INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

M/W 2:00 - 3:15PM, Spring 2016
O'Leary Library 327 - SC
Department of Political Science
University of Massachusetts Lowell

Dr. Mona S. Kleinberg
Office Hours: M/W 12:00 - 1:30PM
and by appointment in Dugan Hall, RM 201K
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1. Summary

This course serves as a primary introduction to American politics. We will cover basic democratic principles, the historical significance and provisions of the Constitution, and the structure and institutions of government. You will also learn about the role of parties, the mass media, interest groups, and citizens in American politics. We will devote time to thinking about how race and gender matter in the American political process. We will also spend time examining how political pundits gage public opinion and how we record and analyze political behavior.

2. Course Objectives

(1) We will cover the basic facts of the American political system, such as its history, institutions, and development.

(2) You will learn how to analyze various aspects of the political process. Hence, this course improves your critical thinking skills. One writing assignment will also allow you to work on putting your analyses to paper, thereby improving your written communication skills.

(3) A third objective in this class is to understand important issues in American politics through discussion. While class consensus is rare, learning how to deliberate and respect the opinion of an opponent is an important skill. Consequently, you will have a chance to sharpen your oral communication skills. Hopefully, you will also gain a better understanding of your own opinions and beliefs and examine their origins in a critical manner.

(4) Last but not least, you will also gain a basic understanding of research and surveys and hopefully become a more critical consumer of data after acquiring these basic quantitative reasoning skills.

3. UML Essential Learning Outcomes

This course meets the UML Essential Learning Outcome of Diversity and Cultural Awareness. As stated in the course summary above, we consider how race and gender matter in the American political process. We will also pay attention to the civil rights struggles of LGBTQ Americans. As a consequence, this course will (1) help you to identify your own cultural norms and values in relation to those of other cultures and diverse social groups. (2) It will challenge you to recognize
indicators of discrimination and to analyze how discriminatory practices and attitudes can create barriers for some and opportunities for others. (3) Lastly, you will articulate answers to complex questions about other cultures and diverse groups, reflecting an awareness of diverse cultural and social group perspectives.

4. Required Texts

You are expected to have completed the weekly readings before class. We will talk about the readings in class and I expect you to bring your reading notes to each class. Your textbook is available as an ebook for only $30.


(2) Additional Readings are provided on Blackboard. You will have to get your Backboard username and password: http://continuinged.uml.edu/online/confirmation/. Next, log in at: https://continuinged.uml.edu/login/login.cfm. Call technical support if you need help (978-934-2467).


(4) You will also be required to use the University’s Library and academic search indexes and repositories to retrieve other readings as needed.

5. Schedule


Wed. Jan. 20 — Class 1, Course Overview, Syllabus

(1) No Readings for today

Mon. Jan 25 — Class 2, The Founding

(1) Textbook Chapter 2 The Founding and the Constitution.

(2) http://econfaculty.gmu.edu/wew/quotes/slavery.html

Wed. Jan 27 — Class 3, The US Constitution

(1) The US Constitution incl. the Amendments (http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html)

(2) Dahl How Democratic is the American Constitution? (Ch. 1 and 2)

Mon. Feb. 1 — Class 4, How Democratic is the American Constitution?

(1) Dahl How Democratic is the American Constitution? (Ch. 3 and 5)

(2) http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/how-the-constitution-was-indeed-pro-406288/
(3) http://www.nationalreview.com/article/424056/no-bernie-america-was-not-actually-founded

Wed. Feb. 3 — Class 5, Civil Liberties and Civil Rights
(1) Re-read the first ten amendments to the US constitution
(2) Re-read the reconstruction amendments (13, 14, and 15) to the US constitution
(3) Textbook Chapter 4 (Civil Liberties and Civil Rights)
(4) OPTIONAL Reading: Charles H Wesley *Lincoln’s Plan for Colonizing the Emancipated Negroes*

Mon. Feb. 8 — Class 6, Federalism
(1) Textbook Chapter 3 (Federalism)
Paper 1 assigned in class — “So, how democratic is our Constitution?”

