Course Description: This course is an introduction to American government. We will explore several themes throughout the course, including who has power in our political system (the president, lobbyists, Congress, ordinary citizens?) and the sources of that power, what limits the power of various groups and institutions, and how the political system has developed over time. The first section will cover the historical foundations of the American political system. The next section focuses on the role of the public in the American political process and the channels through which the public participates. The third part of the course looks at the major institutions in American government and how they interact with one another and the public. By the end of the term, you should have some understanding of how the government makes policy and why decisions are made as they are; in short, you should be able to provide some explanation for the behavior of politicians and the public in current events.

This course is also an introduction to political science. Through the readings and assignments, students will learn the kinds of questions political scientists ask about the American political system and how they investigate those questions. Students should develop stronger critical reading skills and understand the kinds of evidence used to study empirical questions about politics.

Finally, this course will help equip students to participate effectively in civic life (and the real world). Assignments and class time provide opportunities for students to learn how to evaluate critically various sources of political information in today’s media environment, to engage in civil discussion about politics and public policy, and to write effectively.

Course Evaluation: Grades will be based on a combination of exams, papers, and participation. All assignments must be completed to pass the course.

Exams: There will be short quizzes roughly every other week on ID terms from the reading and class discussion. Dates for these are listed on the syllabus. These quizzes will be combined to make up one exam grade (10%). There will be no makeup quizzes. Students who have an excused absence on quiz day will be excused from the quiz. Students who have an unexcused absence on quiz day will receive a zero on the quiz. There will be a midterm exam (15%) that will consist primarily of short essay questions on material up through midterm. The final exam will be cumulative (20%). All reading (whether or not we discuss it in class), lectures, and class discussions are fair game for exams. The date for the final exam is listed on the syllabus. Do not ask the instructor to change the date or time of the final; she has no authority to do so.

Commentary Analysis (10%): Students will analyze opinion commentary on an issue in American government and write a 5-6 page paper discussing their findings. More information on this assignment is provided at the end of the syllabus.

Congress and Social Media Project (20%): Students will follow and analyze congressional communication via Twitter and Facebook and write a 6-8 page paper evaluating their findings. More information on this assignment is provided at the end of the syllabus.

Simulation (10%): There will be a simulation of the House of Representatives. It will take up one evening. The date is listed on the syllabus, and students should plan accordingly. To prepare for the simulation, students will write a brief simulation paper. More information will be provided on the simulation as the term progresses.

Participation (15%): Students will have ample opportunity to participate in class discussions. To be able to participate effectively, students should complete the reading by the date listed on the syllabus. Discussion questions can be found in the boxes of each chapter in the textbook and will be suggested at the end of each class to provide students with some focus for the next day’s readings. However, discussion will
not be limited to these questions. Students should feel free to bring their own questions about the reading and relevant current events to class or email them to the professor for discussion.

Students, particularly those who are uncomfortable talking in large groups, are also encouraged to comment on the readings or class lectures and discussion by e-mailing the professor or talking to her outside of class. Merely showing up to class everyday without engaging in some of these other forms of participation will result in at best a C+ on participation.

Attendance will be taken. More than one unexcused absence will begin to affect participation grades. Five unexcused absences will result in a 50 on participation, and for each additional unexcused absence, ten points will be deducted from the participation grade. Generally, an absence is excused if the student has a note from the infirmary or a doctor or if the student is representing the University in some capacity. Students who know that they are going to be absent when assignments are due are expected to turn in papers or take exams in advance. In the case of unexpected absences due to illness, students are expected to make up the work they missed.

-- Optional Events: Students will be encouraged to attend outside events that focus on politics throughout the term. For example, the Political Science Department hosts Pizza and Politics lunch discussions twice a month (usually 2nd Wed. 12:30-1:15 and 4th Tues. 12:00-12:45), and there are often CLP lectures relevant to politics on campus as well as political events. Attendance at such events is not required, but it can help students’ participation grade. Attendance at 4 of these events will allow students to drop their lowest quiz grade of the semester (you can only drop one quiz grade). To get credit for these events, students should email the professor a brief summary (2-3 coherent paragraphs) of what the student learned at the event and the student’s reaction to it within a week of the event’s occurrence.

