

Political Science 1100
Course Syllabus
Fall 2017

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Course Description

This course introduces the institutions and processes of U.S. government to students with little or no background in the subject. It 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.

Unlike many introductory courses, 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, with rules set by the U.S. Constitution and U.S. election laws. 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 doing what they must to stay in office and to preserve their power, while voters try to capture the maximum policy benefits from government with the minimum exertion of effort. Because they minimize effort, voters remain largely informed, and this explains much about U.S. government that otherwise makes no sense. About halfway through the semester, it should all start to fall into place.

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 concepts such as probability and proportionality. The course will also touch upon economics, the origins of Christmas, the Wizard of Oz, Game of Thrones, the art of Picasso, the divorce rate in Maine, and nutrition research--advancing your *general education*. Some of you may question the value of general education. 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, most of 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 most high school civics or history courses. Political Science is primarily an objective, empirical *science*, not a subjective study of values. It is also a theoretical discipline that relies on abstract concepts to analyze cause and effect. 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.

Course Learning Objectives

1. To provide students with a factual and conceptual understanding of the essential features of the U.S. political system.
2. To apply theory to explain 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.

Teaching Assistant and Supplemental Instruction

Teaching Assistants

Joseph Johnson: j.r.johnson@aggiemail.usu.edu
Tyler Thomas

Supplemental Instruction

Landon Graham: landon.graham@aggiemail.usu.edu
Savanna Jones: savannamjones@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 Instructors are undergraduates with outstanding academic credentials who conduct weekly study sections and exam reviews, with an emphasis on test taking skills. Attendance at exam review and weekly study sections is voluntary, but highly recommended. 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 all afternoon, and MWF after 4:00, even though I do not have office hours at those times. Please do not bring questions to me when I arrive in class, as I need to put an outline on the board to get computer set up in those precious few minutes. Questions about lecture material are always best asked in class. Please refer questions about when and where SI sessions are held to Landon Graham or Savanna Jones. If you have trouble logging in to take a quiz on Canvas, contact the USU Center for Innovative Design and Instruction (CIDI), at 797-9506.

Canvas

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

Lectures and Note Taking

Because the material covered in lectures is mostly not covered in the text, and also because the class lectures are largely extemporaneous and not available on line, 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 lecture topics require much more class time than others. 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. The supplementary course readings can be accessed on Canvas. To download these assignments, click on “Files,” and then on “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 lectures and short articles in P.S. 1100 are theoretical and focus on specific examples in depth. The text has little depth on any topic, but it is comprehensive and covers recent political history much more thoroughly than the lectures do. So the text fills in the gaps between the lectures, providing breadth. As you read the text, try to imagine how the theory presented in lecture applies to it, and if you are confused about how the readings and lectures tie together, please bring questions to my office or to S.I. sections.

Supplementary Reading Assignment Themes

“Are America’s Best Days Behind Us?” is a 2011 *Time* magazine cover story that concisely explains many of the dysfunctional characteristics of the U.S. political system. The author, Fareed Zarkaria is a liberal leaning CNN commentator.

“Protectors of a Blameless Citizenry” is a short chapter from a humorous 1991 best selling book about dysfunctional government, written by a Republican *Rolling Stone* contributor, P. J. O’Rourke. It argues that, contrary to popular perception, government bureaucracy isn’t the problem.

“The Governing Cancer of Our Times” is short *New York Times* article by Republican columnist David Brooks about the public distrust of professional politicians and its destructive consequences for the nation. Though very short, it is the most important reading assignment of the semester.

“Running Scared,” is a capsule version of a 1997 book by Canadian Political Scientist Anthony King. It warns us about the long term consequences of “populist” reforms designed to bring U.S. government “closer to the people.”

“What is a Populist?” is 2017 *Atlantic* article about U.S. democracy operating on the basis of emotion rather than reason. It fits together nicely with “The Governing Cancer of Our Times”

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

“The Hamburger Problem” is a July, 2017 *Business Insider* analysis of how the Democratic Party has managed to alienate so many voters, leading to the election of Donald Trump as president.

