Course Description

American Government is an introductory course that serves as one of the gateway courses to the political science major and also fulfills the empirical studies–human behavior requirement. The course has several goals. As an empirical studies course, it exposes students to the systematic and observable study of one aspect of human behavior—politics. Students will leave the course with a better understanding of and appreciation for empirical methods that are employed in the study of political phenomena. Substantively, the course focuses on evaluating how the design of American political institutions (Congress, Courts, Executive, Bureaucracy) has an impact on American political behavior and public policy. The textbook incorporates several concepts borrowed from economics to explain the profound way in which institutional design affects political outcomes. To understand these institutional design issues, we begin with the study of the Constitution and the philosophical perspective of the Framers who laid the foundation for US politics. What are the implications of a governance system that is shaped so fundamentally by Madisonian political architecture? Following this discussion, students also examine civil liberties and civil rights, paying particular attention to the continuing debate over affirmative action. In the second section of the course, we consider the role of institutions more explicitly. The readings and lectures focus on the way in which these institutions developed and the implications for contemporary US national politics. Professors Kernell, Jacobson, and Kousser (authors of the textbook) argue that these institutions were designed to solve the problems that result when citizens attempt to act collectively. Students will learn that these institutions are not neutral and that the governance rules designed to resolve problems in one era have profound implications for resolving issues at another historical moment. In this section, we will learn about the polarized Congress, the drift of authority from the legislative to the executive branch, the politicization of the federal judiciary, and the role of the bureaucracy in shaping public policy. Next, we turn our attention to the linkage institutions—political parties, the media, interest groups, campaigns and elections, and public opinion. Our discussion in this section focuses on the extent to which these linkage institutions connect citizens to elected officials and how the policymaking institutions shape the way in which citizens respond and connect to their elected officials. We take considerable time analyzing the 2012 presidential election and how political scientists make sense of a national election. In so doing, we will take up the role of political parties, interest groups, and the media during a presidential election cycle. Finally, we consider whether US political institutions can be reformed and some of the recent attempts to do so. Remember that this course takes place (as do all Furman courses) within the context of a liberal arts college where vigorous discussion and rigorous examination of issues are central to our community’s search for truth.
Readings


Course Requirements

**Exams: 25%**. Two take-home, essay exams. The first exam counts for 10% of the course mark, and the second for 15% of the course grade.
The first exam will be available at the end of class on **Thursday, 27 September** and due by **11:59 PM on Friday, 28 September**.
The second exam will be available at the end of class on **Thursday, 25 October** and due by **11:59 PM on Friday, 26 October**.
**Comprehensive Final Examination: 20%**. **Tuesday, 11 December, NOON-2:30 PM**. This exam will focus on the final sections of the course; the comprehensive sections of the course will be announced in advance of the final.
**Book Reviews: 30%**. Each student will complete **two**, five-page, double-spaced book reviews, one of Barbara Perry’s *The Michigan Affirmative Action Cases*, and another of Diana Mutz’s *Hearing the Other Side*. These reviews will summarize the arguments of the authors and also use the insights of the authors to make sense of contemporary debates on affirmative action policy and civility in politics. The Perry review is due on **Wednesday, 10 October by 11:59 PM**, and the Mutz review is due on **Monday, 26 November by 11:59 PM**.
**Learning Portfolio: 25%** It is imperative that students come to class prepared. Students will demonstrate either by performance on pop quizzes or notes taken on the readings or other means that they are prepared for each class session. Students can also complete the exercises at the website associated with the course textbook at http://college.cqpress.com/sites/logic. Additionally, in consultation with the professor, the student will design a project that meets his/her learning goals. The student has a wide berth to decide what he/she might like to learn. Those interested in tracking elite opinion could follow the editorial pages of the *NYTimes* and *Wall Street Journal*; others could follow a particular aspect of the 2012 election (for example, the role of Super PACs); still others interested in public policy could investigate the state of campaign finance (after *Citizens United*), state Photo ID aws, or environmental regulations. For those of you who are more inclined toward activism, working on a political campaign or attending political rallies might be of great interest. The portfolio will be picked up at various times by your instructor during the semester for evaluation, but the final product is due on **Tuesday, 4 December in class**.
Grading