Electronic devices in class: Cell phones should be turned off and put out of sight as soon as students walk in the classroom. Use the time before class to get to know your classmates. If the professor hears a phone in class or sees a student using it for any reason after class begins, she will deduct 5 points from the student’s participation grade. If it happens a second time, the student will receive an F for participation. During exams, students should put their cell phones or other electronic devices in their book bag or purse or leave them at the front of the room with the professor. If the professor sees a cell phone or electronic device in the student’s hand once the exam begins (regardless of the reason), the student will fail the exam. Laptops, Ipads, etc. may be used for taking notes, but all other applications (e-mail, internet, etc.) should be closed (not merely minimized). If the professor finds a student using the laptop for any reason other than taking notes, the student will lose 5 points from their participation grade and will no longer be allowed to use the laptop in class. Before deciding to use an electronic device for taking notes, you might want to read some interesting research on the performance of students who use electronic devices in class (see “Digital Distractions” on Moodle).

Grading scale: Plus grades end in 8 or 9 (88-89= B+). Minus grades end in zero or 1 (90-91= A-).

Academic Dishonesty: Plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this class. If it occurs, it will result in a penalty ranging from a reduction of one-letter grade to a zero on the assignment or failure in the course, depending on the severity, and will be reported to the Associate Dean. If students are unsure what constitutes academic dishonesty or plagiarism, they should consult the professor.

A nod to sustainability: Unless otherwise stated, students should turn all assignments for class in electronically. If students print assignments, they are encouraged to print on both sides of the paper.

Books: The following book is required and is available from the Furman bookstore.

--Thomas E. Patterson. We the People: an Introduction to American Politics. 11th ed. McGraw-Hill. Referred to on the syllabus as “text.”

Keeping up with the daily news is essential for this course, particularly for class discussions. Therefore, students must follow either the New York Times (available on campus free) or Washington Post (www.washingtonpost.com) daily. The Washington Post is free online if you register with your Furman email ending in “edu.”
Course Schedule and Reading Assignments:

Aug. 26—Introduction
Aug. 28—What is Political Science?
   Readings: Text, Chapt. 1; Commentary Analysis assignment on syllabus.

I. Historical foundation
A. Creating a Government
Aug. 31—Constitutional Background
   Readings: Text, Chapt. 2 and Declaration of Independence (Appendix in Text)
Sept. 2—Constitution
   Readings: Text, Constitution (in Appendix)
Sept. 4—No class (DV at conference)
Sept. 7—No class (Labor Day)
Sept. 9—Readings: Text, Federalist No. 10 and 51 (Appendix)
   Email Commentary Analysis topic and sources to professor by beginning of class.

Sept. 11—Current Events Discussion

Sept. 14—Quiz 1; We’ll also discuss CSMP assignment.
Sept. 16—Commentary Analysis due at beginning of class.

B. Federalism
Sept. 18—Development of Federalism
   Readings: Text, Chapt. 3
Sept. 20 (Sunday)—start collecting tweets and FB posts
Sept. 21—Federalism Today (in class)
   CSMP lab (pick one of these times): 4:00-5:00 p.m. or 7:00-8:00 p.m. (meet in JH 203 computer lab)

C. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights
Sept. 23—Development and Current Issues in First Amendment
   Readings: Text, Chapt. 4 (p.100-122 or through section on right to privacy)
Sept. 25—Due Process and Post 9/11 Liberties
   Readings: Text, Chapt 4 (p.122-end of chapter)
   Upload CSMP spreadsheet for Sept. 20 and 22 to Box.
Sept. 28—Civil Rights
   Readings: Text, Chapt. 5

Sept. 30—Quiz 2; Continue discussion of civil rights/liberties.
Oct. 2—Current Events Discussion
Oct. 5—No class. Work on CSMP assignment.

II. Political Participation and Political Intermediaries
A. Public Opinion
Oct. 7—What shapes public opinion?
   Readings: Text, Chapt. 6
Oct. 9—Measuring Public Opinion
Oct. 12—No class. Fall Break.

B. Political Participation
Oct. 14—Why don’t people vote?
   Readings: Text, Chapt. 7
   Upload completed CSMP spreadsheets and FB documents to Box.
Oct. 16—Participation
Oct. 19—Midterm Exam
October 21—Discuss CSMP analysis and paper. (Bring flashdrive to class with CSMP dataset uploaded)

C. Political Parties and Campaigns
Oct. 23—Party platforms, activities, strength
   Readings: Text, Chapt. 8
Oct. 26—What affects the way people vote?

