

Introduction to American Politics – PS 101

Winter 2023

Monday / Wednesday / Friday, 10:45 – 11:50 AM

Instructor: Dr. Andrew A. Szarejko (andrew.szarejko@wartburg.edu)

Office Location: CTC 306

Office Hours: Monday / Wednesday, 12:00 – 1:30, and any day by appointment

Classroom: LH 333

Course Credit: 1 credit

Essential Ed: Interconnected (IC) Social Sciences

Course Description and Goals

This course is an introduction to American national politics. We will begin the class by examining the basic structure of the U.S. government, and we will then consider some of the ideas that have shaped and reshaped those structures over time. We will also examine each branch of the U.S. government in depth, and we will consider how U.S. citizens relate to the various institutions of their government. We will also examine contemporary issues and divides in American politics—how is the U.S. political system changing today? Does the system work differently for different people? Why does the U.S. government spend money on some things but not others? Finally, we will conclude the course by reflecting on the question of how one can change aspects of the U.S. political system.

Requirements and (Un)Grading

Requirements of this course include (1) reading assigned pieces, (2) contributing to in-class discussions, and (3) writing multiple papers. Our class sessions will generally take the form of a seminar in which we discuss assigned readings as a class. I will only occasionally lecture, and some of our sessions may include a guest speaker or another activity.

The course structure reflects my goal of “ungrading,” which has been [defined](#) as “an umbrella term for any assessment that decenters the action of an instructor assigning a summary grade to student work”. In other words, I want you to be able to focus less on attaining a particular grade and more on your intellectual growth. Central to this effort will be several short papers that ask you to reflect on assigned readings and on your contributions to the class. “Ungrading approaches learning as a process or a journey rather than the completion of a set of tasks or competencies,” and throughout that process I will provide feedback on your written and in-class work in an effort to help you through that process.

Attendance & Participation

This will primarily be a discussion-based class, so participation will constitute a large portion of your grade. Good participation in this course will entail regular attendance and making comments or asking questions that provide evidence of having done the readings and that move our discussion forward. It is not the quantity but the quality of your in-class participation that will determine your participation grade. Assigned readings include primary sources (e.g., the

Declaration of Independence) and scholarly articles. For primary sources, you should generally be prepared to discuss the following questions: 1) What stuck out to you? 2) If you had read the piece before, how did your reaction to the piece differ upon this reading? 3) What surprised you? 4) What questions does the piece raise for you? By contrast, for each of the scholarly articles, you should generally be prepared to discuss the following questions: 1) What is the author's argument? 2) What kind of evidence does the author provide in support of their argument? 3) Does the evidence suffice to convince you of their argument? 4) If so, why? If not, what evidence would bolster their argument? 5) For weeks with multiple readings, how do the arguments relate to each other? Are they complementary or conflicting? Is one more convincing than the other? 6) As we progress through the course, consider also how the argument relates to earlier arguments you encounter.

I will occasionally provide lectures that may make use of PowerPoint slides, and when they do, I will post the slides on Canvas. Sessions involving a guest speaker will generally take the form of a question-and-answer session, and while I will generally start with a question or two, I would ask you to come prepared to those sessions with questions for the speaker.

Please notify me as soon as possible if any documented medical, family/personal, or religious exceptions are likely to interfere with your regular participation in the course. Emergencies may not allow you time to e-mail in advance; in such cases, just notify me as soon as possible via email. I hope that you all stay well this semester, and I will try to be flexible as exigencies arise. Any given absence will not result in a set number of points being deducted from your participation grade; rather, I will consider your semester-long efforts when assigning a participation grade.

Note that class materials should not be disseminated to anyone outside the class.

Readings

Readings on this syllabus are subject to change, but most weeks will include multiple readings, and you should read them in the order of their listing. We will generally meet three times a week, and you should complete the week's assigned readings before coming to class. **I will make all materials freely available online through Canvas and/or through a link on the syllabus.** If I decide to modify any of the readings or assignments listed below, I will communicate any such changes in advance. If you have any trouble accessing any materials, please let me know.