Wed. Feb. 10 — Class 7, Federalism and Racial Inequality
(1) Lisa L Miller *The Invisible Black Victim: How Federalism Perpetuates Racial Inequality*

Tue. Feb. 16 — Class 8, The Presidential Campaign: The US Constitution as a Campaign Issue
(1) Homework: Find out what the Candidates are saying about the Constitution. E.g.https://www.tedcruz.org/issues/restore-the-constitution/
(2) Discuss at least two candidates and summarize your research on 1 double-spaced typed page. Hand in at start of class.

Wed. Feb. 17 — Class 9, The Courts
(1) Textbook Chapter 12 (The Federal Courts)
Paper 1 due at beginning of class (hardcopies only).

Mon. Feb. 22 — Class 10, Constitutional Law, US vs. Morrison
Read the case description, listen to the oral arguments (on the left hand side of the screen). Answer the following questions: What is being argued? What role does the Commerce Clause play in this case? Do you agree with the majority? Why, why not?
(2) Read pages 1-9 of Sauter’s Dissent in US vs Morrison

**Part II: American Politics**

Wed. Feb. 24 — Class 11, Public Opinion
(1) Textbook Chapter 5 (Public Opinion)

Mon. Feb. 29 — Class 12, Research and Polling in Politics
(1) Wheelan, Charles Naked Statistics: Stripping the Dread from the Data. (2013) Ch. 1&2

Paper 1 returned to students at the end of class.

Wed. March 2 — Class 13, Research and Polling in Politics Continued

(1) Weisberg, Herbert F., Jon A. Krosnick, and Bruce D. Bowen. An introduction to survey research and data analysis (1989) Ch. 1

(2) Harvard Business Review Why Polling is always political

(3) Baretto, Matt Why Pollsters missed the Latino vote (Blog Post)

Mon. March 7 — Class 14, Midterm Exam

Wed. March 9 — Class 15, The Media

(1) Textbook Chapter 6 (The Media)

Mon. March 21 — Class 16, New Media & The Internet

(1) Pariser, Eli The filter bubble: What the Internet is hiding from you (Ch.1, 2, & 8)

Wed. March 23 — Class 17, The Media and Female Candidates

(1) Kahn, Kim and Goldenberg, Edie Women Candidates in the News: An Examination of Gender Differences in U.S. Senate Campaign Coverage (1991)

Mon. March 28 — Class 18, Analysis: Media Coverage of Presidential Candidates

How are the media covering presidential candidates? What kind of information about the candidates do the media provide? What narrative is used for what candidate? Analyze 8 articles from mainstream print newspapers (e.g. New York Times, Boston Globe, Washington Post, etc). Summarize your findings on one page, double-spaced. Hardcopies due at end of class.

Wed. March 30 — Class 19, Parties, Participation, and Elections

(1) Textbook Chapter 7 (Political Parties, Participation, and Elections)

Mon. April 4 — Class 20, Interest Groups

(1) Textbook Chapter 8 (Interest Groups)

Wed. April 6 — Class 21, Catch up Class

(1) to be determined

Part III: Institutions

Mon. April 11 — Class 22, Congress

(1) Textbook Chapter 9 (Congress)

Wed. April 13 — Class 23, Representation & Gender

Mon. April 18 — No Class, Patriot’s Day, *University Closed*

Wed. April 20 — Class 24, The Presidency

(1) Textbook *Chapter 13* (The Presidency)

**Part IV: Policy**

Mon. April 25 — Class 25, Domestic Policy

(1) Textbook *Chapter 13* (Domestic Policy)

Wed, April 27 — Class 26, Foreign Policy

(1) Textbook *Chapter 14* (Foreign Policy)

Final Exam — Check your final exam schedule and our blackboard site for location, day and time

6. **Expectations**

6.1. **Class Participation & Preparedness.** We meet twice a week. I will lecture but there will be plenty of class discussion. You should be prepared to talk at least once during each class meeting. You should also be ready to take pop quizzes about the assigned readings. (The pop quizzes are multiple choice or short answer and prepare you for the exams.) Each pop quiz answer counts as a “check” toward your participation grade. There are also a couple of homework assignments that count toward your participation grade. At the end of the semester, I tally all your “checks” and divide them by three. That’s your participation and preparedness grade. So, you should have 45 checks to receive the full participation grade because 45/3=15.