D. Interest Groups
Oct. 28—Group Formation and Maintenance
   Readings: Text, Chapt. 9
   CSMP paper topic due.

Oct. 30—Group influence
Nov. 2—Quiz 3

III. Political Institutions
A. Congress
Nov. 4—Representation and Members
   Readings: Text, Chapt. 11
Nov. 6—Congressional Organization
Nov. 9—Congress in Action
Nov. 11—Simulation in class and 7:00-9:00 p.m. JH 101
   Simulation paper due at beginning of class.
Nov. 13—Current events discussion.

B. The Presidency
Nov. 16-18—Presidential Power
   Readings: Text, Chapt. 12
Nov. 20—Quiz 4

C. The Bureaucracy
Nov. 23—Organization and purpose
   Readings: Text, Chapt. 13
   CSMP paper due at beginning of class.
Nov. 25-29—Thanksgiving break.
Nov. 30—Control of the bureaucracy

D. The Judicial Branch
Dec. 2—Power and Purpose of the courts
   Readings: Text, Chapt. 14; Marbury v. Madison (available on Moodle)
Dec. 4—Judicial Decision-making
Dec. 7—Wrap up

Final Exam Wed, Dec. 16, 8:30-11:00 a.m.
Analysis of Political Commentary

The purpose of this assignment is to introduce students to different sources of political information and commentary and to help them learn to evaluate sources critically to become more aware of what makes information credible and arguments compelling. It encourages students to reflect on how their own opinions may shape how they process information. And it will help them write more effectively.

Choose a current issue in American government (something prominently in the news within the last two weeks). Look at commentary (opinion, not news coverage) of this issue over a 2-3 day period in a variety of outlets. Please note that commentary is the author of an article or program host expressing his or her own opinions, not reporting the opinion of others and not merely analysis. In the case of television interviews or panel discussions, the person being interviewed or those on the panel offering their opinions can also be considered commentary. Possibilities include but are not limited to:

Written Commentary | Broadcast Commentary (video/audio) | Comedy
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Opinion columns in newspapers | Cable tv news opinion shows | Daily Show or Wilmore Show
Opinion blogs | O’Reilly (FOX) | SNL
Letters to the editor | Maddow (MSNBC) | Late Night Comedy Monologues
Opinion columns on cable network websites | Talk radio (ex. Limbaugh) |

Choose 4 sources for your analysis (at least one from two of the categories above and from at least two different perspectives—so, you can’t choose all conservative or all liberal sources). Email your topic and citations for your 4 sources in the proper format to the professor no later than Sept. 9.

Write a 5-6 page paper analyzing and evaluating (not just describing) the commentary. The paper should include the following:
1) From the perspective of an objective observer, evaluate the commentary using the following questions: What arguments do your sources make or what positions do they take on the issue? (Discuss the most common arguments on each side of the issue; you don’t have to include all of them.) Do they support those positions with evidence, and if so, is it credible (why or why not—reputable sources, logical argument, empirical evidence, etc.)? Do their arguments hold together based on facts? Do they hold together logically? Are there differences or similarities across the different types of commentary?
2) For your conclusion, reflect on your own reaction to the commentary. To what extent did your own opinion on the issue affect your ability to analyze the commentary? Have your own opinions changed? Why or why not?

Papers should be at least 5 full pages double-spaced using standard fonts and absolutely no more than 6 pages (bibliography does not count toward the page limit). Please number pages, and staple or paper clip them; no folders please. They should be properly documented with both a bibliography and parenthetical citations in the text as needed (see Citation guidelines on Moodle). A grading rubric is available on Moodle. There are also sample commentary analysis papers on Moodle.

Papers are due by the beginning of class September 16. Upload papers to your box folder for the class. Late papers will be penalized 10 points per day (each day of the weekend is a separate day).
Congress and Social Media Assignment

This assignment accomplishes several goals of the course. First, it introduces students to another source of political information and allows them to keep up with current events. Second, it helps them see how elected officials communicate and connect with constituents and the media. Third, it gives students an opportunity to do political science by systematically gathering data (the content of members’ tweets and Facebook posts) and analyzing it to answer a research question.

