

PSC 100-D  
MW 3.30-4.45, Hawkins 0143  
Office: Hawkins 149G

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Office Hours: Mon. 2-3pm / Wed. 4.50-5.30pm / Thur. 2-3.30pm / other times, email me

*\*\*you can reserve time during scheduled office hours using Cardinal Star, or just drop-in*

## **US NATIONAL POLITICS Fall 2018**

### **About the Course**

This class is a survey of the constitutional, political, and social bases of the American political system. It examines the structure and functions of the leading institutions of the national government as well as evaluating historical and contemporary political issues and ways in which governmental decisions are made. Students will gain a foundation in American politics that is important not only for possible future coursework in Political Science, but also for being a critical thinker and active participant in the political world around us.

To these ends, this course is organized around two approaches: (1) an historical narrative on American political development and political institutions; and (2) a critical perspective on the exclusions built into US national politics and on the means of challenging those exclusions. By developing both of these themes in relationship to one another, we will come to understand how the way we narrate the history of American national politics is itself a political act. These guiding principles will enable us to analyze issues such as the ongoing interplay between federal and state levels of government, the gaps between foundational American principles and exclusion in the practice of American government, the relationship between governance and political practices, the importance of institutions for understanding American politics, and more. They will also provide a framework for analyzing our current political situation.

The course emphasizes primary documents and academic writing, while lectures on the historical development and institutions of American government will supplement the readings. We will also consistently use course material as a lens onto current events in our political world. Your final project, in which you will create a podcast, will bring together these dimensions of the course as you analyze a contemporary political issue in relation to ideas and material from class.

### **Course Learning Outcomes**

By the end the semester, students should be able to successfully:

- Demonstrate knowledge about the foundations of American government and politics, and the history of American political development.
- Analyze the multiple perspectives on American national politics and evaluate competing narratives about the history of American Government
- Assess primary sources and secondary academic scholarship in relation to political events
- Discuss political issues in a way that uses evidence and academic writing conventions
- Explain their own political orientation in oral and written form

## General Education Learning Outcomes

This class fulfills the Social Sciences General Education requirement. Following a course in this category, students will:

- Demonstrate understanding of the methods social scientists use to explore social phenomena, including observation, hypothesis development, measurement and data collection, experimentation, evaluation of evidence, and employment of mathematical and interpretive analysis
- Demonstrate knowledge of major concepts, models and issues of at least one discipline in the social sciences
- Read with comprehension
- Communicate effectively in written and oral expression
- Evaluate and use technology effectively
- Filter, analyze, and critique information and experience

## Evaluation

- Class citizenship, including attendance: 25%
- Moodle forum: 20%
- Take-home essays: 30% (2 essays, 15% each)
- Final podcast assignment: 25%

Grades will be assigned in accordance with the SUNY Plattsburgh College Catalog: *Superior*: A (92.5-100), A- (90-92.4); *Above Average*: B+ (87.5-89.9), B (82.5-87.4), B- (80-82.4); *Average*: C+ (77.5-79.9), C (72.5-77.4), C- (70-72.4); *Passing but unsatisfactory*: D+ (67.5-69.9), D (60-67.4); *Failing*: E (0-59.9)

I reserve the right to incorporate pop quizzes on the readings/podcasts, which would become part of your class citizenship grade.

## Assignments

- Class citizenship (25% of overall grade): I care about whether you come to class and the role you play in it; our class will be most rewarding if you attend regularly, and if you are an active citizen. I expect you to come on time, to listen, and to participate. After three absences, the class citizenship part of your grade will decrease for each additional absence. Class citizenship, however, entails more than just showing up, it also means participating in class.
  - Participation can take many different forms: asking questions about unclear concepts or materials, raising ideas we as a class or the author may have overlooked, respectfully sharing opinions, volunteering to read passages aloud, visiting office hours, contributing to class discussions in large and small groups without monopolizing conversations, paying attention to me and to your classmates, and taking risks when there are questions asked that have no clear answers. Participation does not only mean talking—it also means working to be aware of the space you inhabit and how you can best contribute to an atmosphere of supportive learning.
  - I understand that speaking in class, especially a large class, can be challenging. We will have a number of different kinds of discussions to encourage participation, and you should use the blog as a way of preparing ideas to bring to our class sessions. Regularly coming to office hours and discussing the readings can contribute to your class citizenship grade as well, as does asking questions in class.

