

Introduction to American Politics
PL101-002
Fall 2017

Dr. Mara Suttman-Lea
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Class, T-Th, 8:10AM-9:30AM
Classroom: Ladd 307

Course Description

This course introduces students to some of the most important topics related to the historical development and operations of the United States system of government. Throughout the course we will return to the following question time and again: how should we evaluate the American political system? We begin with a conceptual examination of core principles and constitutional foundations of American democracy. From there, we will survey key American political institutions and behavior. A portion of this course will also be dedicated to evaluating current events in American politics.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course, enrolled students should be able to

1. Understand and describe the major components of the American political system
2. Analyze the present-day state of the American political system relative to historical counterparts
3. Evaluate key American political institutions and behavior in the context of three core American democratic ideals: liberty, equality, and democracy
4. Become critical consumers of major ideas and current events in American politics

Required Texts

1. Stephen Ansolabehere, Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore J. Lowi, and Kenneth A. Shepsle. *American Government: Power and Purpose*. (W.W. Norton, **CORE** 14th edition) ISBN: 9780393624212. ****MAKE SURE YOU HAVE THE "CORE" EDITION!**
2. David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer. *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics* (W.W. Norton, 8th edition). ISBN: 9780393283655

NOTE: You may buy earlier editions of these textbooks, (I'd recommend not going back further than one or two editions) but you are responsible for making sure you are not missing material from the most current editions. You may check with myself or a classmate who has the most recent editions. FYI- both textbooks have been updated to account for the 2016 presidential elections!

Requirements and Grades

Readings and Media

Students are expected to read the assigned readings prior to the lectures on the same subjects. Readings either come from the assigned textbooks, or will be posted on Blackboard. Readings posted on Blackboard are indicated with (Blackboard) next to them.

Because this is an introductory class, I've done my best to make the readings manageable. There are some weeks where the reading list, at first glance, may make curling up in your dorm / apartment and watching Netflix appear to be a far more pleasant alternative. It is more than likely, however, that the readings that week have a number of shorter pieces rather than full article / chapter length pieces.

That being said, fear not! Developing good reading strategies is all a part of the college learning experience. You will not be "perfect" readers your first go-around, and I am here to help you develop this skill. Please speak to me if you have concerns about the reading load or would like to discuss best strategies for readings. I will be posting a managing readings tip sheet on Blackboard the first week of class.

There will also be classes where I assign a different piece of media for you to review. These can be podcasts, video, or other audio files. Unless it says otherwise, you are required to listen to / watch these. It can be a nice reprieve from burying your nose in reading, and helpful for different learning styles.

Current events

We will spend the first few minutes of class discussing present-day happenings in American politics. Students should be monitoring current events as they relate to the week's topic or American politics, more broadly. I recommend tracking a major national newspaper or a beltway publication such as *The Washington Post*, *The Hill*, or *Politico.com*.

Other highly recommended sources for a "political science" take on current events are *The Monkey Cage* blog (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/>), *Mischiefs of Faction* (<http://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction>), FiveThirtyEight (<https://fivethirtyeight.com/politics/>) and *The London School of Economics American Politics and Policy Blog* (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/>). These discussions will count towards your participation grade.

Attendance

You are allowed to miss two classes without an excuse. Beyond this, the best way to request an excused absence is to talk to me about it **in advance**. I allow for excused absences for Skidmore associated athletic and performance events, class projects that take you away from campus, and religious observances. **If you know well ahead of time that you will be missing class for one of these reasons, it is your responsibility to talk to me at least one class period ahead of time.** For example, if you know you will be absent on a Tuesday, it is your responsibility to let me know no later than the Thursday immediately preceding. In terms of unexpected absences, if you become sick or have to leave campus unexpectedly for a family emergency, please let me

know as soon as possible. If you ask for an excuse after an event has occurred for which you had advance warning (for example, you missed class for an athletic or performance event but did not notify me beforehand), the excused absence **will not** be granted. Every unexcused absence beyond your two allowed absences will result in the deduction of 1% from your total semester grade. So, if you were initially assigned a 90% (A-) for the course but have one unexcused absence, your final grade would be an 89% (B+). When in doubt, talk to me first!

Mid Term Evaluation

I am committed to making our classroom a place that is conducive to spirited discussion and learning for everyone. To do so, I need your input. Around the middle of the semester, I will be sending out a brief survey asking you to share classroom dynamics that are working for you, and areas where you feel we could improve. Though I cannot take everyone's comments into consideration, together we will discuss the survey results to help improve the course for the remainder of the semester. These evaluations are also immensely helpful for me in planning for future courses.

