

# Political Science 1100

## Course Syllabus

### Spring 2017

Dr. Michael Lyons  
[michael.lyons@usu.edu](mailto:michael.lyons@usu.edu)  
Office Telephone: 797-1312

Office: Main 330D  
Office Hours: M 4:30-5:30, WF 2:30-4:30,  
and by appointment. Normally I am also  
available TT after 12:00.

## Course Description

This course introduces the institutions and processes of U.S. government to students with little or no background in the subject. It is a survey course, and covers a broad range of topics including: the U.S. Constitution, federalism, judicial review, civil rights and liberties, democratic theory, voting, elections, political parties, campaigns, Congress, the Presidency, interest groups, and public policy.

The course stresses the real workings of contemporary government more than history, and has an analytic rather than a structural or normative emphasis. This means that we will devote relatively little class time to the formal organization of government. Nor will we debate issues, advocate worthy causes, celebrate the genius of the Constitution, or try to promote good citizenship. Instead, our objective will be to explain the *logic* of U.S. government.

With this emphasis on logic, P.S. 1100 does not consist of detachable, independent modules of information, as an encyclopedia does. Instead, the course resembles a novel more than an encyclopedia. The key protagonists are politicians and voters. We will begin the course by explaining how the U.S. Constitution and U.S. election laws govern the interactions between these protagonists. We will assume--as the constitutional framers did--that self interest, rather than morality or enlightened reasoning, motivates politicians and voters. Thus, politicians advance their self interest primarily by winning reelection while voters try to capture the maximum benefits from government with the minimum exertion of effort, largely failing to become politically informed. About halfway through the semester, it will all start to make sense.

Understanding the unique character of the U.S. political system will require us at times to contrast our system with alternative forms of representative democracy. The explanation of elections will involve mathematical calculations and mathematical constructs, such as probability and proportionality. The course will also touch upon economics and budgetary terminology, the origins of Christmas and Santa Claus, the Wizard of Oz, Game of Thrones, the NBA playoffs, the art of Picasso, the divorce rate in Maine, nutrition research, the five factor personality theory, and U.S. bottled water consumption.

Some of you may question the need for general education courses such as P.S. 1100. Don't. The analytical and scientific thinking skills, writing ability, mathematical comfort, and insight into human behavior that you will receive in your general education will benefit you more than you can possibly foresee--no matter what your career or life situation becomes. Eventually, you will appreciate general education more than anything else you acquire at USU.

Students should not assume that the 1000-level number of the course indicates that the course is easy. Few students find the course easy. Most find it challenging, especially the essay exams and the grading standards. The 1000-level number indicates simply that the course has no prerequisites.

## Political Science as an Academic Discipline

Though most nonmajors find Political Science 1100 more interesting than they had expected it to be,

college Political Science is very different than high school civics or history. Political Science is a *science*. As a science of human behavior, it is not as precise as physics is, for example, but it is a theoretical discipline that emphasizes the application of abstract logic in the analysis of cause and effect. Knowinsometimes g the facts matters, because one cannot analyze without knowing the facts. But Political Science is about *why* as much as it is about *what*. Conceptual precision and clear, specific writing are essential to performing well in a college political science course. Political Science sometimes also requires students to consider conflicting perspectives on issues, and this can frustrate those seeking one correct solution to every problem.

## Course Learning Objectives

1. To provide students with a conceptual understanding of the essential features of the U.S. political system.
2. To apply theory in the explanation of the logic of the U.S. political system; how the Constitution shapes our politics, why we elect who we elect, and why those we elect govern as they do.
3. To stimulate independent thinking about government and political issues.
4. To contribute to the *General Education* of USU students, by giving them critical thinking skills, writing skills, and a better appreciation of human behavior and human organizations.

## Canvas

The course syllabus, course reading assignments other than the text, quizzes, grades, and other course information will be available on Canvas.