- Last but not least, class citizenship means being receptive of and interested in others' political perspectives, respectful of experiences different than your own, and open to having others disagree with you.
- Moodle Forum (20% of overall grade): Throughout the semester, you are responsible for writing 5 responses to current events and posting 8 discussion questions on the readings/podcasts to Moodle.
  - To count, responses and questions must be posted by 8am the day of class, in relation to one or more readings/podcasts from that day
  - Current event responses (approximately 250 words): You will 1) summarize a news story about a current event of political significance at the national, state, or local level (approx. 75-100 words), and 2) analyze how one or more readings/podcasts for class that day relate to that current event (approx. 150-175 words)
    - Your news stories should come from: *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Press-Republican* (Plattsburgh), *Times-Union* (Albany), *Boston Globe*, *LA Times*, *The Guardian*, and similar outlets. You can refer to other kinds of media in your post, but the focus should be on these outlets
  - Discussion questions: Your questions should be something you would want to talk about in class: something in the material that is especially interesting; a question opening up critiques of the reading/podcast, a question making connections to other material from the course; a question connecting the material to contemporary events, and so on. Your questions shouldn't be something any of us could answer quickly through Google, but rather are meant to open conversations.
  - You can complete these mostly on your own preferred schedule, with two caveats: 1) you *must complete 2 responses and 4 questions by 10/10*; and 2) you *cannot post a response and a question for the same day, and cannot post more than one discussion question per day*
  - You can write (substantive, respectful!) responses to others' responses and questions, for a little bit of extra credit – the more substantive responses, the more extra credit.
- Take-Home Essays (30% of overall grade—2 essays, 15% each): There are two take-home essay assignments throughout the semester; they each count 15% toward your final grade. The two essay due dates are 9/26 and 11/26. They will require you to write approximately 1000-1100 words, and you will have the assignment at least one week before the due date.
- Final Podcast Assignment (25% of overall grade): The main form of the final assignment will be creating a podcast analyzing a contemporary political phenomenon.
  - There will be a specific set of guidelines as to what will be included in your podcast.
  - You will have the option to work individually, or in a group of 2-4 people (the more people in a group, the longer the podcast will be required to be).
  - We will build up to this assignment throughout the semester, including a tutorial on audio recording + editing and feedback as you develop topics. We are also frequently listening to podcasts for class.
  - I am familiar with making podcasts and with audio recording and editing, and will be a resource for any technical difficulties you run in to.

- My goal with this assignment is to offer everyone an of-the-moment (and dare I say fun?) way to demonstrate critical thinking and analysis different from a traditional research paper. This assignment will also build technological skills relevant beyond the classroom.
- If they wish, students can opt out of the podcast assignment, instead writing a research paper. I will provide guidelines for this alternate assignment when the podcast assignment is distributed.

### **Texts**

All material for this course will be provided in PDF/electronic form through Moodle.

### **Inclusivity and Classroom Environment**

The diversity of this classroom and campus is a strength. I intend to cultivate a classroom environment that is attentive to and respectful of diversity in its many forms, including but not limited to the intersections of race, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class/socioeconomic background, ability, age, culture, national origin, religion, and political and philosophical opinion. I strive for inclusivity in education, understood as a demonstration of equity through awareness, understanding, and respect for the ways that the differences, identity, culture, background, and experience, and socialization impact how we live and learn. Please let me know if something said or done in the classroom, by either myself or a fellow student, is particularly troubling. Even when the intention may not be to cause discomfort or offense, the impact of what happens is not to be ignored.

I believe that the best way to learn and engage with the course material is adopting a critical perspective. I expect us to challenge all taken for granted assumptions, including our own. To this end, we have to first give all arguments the benefit of doubt, learn how these ideas are constructed, and how they operate in our political world. This class is an open floor for all types of ideas as long as we acknowledge that there might be fundamental differences in our opinions and political positions, cultivate respect for each other, and avoid discriminatory language.

Further, disagreement (including with me!) is inevitable in a political science class, and can be generative for everyone in the room, so long as it proceeds equitably. A diversity of opinions and experiences can be a source of learning for us all. It is also likely that readings in this class will contradict your beliefs. My conviction is that, as the [American Association of University Professors writes](#), this kind of challenge “is inevitable in classrooms if the goal is to expose students to new ideas, have them question beliefs they have taken for granted, grapple with ethical problems they have never considered, and, more generally, expand their horizons so as to become informed and responsible democratic citizens.”

