POL 101-02 Introduction to American Government  
Fall 2019  
M-W-F: 10:30AM – 11:20AM  
Johns Hall 109

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Office: 111N Johns Hall  
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Email: brittany.arsiniega@furman.edu  
Final exam: Monday, December 16, 8:30AM-11AM, Johns Hall 109

“Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.” - Franklin D. Roosevelt

Introduction and Course Overview:

It is an important time to be studying American politics. The President is controversial both at home and abroad. The 116th Congress is meeting amidst turmoil internationally and domestically, increased partisan polarization and debates about the proper way to handle issues like migration at our Southern Border, trade with China, and the role of the Supreme Court in public policy. The 2016 Presidential election shows that the American public is not only divided but also increasingly distrustful of most political institutions. The change in the power balance that occurred in the 2018 midterm elections shifted President Trump’s ability to carry out his agenda. Many Democrats are contending to win the nomination to run against Trump in the 2020 general election.

How should we govern in this political climate? How are decisions be made, and how should they be made? To answer these questions, an important goal of the course will be to develop a greater understanding of the role of power in our political system. In particular, we will focus on the delicate balancing act between the various holders of power in our democracy: the President, Congress, the Judiciary, the states, the media and ordinary citizens. We will focus on the questions: How did the Founding Fathers envision the distribution of power in our political system? What does the Constitution say about the structure of power in our democracy? How has the struggle for civil rights and civil liberties throughout our history redefined this power distribution? How powerful is the modern media in our political system and how powerful should it be? How do the various branches of government share power and how does this contribute to (or prohibit) effective policy-making?

Perhaps most importantly, we will focus on the questions: What power lies in the hands of ordinary citizens like you to shape and determine the direction of our political system? How can we ensure that the power to shape our political system is widely accessible and not reserved for a few elite?
In many ways, an effective and legitimate democracy depends on the active participation of informed and involved citizens. The goal of this course is to begin to provide you with the information and skills to become a true participatory member of our democracy.

This course will not be a passive learning experience. You will be required to participate actively in class discussions and in-class projects. In this class, you will learn how to be an informed, involved and participatory citizen. You will learn how to engage in rational and informed deliberations about issues confronting our political system. And, in the process, hopefully you will learn about the benefits (and costs) associated with living in a democracy.

Because different students have different learning styles, this class will include a mix of teaching mediums including traditional lectures, class discussions, cooperative learning projects, and individual writing assignments.

**Required Materials:** The following materials are required for this course:

1. Barbour, Christine and Gerald C. Wright. 2016. *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics. 9th Edition.* CQ Press. (“KTR”) (Available in Furman’s bookstore; also available through online retailers). **Note: Purchasing an older (i.e. 8th edition) is OK, and will save you some money.**


3. National Public Radio's (NPR) *Morning Edition,* which is a radio show that runs weekdays and is available online (https://www.npr.org/programs/morning-edition/) and through the NPR app. You are expected to listen to the “News Brief” segment of *Morning Edition* each weekday; this segment is about 12 minutes long and highlights the most important stories of the day.

4. Selected readings on Moodle.

**PLEASE NOTE:** *The New York Times* is a significant portion of your reading load and you should schedule accordingly. Consider it a “textbook” for the course. Becoming a daily reader of the news and keeping informed is an essential component to being a good democratic citizen.
**Learning Objectives:** Furman is a liberal arts institution devoted to providing all members of its community with “engaged learning experiences that connect classroom work to meaningful research, global study, professional practice, and projects that have direct community impact” ([https://www.furman.edu/furman-advantage/](https://www.furman.edu/furman-advantage/)). To that end, this course is designed to get you actively engaged not just in a course, but in a life experience. The human brain is unable to focus for long when it is in a passive state (Bligh, 2000; Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Hake, 1998; Jones-Wilson, 2005; McKeachie, 2002; Spence, 2001; Svinicki, 2004). Knowing this, my goal is for you to engage actively in a learning experience that we share as a class.