## Teaching Assistant and Supplemental Instruction

### Teaching Assistants

Joseph Johnson: j.r.johnson@aggiemail.usu.edu  
Alex Wendt

### Supplemental Instructor and UTF

Savanna Jones: savannamjones@gmail.com  
Brontë Forsgren: bronte.forsgren@gmail.com

P.S. 1100 Teaching Assistants are USU political science graduate students who, under the instructor's close supervision, do most of the course grading. The Supplemental Instructor and UTF are undergraduate students with outstanding academic credentials who will conduct weekly study sections and exam reviews. Attendance at exam review and weekly study sections is voluntary, but highly recommended. In the weekly study sections, the SI discusses lecture material, answers questions, and helps students to develop study and test taking skills. Students should never regard supplemental instruction as substitute for attending class or taking comprehensive lecture notes. Virtually every student who attends supplemental instruction does, however, find it to be beneficial.

## Contacting the Professor

My contact information is at the top of the syllabus. I always prefer to meet students in my office rather than to use other forms of communication. Resort to email if you must in an emergency, or if you have a very simple question, but never for questions that require complex answers. Keep in mind that I am usually available TT after noon, and MWF until I leave (usually around 7:00), even though I do not have office hours at those times. I beg you please not to ask questions when I arrive in the classroom just before class, as I need to focus on putting an outline on the board and getting the computer set up in those precious few minutes. Generally speaking, I like to have students raise questions about lecture material in class, but to bring other types of questions to my office. Please refer questions about when and where SI sessions are held to Savanna Jones and Brontë Forsgren.

## Lectures and Note Taking

Because the class lectures are largely extemporaneous presentations loosely based on outlines and not available on line, and also because only a few of the lecture topics are discussed in the class reading assignments, everyday class attendance and thorough, attentive note taking is absolutely essential to effective performance in the course. Without question, irregular attendance accounts for the majority of poor grades received in the course. It is unusual for an “A” student to miss class at all. Students who miss class more than 3-5 times are likely to fail the course. I urge you to *review* your lecture notes *every day* after class, adding things that you did not have time to write down previously, making notes about the notes to yourself, and bringing questions to class or to my office when you find something confusing.

Students should not expect each day of class to correspond to a particular lecture topic. Some of the more complex lecture topics require will require two or more days of class time. Other topics require no more than 20 minutes or so. Because the course does resemble a novel more than an encyclopedia, missing a day of lecture is much like skipping a chapter in a novel, and students often remark missing a day leaves them completely lost in the course.

## Readings

Required course readings include a textbook and several short articles from other sources. The text is *Government in America, Sixteenth Edition*, by Edwards and Wattenberg, available in the USU Bookstore. There is no reason whatsoever to bring the textbook to class unless you want extra aerobic exercise. In the course outline, reading assignments from the text appear as chapter numbers. In several cases, you are required to read just certain sections of a text chapter. You will be responsible on the exams for graphs, boxes, definitions and other learning aids inserted into each required text chapter, as well as the main body of text. Other course reading assignments, which are journal articles and chapters from books, can be accessed on Canvas. Click on “Files” and then “Readings.”

The relationship between P.S. 1100 readings and lectures sometimes perplexes students accustomed to teachers who draw their lecture material directly from a text. The correspondence between lecture and text material is not very precise, especially at the beginning of the course. Be patient and eventually you will see how it all fits together. The text covers the basics. The lectures and supplemental readings go into much more depth. Students failing to complete reading assignments in advance of lectures may quickly find themselves lost in the course.

## Supplementary Reading Assignment Themes

“Are America’s Best Days Behind Us?” is a *Time* magazine cover story that concisely explains many of the dysfunctional characteristics of the U.S. political system.

“Protectors of a Blameless Citizenry” is about dysfunctional government. It argues that, contrary to popular perception, government bureaucracy isn’t the problem; the American public is the problem.

“Rethinking American Electoral Democracy: Factors that Influence Voter Turnout” explores some of the reasons why the U.S. has such poor voter turnout, and what we might do to improve that turnout.

“Running Scared,” is about the long term consequences of populist reforms designed to make U.S. government more democratic.

“The Governing Cancer of Our Times” is about the public distrust of professional politicians and its destructive consequences for the nation.

“Why the U.S. Has a Two Party System,” is a short, self explanatory piece that I wrote.

