

# Introduction to American Politics

## PSC 101

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ONLINE Fall 2017

University Studies: The Social World – The Nature of U.S. Society (Cluster 4B)

Course Website: myCourses, accessed through my.umassd.edu

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Students study a variety of topics in college, but the study of American politics is especially important because students approach the material as citizens as well as learners. As citizens, we are responsible for the health of our political system, and it is critical that we evaluate it accurately and responsibly. Evaluation, however, can only take place with a solid understanding of the true nature of the political process and the institutions of American government. This understanding can be greatly aided by learning what political science has to say about our system.

This course introduces students to political science concepts, theories, and empirical findings in American politics. Topics include the context of the American political system (the Constitution, federalism, political culture, civil rights and liberties), the role of citizen demands (elections, political parties, interest groups), the functioning of the major institutions (Congress, presidency, bureaucracy, courts,) and the outputs of the political system (public policies).

#### Course-Specific Learning Outcomes:

1. Describe the theoretical foundations of American government.
2. Summarize the role institutions, such as Congress, the Presidency and the Supreme Court, play in the American political system.
3. Explain how the actions of institutions are influenced by elections, political parties, interest groups, public opinion and the media.

#### University Studies Learning Outcomes:

1. Explain the different facets of citizenship in the United States.
2. Locate, analyze, summarize, paraphrase and synthesize material from a variety of sources.
3. Evaluate arguments made in support of different perspectives on US society.

### Required Texts

*We The People, Essentials*. 2016. Benjamin Ginsburg, Theodore J. Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline J. Tolbert, and Robert J. Spitzer. W.W. Norton. Ebook (ISBN: 978-0-393-63058-9) or Paperback (ISBN: 978-0-393-28364-8).

*This text is available in both a print and ebook version. The ebook version is MUCH cheaper than the print version, so I encourage you to check this out at:*

*<http://books.wwnorton.com/books/webad-detail-editions.aspx?id=4294986188>*

## **The Mechanics of the Course**

How does this online course work? Basically, students' first responsibility will be to master the material in the textbook. First, students read a chapter in the textbook. For each chapter, there is an associated activity; these are short videos, games, or other types of activities related to the chapter content. While these activities do not have points associated with them, they will help foster your understanding of the materials and often your chapter response will require you to draw on what you've learned from this activity in composing your response so you are strongly encouraged to complete these short activities. Each chapter has an extensive set of additional activities grouped in a folder that you are encouraged to explore to deepen your understanding of the chapter, but you are not required to do so.

After reading the chapter, students take a quiz, using their book as a reference, to help them master the chapter material. You will also complete a short (1-2 paragraph) chapter response, drawing on what you have learned. Finally, students' understanding of the material from the chapters and activities will be assessed in a more comprehensive way through a midterm and final exam.

Students will discuss the course material and current events on the discussion boards. In addition, this course fulfills the University Studies: Social World - The Nature of U.S. Society requirement. To fulfill these requirements, students will undertake a project related to a contemporary political issue. Students will take several self-assessments based on information from library tutorials; locate, analyze and synthesize information related to this issue; and then complete three short writing assignments to evaluate the arguments made in support of different perspectives on this issue. More information about all of these assignments is available in the Issue Assignment Folder on the course website.

## **Requirements**

Your grade in the course is based on the number of points out of 1,000 that you earn on the following assignments.

### *Overview*

1. Two Exams (150 points each = 300 points)
2. Chapter Quizzes (14@15 points = 210 points)
3. Chapter Responses (14@15points = 210 points)
4. Current Events/Issues Discussion Board Postings (80 points)
5. Issue Assignment (200 points)

### *Details*

#### **Exams:**

There will be two exams—a midterm and a final. Each exam covers one-half of the course material. The purpose of the exams is to give you an opportunity to intensively review the material and therefore learn it more comprehensively. The exams will be completed on MyCourses and will consist of a combination of multiple choice and short answer questions. Please note: the short answer responses **MUST** be completed in

your own words. I know that you will be reviewing the textbook when you are composing your short answer responses, **but you may not copy from the textbook nor may you draw on outside sources (i.e. sources other than the textbook) without properly citing them.** This is plagiarism; failure to abide by these rules will result in a failing grade for the class.

#### Chapter Quizzes:

After reading the chapter and studying it, you will take a quiz that assesses how well you have mastered the material in the chapter. The purposes of these quizzes are two-fold. First, I want to ensure you have actually read the chapter, so these quizzes will force you to go back and review your text. Secondly, I want to ensure you are familiar with and understand the key concepts in the chapter. All of the quizzes will be administered using Norton's Inquisitive (which will reside in the course site), with the exception of the State and Local government quiz. There will be no time limits for the quizzes, and you are encouraged to use your book to answer the questions. Quizzes for the chapters covered by the mid-term (chapters 1-7) exam must be completed prior to the midterm deadline. Quizzes for the chapters covered by the final exam (chapters 8-14 plus the State and Local Government reading) must be completed by 12/8.