Substantial research on learning shows that most students retain little of what is transmitted through lecture and texts unless they have the opportunity to be hands-on, engaged learners responsible for their own learning. In other words, my role is more than just teaching you the facts – but, also, teaching you how to think, how to collect and process information on your own, how to weigh the merits of various theories and positions and how to apply what you know in new contexts (Wirth and Perkins 2008).

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, you will learn the kinds of questions political scientists ask about the American political system and how they investigate those questions. You 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 you to participate effectively in civic life both within and beyond Furman’s gates. 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.

**Attendance policy and expectations:** As your classmates agreed on the first day of class, you will be permitted four “freebies” absences during this semester, for which I do not need to hear from you. I will take attendance at the beginning of every class. Students who miss more than four days
of class (unexcused) will have their final exam grade for the class lowered by \( \frac{1}{3} \) (from a B+ to a B, for example) for each additional class, beyond the first four, that they miss. This A freshman who misses in excess of 15% of the class meetings or an upperclassman who misses in excess of 25% of the class meetings for any reason will be dropped from the course with a grade of “F” (Furman University Catalog). If you are not in class (e.g., you arrive late) when I take attendance, you will be marked absent. If your personal circumstances will result in you arriving late on a regular basis, please see me to discuss.

Regardless of the cause of your absence, you are responsible for material covered in class. Therefore, if you must miss a class, it is very important that you get the notes from another student in the class (not from me). You are also responsible for any changes in the syllabus and any announcements related to assignments or exams announced in class.

As an incentive to attend each class, students with zero unexcused absences will be permitted to drop two of their lowest current events quiz grades (instead of just one).

**Academic integrity:** Academic Integrity standards are important to our Furman community and will be upheld in this class. Students should review the Academic Integrity Pledge posted in the classroom and resources available on www.furman.edu/integrity. All violations of this policy will be referred to the Office of Academic Affairs.

**Additional resources in the Center for Academic Success (CAS):** The Writing & Media Lab (WML) is staffed by student Consultants who are trained to help you improve your writing and multimodal communication skills. The consultation process is non-directive and intended to allow students to maintain ownership of their work. In addition to helping with the nuts and bolts, WML Consultants also support you in developing your own ideas thoughtfully and critically, whether you’re writing an essay or planning a video or other multimedia project. You may drop into the WML during its regular hours (in the basement of the library, room LIB 002; 9 AM to 10 PM) or visit the Writing and Media Lab website to make an appointment online.

**Peer Tutors are available free of charge** for many classes and may be requested by dropping by CAS (LIB 002) or on the Center for Academic Success website. Tutors are typically recommended by faculty and have performed well in the class.

**Professional Academic Assistance** Staff in CAS can provide students assistance with time management, study skills, and organizational skills.

The Writing and **ESL Specialist** provides professional writing support as well as support for students whose primary language is not English.

**Accommodation requests:** The **Student Office for Accessibility Resources (SOAR)** is committed
to helping qualified students with disabilities achieve their academic goals by providing reasonable academic accommodations under appropriate circumstances. If you have a disability and anticipate the need for an accommodation in order to participate in this class, please register with the Student Office for Accessibility Resources. They will assist you in getting the resources you may need to participate fully in this class. You can contact the SOAR office at 864-294-2320 or at soar@furman.edu. You can find additional information and request academic accommodations at the SOAR webpage.

**Electronic device policy:** We agreed as a class that you are permitted to use a laptop in class, but only for note-taking. However, a note of caution: research shows that students who take their notes on laptops rather than hand-writing notes perform worse on conceptual questions, process less information, and have trouble reframing new information in their own words.\(^1\) Furthermore, research provides evidence that there really is no such thing as multi-tasking, instead we “task switch.” As such, you are likely to learn more and perform better without technological distractions. And, task-switching on laptops (i.e., browsing the internet or social media) interferes with your nearby peers’ ability to pay attention.\(^2\)

During exams, students should put their cell phones or other electronic devices away or leave them at the front of the room with me. If I see you using a cell phone or electronic device in your hand once the exam begins (regardless of the reason), you will fail the exam and I will report the incident to the Office of Academic Affairs.