“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.

“I Wrote *The Art of the Deal* with Trump” is a short, 2017, *Washington Post* discussion of the president’s self destructive tendencies. The author, Tony Schwartz, also wrote Donald Trump’s 1987 “autobiography.” Schwartz does know Trump very well, but readers should be aware that Schwartz and Trump have had a bitter falling out, and that the *Post* has a liberal orientation. Nevertheless, many others close to Trump characterize him much as Schwartz does in this article.

Quizzes and Exams

The course has four essay exams and six 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 60 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 quiz will contain 12 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 purpose of the quizzes is reward students for reading and gaining the broad perspective on U.S. government that the readings do provide, and that the course lectures do not.

The essay exams will include both shorter and longer questions based entirely on course lectures. These exams emphasize concepts and theoretical analysis, not the memorization of facts, and their purpose is to reward students who master the concepts and the analysis presented in lectures. 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, September 25
Essay Exam #2:	Wednesday, October 18
Essay Exam #3:	Friday, Nov. 10, or Monday, Nov. 13
Essay Exam #4--The Final Exam:	Monday, December 11, 6:00-7:00, or Friday, December 15, 10:30- 11:20.

Note: the USU Final Examination schedule indicates that the final will be Friday, December 15, 9:30-11:20. Because this is the last day of finals, I will give an alternate final on Monday, December 11 (or possibly Tuesday, the 12th) at 6:00-7:00. Also, we need only 50 minutes for the exam on Friday, December 15. So we will start at 10:30, letting everyone sleep another hour.

Quiz Dates

Quiz #1:	Thursday, Sept. 7-Friday, Sept. 8
Quiz #2:	Tuesday, Sept. 19-Wed., Sept., 20
Quiz #3:	Tuesday, Oct. 3 -Wed., Oct. 4
Quiz #4:	Tuesday, Oct. 10 -Wed., Oct. 11
Quiz #5:	Thursday, Nov. 2 -Friday, Nov. 3
Quiz #6:	Thursday, Nov. 30-Friday, Dec. 1

Quiz #1 will cover the course syllabus, "Are America's Best Days Behind Us?" "The Governing Cancer of Our Times," and "Protectors of a Blameless Citizenry."

Quiz #2 will cover text Chapter 1 (you can skip 1.2, 1.3, and “Three Contemporary Theories of American Democracy” in 1.4—but do read “Challenges to Democracy” and the remainder of the chapter). It also covers text Chapters 2, and 13 (13, 13.1 and 13.2 only).

Quiz #3 will cover text Chapters 3 (except 3.3), 6, and 7 (7, 7.1, 7.2, and 7.3 only).

Quiz #4 will cover text Chapter 8, “Running Scared,” “What is a Populist,” “Why the U.S. Has a Two Party System,” and “The Hamburger Problem.” Superficially, this may appear to be the most difficult quiz of the semester, because it covers four supplemental reading assignments. But two of those supplemental assignments are very short, the other two are only medium length, and all are quite interesting. Plus, there is only one text chapter.

Quiz #5 will cover text Chapters 9, 10 (10, 10.1, and 10.6 only), 11, and “Game Change.” Do not fail to read “Game Change.” Most students regard it as the best assignment of the semester, although I suspect that “The Hamburger Problem” will give it new competition this semester.

Quiz #6 will cover text Chapters 4, 5 (5, 5.1, 5.2 only), 12, and “I Wrote *The Art of the Deal* with 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, Chapter 11 corresponds to lecture material from November 6-10, but is covered on Quiz 5, November 2-3. Requiring you to “reading ahead” like this 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 because 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 week 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 six quizzes will be dropped from the grade computations. The lowest score that each receives on one of the one of the essay exams 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.

Recognize that over the course of the semester as Canvas updates your grades, the cumulative % score that you have on Canvas will be giving you an ARTIFICIALLY LOW estimate of your final grade. Why? Because we cannot program Canvas to raise your lowest essay exam score until after your final exam score is recorded. So your % final grade will be somewhat higher than what Canvas has been telling you during the semester—not enough to make a difference in your letter grade in every case, but it will make a difference in many cases.

