

**San Francisco State University**  
**Political Science 200 / American Politics**  
**Fall 2015, Online, 3 Units**

Instructor: Kerri Ryer  
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**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This course is a survey of the American political framework and processes. The course covers the Constitutional structure and functions of the legislative, executive and judicial branches at national, state and local levels. Using a Madisonian framework, this course will examine the challenges of democratic theory in practice. With an emphasis on pluralism, students will place themselves within current political debates. Viewed in the context of political parties, interest groups, and citizenship, students will engage with questions about power and justice. Students will become competent in critical thinking and analysis and appreciate the necessity and difficulty in making ethical choices.

GE D3: Social Sciences: /U.S. and California Govt.

AI: U.S. Government & CA State & Local Government

Course twitter tag: #APatSFSU

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

1. Gain an understanding of the foundation of American political systems.
2. Analyze the role of culture, diversity, and ideology in shaping public opinion and policy in the United States and California.
3. Locate yourself with some discernment and judgment among the assertions and choices in United States public life.
4. Recognize the origin of political conflict within your own values and expectations.
5. Critically analyze the relationship between the individual and the state.

**STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

1. Describe the basic structures and procedures of United States & California government.
2. Contrast several analytical models of United States politics.
3. Identify sources of conflict within current political debates.
4. Compare the American Political system with alternative systems.
5. Explain the civil liberties and civil rights of individuals as articulated in the U.S. Constitution and federal court decisions.
6. Write an academic argumentative or exploratory essay in the field of American Politics.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

1. *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship*, 7<sup>th</sup> essentials edition. By: Barbour & Wright. ISBN: 978-1483352749
2. The instructor will also provide other assigned readings and media online.

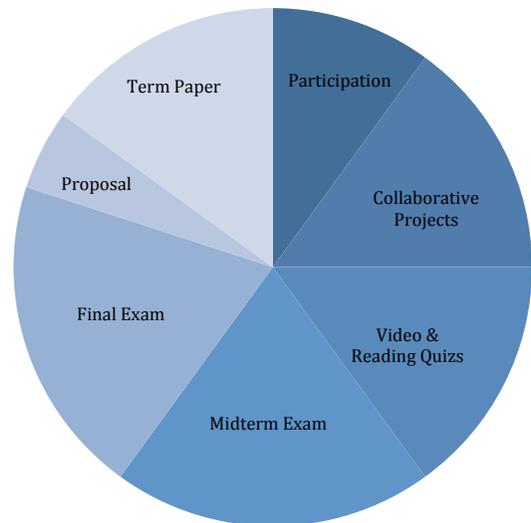
**TEACHING & LEARNING COMMUNITY:** This course will be delivered fully online at [ilearn.sfsu.edu](http://ilearn.sfsu.edu). It will incorporate a variety of learning activities and engagement opportunities. Participants will view online lectures, read the text and additional materials, record academic notes, and participate in a series of discussions on hot button issues. Students are required to keep up with the course schedule and complete all assignments by their assigned due dates. Students will be required to actively engage in the teaching and learning process through group and peer teaching exercises. In our learning community, everyone's contributions are valued and respected. We are all in this together and I look forward to learning with you throughout the semester. You should expect to spend 5 hours a week on this course.

**EVALUATION**

Your performance will be evaluated by your participation in class discussion and collaborative projects, a midterm exam, weekly video and chapter quizzes, a term paper proposal and term paper, and a final exam. Students are required to complete all assignments as outlined in the weekly schedule, no late work will be accepted. Only documented medical exceptions will be excused, though reasonable accommodations will be made in extenuating circumstances. Instructor reserves the right to drop anyone who fails to fulfill the weekly requirements for one or more weeks, but is not responsible for dropping disengaged students.

