Professor: Dr. Danielle Vinson
Office: 111C Johns Hall, 294-3241
Office hours: 10:30-11:20 a.m. MWF, or by appointment.

Course Description: This course is an introduction to American government and politics. A key feature of American politics today is political polarization; Americans are divided by party, ideology, and other factors. The one thing that seems to unite everyone is that no one thinks American Government is working well. Government fails to solve problems the country is facing, and many people feel unrepresented. So how did the country get here, and what solutions are available? Many who complain have lost sight of the realities of American government, the system established by the Constitution, and how the founders expected it to function. In an effort to understand the causes of the current dysfunction, we will try to step back from the partisanship and look at what the Founders set up and how and why it has changed.

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, and what limits the power of various groups and institutions. As we look at how the political system has developed over time, we will pay particular attention to how political polarization affects the public and the institutions of government. 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. And ultimately, we will evaluate possible solutions to the problems we identify in American government.

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 two midterm exams (10% each) on the reading and class discussion. Dates for these are listed on the syllabus. 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 on the syllabus. Do not ask the instructor to change the date or time of the final; she has no authority to do so.

--Research Project (30% total): Students will use a variety of methods to investigate how and why public opinion is polarization on a current issue in American politics. More information on this assignment is provided at the end of the syllabus. RP assignments 1-4 (10%); Content Analysis Paper (10%); Research Paper (10%)

--Simulation (10%): There will be a congressional simulation later in the semester. In addition to class time, it will take up one evening. The dates are listed on the syllabus, and students should plan accordingly. More information will be provided on the simulation as the term progresses.

--Homework assignments (5%): Written homework assignments will be posted on Moodle or provided via email. They will be graded on a 10-point scale. These will not be accepted after the deadline without an excuse from a doctor/trainer or the Associate Dean. Students who have a planned excused absence the day
a homework assignment is due must turn assignments in on time. Students may drop the lowest homework grade if they attend three relevant outside events (see “optional events” below for details).

--Participation (15%): Learning is not a passive activity, and students have a responsibility to themselves and to each other to be prepared for and to participate in class. To be able to participate effectively, students should complete the reading and homework assignments by the beginning of class on the date listed on the syllabus and keep up with news. To facilitate this, there will be unannounced quizzes on the reading. On these quizzes, students may use any notes they themselves have taken on the reading (not the reading itself—notes should be in a separate document or paper). The grading rubric for these quizzes and how they affect the student’s participation grade can be found on Moodle. I will drop the lowest quiz grade. Students may not make up quizzes. Excused absences on a quiz day will not affect the student’s grade. Unexcused absences will result in a zero on that quiz. Be on time to class so you don’t miss quizzes.

To help students focus on the reading, the professor will provide questions at the end of each class for the next day’s reading. Students should also come up with at least one question they’d like to discuss related to each day’s reading. Students should feel free to raise questions about the reading or relevant current events in 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 documentation from Student Health or a doctor that the student needs to miss class for health related reasons or from the Associate Dean if the student is representing the University in some capacity. Students who know that they are going to be absent when assignments are due must turn in homework and papers on time and take exams in advance. In the case of unexpected absences due to illness, students are responsible for the work they missed, including homework assignments, class notes, and announcements.

Optional Events: Students are 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 (the professor will let you know about these), and there are often CLP lectures relevant to politics. Attendance at such events is not required, but it can help a student’s participation grade. Attendance at 3 of these events will allow students to drop their lowest homework 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: As soon as you walk in the classroom, turn off cell phones or other electronic devices including laptops and ipads. 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. If the use of a computer is part of your academic accommodations from the Student Office for Accessibility Resources, please see me at the beginning of the semester.

General Assignment Guidelines: Unless told otherwise, the following guidelines apply to all assignments:
-- For any assignments with a word limit, you can have leeway of +/-50 words. Bibliography does not count toward the word limit.
-- Use the Chicago Style for author/date for parenthetical citations and bibliography (https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html). Also see “Citation Guidelines” on Moodle.
-- Upload assignments to Moodle. Turn in hard copies only when specified on the syllabus or assignment.
Late assignments will be penalized 10 points per day. **They will not be accepted more than 3 days after the assignment is due unless students follow guidelines for extensions below.**

Assignment Deadlines and Extensions: Due dates for all assignments are listed on the syllabus. They are not suggestions; they are requirements. Failing to turn in assignments on time will result in a 10 point deduction for each day the assignment is late. Start assignments early enough to avoid stress and unexpected problems; see the professor if you encounter difficulties along the way. Back up your work and/or print it frequently to avoid catastrophes related to demon-possessed computers. Occasionally, unforeseen circumstances (for example, serious illness or family emergency) may warrant an extension on an assignment. Extensions must be requested **before** the assignment is due (not after). You should be prepared to show the professor what has been done on the assignment up to that point (rough draft, research notes, etc.) and explain the reason for requesting the extension with appropriate documentation (a note from a doctor, confirmation of family emergencies from the Associate Dean’s office, or IT in the case of late night computer crash eating the final draft of the paper). The professor will determine if an extension is warranted and the length of that extension. Extensions will not be granted for procrastination, problems that could have been resolved in advance with consultation with the professor, or a common cold.

