POLI 1061: Introduction to American Politics

Summer 2015, Session 2            3 Credits

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Boston College Mission Statement:

Strengthened by more than a century and a half of dedication to academic excellence, Boston College commits itself to the highest standards of teaching and research in undergraduate, graduate and professional programs and to the pursuit of a just society through its own accomplishments, the work of its faculty and staff, and the achievements of its graduates. It seeks both to advance its place among the nation's finest universities and to bring to the company of its distinguished peers and to contemporary society the richness of the Catholic intellectual ideal of a mutually illuminating relationship between religious faith and free intellectual inquiry.

Boston College draws inspiration for its academic societal mission from its distinctive religious tradition. As a Catholic and Jesuit university, it is rooted in a world view that encounters God in all creation and through all human activity, especially in the search for truth in every discipline, in the desire to learn, and in the call to live justly together. In this spirit, the University regards the contribution of different religious traditions and value systems as essential to the fullness of its intellectual life and to the continuous development of its distinctive intellectual heritage.

Course Description:

Introduction to American Politics is, as the name suggests, an introductory course in American government. The overarching aim of the course is to acquaint students with the fundamental features of the American political system. We will focus our attention on both the bedrock ideals and the key institutions that constitute our regime, and our inquiry will be conducted with eyes to the past, present, and future of American politics. Thus, students will be asked to explore questions like: What kind of political order did the Founders create? How has the system of government they fashioned served our nation over time? To what extent do the values and principles at the heart of our political system continue to illuminate our present-day politics? How well are our governing institutions functioning?
**Course Objectives:**

1. The student will learn about fundamental principles and theories in American politics as demonstrated by an ability to describe and critically evaluate the various theories and principles introduced in the assigned readings. The student will be asked to explain and explore these themes in class discussions and in papers.
2. The student will learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view, as demonstrated by an ability to play an active role in class discussions and write cogent, concise papers. The student will be asked to begin formulating his or her own views on key questions in American politics and will be expected to defend those views orally and in writing over the course of the semester.
3. The student will demonstrate knowledge across cultural settings and will learn the impact of culture, gender, and age in American politics, as demonstrated by a willingness to explore, talk about, and write about the ways in which culture, gender, age, and other factors shape our beliefs about our form of government, its evolution over time, and the ends we expect it to pursue.
4. The student will demonstrate ethical knowledge pertaining to American politics, as demonstrated by an ability to engage in the field’s central debates and appreciate a variety of perspectives on American government. The student will exchange views with other students during class discussions and will be asked to weigh the merits of different perspectives in written work.

**Grading:**

Your course grade will be calculated in the following manner:

- 20% - Paper #1 (July 7)
- 25% - Paper #2 (July 23)
- 35% - Final exam (July 30)
- 20% - Participation

Now, a few words about each component of your course grade…

**Papers:** Short papers are to be no more than five (5) pages in length, and they are due at the beginning of class on July 7 and July 23. Paper topics will ask students to explore core themes contained in the readings and lectures, and they will not require any outside research. I will distribute the paper topics in advance and say more about my expectations in class.

**Final Exam:** The final exam will test students on all of the material covered over the course of the entire semester. This means that in order to do well, students will need to be well-versed in both the readings and the lectures. The exam will involve a combination of short answer and essay questions. It will be administered on the final day of class, July 30. I will say more about the exam in class.
**Participation:** Class participation is a major part of your grade in this course, so it is important for you to understand what it means. For starters, students are expected to attend every meeting. But in order to receive a good participation grade, students must also come to class prepared to answer questions about the readings and actively engage in class discussions, which will occur on a regular basis.

**NOTE:** If you are uncomfortable speaking up in class, please talk to me about it at the beginning of the semester. As someone who used to be a relatively quiet student and worked hard to overcome it, I can relate! And I am happy to discuss strategies for helping you become a more active participant so that your grade does not suffer. Class participation is a shared responsibility, and I can promise that you, your classmates, and your instructor will all find this course more rewarding if you do your part.