Your final grade will be based upon the following rubric:

Class participation (Discussion forums & lessons)	10%
Collaborative projects	15%
Video & Reading quizzes	15%
Midterm exam	20%
Final exam	20%
Term paper proposal	5%
Term Paper	15%
<hr/> Total	<hr/> 100%



Final grades will be assigned using the following evaluative grades and symbols:

- A—Excellent
- B—Good
- C—Adequate
- D—Less than adequate
- F—Requirements have not been met
- \*+ & - system will be used.

**CODE OF CONDUCT:** All students are required to adhere to the college code of conduct and academic honesty policies at all times. They can be found here:

- <http://conduct.sfsu.edu/standards>
- <http://conduct.sfsu.edu/academic-dishonesty>
- <http://conduct.sfsu.edu/plagiarism>

### DISABILITY:

Students who require alternative formats for course materials or adaptive equipment because of a disability can request them through the Disability Programs and Resource Center <http://www.sfsu.edu/~dprc/>. Located in the Student Services building Room 110. Their phone number is 415-338-2472, and email [dprc@sfsu.edu](mailto:dprc@sfsu.edu) for more information. Please email me right away if you have a DPRC need.

### COMMUNICATION POLICY:

I will be available for communication by phone, skype, and ichtat by appointment only. I prefer email communication, and will respond within 24 hours. If I do not respond within 24 hours expect that I did not receive your message and send the email again.

### WITHDRAWAL POLICY:

I will drop anyone who does not complete the activities the first week of the course by the assigned deadlines. After that, it is the student's responsibility to drop the course if they wish to withdraw. Do not expect that I will initiate the withdrawal procedures for you after the first week of classes, I will not. Please see the important dates below.

### IMPORTANT DATES:

August 24	First day of instruction
September 4	Last day to withdraw without "W"
November 20	Last day to withdraw with "W"
November 23-28	Fall recess
December 11	Last day of classes
Monday December 14	FINAL EXAM

### SCHEDULE:

\*Schedule is tentative and subject to change.

## **What is this thing called politics?**

**Week 1: August 24-30** In this unit you will engage in discussion with fellow classmates on the question: What is politics? Your engagement in this activity will facilitate your ability to think critically about the conflictual nature of politics.

#### **By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Construct a working definition of the concept of the political.
2. Critically analyze the nature of conflict and compromise in recent policy decisions.
3. Recognize the presence of politics in your everyday lives and the origin of political conflict in your own values and expectations.

#### **Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 1  
Chapter 1 reading quiz

#### Lessons:

What is Politics?  
Origins of Democracy in America  
Thinking Critically about American Politics

Video: Lecture video 1 & TedTalk

Discussion: Week 1 forum

**Week 2: August 31- September 6** In this unit you will acquire fundamental skills for navigating and understanding the political world in your every day life.

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Identify the main characteristics of American political culture.
2. Identify the American citizen and evaluate the relationship between the individual and the state.
3. Evaluate recent immigration reform policy stances and policies.
4. Describe the gap between the American democratic ideal and its real practice.

**Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 2  
Chapter 2 reading quiz

Lessons:

Who is an American?  
Ideas That Divide Us & Divide Us  
Citizens and American Political Beliefs

Video: Lecture video 2 & TedTalk

Discussion: Week 2 forum

Collaborative Project 1 due

**Foundations of American Politics**

**Week 3: September 7-13** In this unit you will acquire fundamental skills for understanding the foundation of the American political system and the debates that have remained fluid throughout our history.

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Compare the founding fathers with modern radicals.
2. Identify the structural differences between the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution.
3. Create a dialogue between the federalists and antifederalists in which you compare and assess the importance of different political structures on future public policy from each theoretical viewpoint.

**Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 3  
Chapter 3 reading quiz

Lessons:

The Split from England  
The Articles of Confederation  
Constitutional Convention & Ratification

Video: Lecture video 3

Discussion: Week 3 forum

**Week 4: September 14-20**

In this unit you will continue to acquire critical thinking skills in order to assess the foundation of the American political system.

