be in-class essay exams. On exam day in class I will give you 2 prompts and you will need to write an essay to answer 1 question of your choice. For these essay exams, you will be asked to put only your student ID on blue book exam covers and leave your name off of them so as to facilitate blind grading. Make up exams will only be given provided you have a documented excused absence.

Grading

Participation will be graded based on timely attendance to each class meeting as well as completion of written assignments in order to participate when called upon in class to discuss the week's readings.

All assignments other than exams must be typed (1-inch margins, double spaced, normal font size and type). Handwritten assignments are not accepted. Late papers without a valid, documented excuse will not be accepted, but in general if you miss a paper assignment, you will be asked to choose another week's readings to write about.

As a student it is your right to be thoroughly and fairly graded. Examinations will be graded blindly to prevent bias. Response papers will be graded through TurnItIn. If you have an issue with the grade you received, see me as soon as possible. Any requests for a re-grading of an assignment or exam must be **submitted in writing within a week of receipt of the graded assignment**. Written requests must address the comments of the instructor. (Note that a re-grading of an assignment can result in a grade higher or lower than that originally received.)

Incompletes will be granted only with a documented excuse and only for a limited time (usually no longer than the time you were incapacitated), the duration to be set at the time the incomplete is approved.

- 10% — Attendance and participation
- 10% — Handouts
- 20% — 4 response papers
- 30% — Midterm exam
- 30% — Final exam

Grade scale

A	92.5-100%
A-	90.0-92.4%
B+	87.5-89.9%
B	82.5-87.4%
B-	80.0-82.4%
C+	77.5-79.9%
C	72.5-77.4%
C-	70-72.4%
D	60-69.9%
F	59.9% and below

Required texts

1. Kernell, Samuel H., Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck. 2017. *The Logic of American Politics*. Eighth edition. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press. (7th edition is acceptable as well. Copies are on reserve in the library. Referred to as *Logic* below.)
2. Additional weekly readings listed below (links below or on Canvas)

Schedule

The dates that follow are approximate and are subject to change (due to, for example, inclement weather). It is the responsibility of students to stay up to date on the schedule. If you are absent from class, please contact me to determine the next assignment due when you return. Please check Canvas and the email associated with your account regularly for any potential announcements and updates.

Due dates for response papers are Sunday at 11:59pm each week via the TurnItIn submission link on Canvas.

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION & HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Week 1 – Syllabus and introduction (Sept. 5th)

- Read for next week: *Logic*, chapter 1
- Hartz & Smith (on Canvas)
- Complete response paper on Hartz & Smith due Sunday, Sept 9th at 11:59pm. **Everyone must complete this assignment; it is worth 5% of your final grade.**

Week 2 – Hartz & Smith (Sept. 10th & 12th)

- Sept. 10th – Go over practice handout on Hartz & Smith together in class.
- Sept. 12th – Read for Weds. *Federalist 10 & 51* (links on Canvas)

Week 3 – Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists (Sept. 17th & 19th)

- Sept. 17th – Read for Monday, Anti-Federalist papers: *Brutus No. 2 & No. 5* (links on Canvas)
- Sept. 19th – U.S. Constitution; read *Logic*, chap. 2 “The Constitution”

Week 4 – Federalism (Sept. 24th & 26th)

- *Logic*, chap. 3 “Federalism”
- Governor Wallace’s School House Door Speech (Canvas)
- Excerpts from *United States v. Lopez* (Canvas)
- Handout 1 due beginning of class, Mon. Sept. 24th

Week 5 – Civil Liberties (Oct. 1st & 3rd)

- *Logic*, chap. 5 “Civil Liberties”
- [Roe et al. v. Wade](#) (Canvas; Read Part I and skim Part II, then read IX thru XII)

Week 6 – Civil Rights (Oct. 8th & 10th)

- *Logic*, chap. 4 “Civil Rights”
- Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (Canvas).
- “Declaration of Sentiments” (Canvas).
- Handout 2 due beginning of class, Mon. Oct. 8th

Week 7 – Midterm in class (Oct. 15th)

SECTION B: LINKAGE INSTITUTIONS

Week 7 (continued) – Media (Oct 17th)

- *Logic*, chap. 14 “News Media”
- Forestal, Jennifer and Menaka Philips, [“People blame Facebook for fake news & partisan bile. They’re wrong.”](#) Monkey Cage, *Washington Post*, December 16, 2016.

Week 8 – Public Opinion (Oct. 22nd & 24th)

- *Logic*, chap. 10 “Public Opinion”
- Squire, Peverill, “Why the 1936 Literary Digest Poll Failed.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Spring 1988, p. 125-133. (Available through JSTOR/link on Canvas)
- *FireThirtyEight*’s [May 31, 2018 podcast](#) “A Conversation about Our Pollster Ratings”
- Handout 3 due beginning of class, Mon. Oct. 22nd.

Week 9 – Participation, Voting, and Elections (Oct. 29th & 31st)

- *Logic*, chap. 11 “Voting, Campaigns, and Elections”
- Dalton, Russell J. 2016. *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation is Reshaping American Politics*. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press, p. 1-20. (Canvas)

Week 10 – Political Parties (Nov. 5th & 7th)

- *Logic*, chap. 12 “Political Parties”
- Desilver, Drew. [“The polarized Congress of today has its roots in the 1970s.”](#) *Pew Research Center*. (Canvas)
- Handout 4 due beginning of class, Mon. Nov. 5th.

Week 11 – Interest Groups (Nov. 12th & 14th)

- *Logic*, chap. 13, “Interests Groups”
- Excerpts from *Citizens United v. FEC* (Canvas)

SECTION C: INSTITUTIONS

Week 12 – Congress (Nov. 19th & 21st)

- *Logic*, chap. 6 “Congress”
- Binder, Sarah. “[Congress in the rearview mirror](#),” *Monkey Cage, Washington Post*. Dec 31, 2013.
- Silver, Nate. “[As Swing Districts Dwindle, Can a Divided House Stand?](#)” *FiveThirtyEight. New York Times*. 27 December 2012.
- Handout 5 due beginning of class, Mon. Nov. 19th.

Week 12 – Presidency (Nov. 26th & 28th)

- *Logic*, chap. 7 “The Presidency”
- Klein, Ezra. “[The Unpersuaded: Who listens to a president?](#)” *New Yorker*. March 19, 2012.

Week 13 – Supreme Court (Dec. 3rd & 5th)

- *Logic*, chap. 9 “The Federal Judiciary”
- [Marbury v. Madison](#) (1803)
- Handout 6 due beginning of class, Mon. Dec. 3rd.

Week 14 – **Final exam in class, Monday, December 10th, 12:30pm – 2:30pm**