Good participation and paper grades alike will require you to have a strong comprehension of the material covered in the readings. We will discuss good reading and note-taking strategies in class to ensure that you are well-prepared to do these readings, but if you are having any trouble with them, please see me at your earliest convenience.

We will primarily read pieces by political scientists in this class, and the readings may include research methods (e.g., statistical tests) that are unfamiliar to you. I will discuss those methods as necessary in our discussions, but you don't need to understand every methodological choice that appears in the readings—rather, you should focus on identifying the core argument and the evidence provided to substantiate that argument. If unfamiliarity with any method impedes your understanding of a piece, please feel free to raise the issue in class or in office hours.

Reading Reflection Papers

I will ask you to complete three reading reflection papers throughout the course—one for each of the three full months we will have in this course. For these papers, (1) select two assigned readings from different weeks in the previous month, (2) identify something that connects those two readings, and (3) explain how your two chosen pieces complement or contrast with each other. (4) You should conclude by briefly explaining which piece you enjoyed reading more. Each paper should be roughly 400 to 500 words. You should upload a reading reflection paper on our Canvas course site no later than midnight on the Friday after the last class in each month (that is, on February 3, February 24, and March 31).

Discussion Reflection Papers

Alongside the reading reflection papers, I will ask you to evaluate your contributions to in-class discussions with three discussion reflection papers. In roughly 200-400 words, you should (1) describe how you would grade your participation so far, (2) explain why you would grade it that way, (3) identify a point you are especially proud to have raised (or one that you wish you had raised), and (4) explain why that was a valuable point to raise in class (or why it would have been a valuable point to raise). As with the reading reflection papers, you should upload a discussion reflection paper on our Canvas course site no later than midnight on the Friday after the last class in each month (again, on February 3, February 24, and March 31).

American Politics Study: Part I

This is the first of three related assignments in which you will examine how one branch of the U.S. government. For Part I, in no more than 500 words, (1) identify the branch (executive, legislative, or judicial) about which you want to learn more. (2) Explain why you chose that branch, and based on any governmental, journalistic, or peer-reviewed sources available to you, (3) briefly explain how that branch of government serves as a check on the other two branches of government. You should submit this paper by midnight on Friday, January 27.

American Politics Study: Part II

Consider the same branch of government you examined in Part I of this assignment, and respond to the following prompt: “The [executive/legislative/judiciary] branch no longer serves as an effective check on the other two branches of government.” In no more than 750 words, (1) explain why one might agree with that statement, (2) explain why one might disagree with that statement, and (3) conclude with a discussion of which side of the argument is more persuasive to you. This explanation should cite at least two assigned scholarly articles and at least two external peer-reviewed sources (e.g., journal articles or university press books). Additional citations to other sources are welcome but not required. You should submit this paper by midnight on Friday, March 10.

American Politics Study: Part III

After you submit Part II of this assignment, I will provide feedback on your papers. For Part III, you should revise the paper you submitted for Part II in line with my feedback, and you may take up to 1,000 words to do so. You should submit the revised paper (with tracked changes) by midnight on Friday, April 14.

We will discuss all of these assignments further in class, but if anything remains unclear, I encourage you to contact me via email or in office hours.

You should submit all of the written assignments on Canvas as PDF files. Documents should be double-spaced and typed in 12-point Times New Roman font with standard spacing, 1-inch margins, and page numbers in the upper right-hand corner. Please include your name, the date of your submission, and the course number in the upper-left hand corner as well as a centered title. I would suggest using parenthetical author-date citations and a works cited page for references, but proper attribution and consistency are the most important things when citing other works. Please note that I will not include headers, titles, page numbers, or references in the word count for your papers.