Grading

Beneath each grading area, you will notice there is a line entitled *evaluative purpose*. *Formative* evaluations help me assess baseline abilities, your learning process, and where improvements might be made later on in the course both in your own studying habits and our classroom. *Summative* evaluations are meant to evaluate your learning achievements to make final decisions, for example assigning mid-term or end of term grades. Most assignments will contain elements of both, though formative evaluations will weigh more heavily at the beginning of the term.

5% - Short critical analysis paper #1 – **Due September 28th at the start of class**
Evaluative purpose-Formative

15% - Short critical analysis paper #2 – **Due October 31st at the start of class**
Evaluative purpose- Formative / Summative

20% - Debates and Participation: One class every week, we will engage in a class debate / discussion based (mostly) on readings from the “Enduring Debate” textbook. There are a few weeks where I will craft debate questions from other readings. You will post responses to debate questions on an online discussion board on Blackboard. Your responses to these questions must be posted each week by **5PM the day before a debate** or you will not receive credit for the debate that week. So, if a debate is held on a Thursday, you need to post your responses by 5PM on Wednesday. **Failure to post by 5PM the day before a debate will result in the deduction of 4 points from your semester debates / participation grade.** There are a few weeks where we will still debate, but no formal post is required. These weeks are noted in the course outline and reading schedule.

These responses need not be essays, but it should be clear that you a.) read the material and b.) have spent some time thinking critically about the questions. These posts are not formally graded, but I will do my best to respond to your comments with my own thoughts and feedback.

If I feel a post is not satisfactory, I reserve the right to only give half credit for that post (2 points).

Evaluative purpose-Formative

25%- “Mid-term” exam- **November 7th**: Students will take an in class, pencil and paper exam. This exam will actually fall closer to the end of the semester to ensure comprehension of key ideas to help you prepare for your final paper.

Evaluative purpose-Formative & Summative

35%- Final Critical Analysis Paper- **Due December 12th by 5PM**

Evaluative purpose-Summative

No matter how careful, instructors sometimes make mistakes in grading. I will be happy to regrade any exam or assignment. I ask, however, that you hold on to any item for at least 24 hours after it is returned to you before asking for a regrade. Any request for a regrade must be made in writing and within one week from the item being returned to you, after which no regrading will be done. The entire assignment will be regraded, which means that the grade may go up, go down, or stay the same.

Classroom Policies

Cell phones, Laptops, and Classroom Behavior

All phones must be silenced *before* class begins. Use of laptop computers during class is strictly prohibited. Several credible experimental studies have shown that computer note-taking adversely affects one’s ability to synthesize and retain information (see, for example: <http://www.npr.org/2016/04/17/474525392/attention-students-put-your-laptops-away>). Also, it can be annoying and distracting for other students to have the person sitting next to them using their laptops for non-course related purposes (which, let’s be honest, happens!) Students must comply with Skidmore’s Policy on Civility and Comportment in the Classroom (https://www.skidmore.edu/political_science/majors/handbook/comportment.php).

Office Hours

Students are encouraged to meet with me throughout the semester. If you feel you are having difficulties, you should attend office hours as early as possible in the semester to discuss strategies for improvement. Your feedback is also important to me. Please come visit my office hours if you have questions about the class or suggestions of how your learning may be improved. I also welcome the chance to get to know you better, so please feel free to stop by to chat, say hello, and talk current events. Chances are the more often you come by, the more likely it is you’ll meet one of my two dogs (a beagle named Ladybird and a basset hound named Baily), who will make semi-regular appearances.

Disabilities

Students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known to myself and seeking assistance through Skidmore’s disability and accessibility services (<https://www.skidmore.edu/accessibility/>) at the *beginning* of the semester.

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need academic accommodation, you must formally request accommodation from Meg Hegener, Coordinator of Student Access Services. You will also need to provide documentation which verifies the existence of a disability and supports your request. For further information, please call 580-8150 or stop by the office of Student Academic Services in the Starbuck Center.