95-100-A  
90-94-A-  
87-89-B+  
84-86-B  
80-83-B-  
77-79-C+  
74-76-C  
70-73-C-  
67-69-D+  
64-66-D  
60-63-D-  
Below 60-F

Rules of the Game

(1) Incompletes will be given only in extenuating circumstances and with the advance permission of the instructor.
(2) No make-up exams will be given.
(3) Failure to take exams on scheduled dates will result in a zero (0) for that exam.
(4) No extra credit is available.
(5) Students must complete all work to receive course credit.
(6) Students are responsible for knowing the content of the Academic Integrity policy; it will be enforced.
(7) Any student wishing to receive an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) needs to provide documentation from the University’s ADA officer.
(8) One unexcused absence is allowed; excused absences are those that are granted by Dean Gabbert’s office for students participating in a University-related activity or are for documented, extenuating circumstances that prevent you from attending class (read: illness documented from the infirmary).
(9) No computers or cell phones are allowed in class. Notes should be taken the old-fashioned way—with pen and paper. All cell phones must be placed in a basket before class begins.
(10) Once seated, please do not leave the classroom until the class session is over unless it is absolutely necessary. This is Professor Halva-Neubauer’s #1 pet peeve.

All reading is to be completed by class time.

Introduction—The Logic of American Politics

21 August—Introduction to course; the empirical study of politics—political science isn’t just gussied-up current events, but the systematic examination of political phenomena.

23 August—Logic of American Politics  
Read: KJK, Chapter 1

28 August—Designing Institutions  
Read: KS, Chapter 1

Constitutional Underpinnings

30 August—Constitutional Foundations I  
Read: KJK, Chapter 2
4 September—Constitutional Foundations II
   Read: KS, Chapter 2

6 September—Federalism I
   Read: KJK, Chapter 3

11 September—Federalism II
   Read: KS, Chapter 3

13 September—Civil Liberties I
   Read: KJK, Chapter 5

18 September—Civil Liberties II
   Read: KS, Chapter 5

20 September—Civil Rights I
   Read: KJK, Chapter 4

25 September—Civil Rights II
   Read: KS, Chapter 4

**Policymaking Institutions**

27 September—Congress I
   Read: KJK, Chapter 6

2 October—Congress II
   Read: KS, Chapter 6

4 October—Presidency I
   Read: KJK, Chapter 7

9 October—No Class, Fall Break

11 October—Presidency II
   Read: KS, Chapter 7

16 October—Bureaucracy I
   Read: KJK, Chapter 8

18 October—Bureaucracy II
   Read: KS, Chapter 8

23 October—Judiciary I
   Read: KJK, Chapter 9

25 October—Judiciary II
Read: KS, Chapter 9

*Linkage Institutions*

30 October—Public Opinion I
   Read: KJK, Chapter 10

1 November—Public Opinion II
   Read: KS, Chapter 10

6 November—Voting, Campaigns, Elections I
   Read: KJK, Chapter 11

8 November—Voting, Campaigns, Elections II
   Read: KS, Chapter 11

13 November—The 2012 Election
   Read: B, All

15 November—Political Parties I
   Read: KJK, Chapter 12

20 November—Political Parties II
   Read: KS, Chapter 12

22 November—Thanksgiving Holiday

27 November—Interest Groups I
   Read: KJK, Chapter 13

29 November—Interest Groups II
   Read: KS, Chapter 13

4 December—Media and Politics I
   Read: KJK, Chapter 14

Saturday, 8 December (2-4 PM)—Media and Politics II; Reform of Institutions
   Read: KS, Chapter 14; KJK, Chapter 15

11 December—**Final Exam, NOON-2:30 PM**