**On your preferred name and pronouns:** Class rosters and University data systems are provided to instructors with students’ legal names. However, knowing that not all students use their legal names or sex/gender assigned at birth, I am happy to use the name and/or pronouns you use. We will take time during our first class together for you to fill out a brief introduction card on which you can tell me your preferred name and pronouns. Additionally, if these change at any point in the semester, please let me know and we can develop a way for you to share this information with the class in a way that is comfortable to you.

\(^1\) Pam A. Mueller and Daniel M. Oppenheimer. 2014. “The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard: Advantages of Longhand Over Laptop Note Taking.” *Psychological Science.*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

**Final grade determination:** Final grades will be calculated on the following basis:

- Current events quizzes: 18%
- Policy brief: 22%
- [Annotated bibliography (5%); Factsheet (5%); Policy Brief (10%); Presentation (2%)]
- Midterm Examination: 20%
- Final Examination: 25%
- Participation/attendance: 15%

**Total** 100%

Descriptions of letter grades (from the *Furman University Catalog*):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Excellent. The mark of highest distinction earned by those students whose work represents the best that can be expected of a student at Furman.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Good. The mark of distinction earned by those students whose work represents a high degree of achievement in meeting the characteristic demands of the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Satisfactory. The mark earned by those students who have attained such familiarity with the content of the course and such ability to apply this knowledge as may be expected of a student who gives to the course a reasonable amount of time, effort, and attention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Marginal. The lowest passing grade representing inferior work. It indicates that the student would be seriously handicapped in attempting subsequent courses for which this work is a prerequisite.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Failure. The mark indicates unconditional failure. No credit earned.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Grading scale:**

- A+  (99-100)
- A   (93-98)
- A-  (90-92)
- B+  (88-89)
- B   (83-87)
- B-  (80-82)
- C+  (78-79)
- C   (73-77)
- C-  (70-72)
- D+  (68-69)
- D   (63-67)
- D-  (60-62)
You are expected to complete each assignment on time. **Assignments are due at the beginning of class** (in hard copy or submitted by email) on the day indicated in the syllabus. Late assignments will be graded down ⅓ letter grade increment (from a B+ to a B, for example) for each day they are late. Any paper handed in after class on the scheduled date will be considered one day late. Exceptions will be made only in the case of documented illness or university-related absence *and only if you have communicated with me first*. Students who must miss class for a university-scheduled event must make arrangements to turn in the assignment ahead of time or have another student turn in the assignment at the scheduled time.

Requests to take the final exam at a time that differs from the University final exam schedule must be approved by the Associate Academic Dean.

**Contacting Me:** Email is the most efficient way to reach me. Please note that I am available via email only between the hours of 8-5 EST M-F. On average, it takes me 24 hours to respond. If I don’t respond, try again. It’s not personal. I (and the rest of your professors) get a ton of emails. Please read these guidelines on [how to communicate with your professors](#).

**DESCRIPTION OF COURSE ASSIGNMENTS:**

**Current events quizzes (18% of final grade):** While we will discuss current events often throughout the semester, we will spend one day approximately every other week reviewing and discussing some of the major events in American politics from the previous two weeks. Every two weeks, we will begin our course with a quiz from *Morning Edition* and *New York Times*. We will have a practice quiz in class on Friday, August 30. There are seven quizzes; I will keep your six highest grades. Each quiz is worth 3% of your semester grade. As an incentive to attend each class, students with zero unexcused absences will be permitted to drop two of their lowest current events quiz grades (instead of just one). The dates of the quizzes are as follows:

- Friday, September 13
- Friday, September 27
- Friday, October 11
- Friday, October 25
- Friday, November 8
- Friday, November 22
- Friday, December 6

**Examinations (45% of final grade):** There will be two exams in this class. The exams will be a combination of short answer identifications and essay questions drawing from the assigned readings as well as the lecture notes. The exams will be closed-book and closed-note, in-class exams. In the spirit of cooperative learning, you are encouraged to study with your student colleagues.
The midterm exam will constitute 20% of your grade in this class. The midterm exam will be during class on **Friday, October 4**. The final exam will constitute 25% of your grade. The final exam will be at its university-scheduled time on Monday, **December 16 from 8:30 AM – 11:00 AM** in our normal classroom. The final exam will be cumulative. The dates for the exams are not negotiable. Please make your travel arrangements accordingly. Absences due to illness or a death in the family must be excused by the Dean’s office. Students who must miss an exam due to a university-scheduled event must make arrangements to take the exam ahead of time.