### **Question Time**

Students are welcome to anonymously submit any questions they have about American politics to <http://freesuggestionbox.com/pub/wslibcn>. This site is free and 100% anonymous—only I can see the posts. There is a lot about American politics – especially given current trends in social media and digital publishing – that is confusing. I will dedicate time each week/every other week, and do my best to answer any question you have, such as: “I keep hearing this X, but I don’t

understand X,” “A person on Twitter said X, are they right?,” “X thing happened, can you explain the basics of it,” etc.

### **Accessibility and Student Support Services**

It is the policy of the College that any student requiring accommodations of any kind to fully access this course must be registered for accommodations with the Student Support Services office located in the Angell College Center. If you need any accommodations for this course, please contact Student Support Services at 518-564-2810.

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. If there are ways I can assist you in reaching your full potential in class, please talk to me or email me. Please feel free to bring and use (quiet) fidget/stim toys in the classroom.

### **Learning Center**

The Learning Center (101-103 Feinberg) offers many resources that may be useful for this course, including free appointment and walk-in tutoring, academic peer mentoring, “academic personal trainers,” and more. Visit the [Learning center website](#), contact them, or ask me for a referral. I am also available to answer any questions, to help with readings, to brainstorm, to assist on assignments, to offer advice, and more – email me or drop-in during office hours.

### **Technology**

Numerous studies (for example [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#); for an overview see [here](#)) demonstrate that, on aggregate, students taking notes by hand learn information more effectively and receive higher grades than those taking notes electronically, even when those on devices are exclusively focused on class tasks (which is hard to do!). Moreover, many of us (myself certainly included) find it difficult to pull ourselves away from social media, news, etc. when we have screens in front of us. Finally, in a class that will involve lots of discussion with one another, screens, alerts, and notifications can distract you and your classmates, and can impede the conversations that will be essential to our experience in the course this semester.

Nevertheless, all of our readings for the course are in PDF/electronic form, and I recognize that laptops/tablets are important to the learning of many students. So, while I encourage you to print out course materials and take written notes, you may use laptops and tablets for referencing readings and taking notes in class; you may NOT use your phones. Any in-class use of technology (e.g., laptop, tablet, etc.) or other activity that is disruptive to your fellow students or to me will result, without warning, in you being deemed absent for that class. If you have concerns or want to take to me for advice on technology use, please come talk to me.

### **Academic Honesty**

It is expected that all students enrolled in this class support the letter and the spirit of the Academic Honesty Policy as stated in the College Catalog.

Academic misconduct and dishonesty—such as cheating, plagiarism, submitting someone else’s work as your own, submitting work from other classes, etc.—are serious offenses. Such acts violate the trust that forms the foundation of the student-teacher relationship, they take away opportunities to learn, and they discount the work of others, including peers, faculty, and

scholars. In particular, plagiarism constitutes intellectual theft and is unacceptable. Any acts of suspected academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will be addressed through the [Suspected Academic Dishonesty Procedure](#).

### **Other course policies and notes**

- If a student has a desired name that is not listed on my course roster, please let me know.
  - Students are encouraged to notify me of their gender pronouns. I use he/him/his pronouns.
  - Check your email regularly – I will do the same for you.
  - I strongly encourage you to come visit my office hours, even if only to chat; if the times listed don't work, email me so we can figure out another time to meet.
  - If you are struggling with any aspect of the course, talk to me sooner rather than later so we can work on the ways to best help you. Please also consider visiting the Learning Center.
  - If you would like a little bit of extra credit, email me a cute animal picture by 8am on August 29 to demonstrate that you have read all way through the fine print of the syllabus
  - If a religious holiday that you observe conflicts with an assignment, please let me know in advance so that we may discuss alternate options.
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### **Reading Schedule**

*Subject to changes, which will be announced in class and over email. When there are multiple readings, please read them in the order listed.*

*For podcasts, stream them at the links provided on Moodle, or download them via iTunes, Stitcher, etc.*

### **I. Introduction to Studying US National Politics**

**8/27:** Introductions; what does it mean to be an American (to political scientists)?

- Listen to *A Few Reasonable Words* podcast, “Ep. 65, What Does it Mean to be an American?” (2018)
- Jane E. Dmochowski, “10 Things This Instructor Loves” (2015), *Chronicle of Higher Education*