Academic Integrity

All students are responsible for adhering to Skidmore's policies regarding academic integrity (<https://www.skidmore.edu/advising/integrity/>). It is expected that all materials submitted as part of any class exercise be the actual work of the student whose name appears on the material. All work that draws from other sources must use an appropriate citation format (e.g. APA, Chicago-Style, MLA). *All student work in this class will be analyzed electronically via Turn It In for violations of the College's Honor Code and may also be included in a database for the purpose of testing for plagiarized content.*

Title IX Statement

Skidmore College considers sexual and gender-based misconduct to be one of the most serious violations of the values and standards of the College. Unwelcome sexual contact in any form is a violation of students' personal integrity and their right to a safe environment, and therefore violates Skidmore's values. Sexual and gender-based misconduct are also prohibited by federal regulations. Skidmore faculty are committed to supporting our students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. As such, I am here to listen and be a compassionate, empathetic resource to help you find the right support. **Please note, however, if a student chooses to confide in a member of Skidmore's faculty or staff regarding an issue of sexual or gender based misconduct, that faculty or staff member is obligated to tell Skidmore's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Deputy Coordinator.** The Title IX Coordinator or Deputy Coordinator will assist the student in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus. Identities and details will be shared only with those who need to know to support the student and address the situation through the college's processes. If a student wishes to confide in a confidential resource, the Counseling Center Staff, Health Services, and Victim Advocates are all options available.

Student Well Being

As an educator, I am fully committed to promoting student well-being. There is a section on our Blackboard course page dedicated to student self-care on which I'll occasionally post resources for dealing with stress during college. I am always happy to talk about self-care and navigating stress in person during my office hours as well.

Syllabus Changes

At one point or another, we may get off schedule with our lecture and discussion and the syllabus will need to be revised mid-semester. **I reserve the right to adjust readings and assignments as I see fit throughout the course.**

Course Outline and Reading Schedule

AG= American Government: Power and Purpose, Core 14th edition

ED= Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics, 8th Edition

Week 1

Thursday September 7th – The Tools of Political Scientists

Course Introduction and Overview

Opening discussion:

Why Study American Politics?

How Do Political Scientists Know What They Know?

Week 2

Tuesday September 12th - Five Principles of Politics

AG, chapter 1

*Don't forget to post your debate response by **Wednesday at 5PM!***

Thursday September 14th – American Political Culture and American Ideals: Liberty, Equality, and Democracy

The Declaration of Independence, ED, Appendix, pp. 537-540

Rogers Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz,” ED, pp. 3-13

AUDIO- Lin-Manuel Miranda. “Cabinet Battle #3.” *Hamilton Mix Tape*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MadmQvJezDA> (Blackboard)

Debate- What does it mean to be an American?

ED, pp. 34-44

Week 3

Tuesday September 19th – The Constitution, Part 1

VIDEO- Andrew Rudalevige. “Too many Americans know too little about the Constitution. Here’s how you can fix that.” *The Washington Post- Monkey Cage*. June 27, 2017.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/27/too-many-americans-know-too-little-about-the-constitution-heres-how-you-can-fix-that/?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.77df7c72f15f (Blackboard)

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AG, chapter 2

The Federalist Papers, No. 51, AG pp. A39-A42

*Don't forget to post your debate response by **Wednesday at 5PM!***
Thursday September 21st – The Constitution, Part 2

PODCAST: Lillian Cunningham. "Episode 1: Framed." *The Washington Post Podcasts- Constitution: A podcast about the story of America.*

Debate: Should the Constitution be fundamentally changed?
ED, pp. 65-85

Week 4

NO DEBATE POST DUE.
Tuesday September 26th – Federalism

VIDEO-Andrew Rudalevidge, "Happy Birthday, America! Here's what you need to know about federalism." *Monkey Cage, The Washington Post*,
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/07/04/happy-birthday-america-heres-what-you-need-to-know-about-federalism/?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.2aa9e00df7de
(Blackboard)

AG, chapter 3

Debate-Immigration Reform—More Power to the States?
ED, pp. 110-120

Thursday September 28th – Civil Liberties, Part 1
Short critical analysis paper #1 due at the beginning of class, hard copy

AG, Chapter 4

VIDEO- Andrew Rudalevidge. "Civil Liberties." *Founding Principles, Bowdoin College*.
<http://www.bowdoin.edu/founding-principles/chapter-thirteen.shtml> (Blackboard)

Week 5

*Don't forget to post your debate response by **Monday at 5PM!***
Tuesday October 3rd – Civil Liberties, Part 2

Jonathan Rauch, "In Defense of Prejudice," ED p. 130-137

Debate-Civil Liberties and Free Speech

Joshua J. Dyck, Francis T. Talty, Hannah Daly, Patrick Martin, and Jasmine Polanco. “Republicans and Democrats both say they support democratic freedoms – but that the other side doesn’t.” *The Washington Post-Monkey Cage*. August 3, 2017. (Blackboard)