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Explain the founding and development of the U.S. Constitution.
2. Compare four theories of federalism, and explain the U.S. federal system.
3. Write a critical essay in which you analyze Madison's system of check and balances and separation of powers. Has the system functioned as Madison intended?
4. Discuss whether the Constitution fosters or limits citizen's participation in government.

**Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 4  
Chapter 4 reading quiz

Lessons:

The Three Branches of Government  
Separation of Power and Checks & Balances  
Federalism

Video: Lecture video 4

Discussion: Week 4 forum

Collaborative Project 2 due

## **Civil Liberties & Civil Rights**

**Week 5: September 21-27** In this unit you will acquire skills to critically evaluate civil liberties as outlined in the U.S. Constitution.

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Critically analyze the Bill of Rights, as applied to your everyday life.
2. Evaluate the positive and negative rights doctrines.
3. Create a draft Constitutional Amendment in which you make the argument for or against the expansion of a civil liberty.

**Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 5  
Chapter 5 reading quiz

Lessons:

Rights in a Democracy  
Freedom of Expression, Religion, Privacy & Bear Arms  
Rights of Criminal Defendants

Video: Lecture video 5

Discussion: Week 5 forum

**Week 6: September 28- October 4** In this unit you will acquire skills to critically analyze the U.S. Supreme Courts' civil rights doctrines.

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Identify current civil rights groups in the U.S. and critically analyze the application of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment's due process clause to their cause.
2. Critically evaluate recent supreme court decisions that expand or restrict civil rights.
3. Construct a political outlook on equal rights that recognizes the value of diversity and historical struggles of minority groups.

**Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 6  
Chapter 6 reading quiz

Lessons:

The Meaning of Political Inequality  
Rights Denied on the Basis of Race and Gender  
The Citizen & Civil Rights

Video: Lecture video 6

Discussion: Week 6 forum

Collaborative Project 3 due

Term paper topic forum post

## **It's all about Framing**

**Week 7: October 5-11** In this unit you will acquire skills for conducting public opinion research. This will assist you in critically analyzing public opinion research and the role it plays in policy formation.

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Critically analyze the role of public opinion in public policy formation.
2. Evaluate the political socialization process.
3. Create a public opinion poll in which you research feelings on a current political debate, while recognizing the limitations of public opinion polling.

**Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 11  
Chapter 11 reading quiz

Lessons:

The Role of Public Opinion in a Democracy  
What Influences Our Opinions About Politics?  
The Citizens & Public Opinion

Video: Lecture video 7

Discussion: Week 7 forum

**Week 8: October 12-18** In this unit you will acquire necessary skills to evaluate the political implications of the mass media and its influence upon public opinion and political culture in the U.S.

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Critically analyze the role mass media plays in shaping public opinion.
2. Evaluate the media affects of recent news articles for filtering, framing, slant, and priming.
3. Discuss the creation of safe/ open spaces in media production and the shortening of the media cycle.
4. Describe the link between media and politics

**Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 15  
Chapter 15 reading quiz

Lessons:

Where Do We Get Our Information?  
Who Owns the Media, and How Does That Affect the News?  
The Media & Politics

Video: Lecture video 8

Discussion: Week 8 forum

**\*MIDTERM EXAM**

**Political Interests**

**Week 9: October 19- 25** In this unit you will chart the history of political parties in the United States. Different party systems and the impact of party polarization upon public policy will be analyzed.

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Explain the role parties play in policy creation.
2. Describe the structure and function of the American party system.
3. Compare and analyze the American two party system with alternative party systems.

**Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 12  
Chapter 12 reading quiz

Lessons:

What are Political Parties?  
Do American Parties Offer Voters a Choice?  
Characteristics of American Party System

Video: Lecture video 9

Discussion: Week 9 forum

**Week 10: October 26- November 1** In this unit we will discuss interest groups and campaign finance. We will distinguish the role of interest groups to that of political parties. Students will acquire analytic tools to evaluate the power of interest groups and individuals.