**8/29:** Debating American political culture

- Read the syllabus, start to finish
- Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (1955) excerpt in Cannon et al., *The Enduring Debate*
- Rogers Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America” (1993), excerpt in Cannon et. al., *The Enduring Debate*
- Listen to *New Books in Political Science*, “Lilliana Mason, Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity” (2018)
- Catch up on the podcast and Dmochowski reading from 8/27

### **II. The Founding Era and Constitutional Debates**

**9/3:** The Declaration of Independence

- Declaration of Independence (1776)

- Listen to *Ben Franklin's World*, “Danielle Allen, Our Declaration” (2015)
- Robert G. Parkinson, “Did a Fear of Slave Revolts Drive American Independence?” *The New York Times* (2016).
- Howard Zinn, “A Kind of Revolution” in *A People's History of the United States* (1990), excerpts

#### 9/5: Constitutions

- US Constitution (1787)
- *Great Law of Peace of the Iroquois Nation*, excerpts (c. 1451)
- *New York Times*, “Iroquois Constitution: A Forerunner to Colonists' Democratic Principles” (1987)

#### 9/10: Debating the Constitution: Federalists

- Federalist No. 10
- Federalist No. 51

#### 9/12: Debating the Constitution: Antifederalists

- Brutus No. 2
- Brutus No. 5
- Melancton Smith, “Speech in the New York Ratifying Convention, June 21, 1788”

#### 9/17: Debating the Constitution: Alexander Hamilton

- Kenneth M. Dolbeare and Linda Medcalf, “The Dark Side of the Constitution,” in *The Case Against the Constitution: From the Anti-Federalists to the Present* (1987), excerpt
- *Hamilton (Original Broadway Cast Recording)*, selected songs: listen to the playlist at <https://johnamcmahon.com/2016/08/08/hamilton-110/>

#### 9/19: Debating the Early Republic: Race and Empire

- Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, pp. 76-7 + “chap. 5, The Birth of a Nation,” *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* (2014)
- Richard Young and Jeffrey Meiser, “Race and the dual state in the early American republic” (2008), in *Race and American Political Development*, ed. Lowndes, Novkov, and Warren

#### 9/24: Federalism

- Martha Derthick, “How many Communities?” in *Keeping the Compound Republic: Essays on American Federalism* (2001), pp. 9-32
- Listen to *A Few Reasonable Words* podcast, “Ep. 48, What's Federalism Got to Do with It?” (2017)
- Michael Stratford, “Trump endorses states' rights – but only when he agrees with the state,” (2018), *Politico*

#### 9/26: ESSAY DUE

- No reading

### III. Civil Rights, Civil Liberties, and Race

#### 10/1: Slavery and the Civil War

- Frederick Douglass, “What To The Slave Is The Fourth of July?” (1852)
- Abraham Lincoln, “First Joint Debate,” in Robert W. Johannsen, ed., *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 51-55.

**10/3:** Debates in the Civil Rights era

- Martin Luther King Jr., “Letter From A Birmingham Jail,” April 16, 1963
- Malcolm X, “The Ballot or the Bullet,” April 3, 1964
- Fannie Lou Hamer, “Testimony to the Credential Committee, Democratic National Convention,” August 22 1964

10/8: NO CLASS (Indigenous Peoples Day/fall break)

**10/10:** Civil Liberties, the basics

- Bill of Rights
- Ken I. Kersch, “The Right to Privacy,” in David J. Bodenmaer and James W. Ely, Jr., eds, *The Bill of Rights in Modern America* (2008), read pp. 214-29
- Cass R. Sunstein, Chapter 5 “Free Speech,” in *Why Societies Need Dissent* (2003), pp. 96-110

**10/15:** Abortion and the Right to Privacy

- *Roe et.al. v. Wade, District Attorney of Dallas County* 410 U.S. 113 (1973), excerpt
- *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*, 112 S.Ct. 2791 (1992), excerpt
- TBA on *Whole Women’s Health v. Hellerstedt* (2016)

**10/17:** Mass Incarceration

- Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow* (2010), “Introduction” and “The Lockdown”

**IV. People and Institutions in Politics**

**10/22:** Voting Rights in the United States

- Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (2000), pp. 159-62
- Ari Berman, “Why the Voting Rights Act Is Once Again Under Threat,” NY Times (2015)
- Listen to *NPR Fresh Air*, “Do Voter ID Laws Prevent Fraud, or Dampen Turnout?” (2012)
- Brennan Center for Justice, “Debunking the Voter Fraud Myth” (2017)
- Gregory Downs, “Today’s Voter Suppression Tactics Have A 150 Year History,” *Talking Points Memo Series on Voting Rights and Democracy* (2018)