Rachel Chason. “Berkeley’s mayor asked UC Berkely to cancel Milo Yiannopoulos speech. The school said no.” *The Washington Post*. August 30, 2017.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/08/30/berkeleys-mayor-asked-uc-berkeley-to-cancel-milo-yiannopoulos-the-university-said-no/?utm_term=.8b3287770576
(Blackboard)

Thursday October 5th – Civil Rights, Part 1

AG, Chapter 5

PODCAST- Lillian Cunningham. “Episode 4: Race.” *The Washington Post Podcasts-Constitutional*. August 21, 2017. (Blackboard)

Week 6

Tuesday October 10th – Civil Rights, Part 2

Martin Luther King. “Letter from Birmingham Jail.” (Blackboard)

Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President at the 50th Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery Marches,” ED, pp. 121-129 (Blackboard)

Logan Strother, Thomas Ogorzalek, and Spencer Piston. “The Confederate flag largely disappeared after the Civil War. The fight against civil rights brought it back.” *The Washington Post- Monkey Cage*. June 12, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/06/12/confederate-symbols-largely-disappeared-after-the-civil-war-the-fight-against-civil-rights-brought-them-back/?utm_term=.02e3d1cf3254 (Blackboard)

ED, pp. 138-151

*Don’t forget to post your debate response by **Wednesday at 5PM!***

Thursday, October 12th – Voting Rights

Jim Rutenberg. “Dream Undone: Inside the 50-year campaign to roll back the Voting Rights Act.” *The New York Times*. July 29, 2015.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/29/magazine/voting-rights-act-dream-undone.html>

(Blackboard)

Rick Vallely. “Is the Voting Rights Act Dead?” *Washington Monthly*. July 2, 2013.

<http://washingtonmonthly.com/2013/07/02/is-the-voting-rights-act-dead/> (Blackboard)

Debate: Voter ID Laws- Reducing Fraud or Suppressing Votes?- ED pp. 353-361

Week 7

Tuesday, October 17th – Congress, Part 1

VIDEO-Andrew Rudalevige. “Why does Congress have such a hard time passing laws? Let’s blame the Constitution.” *The Washington Post*. July 11, 2017.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/07/11/why-does-congress-have-such-a-hard-time-passing-laws-lets-blame-the-constitution/?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.ad963d5dc66f

(Blackboard)

AG, chapter 6, pp. 182-216

David Mayhew, “Congress: The Electoral Connection,” ED, pp. 156-158

*Don’t forget to post your debate response by **Wednesday at 5PM!***

Thursday October 19th – Congress, Part 2

AG, chapter 6, pp. 217-238

Debate: Checks and Balances- Too Many Checks, or Not Enough Balance?

ED, pp. 179-188

Week 8

Tuesday October 24th – The Presidency, Part 1

AG, chapter 7, pp. 240-261

VIDEO-Andrew Rudalevige, “What did the Founders have in mind for the presidency? Here’s what you need to know.” *Monkey Cage, the Washington Post*,

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/07/18/what-did-the-founders-have-in-mind-for-the-presidency-heres-what-you-need-to-know/?tid=a_inl&utm_term=.7fce60fac24d (Blackboard)

AUDIO-Christopher Jackson, Daveed Diggs, Lin-Manuel Miranda, Okieriete Onaodowan, The Original Broadway Cast of Hamilton. “Cabinet Battle #2.” *Hamilton, An American Musical* (2015) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B0HZUatZtXI> (Blackboard)

AUDIO - Christopher Jackson, Lin-Manuel Miranda, The Original Broadway Cast of Hamilton. “One Last Time.” *Hamilton, An American Musical* (2015). Performed at the White House

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uV4UpCq2azs> (Blackboard)

Charles O. Jones, “Perspectives on the Presidency,” ED, pp. 199-205

*Don’t forget to post your debate response by **Wednesday at 5PM!***

Thursday October 26th - The Presidency, Part 2

AG Chapter 7, pp. 261-289

Richard Neustadt, "The Power to Persuade," ED, p. 189-198

Debate-Prospects for Success in the Trump Presidency.