**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. Students should review the Academic Integrity Pledge posted in the classroom and resources available on [www.furman.edu/integrity](http://www.furman.edu/integrity). If students are unsure what constitutes academic dishonesty or plagiarism, they should consult the professor.

**Accommodation Requests:** If you anticipate the need for an academic accommodation to participate in this class, please register with the Student Office for Accessibility Resources (864.294.2320 or soar@furman.edu). You can find additional information and request academic accommodations at the SOAR webpage. Please make accommodation requests as soon as possible.

**Books:** The following books are required and are available from the Furman bookstore.

**Additional Reading:**
--Keeping up with the daily news is essential for this course, particularly for class discussions. Therefore, students must follow either the [New York Times](https://www.nytimes.com/) or [Washington Post](http://www.washingtonpost.com) daily. You can find reduced subscription rates for students (a few dollars per month) at these links: [Academic Rate for the Basic Digital subscription](http://www.nytimes.com/subscriptions/edu/lp8W37U.html).

--Other reading will be posted on Moodle.

Additional (reputable) free news sources:
[www.politico.com](http://www.politico.com) (Politico)
[www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org) (National Public Radio—it is an independent public affairs news organization)
[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/) (The News Hour on the Public Broadcasting System—independent news of the day’s events)
Course Schedule and Reading Assignments:
Aug. 28—Introduction
Aug. 30—What do you think?
   **Reading:** Barbour Chapt. 1; **bring completed worksheet to class** (Do NOT put your name on it!)
   In class: after reading everyone’s worksheet, write at least one paragraph about what you have learned about the political views of your classmates and how you reacted to what you learned.
   Will this information affect the way you participate in class? If so, how? If not, why not?
Sept. 2—Labor Day, no class.

I. Historical foundation
A. Creating a Government
Sept. 4—American Political Culture: what does it mean to be American?
   **Reading:** Barbour, Chapt. 2 (p. 33-42)
   *Declaration of Independence* (on Moodle)
   >> In what ways do you see the fundamentals of American political culture (as explained in Barbour, p. 13) in the Declaration of Independence?

The Constitution
Sept. 6—Reading: Barbour, Chapt. 2 (p. 42-54, 66-68)
   Robertson, “The Constitution and America’s Destiny” (on Moodle)
   >> What evidence do you see in the news coverage that the way the Founders set up the government in the Constitution is making policymaking in the U.S. is difficult to do?

Sept. 9—Reading: *The U.S. Constitution*; James Madison, *Federalist No. 51* (both on Moodle)
   RP #1 emailed to DV by noon.

Sept. 11—Reading: James Madison, *Federalist No. 10* (on Moodle)

Sept. 13—Current Events Discussion
   **Homework #1** due at beginning of class (bring hard copy)

B. Federalism
Sept. 16—Reading: Barbour, Chapt. 2 (p. 54-66)
   Kettl, “Federalism: Sorting out Who Does What” (on Moodle)
   >> What are the different types of federalism? How do the state and national governments influence each other?

Sept. 18—Watch video ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcR_Wg42dv8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcR_Wg42dv8))
   >> What are the advantages and disadvantages of having national and state governments?

Sept. 20—Discuss Research Project
   **Reading:** Research Project
   Vinson, “Content Analysis” (p. 156- top of 167)
   Vinson, Congress and Media (p. 92-108) (all on Moodle)

Sept. 23—Library resources with Librarian Steve Richardson (bring computer to class)
Sept. 25—Exam 1 (covers everything through Sept. 20)

C. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights
Sept. 27—Development of civil liberties
   **Reading:** Barbour, Chapt. 3 (p. 72-90)
   Constitution (Amendments I-X, XIV); Sullivan (p. 23-38) (on Moodle)
   RP #2 due by beginning of class (bring hard copy).

Sept. 30—Current issues in first amendment liberties
Homework #2 due at beginning of class.