6.2. **Mobile devices and laptops.** I do not allow cellphones or computers in class. Make sure you mute the ringer on your phone and do not text, update your facebook status, etc. in class. You may not use laptops in class unless you request permission to do so. The same rules obviously apply to tablets and other devices.

6.3. **Absence.** Read this section carefully! Attendance and punctuality are required. I cover material in class not covered by your textbook. Hence, you are required to be present and to take notes. Absences: If you are absent for an unexcused reason (e.g., oversleeping, going on a trip, job interview, car breaking down) you will be penalized. If you are absent 3 times, your letter grade will be lowered by a half grade. If you miss more than 4 classes, your grade will be lowered by a whole grade, etc. If you are absent for an excused reason (illness, family emergency, etc.) that can be verified, simply document the absence.

If you foresee having to be absent, talk to me at the beginning of the semester. Should you encounter an emergency or situation that you believe will hamper your ability to complete the course requirements, let me know, and speak to the Dean of Students as soon as possible, do not wait until the end of the semester, or when assignments or grades are due.
Lastly, I do not tolerate lateness. If you are not present at the beginning of class, you will be marked absent for the entire session, whether you walk in late or not.

7. Course Grade Distribution

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation &amp; Preparedness</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
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I do not accept late work unless you can document an emergency.

8. Assignments

8.1. **Short Paper.** You will write one short paper. I will hand out detailed instructions one week prior to the due date.

8.2. **Exams.** There are two exams. The midterm will cover all material covered up to the exam. The final covers all material after the midterm. Your textbook features quiz questions at the end of each chapter. Both exams are based on these quizzes, our class quizzes, and the slides.

9. Academic Integrity

I enforce academic integrity as determined by the University of Massachusetts. A copy of these regulations is available through the University’s website, at: https://www.uml.edu/Catalog/Undergraduate/Policies/Academic-Integrity.aspx. Ignorance of these policies is not an excuse for violations. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to:

- Cheating on a quiz or exam
- Using and/or submitting as one’s own a paper/project that was obtained through the Internet, or some other source
- Engaging in plagiarism: using any statements (either in a verbatim or paraphrased form) found in other people’s work, or the Internet as one’s own, and without proper citations
10. Grading

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>Course Total</th>
<th>Paper Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100-94</td>
<td>30-28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>93-90</td>
<td>28-27</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>89-87</td>
<td>26.5-26</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>86-84</td>
<td>25.5-25</td>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>83-80</td>
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<td>C+</td>
<td>79-77</td>
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<tr>
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<td>&lt;60</td>
<td>&lt;18</td>
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- **A**=Excellent knowledge of class material demonstrating both mastery of the readings and arguments. Plus, novel insight that expands on the ideas presented in class or the readings. No spelling or syntactical errors. A well-argued and well-developed presentation of your idea.

- **B**=Correct knowledge of class material demonstrating complete understanding of the readings and arguments. A paper with an argument that unfortunately does not contain insight not already expressed in class or the readings. Some spelling or syntactical errors.

- **C**=Partially correct knowledge of the class material and readings. Superficial engagement with the arguments introduced in class and the readings. No new insight. More summary than analysis. Many spelling and syntactical errors.

- **D**=Incorrect application of the material, arguments and readings. Intellectual disengagement and use of summary instead of analysis to fill pages. Many spelling and syntactical errors.

- **F**=No work submitted when due.