“Game Change” is from a book on the 2008 presidential campaign. It chronicles John McCain’s selection of Sarah Palin as his 2008 running mate. There are two versions of “Game Change” on the course website. Language that some may find objectionable has been edited from one version.

“The Mind of Donald Trump” is an assessment of his personality, and how his personality might shape his decision making as president.

“Why Generation Y Yuppies Are Unhappy,” is not true of every member of your generation by any means, but it does explain why some young people have developed and unwarranted sense of entitlement. It blames the problems that your generation has largely on my, “baby boom,” generation.

## Quizzes and Exams

The course has four essay exams and seven online multiple choice quizzes. All of the essay exams will be conducted during the regular class period, except the final exam, which is scheduled by the university. You will have 50 minutes for each essay exam, and 50 minutes to complete each quiz, with two days to access each quiz on Canvas. Each student’s lowest quiz score will be dropped from the grade computations; each student’s lowest essay exam score will be raised to the average of all their essay exam scores.

Each online quiz will contain 10 multiple choice questions based entirely on course reading assignments (including the syllabus), with each correct answer being worth one point. Students are welcome to access the course readings when they take these quizzes—so the quizzes are “open book.” The essay exams will include both shorter and longer questions based entirely on course lectures. They emphasize conceptual comprehension and analysis, not the memorization of facts. Each is worth 30 points and covers material only from the preceding 9-10 days of class lectures and discussion--so the final essay exam will not be “comprehensive.” You will need to buy a large (8” by 11”) “blue book” for each essay exam.

## Essay Exam Dates

Essay Exam #1:	Monday, February 6
Essay Exam #2:	Friday, March 3
Essay Exam #3:	Wednesday April 5
Essay Exam #4—The Final Exam:	Monday, May 1, 11:30-12:20.

## Quiz Dates

Quiz #1:	Thursday, Jan. 19-Friday, Jan. 20
Quiz #2:	Thursday, Jan. 26-Friday, Jan. 27
Quiz #3:	Thursday, Feb. 16-Friday, Feb. 17
Quiz #4:	Thursday, Feb. 23-Friday, Feb. 24
Quiz #5:	Tuesday, March 21-Wednesday, March 22
Quiz #6:	Tuesday, March 28-Wednesday, March 29
Quiz #7:	Tuesday, April 18-Wednesday, April 19

Quiz #1 will cover the course syllabus, “Why Generation Y Yuppies Are Unhappy,” “Are America’s Best Days Behind Us?” and “Protectors of a Blameless Citizenry.”

Quiz #2 will cover text Chapter 1, Chapter 2, and Chapter 13 (13, 13.1 and 13.2 only).

Quiz #3 will cover text Chapter 3 (except 3.3), Chapter 4, and Chapter 5 (5, 5.1, and 5.2 only).

Quiz #4 will cover text Chapter 6, Chapter 7 (7, 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3 only), and “Rethinking American Electoral Democracy.”

Quiz #5 will cover text Chapter 8, “Running Scared,” and “Why the U.S. Has a Two Party System,” and “The Governing Cancer of Our Times.”

Quiz #6 will cover text Chapter 9, Chapter 10 (10, 10.1, and 10.6 only), and “Game Change”

Quiz #7 will cover text Chapter 11, Chapter 12, and “The Mind of Donald Trump,”

There is some flexibility in both the exam dates and the quiz dates, with the exception of the final exam. Note that in several cases, a quiz will cover reading material corresponding to lecture material not yet covered—so students will need to “read ahead.” For example, “Rethinking American Electoral Democracy” is covered on Quiz #4 on Thursday, Feb. 23-Friday, Feb. 24, but we not get to the corresponding lecture material until the following week. “Reading ahead” like this will help you to understand the material better. It also enables us to cover just about the same amount of reading material on each quiz.

## Missed Exams Policy

Students will NOT be permitted to take early exams for any reason, except in the case of the final, which will be offered on two different days. Students who miss an exam as the result of required participation in a university activity or a death in the immediate family will be given the opportunity to take a make up exam during finals week. Students who miss an exam for other reasons—such as weddings, car problems, or work related issues--will receive zeroes on the missed exam.