Oct. 2—Civil Rights
Reading: Barbour, Chapt. 3 (p. 90-109)
Brown v. Board of Education (1954) (Moodle)

Oct. 4—Current Controversies in Civil Rights
>>Pick a current controversy in civil rights that interests you and read a news story about it. (Possibilities: racial profiling in policing; gay rights vs. religious freedom; gender equity; discrimination against a particular group; voter suppression policies)

Oct. 7—Research Project: Micropolitics
Reading: Brooks, “Incorrect Assumptions”
Steele, “Micropolitics” (both on Moodle)
RP #3 due (bring hard copy to class)

II. The Public and Political Intermediaries
Oct. 9—What influences opinion?
Reading: Barbour, Chapt. 8 (p. 247-262); Goidel, Chapt. 2 (Moodle)
Oct. 11—Ideology
Reading: S&E, Chapt. 1-2

Oct. 12-15—Fall break, no class.

Oct. 16—Measuring public opinion
Content Analysis paper due by beginning of class (upload to Moodle).

Oct. 18—Voting behavior: are people rational?
Reading: Barbour, Chapt. 8 (p. 262-282)
Oct. 21—Elections
Reading: S&E, Chapt. 3
Oct. 23—Parties
Reading: Barbour, Chapt. 7 (p. 213-233)

Oct. 25—Current Events Discussion
Homework #3 due at beginning of class (bring hard copy)

Oct. 28-30—Interest groups
Reading: Barbour, Chapt. 7 (p. 233-245)

Nov. 1—Exam 2 (Covers everything from Sept. 27-Oct. 30)

III. Political Institutions
A. President
Nov. 4—Reading: Barbour, Chapt. 5 (p. 149-166); Neustadt, “Power to Persuade” (Moodle)
Nov. 6—Reading: S&E, Chapt. 4

Nov. 8—Current Events Discussion; Read simulation paper assignment
Homework #4 due at beginning of class (bring hard copy)

B. Congress
Nov. 11—Goals of members of Congress
Reading: Barbour, Chapt. 4; Vinson (on Moodle)
Nov. 13-Nov. 15—Legislative process
Reading: S&E, Chapt. 5

Nov 18—Simulation in class. Simulation paper due (upload to Moodle by beginning of class)
Simulation in JH 101 7:30-10:00 p.m. (dress professionally)

Nov. 20—Simulation Debrief; current events. Homework #5 due at beginning of class (bring hard copy).
C. The Bureaucracy
Nov. 22—Reading: Barbour, Chapt. 5 (p. 166-179); Reich, “Locked in the Cabinet” (Moodle)
Nov. 25—Reading: Look for news coverage of the White House staff and the bureaucracy.

Nov. 27-Dec. 1—Thanksgiving break, no class.

D. The Judicial Branch
Dec. 2—Reading: Barbour, Chapt. 6; Marbury v. Madison (on Moodle)
Dec. 4—Reading: S&E, Chapt. 6
Dec. 6—Research Paper and RP#4 due by beginning of class (upload to Moodle).

IV. Assessing American Government (and fixing it?)
Dec. 9—Reading: S&E, Chapt. 7

Dec. 11—Study Day

Final Exam Wed. Dec. 18, 8:30-11:00 a.m.

POL 101 Research Project: Doing Political Science

Overview: Political Science is the systematic study of politics and government. It attempts to understand, explain, and predict political behavior, and it uses a variety of methods—quantitative and qualitative—to do so. One of the most important developments in American politics over the last twenty years is political polarization. We’ll be reading one book on polarization in class. In this research project, you will add to the scholarly conversation by employing a variety of methods and data to try to understand and explain political polarization in the context of one issue in American politics that interests you. Your audience will be political scientists who study the issue as well as politicians, journalists, and citizens interested in understanding and perhaps bridging political divides in the US. For all parts of the assignment, use Chicago author date style parenthetical citations and a bibliography to cite sources (click here for details); we will not use footnotes or endnotes.

Steps in the Research Process:
1. Choose an issue/problem currently facing the United States that interests you. You must pick an issue (not a person) that divides people in the US; it can’t be something we all agree on. You can start with a broad issue, but you’ll probably need to narrow it down over the course of this project. For example, you might start with racism, but eventually you’ll need to figure out if you want to focus on white nationalism or racial injustice in policing or some other aspect of the issue. Possible topics include climate change, immigration, abortion, gun violence, health care, budget deficits (or other fiscal issues like spending or taxing), US trade relations with other countries, or other issues you may come up with. [Important Note: the purpose of this project is not to advocate for a particular position on the issue or topic you choose. You will be trying to understand how and why people are polarized on this issue. If there are issues on which you aren’t willing or able to encounter and study perspectives that differ from your own, you should not choose those issues. You’re a political scientist studying the issue, not a lobbyist.]

   • **RP 1 due Sept. 9:** Select your issue and write one paragraph describing your views/position on the issue. What groups do you identify with or what experiences have you had that have shaped your views on this issue? Write a second paragraph describing what you think are the views/positions of Americans on a different side of the issue from you. No outside sources required; this is your opinion. Email to DV.

