Introduction

The American Political System is an introductory course that surveys the many facets of American politics. While we will examine the constitutional framework of the American system, as well as voting, political parties, interest groups and our national institutions, we will also address several enduring and challenging questions of democracy, sovereignty, liberty, equality and rights. Although I hope you will attain a mastery of this subject matter, the course is also designed to assist you in developing your ability to read, think and write critically and analytically. The most serious goal of the class, however, is to learn about politics and our democracy in such a way as to encourage all of us to participate actively, frequently and intelligently.

Academic Integrity

As stated in the Honor Code of Guilford College, all students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. This class will maintain and support these standards, specifically the section of the Guilford College Honor Code quoted below:

Academic honesty and integrity represent central elements of the liberal arts education at Guilford College. As scholars pursuing knowledge and truth, informed by the Quaker testimony on integrity, we seek a community where each member acts responsibly and honorably in all activities and at all times. Acts of dishonesty represent a serious offense at Guilford College. Guilford College defines plagiarism broadly as presenting the interpretations, wording, images, or original conceptions of others as one’s own without appropriate acknowledgement. Individual faculty members determine what constitutes appropriate acknowledgement within the context of their courses, either by
What keeps bureaucracies from being more effective?

Why are political parties and interest groups necessary evils in politics?

### Learning Outcomes

Students that successfully complete this course can be expected to demonstrate learning based on two different and important outcomes or goals. Both of these goals represent the central purpose of this course.

First, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of human behavior in the context of society. Specifically this course asks students to engage in questions central to their place, purpose, action and responsibility within the American political system, broadly defined. How do students understand and explain their rights and responsibilities as political actors within this system, either as citizens, residents or visitors. Given the central place of individual knowledge, action and responsibility in our political system, this course is organized in order to provide students with basic concepts, skills, knowledge and purpose for being an engaged individual politically. In service of this outcome, students will over the course:

Appropriate acknowledgment for the purposes of this course requires giving credit where credit is due to the work of others described above. All sources used for completing assignments for this class must appear in the bibliography of a paper; not doing so constitutes plagiarism and violates appropriate acknowledgement according to the standard practice within political science. Any use the work of others requires acknowledgment by citing the original author with a complete Chicago Manual footnote citation.

While learning from others represents an essential component of academic and intellectual inquiry, failure to give proper attribution to words, concepts, and evidence borrowed from others constitutes plagiarism, which is a serious academic offense. Any requirement for this course containing plagiarized material will, at minimum, receive a grade of F. Repeated or flagrant use of plagiarized material, even in a single assignment, may lead to the grade of F in the course, at the discretion of the professor. All honor code violations other than plagiarism will also be addressed in this manner.

In order to avoid unintentional errors, follow the guidelines on avoiding plagiarism in Chapter 33 of Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers. While not required to purchase for the class, please consider obtaining Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers. Using this or another reputable writing guide will help you avoid plagiarism. If you have questions about avoiding plagiarism, also please do not hesitate to contact me.
1. Explain, compare, and contrast theories, major ideas or principles in political science.
2. Apply different theories, major ideas, or principles of political science to understand events or identify solutions for problems.
3. Describe the methods of inquiry in political science.
4. Demonstrate oral and/or written communication skills reflective of the discipline.

A second objective for the course is to develop a useful and necessary skill set that will assist students in academic success at Guilford College. Assignments, class activities, simulations, and work with a group outside of the classroom will all foster and enable the development of library and research skills, computer literacy and competence, as well as public speaking and listening.

Course Books

The following books will be read for this course:


Other required readings will be available from the professor. In addition, it is highly recommended that all students purchase the Simon and Schuster Handbook for Writers as this is used in this course and is an excellent resource for all serious writers.

Grading, Course Policies & Detailed Requirements

Grading for the course will be consistent with the guidelines of the College. To that end, as discussed in the Faculty Handbook:

The grade of A is awarded for original insight, sound reasoning and the ability to evaluate the scope of the materials studied.

The grade of B reflects interpretive skill on the part of the student and a clear understanding of the meaning and interrelatedness of the course materials.

A grade of C indicates thorough familiarity with the basic facts and concepts considered in the course, even though underlying principles may not have been grasped.

Although D is labeled a passing grade, it reflects a lack of fundamental knowledge of the subject.

The grade of F is assigned for failing work.

In addition to the above criteria from the Faculty Handbook, mechanical, grammatical and stylistic skills in written assignments are also considered in determining grades.