## Exam Preparation

The key to written exam preparation in P.S. 1100 is effective use of the course study questions. About one prior to each essay exam, I will distribute extensive study questions for that exam. The study questions are designed to help students see the material from the instructor’s perspective and to tie the course materials together. The exam questions are simply variations on the study questions, and always cover the same material. Material not covered in the study questions will not be covered on the exams. I strongly recommend that every student write out an answer, or at least an answer outline, for every study question. I also encourage students to work together in groups to discuss the questions, and to compare and evaluate outlines and written answers.

## Grade Computations

The lowest score that each student receives on one of the seven quizzes will be dropped from the grade computations. The lowest score that each receives on one of the one of the essay exams will NOT be dropped, but it will be raised to the average essay exam score that each student has at the end of the semester. The table below displays the relationship between cumulative exam scores and final grades in P.S. 1100. Note that the grading scale is MORE LENIENT than a standard, high school “94-100=A, 90-93=A-” scale.

Do not assume that the grade computations that you see on Canvas are correct. They are in the ball park, but there is no way to program Canvas to give you accurate grade estimates under the course grade computation policy. Final grades could be higher or could be lower than Canvas predicts, depending upon final essay exam scores. Students who score poorly on an early essay exam, but who improve and who do

well on the final, will, in many cases, be pleasantly surprised. Students who have entirely miss an essay exam, and who fail to make up that exam during finals week, may wind up with grades lower than Canvas seems to predict. The only safe way to compute where you stand is to do the math yourself.

Course Score	Final Grade No Lower Than
90.0% - 100%	A
88.5% - 89.9%	A-
87.0% - 88.4%	B+
80.0% - 86.9%	B
78.5% - 79.9%	B-
77.0% - 78.4%	C+
66.0% - 76.9%	C
64.0% - 65.9%	C-
58.0% - 63.9%	D

Students who with scores lower than 58.0% will normally fail the course.

### Written Grading Criteria

1. Responsiveness to the questions: reading questions carefully and answering them directly.
2. Command of information: demonstrated knowledge of the relevant concepts and facts.
3. Analysis: explaining concepts and facts with logical cause-and-effect relationships.
4. Specificity: presenting concepts and facts exactly.
5. Organization: clarity and coherence of written exams.

Keep in mind that we grade you only on the basis of what you write on your exams, NOT on the basis of how much you study, or how much you “know.” If you know something, make sure your exam demonstrates that you do.

### Grading Standards

Although I occasionally award a bonus point to a student for a particularly perceptive class comment or for correctly answering a question in class, there is no extra credit is awarded for extra work.. Also, certain students do not receive special consideration for any reason, such as the need to maintain a certain GPA to keep a scholarship. In addition, there are no grade quotas, and overall course grade distributions vary from semester to semester. Students who make a "good faith effort" in the course--by attending class at least 90% of the time, paying attention, taking notes carefully, and completing reading assignments--seldom receive course grades lower than "C."

"A" grades in Political Science 1100 are reserved for students who demonstrate a superior understanding of both factual material and the logical relationships between concepts and facts. One common difference between “A” students and “B” or “C” students is that “B” or “C” students “know the answers,” whereas “A” students know *why* the answers are the answers, and they can fully and specifically explain the *logi*. The grade distribution for P.S. 1100 over the last four semesters appears below. About half of the students who have failed the course did not finish it.

Grade	Percentage
A	33%
B	25%
C	25%
D	4%

Most students find the grading standards in P.S. 1100 to be rigorous, and students entering the course directly from high school or junior college should adjust their expectations accordingly. College professors do not establish rigorous grading standards to make students feel inferior, or to intimidate them. We simply want to prepare you for careers in which you will be required to think logically and to write intelligibly. The “grading standards” that most of you will encounter in your postgraduate careers will be far more rigorous than the grading standards in Political Science 1100.