#### Chapter Responses:

After reading the chapter, completing the online activity and taking the quiz, you will must respond to a question prompt that will ask you to respond to the chapter in some way. These discussions require you to analyze some of the material from the chapter while also articulating your own response and perspective on the topic. Appropriate responses should be one, maybe two, paragraphs long.

#### Current Events/Issues Discussion Board Postings:

One of the course objectives is to for you to be able to articulate and defend a position using evidence and reasoning on various issues in contemporary U.S. politics. Toward this aim, there will be current events/political topics discussion questions on the course website. Each substantive post will be worth 10 points; in all, you are required to post AT LEAST 8 times to the discussion boards. Posts that offer simple agreement with another message don't count as a post; you have to express an opinion with some thought and care and offering some evidence or reasoning to back your claims —not just a quick reply.

I will require that you post to at least 5 discussion topics. I also require that half (4) of your posts occur before the midterm. However, during each half of the course I will allow you to post an additional five times for *extra credit*—each additional post being worth 2 points. So, a student who posts 9 times in the first half and 9 times in the second half would earn 100 points total (40 in each half for the required posts plus 10 in each half for the extra credit posts). In contrast, if you post 20 times in the second half, you would only get credit for the four posts and five extra posts, not ten.

	Required Posts	Extra Credit Posts
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First Half	4 (40 points total)	5 (10 points total)
Second Half	4 (40 points total)	5 (10 points total)
Total Posts	8 (80 points total)	10 (20 points total)

Because people are often passionate about current events and political topics, it is important to keep in mind some simple rules of courtesy and decency. Please, address your comments to the ideas and concepts in the discussion and refrain from personal attacks or insults. In order to access the discussion boards, you will need to make a promise on the course website to act with civility in the online conversations.

### Issue Assignment

For this assignment, you will gain some basic research skills, conduct research on an issue, share that research with your peers, articulate the arguments about the issue in a pair of letters to an elected official that make the case for both sides of the issue and then evaluate both sets of arguments. The assignment directions will be posted on myCourses in a link called Issue Assignment.

Your final grade is calculated based on the total points you earn:

LETTER GRADE	TOTAL POINTS	PERCENT		LETTER GRADE	TOTAL POINTS	PERCENT
A+	990-1000+	99-100		C	730-769	73-76
A	930-989	93-98		C-	700-729	70-72
A-	900-929	90-92		D+	670-699	67-69
B+	870-899	87-89		D	630-669	63-66
B	830-869	83-86		D-	600-629	60-62
B-	800-829	80-82		F	<600	<60
C+	770-799	77-79				

### Course Website

You will need to use the course website on MyCourses for this class. All course based activities that will be assessed for a grade will be in MyCourses, so you must have access. The course website must now be accessed by logging on through my.umassd.edu. Once you have logged on here, you will see the link to myCourses on the left.

If you need help logging on or using MyCourses, first visit the student help page:

<http://www.umassd.edu/cits/id/student/>. If you still need assistance, send email to [mycourseshelp@umassd.edu](mailto:mycourseshelp@umassd.edu), call the Student IT Service Center at 508-999-8884 or visit the library lower level.

### Policies

*Reaching Me*

Without regular classroom contact, it is important that opportunities to discuss the course and the material with me be explicitly stated. You may email me at my regular address (sjenkins@umassd.edu) anytime you like, and I will do my best to respond within 24 hours on weekdays and by the next business day on weekends. MyCourses has an internal email system, but I encourage you to avoid this and just email my regular address. If you'd like, you can call me in my office (508.999.8036), but generally speaking, email is a better way to communicate with me as I often check my email even when I am away from my office. If you would like to schedule a face-to-face appointment on campus, I am happy to do so.

### *Late Penalties and Incompletes*

Exams **MUST** be completed by the last day listed on the syllabus – no exceptions. Incompletes will only be given in exceptional circumstances. A request for an incomplete must be made prior to the last day of classes (12/8). You must be passing at the time of the request or sufficiently close to passing that the completion of the work after the semester will likely lead to a passing grade. As there is a good deal of latitude in the time frame for completing the quizzes, there will be no extensions for these assignments. Finally, the issue assignment sheet lists late penalties for the components associated with that assignment along with the final date these assignments may be turned in with penalty; after this point, these assignments will not be accepted, even with the penalty. No extensions will be given for these dates.