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Differentiate interest groups from political parties.
2. Describe interest group tactics to utilized influence public policy.
3. Identify four types of interest groups and analyze one that you have a personal interest in.

**Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 13  
Chapter 13 reading quiz

Lessons:

The Role and Formation of Interest Groups  
Types of Interest Groups  
Interest Group Politics

Video: Lecture video 10

Discussion: Week 10 forum

**\*Term paper proposal due**

## **To the VOTING BOOTH!**

**Week 11: November 2-8** In this unit you will acquire analytic tools necessary to analyze the U.S. election system. Who votes? Why / why not? We will discuss the theoretical foundation of the U.S. election system and analyze elections in practice.

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Analyze the reasons why American's vote – or do not vote.
2. Identify demographics based upon voter turn out, and four factors that influence vote choice.
3. Construct a process by which to become an informed voter and make tough political decisions.

### **Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 14  
Chapter 14 reading quiz

Lessons:

Voting in a Democratic Society  
How the Voter Decides & Presidential Campaigns  
The Citizens & Elections

Video: Lecture video 11

Discussion: Week 11 forum

Collaborative Project 4 due

## **Institutions of American Government**

**Week 12: November 9-15** In this unit students will develop skills necessary to analyze the system of checks and balances. Students will engage in the legislative process and develop an understanding of the difficulty in passing legislation.

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Explain the system of checks and balances.
2. Evaluate the legislative process and current policy debates.
3. Discuss the structure and role of political parties in Congress.

### **Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 7  
Chapter 7 reading quiz

Lessons:

Understanding Congress and How it Works  
Congressional Elections and Organization  
The Citizens & Congress

Video: Lecture video 12

Discussion: Week 12 forum

**Week 13: November 16-22** In this unit students will explore the executive branch and construct an outlook on presidential power.

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Compare the president's roles as head of state and head of government.
2. Explain the origin of executive powers and what role the founders had imagined.
3. Evaluate five recent presidents' leadership styles and the implications for policy and public approval.

### **Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 8  
Chapter 8 reading quiz

Lessons:

The Double Standard Gap  
The Evolution of American Presidency  
Presidential Politics

Video: Lecture video 13

Discussion: Week 13 forum

Collaborative Project 5 due

First Draft Term Paper Peer-Review

**Week 14: November 23-29**

Fall Recess no classes

**Week 15: November 30- December 6** In this unit we will discuss the role of the bureaucracy in everyday individual interactions with government and the bureau's influence on policy.

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Describe the relationship between the federal agencies and the three branches of the federal government.
2. Explain the impact of the bureaucracy on decision making and individual citizens.
3. Analyze the tension between transparency and efficiency in the federal bureaucracy.

**Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 9  
Chapter 9 reading quiz

Lessons:

What is Bureaucracy?  
Politics Inside and Outside the Bureaucracy  
The Citizens & the Bureaucracy

Video: Lecture video 15

Discussion: Week 15 forum

**\*Term Paper Due**

**Week 16: December 7-13** In this unit students will acquire skills to evaluate the power of the judicial branch and analyze recent Supreme Court decisions. We will look closely at the power of politics in the theoretically apolitical branch.

**By the end of this unit, students will be able to:**

1. Explain the rule of law and the role the legal system plays in democratic society.
2. Evaluate Hamilton's claim that the judiciary was the "least dangerous branch of government" in light of the power it wields.
3. Discuss the role politics and ideology play in judicial appointments and decisions.
4. Evaluate the application of judicial review to recent Supreme Court decisions.

**Activities:**

Readings: Barbour Chapter 10  
Chapter 10 reading quiz

Lessons:

Law and The American Legal System  
The Supreme Court & Judicial Review  
The Citizens & the Courts

Video: Lecture video 16

Discussion: Week 16 forum

Collaborative Project 6 due

**December 14**

**\*FINAL EXAM**