**10/24:** Money and Elections

- Listen to *New Books in Political Science*, “Richard L. Hasen: Plutocrats United” (2016)
- Seth Masket, “Just How Much of a Problem is Campaign Money?” *Pacific Standard* (2013).
- Jonathan Bernstein, “Why Campaign Finance Laws Make Things Worse.” *Bloomberg Views* (2014).
- Listen to *We the People/National Constitution Center* podcast, “The constitutional and political impact of Citizens United” (2016)
- Optional: Listen to *Decode DC*, “Episode 133: The FEC Is a Watchdog that Doesn’t Bite”

**10/29:** Political Parties and Polarization (don’t worry, most of these are short)

- Elena Veatch, “Seth Masket Answers 7 Questions on Political Parties” *The Campaign Workshop* (2018)
- Nolan McCarty, “What we do and don’t know about our polarized politics,” *Washington Post* (2014)

- Richard Pildes, “How to fix our polarized politics? Strengthen political parties.” *Washington Post* (2014)
- Julia Azari, “Politics is More Partisan Now, But It’s Not More Divisive,” *FiveThirtyEight* (2018)
- Choose one of:
  - Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *It’s Even Worse Than it Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism* (2012), Introduction, pp. 84-103, and pp. 163-178
  - Lee Drutman, “American Politics has Reached Peak Polarization,” *Vox* (2016)

### **10/31: The 2018 Midterms**

- TBA readings/podcasts on 2018 elections
- Julia Azari, “Why the 2016 Election Won’t Go Away,” *FiveThirtyEight* (2017)

### **11/5: Congress**

- Eric Schickler, “Institutional Development of Congress,” in Paul J. Quirk and Sarah A. Binder, eds., *The Legislative Branch* (2005), pp. 35-62.
- Mary Hawkesworth, Case study on Congress, from “Chapter 8: Intersectionality” in *Feminist Inquiry* (2006)

### **11/7: The Presidency**

- Listen to *A Few Reasonable Words*, “Ep. 24: Presidential Power & the Unitary Executive” (2017)
- Robert Dallek, “Power and the Presidency, from Kennedy to Obama,” *Smithsonian Magazine* (2011)

### **11/12: The Presidency**

- Julia R. Azari, “Trump’s presidency signals the end of the Reagan era”, *Mischiefs of Faction* (2016)
- Matt Glassman, “The Root of White House Chaos?” *New York Times* (2018)
- Listen to *New Books in Political Science*, “Meredith Conroy, Masculinity, Media, and the American Presidency” (2016)

### **11/14: The Supreme Court**

- Federalist No. 78
- Cass R. Sunstein, “Judges and Democracy: The Changing Role of the United States Supreme Court,” in Kermit L. Hall and Kevin T. McGuire, eds., *The Judicial Branch* (2005)

### **11/19: The Supreme Court**

- C-SPAN, “Original Intent and a Living Constitution: Antonin Scalia & Stephen Breyer” (2010) – start watching at 12:50 of the video
- Jedidiah Purdy, “God Save the United States from this Anti-Democratic Court,” *The Daily Beast* (2014)

(11/21 NO CLASS)

### **11/26: ESSAY DUE**

- No reading
- In-class podcast tutorial
- In-class visit from Global Education Office

**11/28: Social Movements**

- “The Seneca Falls Declaration and Resolutions”
- Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I A Woman”
- Combahee River Collective, “Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organizing in the Seventies and Eighties”
- “Guiding Principles,” *Black Lives Matter*
- Listen to *New Books in Political Science*, “S. Laurel Weldon, *When Protest Make Policy*” (2013)

**12/3: News (and Fake News) (\*\*or other topic chosen by students)**

- Listen to *NPR Hidden Brain* podcast, “Fake News: An Origin Story” (2018)
- Listen to *A Few Reasonable Words* podcast, “Ep. 61: How to Think About the Media (Part 2: Partisanship & Bias)”
- Dan Hopkins, “All Politics is National because All Media is National,” *FiveThirtyEight* (2018)

**12/5: Conclusion, Review, and Major Themes**

Finals week begins 12/8

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