Furthermore, it is extremely important for each student to affirm his/her commitment to the course and the work necessary to achieve the learning objectives outlined here. While there are numerous ways of recognizing student effort, the common standard at Guilford is to assign academic credit using the ratio of one credit unit per semester for each three hours of consistent effort per week. This course affirms this practice and this level of commitment is required to attain the learning objectives outlined here. This means that students should be prepared to spend 2.5 hours in class each week and at least 9.5 hours each week preparing for class.
Course Requirements

The course requirements include class participation (attendance and discussion), written summaries, reading quizzes, short papers and a final exam. Please note that no late work will be accepted. You must complete all requirements in order to pass the course. Failure to complete one or more of the course requirements will lead to a failing grade in the course except in extraordinary circumstances.

Final grades are based on 400 points and are calculated by this formula:

80 points (20%) Class participation
40 points (10%) Summaries (2)
80 points (20%) Reading quizzes (5)
120 points (30%) Short papers (2)
80 points (20%) Final exam

Class Participation & Discussion

This element of the course includes class attendance, the ability to answer questions regarding readings in class, and participation in class discussions. Because we will use much of the class time to discuss the readings, I expect you to have done the day’s readings carefully before coming to class and to be an active participant in class discussions.

Additionally, there are two requirements to receiving a good participation grade. First, you must register to vote or provide proof of your current voter registration. Early in the class we will explore how to register to vote and who to contact to begin this process. This would be an excellent opportunity to begin to participate fully in our democracy. Please discuss with me any political, personal or religious obligations that prevent you from registering; alternative assignments can be arranged. The second requirement is that every student must be an active reader of the New York Times. As evidence of your active readership, I will expect every students to reference specific articles in our class discussions. These articles should help us to understand some aspect of American politics that we are currently discussing in class. Failing to demonstrate active and critical reading will result in a lowering of your participation grade.

Attendance is recorded in each political science course at Guilford. In support of Guilford’s core values of integrity and community, it is the responsibility of each student to be present and on time for each class meeting. Arriving late or being absent from class meetings stands contrary to these values. Excused absences are rare. Students seeking an excused absence should be prepared to provide the instructor with certifiable documentation and justification for the absence to be excused (e.g. doctor’s note). Each unexcused absence beyond the first one will result in a 1% deduction from a student’s final grade in the course. Further, in support of the college-wide policy on attendance as noted in the Student Handbook, any student missing 10% of class meetings in a semester (e.g. six changes from a twice a week course)
any student missing 20% of class meetings in a semester (e.g. six absences from a twice-a-week course) may be administratively withdrawn from the course by the Academic Dean's office. Students with concerns about attendance should speak directly with the faculty member. Students with perfect attendance will also receive a 20-point bonus to their final grades.

Finally, while I expect each student to participate fully in class discussions and activities, participation should be respectful and always with an eye toward valuing the larger whole of our community of learners in the class. Rudeness, excessive side conversations and such run counter to community. Two additional reminders will also greatly help build a sense of community in our class. First, please refrain from using cell phones (silence them), texting, providing Facebook status updates, playing games or anything else that takes you out of our common activity. While I do encourage students to access the web to enhance their participation in a particular discussion, please limit your activities to those things related to our class. I use technology in class and you may too. However, there is a proper place for this. Second, try to learn the names of your fellow students. I will make every effort to call on people by name. When speaking of or to others, try to use their name. Doing so will help us all achieve richer discussions.

**Summaries**

A basic skill necessary to succeed in this class is the ability to summarize a complex work in a very short and succinct manner. You will write two brief summaries of designated readings over the first two weeks of the term. Good summaries will not only provide the central argument or thesis of each reading, but also illuminate the on the evidence provided and the logic used by the author. Each individual summary must be no more than 150 words in length. All words (even "a"), count. Summaries over 150 words will be dropped a full grade. Summaries must be turned in as hard copies during special office hours. I will discuss your writing, grade your summary, and provide any feedback on your writing at this time.

**Reading Quizzes**

Approximately seven quizzes will be given in class over the course of the term. The quizzes will test your comprehension of the readings. All quizzes will be given at the beginning of a class. All quizzes will be "pop" quizzes, given without prior notice. Because these quizzes cover material discussed in class the day they are given, these quizzes cannot be "made up" at a later date. The quizzes will test basic comprehension of the readings assigned for class that day. They also reinforce developing good study and time management skills. While there are seven quizzes, only your top five grades will be used to calculate your overall quiz grade. As good note taking represents an essential element in successful learning, notes taken by the student (apart from physical copies of the readings) can be used in taking reading quizzes. In fact, success on the reading quizzes depends on comprehensive, easily accessible, and organized notes.