**Policy Brief (22% of final grade):** Over the course of the semester, you will work toward becoming an expert on a very small slice of public policy and writing a practically perfect, beautifully crafted, and incredibly concise policy brief. You can find detailed instructions for each part of this assignment on Moodle, and we will spend class time going over each element of the assignment. Your project idea is due **Friday, September 20th** (this is ungraded, but required). Your annotated bibliography is due **Wednesday, October 16th** (worth 5% of semester grade). A draft of your factsheet is due **Friday, November 1st** (this is ungraded, but will be peer-reviewed in class). Your final factsheet is due **Friday, November 15th** (worth 5% of semester grade). A draft of your policy brief is due **Monday, November 25th** (this is ungraded, but will be peer-reviewed in class). Your final policy brief is due **Wednesday, December 4th** (worth 10% of semester grade). We will schedule in-class presentations of your policy issue, which will be worth 2% of your semester grade.

**Participation/attendance (15% of final grade):** You are expected to do all of the required reading and to come to every class session. In addition, you are expected to participate actively in the class discussions. Simply attending class but not participating actively in the class discussion will result in a participation grade of C, because I strongly believe (and the research supports) that you learn the material in a more meaningful way when you actively engage in the class discussion and are forced to articulate your thoughts orally as well as in written form. Another way to demonstrate your participation in this course is to visit me during office hours to discuss, question, reflect on, or otherwise engage the course material.

**On flexibility:** This syllabus is subject to change. Any changes will be announced in class. It is your responsibility to be aware of any changes. Please note that the dates are approximations. My primary interest is that you learn the material and learn it well. If we decide to spend more or less time on a topic (because you find it easy, difficult or just particularly interesting), so be it. If you are feeling uncertain about where you should be with the reading, just ask me.

**TL;DR: IMPORTANT DATES:**

- **Friday, September 13:** Current events quiz
- **Friday, September 20:** Policy brief project idea due
- **Friday, September 27:** Current events quiz
- **Friday, October 4:** Midterm exam
Friday, October 11: Current events quiz
Wednesday, October 16: Annotated bibliography due
Friday, October 25: Current events quiz
Friday, November 1: Draft of factsheet due (ungraded, but in-class peer review)
Friday, November 8: Current events quiz
Friday, November 15: Final factsheet due
Friday, November 22: Current events quiz
Monday, November 25: Draft policy brief due (ungraded, but in-class peer review)
Wednesday, December 4: Final policy brief due
Friday, December 6: Current events quiz
Monday, December 16: Final exam

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Weekly reading schedules will be posted to Moodle each Friday for the following week.

Week of August 26:
Introduction to and overview of the course; getting to know each other; syllabus review

Weeks of September 2, 9, 16, & 23
Unit 1: Historical foundations of American government; governance and power
   Topics covered: Pre-constitutional history and politics; U.S. Constitution; Post-convention politics: The Federalist Papers; Development of federalism, and federalism today; The Bill of Rights; The struggle for equal rights: due process and equal protection

Weeks of September 30, October 7, 14, 21, 28
Unit 2: Political participation and political intermediaries
   Topics covered: Public opinion: what shapes it, why it matters, and how we can measure it; Political parties and campaigns: party platforms, activities, and strengths; Polarization; Interest groups: formation, maintenance, influence; Voting: campaigns and elections

Weeks of November 4, 11, 18, 25, December 2
Unit 3: Political institutions of U.S. government
   Topics covered: Congress; the presidency; the bureaucracy; the American legal system; the judiciary; the media

   NOTE: I will be gone the week of November 11 traveling to Chile for the APEC conference. You will have reading and independent work that I will assign once the date gets closer.
December 9

Policy brief presentations

December 11

Study day

Final Exam: Monday, December 16, 8:30AM-11AM, Johns Hall 109