Mara Suttman-Lea, "As a true outsider, what Trump's presidency will look like is anybody's guess." *The London School of Economics American Politics and Policy Blog*. January 12, 2017. <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2017/01/12/as-a-true-outsider-what-trumps-presidency-will-look-like-is-anybodys-guess/> (Blackboard)

Week 9

Tuesday October 31st – The Bureaucracy

Short critical analysis paper #2 due at the beginning of class, hard copy

AG- Chapter 8

Woodrow Wilson, "The Study of Administration," ED, pp. 219-227

James Q. Wilson, "Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It," ED pp. 228-236

NO DEBATE POST DUE

Thursday November 2nd – The Federal Courts

VIDEO-Andrew Rudalevige. "Here's everything you need to know about how the constitution created the judicial branch, in a 15-minute video." *The Washington Post-Monkey Cage*. July 26, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/07/26/heres-everything-you-need-to-know-about-how-the-constitution-created-the-judicial-branch-in-a-15-minute-video/?utm_term=.4ceb1b7b81ef (Blackboard)

Debate-Interpreting the Constitution- Originalism or a Living Constitution?
ED, pp. 279-300

Week 10

Tuesday November 7th – Mid Term Exam

Thursday November 9th – Public Opinion and Behavior, Part 1

VIDEO-Andrew Rudalevige. "Should democracy depend on 'we the people'? Here's what the framers wanted." *The Washington Post- Monkey Cage*. August 2, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/08/01/yes-the-constitution-thought-about-public-opinion-heres-what-the-framers-had-in-mind/?utm_term=.39d31076a4b4 (Blackboard)

AG, ch. 10

The Federalist Papers, No. 10, AG. Appendix.

Week 11

*Don't forget to post your debate response by **Monday at 5PM!***
Tuesday November 14th – Public Opinion and Behavior, Part 2

Debate - Should we trust public opinion?

V.O. Key, Jr, “The voice of the People: An Echo” & Louis Menand, “The Unpolitical Animal: How Political Science Understands Voters,” ED pp. 333-347

Markus Prior, “News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout,” ED pp. 316-322

Thursday November 16th – Political Parties- How they function

AG, chapter 12, pp. 490-519

Daniel Galvin. “Obama built a policy legacy. But he didn’t do enough to build the Democratic Party.” *The Washington Post- Monkey Cage*. November 16, 2016.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/11/16/obama-built-a-policy-legacy-but-didnt-do-enough-to-build-the-democratic-party/?utm_term=.86448468b401

(Blackboard)

Julia Azari. “Partisanship can campaign, but it can’t govern.” *Vox- Mischiefs of Faction*. July 28, 2017. <https://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2017/7/28/16055374/partisanship-campaign-govern> (Blackboard)

Week 12

*Don't forget to post your debate response by **Monday at 5PM!***
Tuesday November 21st – Political Parties- Historical Development and Present Problems

AG, chapter 12, 519-537

Matt Grossmann and David A. Hopkins. “How different are the Democratic and Republican parties? Too different to compare.” *The Washington Post- Monkey Cage*. September 8, 2016.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/09/08/how-different-are-the-democratic-and-republican-parties-too-different-to-compare/?utm_term=.f43f6e4327c3

(Blackboard)

Debate: Red vs. Blue America- Are We Polarized?

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ED pp. 384-391

Thursday November 23rd - NO CLASS! Thanksgiving break!

Week 13

*Don't forget to post your debate response by **Monday at 5PM!***

Tuesday, November 28th – Groups and Interests

Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, “The Two Faces of Power.” *American Political Science Review* 56(4): 947-952. (Blackboard)

Debate: Donor disclosure- Is anonymous campaign funding a problem?
ED, pp. 392-426

Thursday, November 30th – The Electoral Process

VIDEO-Andrew Rudalevige. “Why did the Founders make U.S. elections so complicated and confusing? Get your answers here.” August 16, 2017. *The Monkey Cage- Washington Post*.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/08/16/why-did-the-founders-make-u-s-elections-so-complicated-and-confusing-get-your-answers-here/?utm_term=.38f771641cf1 (Blackboard)

AG, Chapter 11

Mara Suttman-Lea. “Early voting in the 2017 Montana special congressional election.” 2017. *The London School of Economics United States Politics and Policy Blog*.
<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2017/06/07/profound-partisanship-rather-than-early-voting-may-have-guaranteed-greg-gianfortes-success-in-montana-amidst-assault-charges/> (Blackboard)

Week 14

*Don't forget to post your debate response by **Monday at 5PM!***

Tuesday, December 5th – The Media and U.S. Politics

AG, Chapter 14

Thomas E. Patterson. “News Coverage of the 2016 General Election: How the Press Failed the Voters.” *Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy*. December 7, 2016.
<https://shorensteincenter.org/news-coverage-2016-general-election/> (Blackboard)

Debate: Is Partisan Media Exposure Bad for Democracy?
ED pp. 323-332

Tuesday, December 5th – Concluding Thoughts

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Tuesday, December 12th- Critical Analysis Paper Due by 5PM