American Politics  
PS 0200  
3 Credits

1. This is an introductory course in American politics. The course is suitable for beginning political science students or students who wish to complete the course as part of a “general education” requirement. The purpose of the course is to teach students both about the American political system and about broad concepts social scientists use to study politics.

2. Basic algebra is a suggested prerequisite for this course.

3. The grade in this course is based on examinations and an optional “debate the issues” assignment.

4. In the course’s optional “debate the issues” section, students would be asked to construct arguments surrounding a controversial issue of the day. Students should work in groups to present these arguments both in a short paper and in a speech. Each group, then, would produce a series of papers and speeches. This optional section may come at the end of the term, as a “capstone” that uses material learned throughout the semester.


The following is a list of topics that should be included in the course. Although the topics are listed here in a somewhat intuitive order, they may be covered in any order that works best for the students. The “broader concepts” ought to be discussed throughout the course, as they are relevant to the specific topics.

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<tbody>
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<td>Philosophical influences on the founding</td>
<td>Institutional design</td>
<td>The Missouri Compromise</td>
<td>Relationship to majority rule</td>
<td>Powers of Congress</td>
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<td>The Continental Congress</td>
<td>Separation of powers</td>
<td>The Civil War</td>
<td>The first ten amendments, esp. the first</td>
<td>Elections</td>
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<td>Declaration of Independence</td>
<td>The Great Compromise</td>
<td>Dred Scott</td>
<td>“Incorporation” and the 14th Amendment</td>
<td>Representation</td>
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<td>Institutional design and development</td>
<td>The 3/5 Compromise</td>
<td>Reconstruction and Jim Crow</td>
<td>Criminal rights</td>
<td>Legislative Organization</td>
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<td>Ratification</td>
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5. Congress (continued)
   - Parties and Committees
   - Legislative process

6. The Presidency
   - Historical context of the presidency
   - The Modern Presidency
   - The powers of the president
   - The “bully pulpit”
   - The power of the veto
   - The federal bureaucracy
     - Bureaucratic autonomy
     - Congressional control
     - Presidential control

7. The Judiciary
   - McCullough v. Maryland
   - Dred Scott
   - The Supreme Court
   - The Federal Courts
   - Judicial decision-making
   - Separation of powers

8. Public opinion
   - Polling practices
   - Attitudes/Ideologies
   - Partisanship
   - Party development
   - Information acquisition
   - Framing effects
   - Demographic divisions in public opinion

9. Voting and Elections
   - Turnout
   - Electoral laws
   - Voters’ decision-making
   - Interest groups
   - Campaign finance

10. Broad concepts/problems
    - Collective action problems
    - Coordination problems
    - Delegation and principal-agent problems
    - Institutional “stickiness”

Optional “debate the issues” topics
   - How much influence should public employees unions have?
   - How much oversight should the federal government have over the financial industry?
   - Should the government step in to decrease income inequality?
   - Is business-style competition a good model for improving schools?
   - Does the federal government take too much power from the states?
   - How will the Tea Party affect the American political landscape?
   - Is the United States in a global clean energy race?
   - Is “Obamacare” a good law?
   - Is WikiLeaks a threat to national security?
   - Should the US move to a carbon tax to protect against global climate change?
   - Should the United States negotiate with the Taliban?
   - Should the US amend the Constitution in the wake of the Citizens United decision?