Each student will be assigned to follow one senator and one House member on Twitter and Facebook Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday from Sept. 20- Oct. 8, 2015. Students will collect and electronically save all Facebook posts and tweets on those days during the time period. Students, working in pairs, will use the content code provided on the CSMP assignment guide on Moodle to code each tweet and FB post and enter the data on the excel spreadsheet provided on Moodle. Students will periodically upload their data to their folder on Box (see timeline below). The professor will combine all the data and move it to SPSS where we can analyze it more easily.

Students will write a paper analyzing some aspect of the content of members’ social media messages. More information on the paper will be provided in class on Oct. 21 and can be found on the CSMP guide on Moodle.

Timeline for this assignment:
Sept. 14—Discuss assignment in class.
Sept. 20- Oct. 8—Collect tweets and posts only on Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday each week.
Sept. 21—Attend lab to discuss assignment either 4:00-5:00 or 7:00-8:00.
Sept. 25—Upload spreadsheet with first two days coded. (Failing to upload spreadsheets on time will result in loss of points on CSMP paper.)
Oct. 14—Upload spreadsheet with analysis complete for tweets/posts through Oct. 8 and FB documents.
Oct. 21—Discuss how to analyze social media data and the paper assignment in class.
Oct. 28—Email professor your research question for your paper.
Nov. 16—You should be done with most of your data analysis by now. DV is happy to help you with this, but don’t wait till the last minute.
Nov. 23—Papers are due by the beginning of class Nov. 23. Upload it to your box folder for the class. Late papers will be penalized 10 points per day (each day of the break is a separate day).
Congressional Simulation Paper

The simulation paper is designed to familiarize students with the member of Congress they are assigned to portray in the simulation and to introduce them to some of the resources available for political science research, particularly topics requiring current information in an environment that changes frequently. It should be 3-4 pages double-spaced using standard fonts and margins, and pages should be numbered. It should include appropriate in text parenthetical citation of sources and a bibliography of sources, including internet sources. Citation of internet sources must include an author or organization that provides the information, a title of the specific page on the website where information was obtained, a date where possible, and the web address. If you can’t figure this information out on your own, ask the reference librarian or the professor. A sample citation and bibliographic format is posted on Moodle.

The paper should include basic information about the representative and the district he or she represents, information about his or her connections to interest groups or PACs, information on his or her voting record on the kinds of issues we will discuss in the simulation, and information about what bills he or she has introduced, sponsored, or spoken about in congressional debate in recent years.

Basic Congressional Member Information
In addition to basic information about the member (such as political party, career background, and current committee assignments), discuss information about the member’s congressional district or state that might have an impact on the legislator’s interests and votes in Congress (the demographic makeup of the district or state, major industries, economic conditions, ideology, etc.). Also look for information that might indicate whether or not this individual is vulnerable to electoral defeat (for example, tenure in office or margin of victory in the last election). Be selective with the information you include; where the member was educated and all of his or her previous jobs are probably not particularly useful to you.

Interest Groups and PACs
You should find out how much your assigned representative spent on his or her last congressional election. What groups contributed significant amounts to the campaign? (Use broad groupings such as agriculture or business rather than specific organizations to answer this question.) Find out how a variety of interest groups have rated your assigned congressional member’s voting record. Choose at least four different interest groups. For example, you might look at ratings from a pro-life group, a pro-choice group, a liberal or conservative ideological organization, environmental groups, labor unions, etc.

Voting Record and Issues of Concern
You can use the Congressional Record to find out what bills your assigned member of Congress has introduced and what he or she has spoken about on the House or Senate floor during the current congressional session (114th). Find out how your member voted on key bills in Congress in recent years. More information will be given to you early in the term about what issues will be discussed in the simulation. You will want to look for information about your member’s voting record that is relevant to the issues we discuss in the simulation.

Useful Resources (you won’t need to go beyond these for your paper)
--The Almanac of American Politics includes biographies of all members and descriptions of states and districts. Available in the library.
--Project Vote Smart has a website that provides much of the information you will need.
--The Center for Responsive politics provides campaign finance information at opensecrets.org.
--http://thomas.loc.gov/. Thomas is the official website of the Library of Congress. It includes links to member websites and links to The Congressional Record.

Note: You may use members’ websites to prepare for the simulation, but you may not use them for the simulation paper.

The Simulation Paper is due by the first of class on Nov. 11. Late papers will be penalized 10 points per day.