Students sometimes complain about the test-based grading in courses such as Political Science 1100 because they “do not take tests well.” Students who have this perspective need to realize that college amounts to little more than one never-ending four year test, and that it is impossible to have a good experience in college without learning to take tests well. So, learn to take tests well. In Political Science 1100, you will periodically receive study questions, advice, supplemental instruction, and evaluations of your exams designed to improve your test taking skills. Take full advantage of this assistance.

I strongly encourage students to meet with me (or with the SI or a teaching assistant) to question the evaluation of an exam, or to seek further explanation of the reasons for a grade, or to get advice about how to improve in the future. I ask, however, you do so as soon as possible after an exam is returned to you, as we can do much more to help you if you come to us sooner rather than later.

### Tape Recording and Laptop Computers

The tape recording of lectures is not permitted. Note taking on laptop computers in P.S. 1100 is also prohibited. Occasionally, but rarely, I make exceptions to these policies for disabled students or in other special circumstances.

### Classroom Civility

Regrettably, a small minority of USU students demonstrate discourtesy to other students and to instructors by disrupting classes unnecessarily. Such disruptions commonly result from talking to friends, text messaging, bringing young children to class, reading newspapers, and packing notebooks prior to the end of lecture. Never assume that professors or other students fail to notice discourteous behavior of these and other types. Arrive to class on time, turn off your cell phone ringer, sit quietly, take thorough notes in class, ask questions of the instructor, and stay to the end of the period—or do NOT come at all. Discourtesy and disruptions will not be tolerated in P.S. 1100. Students who violate this policy will receive one firm warning, and will be dismissed from class if they cause any further problem.

### Disabled Students

Students with disabilities who are likely to require accommodation by the instructor must contact the instructor and document the disability through the Disability Resource Center during the first week of classes. Requests for special considerations relating to attendance, pedagogy, or exams, etc. must be approved by the instructor.

### Course Outline

The course outline has been provided to help students to understand the course organization and the relationship between lecture topics and reading assignments. Students should not, however, expect that the course will adhere strictly to this outline, as the switch to a new text has resulted in a significant reorganization of the course, and I may revise during the semester.

Week	Lecture Topics	Corresponding Reading Assignments
Part One: Introduction and The U.S. Constitution		
January 9-13	I. Why Study U.S. Government?	The Course Syllabus (Quiz #1)
January 18-20	II. Dysfunctional U.S. Government? A. Functional U.S. government 1915-1990 B. Dysfunctional U.S. government today 1. Paralysis: tyranny of inaction 2. Public apathy and antipathy 3. Interest group control over policy ("hyperpluralism" in the text)	"Why Generation Y Yuppies Are Unhappy," "Are America's Best Days Behind Us?" "Protectors of a Blameless Citizenry" (All on Quiz #1) Chapter 1 (Quiz #2) Chapter 13 (13, 13.1, 13.2 only) (Quiz #2)
January 23-27	III. The U.S. Constitution A. Some basic definitions B. The Federalists, The Framers, Federalism, and the Anti-Federalists C. The framers political philosophy: constrain human self interest, prevent tyranny D. The framers constitutional choices 1. Formal powers of government and limits on formal powers 2. Democracy v. aristocratic rule 3. Centralization v. decentralization of power a. Centralization. Government capable of action, including tyranny b. Decentralization. Government prone to paralysis c. Decentralization case study: the minting of the penny	Chapter 2 (Quiz #2)
January 30- February 3	IV. Decentralization in Practice A. The separation of the Legislative and Executive Branches B. State and district, rather than national, elections—what really makes the system distinctive	

Part Two: Federalism, Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

February 6-10	I. Federalism A. Definition B. Exclusive powers and shared powers 1. The Supremacy Clause 2. The "Commerce" clause 3. The reality of power sharing 4. National government paralysis and the resurgence of state government C. The case for state government D. The case against state government	Chapter 3 (except 3.3) (Quiz #3)
February 13-17	II. The Courts and Judicial Review A. Organization and powers of the courts B. How judicial review occurs III. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights A. Freedom of speech and press B. Establishment of religion C. Civil Rights	Chapter 4 (Quiz #3) Chapter 5 (5, 5.1, 5.2 only) (Quiz #3)