Final 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.

Essay 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 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 P.S. 1100—by attending class at least 90% of the time, taking notes carefully, and completing reading assignments—seldom receive course grades lower than “C.” “A” grades 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” students is that “B” students “know the answers,” whereas “A” students can explain *why* the answers are the answers. The course grade distribution over the last four semesters appears below. Most of those who failed the course did not finish it.

Grade	Percentage
A	29%
B	33%
C	24%
D	3%
F	13%

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.” Please 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 an 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. 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—most commonly by talking to friends or using electronic devices. 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. Never assume that because a class is large that you are somehow invisible. And if you lack the attention span or the discipline to spend 50 minutes in class without using an electronic device or talking to friends, you should question whether you belong in college.

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 it is impossible to predict how much class time will be devoted to answering student questions related to various topics.

Week	Lecture Topics	Corresponding Reading Assignments
Part One: Introduction and The U.S. Constitution		
August 28- Sept. 1	I. Political Science and Scientific Reasoning 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	The Course Syllabus (Quiz #1) “Are America’s Best Days Behind Us?” “Protectors of a Blameless Citizenry” “The Governing Cancer of Our Times” (All on Quiz #1) Chapter 1 (Quiz #2)

In Chapter 1, 1.2, 1.3, and “Three Contemporary Theories of American Democracy” in 1.4 are NOT required

- Sept. 6-8 3. Interest group control over policy Chapter 13 (13, 13.1, 13.2 only) (Quiz #2)
- Sept. 6-8 III. The U.S. Constitution Chapter 2 (Quiz #2)
 - A. Some basic definitions
 - B. The Federalists, The Framers, Federalism, and the Anti-Federalists
- Sept. 11-15 C. The framers political philosophy: constrain human self interest, prevent tyranny
- Sept. 11-15 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
- Sept 18-22 IV. National Government Decentralization in the 21 Century
 - A. The separation of the Legislative and Executive Branches
 - B. State and district, rather than national, elections—what really makes the system distinctive
- Sept 18-22 V. Federalism in the 21st Century Chapter 3 (except 3.3) (Quiz #3)
 - A. 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
- Sept 25-29 B. The case for state government, the case against state government

Part Two: Democracy, Public Opinion, The Media, and Voting

- I. Public Opinion and Representative Democracy Chapter 6 (Quiz #3)
 - A. Representative democracy in theory
 - B. U.S. representative democracy today
 - C. A disengaged and disenchanted electorate
- Oct. 2-6 II. The Media Chapter 7 (7. 7.1, 7.2, 7.3 only) (Quiz #3)
- Oct. 2-6 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.
 - a. Simple—“user friendly”—elections
- Oct 9-13

- b. Voter perceptions of stakes
- c. Competitiveness; the probability that one vote will determine the outcome

Part Three: Representation, Political Parties, and Elections

- I. The Framers Vision: Trustees and Delegates.
Trusteeship Puts Fewer Demands on Voters "Running Scared" (Quiz #4)

Note: Trusteeship and Delegate representation are "Division of Labor" and "Agency" democracy in "Running Scared"

- II. Populism and Populist Reforms "What is a Populist?" (Quiz #4)
 - 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

- Oct.16-19 III. The U.S. Two Party System Chapter 8 (Quiz #4)
 - A. Why the U.S. has a two party system "Why the U.S. Has a Two Party System" (Quiz #4)
 - B. How a two party system confuses voters: the need for broad party coalitions "The Hamburger Problem" (Quiz #4)
 - C. The two party system and U.S. political campaigns)
 - 1. Name recognition
 - 2. Issue Avoidance
 - 3. Negative campaigning

Note: In conformity with university policy for MWF classes, P.S. 1100 will meet on Thursday, October 19

- Oct. 23-27 IV. Presidential Elections Chapter 9 (Quiz #5)
 - 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
 - Oct. 30- Nov. 3 B. The general election: Electoral College "Game Change" (Quiz #5)
 - 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