**Short Papers**

Each student is required to complete a minimum of two short papers for this course and may write a maximum of three papers. Although students do not need to complete three paper assignments, if a student does complete three assignments, only the student’s top two grades will count toward the student’s final grade in the course.
Students may write a paper on any of the questions that begin each section of the class. If writing a paper on a question for that section, the due date of the paper falls on the day before the final class of that section. All papers are due at 6pm the day before the final class meeting of a section. For example, if you are writing on whether interest groups and parties are harming our politics, your paper must be turned in no later than 6pm on Thursday, 27 September.

The following instructions sheet & grading rubric contains requirements for writing a paper and also a table for understanding how your paper will be evaluated; the rubric will be discussed in class early in the semester. Each paper must be submitted as a Google Document and posted before the deadline of the assignment. I will post comments on these Google Documents and you will be able to review them right away. Papers not properly posted by the deadline specified on the assignment or modified after the deadline will not be graded and receive a zero. Similarly, only papers that have met all the requirements will be graded.

Finally, all students must write a short paper on either of the first two section questions (“How are political opinions and knowledge acquired?” or “Why are political parties and interest groups necessary evils in politics?”). Writing at least one paper by this time will allow your midterm grade to reflect at least one paper assignment.

**Final Examination**

The final exam is a equal combination of multiple choice and essay questions covering material from the entire semester. The final exam will be held on Wednesday, December 12 from noon to 2:30.

**Course Calendar**

Below is a general outline of how the course will proceed. As the course progresses, it is possible that specific reading assignments for each class will be changed to reflect our progress. As always, it is important to stay aware of any changes in the calendar and updates on specific reading assignments. Presentation slides from class, when used, will be available as YouTube videos and will be posted under a given meeting date.

**Enduring questions about American politics**

**T 21 August**

Introduction

**F 24 August**


American Government, Chapter 1 "What Should We Know About American Government?"

**T 28 August**

Question #1: Why is government so political? 

Alan Blinder, "Is Government Too Political?" Foreign Affairs 56.
Why are political parties and interest groups necessary evils in politics?

How are political opinions and knowledge acquired?

Why are political parties and interest groups necessary evils in politics?
What can be done to make Congress more effective?

T 2 October
U.S. Constitution, Article I.
American Government, Chapter 9 "Congress".

F 5 October
C-SPAN exercise

T 9 October

F 12 October
American Government, Chapter 8, "Campaigns and Elections".

T 16 October
No class, Fall Break

F 18 October
No class, Fall Break

Are great presidents good for American democracy?

T 23 October
Nicollo Machiavelli, The Prince, excerpts.

F 26 October
U.S. Constitution, Article II.
American Government, Chapter 10, "The Presidency".

T 30 October

F 2 November

What is democratic about a powerful judiciary?
T 6 November
US Constitution, Article III.
American Government, Chapter 12 "The Judiciary".
Comiskey, "The Supreme Court Appointment Process: Lessons from Filling the Rehnquist and

F 9 November
US Constitution, Amendments I-X (Bill of Rights).
American Government, Chapter 3 "Civil Liberties"
Gratz v. Bollinger 539 US 244 (2003) (Click "Play" button in lower left of the window)

How does policy reflect and reject the politics of the day?

T 13 November
American Government, Chapter 13 "Making Domestic Policy".
Budget Puzzle activity (complete before class and bring a print-out of your solution)
2011 Budget Proposal interactive

F 16 November

What keeps bureaucracies from being more effective?

T 20 November
American Government, Chapter 11 "The Bureaucracy".
Peters, "Why Bad News Doesn't Travel Up," American
Politics, pp. 439-447.
Columbia Accident Investigation Board Report, Volume 1, Part
Two, Chapter 8.

F 22 November
No class, Thanksgiving Break

Would direct democracy be a better political system?

T 27 November
David Broder, Democracy Derailed, Introduction and Chapter 1.

F 30 November
(1957), pp. 135-150. [Begin reading at Part IV on page 139].
166-174.
T 4 December
  Review class; no new reading.

F 9 December
  No class, Reading Day.

W 12 December
  Final examination; noon - 2:30 p.m.