### Part Three: Democracy, Public Opinion, The Media, and Voting

- February 21-24 I. Public Opinion and Representative Democracy Chapter 6 (Quiz #4)
- A. Representative democracy in theory
  - B. U.S. representative democracy today
  - C. A disengaged and disenchanted electorate
- February 27- March 3 II. The Media and Public Opinion Chapter 7 (7. 7.1, 7.2, 7.3 only) (Quiz #4)
- III. The Rational Self Interest Theory of Voting
- A. Designed to explain how people will behave, rather than how they *should* behave
  - B. The costs, benefits, and mathematical probabilities associated with voting
  - C. Predictions of the rational self interest theory of voting
    - 1. Voters will invest limited time and effort in elections. They may vote, but they will almost never have the incentive to become informed.
    - 2. Implications of this prediction. We must:
      - a. Change human nature, or:
      - b. Give up on democracy, or:
      - c. Do the best we can with little voting incentive
    - 3. How to do the best we can. “Rethinking American Electoral Democracy” (Quiz #4)
      - a. Simple–“user friendly”--elections
      - b. Voter perceptions of stakes
      - c. Competitiveness; the probability that one vote will determine the outcome

### Part Four: Representation, Political Parties, and Elections

- March 13-17 I. The Framers Vision: Trustees and Delegates. Trusteeship Puts Fewer Demands on Voters “Running Scared” (Quiz #5)

*Note: Trusteeship and Delegate representation are “Division of Labor” and “Agency” democracy in “Running Scared”*

- II. Populism and Populist Reforms “The Governing Cancer of Our Times” (Quiz #5)
- A. Voting rights
  - B. Presidential elections
  - C. U.S. Senate elections
  - D. Ballot propositions
  - E. Primary elections
  - F. Unintended consequences of populist reforms
    - 1. Partisan polarization
    - 2. The world’s most expensive democracy
    - 3. Changed public expectations: delegate democracy
- March 20-24 III. The U.S. Two Party System Chapter 8 (Quiz #5)
- A. Why the U.S. has a two party system “Why the U.S. Has a Two Party System” (Quiz #5)
  - B. How a two party system confuses voters: the need for broad party coalitions
  - C. The two party system and U.S. political campaigns)
    - 1. Name recognition
    - 2. Issue Avoidance
    - 3. Negative campaigning

- March 27-31 IV. Presidential Elections Chapter 9 (Quiz #6)
- A. Nominations
    1. National conventions
    2. The formalities of delegate selection
    3. The reality of the nominating process:
    4. The importance of the “early” states
  - B. The general election: Electoral College “Game Change” (Quiz #6)
    1. The Constitution
    2. How popular votes determine Electoral Votes
    3. How politically competitive states benefit
    4. Effects on voting incentives
    5. How a loser of the popular vote can still win the electoral vote
    6. The Direct Popular Election movement

- April 3-7 V. Congressional Elections
- A. The “incumbency advantage”
  - B. U.S. House districts

#### Part Five: Interest Groups, Congress, the Presidency

- April 10-14 I. Interest Groups: The Bias in Favor of the Organized Chapter 10 (10, 10.1, 10.6 only) (Quiz #6)
- II. The Presidency Chapter 12 (Quiz #7)
- A. Exaggerated public expectations “The Mind of Donald Trump” (Quiz #7)
  - B. Formal powers and their limits
    1. The Veto
    2. The Executive Power
    3. Commander in Chief
  - C. Consequences for presidential leadership
- April 17-21 D. Informal sources of power
1. Personal relationships with congressmembers
  2. Mobilizing public opinion
    - a. Effective Mobilization: FDR, Ronald Reagan  
Simplicity, self confidence, correct priorities
    - b. Ineffective Mobilization: Jimmy Carter, “National Malaise”
  - E. Presidents since JFK
- April 24-28 III. Congress Chapter 11 (Quiz #7)
- A. Why Congress accomplishes so little
    1. Representation and congressional time allocation
    2. Bicameralism
    3. Senate debate rule
  - B. How Congress accomplishes anything
    1. Committees
    2. Pork barreling