   • **RP 2 due Sept. 27:** Research the issue using credible sources (scholarly research, government research, information from think tanks or other reputable organizations). Using your research, summarize the arguments and evidence on each side of the debate and use it to explain what
supports your view and what refutes it and what supports the other side and what refutes that. I’ll be looking to see if you’ve made the best case you can for each side while also noting the weaknesses of each. Use parenthetical citations and a bibliography to cite your sources. [Note: you can write this part of the assignment as a paper or in a detailed outline or bullet points. Use whatever format works for you. You should be able to do it in 2-3 pages.] Bring a hard copy to class.

2. Public opinion on the issue: 
   **RP 3 Survey research due Oct. 7:** Look at surveys of public opinion to see what American citizens think about this issue. Look at breakdowns of opinion by group (party, demographics, etc.) to identify evidence of polarization. Write a paragraph describing your findings; be sure to include information about the survey (who did it and when, and citation). Bring a hard copy to class.

3. Content Analysis due Oct. 16: 
   There is evidence that media (particularly partisan media) contribute to polarization. What do partisan or ideological media sources report on your issue? **Systematically analyze recent partisan/ideological media coverage of the issue** (do not go back further than a year for the coverage). To do this, you need to identify sources of content you’d like to study: you can look at major national papers’ opinion sections (be sure about which columnists are on the right and left), partisan cable news like Fox and MSNBC, or other sources of commentary (national magazines like the *New Yorker* or *National Review*). Pick the sources first; then search for stories related to your issue, using the same time period for each source. Collect all the relevant articles or videos for each source during the time period. If your search yields more than 20 stories, then consult with Dr. Vinson to decide how you can select a sample of 20 stories without biasing your results. You must have at least 16 stories for this analysis (expand the number of sources or time period as needed if you don’t find the minimum number in your first search).

   - Turn in a 1200-word paper (+/-50) double-spaced explaining your method for conducting the content analysis and presenting your findings. What have partisan media covered on your issue, and how does coverage from each side compare? Be sure to cite your sources in the correct Chicago author date style.

4. Micropolitics: Talking to and observing people on different sides of the issue you’re studying to understand what they think and why they think that.
   - Think of people who are part of the groups you identify with—politically, economically, religiously, socially, or in other ways related to your background and identity. Talk to them (in a group or individually) about politics and the particular issue you’re studying—what do they think about it and why; what is their reaction to some of the information you’ve learned that might challenge their views?
   - Then, find people or groups that differ from you politically and/or in other important ways related to identity and talk to them or observe their discussions on politics and the issue you’ve chosen to study.

   **RP 4:** For both groups: take notes on how and why you chose the people/groups that you include and how you conducted your discussions or observations. Take notes on the discussion and your observations of how people react. Try to ask the same questions or observe the same things with each group (be systematic). **You will turn in your notes with your final research paper on Dec. 6,** but please remove names or other information that would allow specific people to be identified, and do not identify specific individuals in the research paper. You may identify individuals by broad categories if you are reporting something they said (for example: young, white, female Republican; older Muslim male; etc.). We’ll talk in class about the ethical obligations of doing research with human subjects.

5. Final Research Paper due Dec. 6 by the beginning of class. Upload to Moodle (put field notes and paper in 2 separate documents)
You will write a paper that uses the research you have done to explain how and why opinion on the issue you have chosen is polarized. The paper should offer a thesis or make a central argument that answers the research question. You should use the research you have done in sections 1-4 to provide evidence that supports your thesis/argument. You may revise and incorporate earlier portions of the research assignment into this paper where they are relevant, but be sure to organize the pieces coherently and connect them so everything fits together and flows smoothly as a single paper.

The paper should include the following:

-- **Meaningful Title** (so, not Research Project!)
-- **Introduction** of your issue and the thesis/argument the paper will make regarding how/why opinion on your specific issue is polarized.
-- **Discussion of your research methods.** With what groups and how did you conduct your interviews or observations; how did you conduct your content analysis?
-- **Present your findings and evidence** from your research. This section should provide evidence to support your thesis.
-- **Conclusions.** Why are your findings important? What do they help us understand about political polarization in the US? What are the implications or consequences of your findings?

Papers should be 2100-2400 words (about 7-8 pages double-spaced). The bibliography should not be included in the word count. Please number pages. Papers should be properly documented with both a bibliography and parenthetical citations in the text as needed (use Chicago author date style citations). Use parenthetical citations within the paper when you quote, paraphrase, or use information from a source, and include that source in the bibliography. Failing to do this is plagiarism and will not be tolerated. A grading rubric is available on Moodle; reading it will help you understand expectations for the assignment and how you will be graded.

Late papers will be penalized 10 points per day. **Papers will not be accepted after December 9 except where students have followed the process for requesting an extension.** Students who do not turn in a paper by Dec. 9 will fail the course.