### *Academic Dishonesty*

All UMass Dartmouth students are expected to maintain high standards of academic integrity and scholarly practice. The University does not tolerate academic dishonesty of any variety, whether as a result of a failure to understand proper academic and scholarly procedure or as an act of intentional dishonesty. For more information about the academic integrity policy at UMass Dartmouth, see:

<http://www.umassd.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/academicregulationsandprocedures/>

A student found guilty of academic dishonesty is subject to severe disciplinary action, which may include expulsion from the University. Please refer to the **Student Handbook** (<http://www.umassd.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/>) and **Student Conduct Code and Discipline Process** (<http://www.umassd.edu/policies/activepolicylist/students/umassdstudentconductcodedisciplineprocess/>) for due process.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. **Students who engage in academic dishonesty will fail the course; under NO circumstances will there be any exceptions to this policy.** If you have any doubts or questions about whether some action constitutes academic dishonesty, please ask me.

Because you will be completing your work outside of a classroom, you will be allowed to use your textbook as a reference (there's no way to avoid it). Two pitfalls can occur because of this, one minor and one major. A minor problem occurs when students complete an answer by closely paraphrasing the information in the textbook regarding the relevant material. For

instance, students simply read each sentence in a section and paraphrase each sentence in turn for their answer. This kind of answer, while not academically dishonest, is not a good demonstration of your learning and will not receive a good score. To avoid this problem, I strongly suggest you draft some talking points for each answer, either as bullet points or as an outline, and then close the book before writing your actual answer. You need to show that you understand and can explain your understanding of the material. Sentence-by-sentence (or point-by-point) paraphrasing is not the same as understanding.

The major problem occurs when material from the textbook (or another source) is put forward as your own writing without quotations or citations. I expect you to draw from the textbooks for your responses, but anytime you *quote* from the textbook in response to an exam question, you **MUST** indicate that the text is quoted. In addition, keep in mind that changing one or two (or a few) words in sentences from a book does **NOT** constitute paraphrasing and so must include a citation. If you do not, it will be considered academic dishonesty. Finally, if you use information from an outside source (quoted or paraphrased), you **MUST** indicate this in your response as well.

As a condition of continued enrollment in this course, you agree to allow any of your course work to be submitted to SafeAssign services for textual comparison or originality review for the detection of possible plagiarism. All submitted assignments will be included in the UMass Dartmouth dedicated databases of assignments at SafeAssign. These databases of assignments will be used solely for the purpose of detecting possible plagiarism during the grading process during this term and in the future.

### *Students with Disabilities*

In accordance with University policy, if you have a documented disability and require accommodations to obtain equal access in this course, please contact me at the beginning of the semester and provide the appropriate paperwork from the Center for Access and Success (CAS). The necessary paperwork is obtained provide proper documentation to the CAS. You may contact them via phone (508-999-8711) or email ([access\\_success@umassd.edu](mailto:access_success@umassd.edu)) to make arrangements.

### **Schedule**

The course is set up so that you should read approximately one chapter per week. I recommend you follow this schedule, but you are not held strictly to it. For instance, you may complete two chapters in one week, then none the next week. The only limit to this flexibility is that you must have completed the quizzes and responses for chapters 1 through 7 for the midterm and quizzes and responses for chapters 8 through 14 for the final. The midterm and final will be available over the course of several days. You may take the exam any time during that period that you wish although you will only have one attempt to complete the exam, so be sure to schedule sufficient time to do so. Please note that the exams **MUST** be completed by the final date available as listed in the schedule. All due dates listed in the syllabus are midnight EST.

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments
9/8	Introduction: The Citizens and Government	Ch. 1	Chapter 1 Quiz and Response
9/15	The Founding and the Constitution	Ch. 2	Chapter 2 Quiz and Response
9/22	Federalism	Ch. 3	Chapter 3 Quiz and Response
9/29	Civil Liberties and Civil Rights	Ch. 4	Chapter 4 Quiz and Response
10/6	Public Opinion	Ch. 5	Chapter 5 Quiz and Response
10/13	The Media	Ch. 6	Chapter 6 Quiz and Response Library Self-Assessments
10/20	Political Parties, Participation, and Elections	Ch. 7	Chapter 7 Quiz and Response
10/27	MIDTERM EXAM DUE (open on 10/21)	.	Quizzes and Responses for chapters 1-7 must be completed
11/3	Interest Groups	Ch. 8	Chapter 8 Quiz and Response
11/10	Congress	Ch. 9	Chapter 9 Quiz and Response
11/17	The Presidency	Ch. 10	Chapter 10 Quiz and Response
11/24	Bureaucracy	Ch. 11	Chapter 11 Quiz and Response Issue Research Postings Due
12/1	The Federal Courts	Ch. 12	Chapter 12 Quiz and Response
12/8	Domestic Policy	Ch. 13	Chapter 13 Quiz and Response Issue Assignment Letters and Essay Due Quizzes and Responses for chapters 8-13 Due
12/17	FINAL EXAM DUE (open 12/9)		