**WCAS Grading System**
The undergraduate grading system consists of twelve categories: A (4.00), A- (3.67), excellent; B+ (3.33), B (3.00), B- (2.67), good; C+ (2.33), C (2.00), C- (1.67), satisfactory; D+ (1.33), D (1.00), D- (.67), passing but unsatisfactory; F (0.0), failure; I (0.0), incomplete; F (0.0), course dropped without notifying office; W (.00), official withdrawal from course. The graduate grading system is A (4.00), A- (3.67), Excellent; B+ (3.33), B (3.00), good; B- (2.67), C (2.00), passing but not for degree credit; F (0.0), failure.

**Grade Reports:** All students are required to log into the web through Agora to access their semester grades. Students must utilize their BC username and password to log on. If your username or password is not known the HELP Desk located in the Campus Technology Resource Center (CTRC) in O’Neill Library will issue a new one. The CTRC requires a valid picture ID (a BC ID, driver’s license or passport) to obtain your password.

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**Required Texts:**
The following texts are available for purchase in the BC Bookstore.


2. James Q. Wilson, John J. Dilulio, Jr., and Meena Bose, *American Government: Brief Version*, 11th edition (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2013). NOTE: If you wish to use an earlier edition of this textbook, that is fine. However, the chapter numbers in older editions may differ from the chapter numbers listed in the course reading schedule below, so be sure to check with me to make sure you are reading the correct chapters.

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**Recommended Reading:**

Students are strongly urged to read a major newspaper on a regular basis, since one of our goals this semester is to link course themes and concepts to current events.

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**Important Policies:**

[http://www.bc.edu/schools/advstudies/guide/academicinteg.html](http://www.bc.edu/schools/advstudies/guide/academicinteg.html)

**Written Work**

Graduate and undergraduate students are expected to prepare professional, polished written work. Written materials must be typed in the format required by your instructor. Strive for a thorough, yet concise style. Cite literature appropriately, using APA, MLA, CLA format per instructors decision. Develop your thoughts fully, clearly, logically and specifically. Proofread all materials to ensure the use of proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. You are encouraged to make use of campus resources for refining writing skills as needed [http://www.bc.edu/libraries/help/tutoring.html].

**Scholarship and Academic Integrity**

It is expected that students will produce original work and cite references appropriately. Failure to reference properly is plagiarism. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not necessarily limited to, plagiarism, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, cheating on examinations or assignments, and submitting the same paper or substantially similar papers to meet the requirements of more than one course without seeking permission of all instructors concerned. Scholastic misconduct may also involve, but is not necessarily limited to, acts that violate the rights of other students, such as depriving another student of course materials or interfering with another student’s work.

**Request for Accommodations**

If you have a disability and will be requesting accommodations for this course, please register with either Dr. Kathy Duggan (dugganka@bc.edu), Associate Director, Connors Family Learning Center (learning disabilities or AHD) or Dean Paulette Durrett, (paulette.durrett@bc.edu), Assistant Dean for students with disabilities, (all other disabilities). Advance notice and appropriate documentation are required for accommodations. For further information, you can locate the disability resources on the web at [http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/libraries/help/tutoring/specialservices.html](http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/libraries/help/tutoring/specialservices.html).

**Attendance**
Class attendance is an important component of learning. Students are expected to attend all classes and to arrive by the beginning of and remain for the entire class period. When an occasion occurs that prevents a student from attending class, it is the student’s obligation to inform the instructor of the conflict before the class meets. The student is still expected to meet all assignment deadlines. If a student knows that he or she will be absent on a particular day, the student is responsible for seeing the instructor beforehand to obtain the assignments for that day. If a student misses a class, he or she is responsible for making up the work by obtaining a classmate’s notes and handouts and turning in any assignments due. Furthermore, many instructors give points for participation in class. If you miss class, you cannot make up participation points associated with that class. Types of absences that are not typically excused include weddings, showers, vacations, birthday parties, graduations, etc. Additional assignments, penalties and correctives are at the discretion of the instructor. If circumstances necessitate excessive absence from class, the student should consider withdrawing from the class. In all cases, students are expected to accept the decision of the instructor regarding attendance policies specific to the class.

Consistent with our commitment of creating an academic community that is respectful of and welcoming to persons of differing backgrounds, we believe that every reasonable effort should be made to allow members of the university community to observe their religious holidays without jeopardizing the fulfillment of their academic obligations. It is the responsibility of students to review course syllabi as soon as they are distributed and to consult the faculty member promptly regarding any possible conflicts with observed religious holidays. If asked, the student should provide accurate information about the obligations entailed in the observance of that particular holiday. However, it is the responsibility of the student to complete any and all class requirements for days that are missed due to conflicts due to religious holidays.

There may be circumstances that necessitate a departure from this policy. Feel free to contact the WCAS at 617-552-3900 for consultation.

**Deadlines**

Assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the specified dates.

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**Course Assignments/Reading Schedule:**

Readings must be completed by the date listed below. For example, students should come to class on Tuesday, June 23, having read the Declaration of Independence and *The Federalist* #1. Doing the reading does NOT mean skimming it or reading summaries of it online. It means carefully and actively reading the entirety of the assignment and coming to class ready to discuss it. Do not fall behind. Your ability to understand lectures, participate in class discussions, succeed on papers, and do well on the final exam hinges on you having done the reading promptly and thoroughly.
Some of the readings will be found on the Canvas site for this course. I have indicated below when that is the case.

**Part I- Founding Principles: Liberalism, Democracy, and the Constitution**

*The Declaration of Independence, Liberalism, and Individual Rights*

Tues, June 23:

- Declaration of Independence (in textbook, also on Canvas)
- *The Federalist* #1

*Faction, the Extended Republic, and Federalism*

Thurs, June 25:

- *The Federalist* #10, 23, 39
- Textbook, Chs. 1, 2, 5
- Articles of Confederation (Canvas)

*Separation of Powers, Representation*

Tues, June 30:

- *The Federalist* #47, 48, 49, 50, 51
- Melancton Smith, 21 June 1788, in *The Anti-Federalist* (Canvas)
- Anthony King, “Running Scared” (Canvas)
- Textbook, Chs. 3 and 4

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**Part II- The Three Branches**

*The Legislative Branch*

Thurs, July 2:

- Article I of the Constitution
- *The Federalist* #57, 62, 63
- Textbook, Ch. 9
Tues, July 7: *PAPER #1 DUE*

- Richard Fenno, Jr., *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*, Ch. 5 (Canvas)
- David Mayhew, “The Electoral Incentive” (Canvas)
- Barbara Sinclair, “Spoiling the Sausages? How a Polarized Congress Deliberates and Legislates” (Canvas)
- Jack Goldsmith, *Power and Constraint*, Introduction, Ch. 1

*The Executive Branch*

Thurs, July 9:

- Article II of the Constitution
- *The Federalist* #70, 71, 72
- Textbook, Ch. 10
- Goldsmith, Chs. 2 and 3

Tues, July 14:

- Goldsmith, Chs. 4-7 and Afterword

*The Judicial Branch*

Thurs, July 16:

- Article III of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights (First 10 Amendments)
- *The Federalist* #78 and 84
- Brutus XV, in *The Anti-Federalist* (Canvas)
- Jeffrey Rosen, *The Supreme Court*, Introduction and Ch. 1 (Canvas)
- Textbook, Ch. 12

Tues, July 21:

- Antonin Scalia, “Originalism: The Lesser Evil” (Canvas)
- William Brennan, Jr., “Living Constitution” speech at Georgetown University (Canvas)
- Rosen, *The Supreme Court*, Conclusion (Canvas)
Part III- Other Bases of Power

Parties and Polarization

Thurs, July 23: *PAPER #2 DUE*

- Alan Abramowitz, *The Disappearing Center*, Chs. 1 and 3 (Canvas)
- Textbook, Ch. 7

Organized Interests, Bureaucracy

Tues, July 28:

- Frank Baumgartner, Berry, et al., *Lobbying and Policy Change*, Chs. 10 and 11 (Canvas)
- James Q. Wilson, “The Bureaucracy Problem” (Canvas)
- Textbook, Chs. 11 and 13

Part IV- Conclusion: Where Are We Now? Where Are We Going?

Thurs, July 30: *FINAL EXAM*

- R. Shep Melnick, “The Gridlock Illusion” (Canvas)
- Textbook, Ch. 15