(Un)Grading

While ungrading will guide this course, you will still need a letter grade for this course on your transcript. The letter grade will be determined primarily by your participation and by writing assignments that will be graded on a pass/fail basis. (Papers that receive a “fail” can be revised and resubmitted once each in an effort to receive a “pass”; late papers will be accepted but cannot be resubmitted. Papers that receive a “fail” due to plagiarism cannot be resubmitted.) When assigning a final letter grade, I will take the quality of those papers as well as demonstrated intellectual growth into consideration. At the end of the semester, we will have one-on-one meetings in which I will ask each of you to detail the reason you should receive a given grade. This is meant to be a collaborative process in which you bring the critical thinking that we will be practicing all semester to bear on your own work. In short, you will have a say in your own grade, and our conversation will be based on the following allocation of points and grading scale:

Participation	30%
Reading Reflection Papers	15%
Discussion Reflection Papers	10%
American Politics Study, Part I	10%
American Politics Study, Part II	15%
American Politics Study, Part III	20%

Letter Grade	Percent
A	94-100%
A-	90-93.99%
B+	88-89.99%
B	84-87.99%
B-	80-83.99%
C+	78-79.99%
C	74-77.99%
C-	70-73.99%
D+	68-69.99%
D	64-66.99%
D-	60-63.99%
F	0-59%

Office Hours and E-mail Etiquette

I will hold office hours twice a week, during which you are free to come discuss any relevant academic matters with me. I encourage you to come for substantive questions about readings, lectures, and assignments (especially for the sort of questions that might be difficult to answer briefly via email), but I am also happy to discuss related academic matters such as post-graduate plans, internship ideas, and the like. If my posted office hours do not work for you, just talk to me before or after class or send me an email to schedule an appointment outside of those hours. You are also welcome to stop by my office (CTC 306) to see if I am available at any time.

I also encourage you to send me questions by email. When doing so, please include IS 201 in the subject line. If you send me an email and do not receive a reply within 24 hours, please follow up to remind me of your question. If it is a time-sensitive matter, you may follow up sooner as well, but keep in mind that I might not reply immediately to emails sent at odd hours.

Part I. Introduction

Monday, January 9 / Wednesday, January 11 / Friday, January 13

Thinking about American Politics

- Amelia Hoover Green, “How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps” ([2013](#)).
- Hans Noel, “Ten Things Political Scientists Know that You Don’t,” *The Forum* Vol. 8, No. 3 (2010): 1-19.

Monday, January 16* / Wednesday, January 18 / Friday, January 20

Federalism, Democracy, and Republicanism

- James Madison, *Federalist No. 10* ([1787](#)).
- Thomas Jefferson, Letter to Isaac H. Tiffany ([1816](#)).
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America, Volume 1* ([1835](#)): Introductory Chapter.

*Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – Shortened Class

Monday, January 23 / Wednesday, January 25 / Friday, January 27

Checks and Balances

- James Madison, *Federalist No. 51* ([1788](#)).
- *United States Constitution* ([1787](#) [ratified 1789]).
- *Bill of Rights* ([1789](#))

Part II. Ideas in American Politics

Monday, January 30 / Wednesday, February 1 / Friday, February 3

Liberalism in American Politics

- Louis Hartz, “American Political Thought and the American Revolution,” *American Political Science Review* Vol. 46, No. 2 (1952): 321-342.
- *Mayflower Compact* (1620).
- *Declaration of Independence* (1776).

Monday, February 6 / Wednesday, February 8 / Friday, February 10

Illiberalism in American Politics

- Rogers M. Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America,” *American Political Science Review* 87 (1993): 549-66
- Frederick Douglass, “What, to the Slave, is the Fourth of July?,” (1852).

Monday, February 13 / Wednesday, February 15 / Friday, February 17

The Interplay of Liberalism and Illiberalism in American Politics

- Stephen Skowronek, “The Reassociation of Ideas and Purposes: Racism, Liberalism, and the American Political Tradition,” *American Political Science Review* Vol. 100, No. 3 (2006): 385-401.
- Albert J. Beveridge, “Speech to the U.S. Senate on the Philippine Question” ([1900](#)).

Part III. Institutions in American Politics

Monday, February 20 / Wednesday, February 22* / Friday, February 24

The Legislative Branch

- Sarah A. Binder, “The Dynamics of Legislative Gridlock, 1947-96,” *American Political Science Review* Vol. 93, No. 3 (1999): 519-533.
- Brian D. Feinstein and Eric Schickler, “Platforms and Partners: The Civil Rights Realignment Reconsidered,” *Studies in American Political Development* Vol. 22, No. 1 (2008): 1-31.

*Ash Wednesday – shortened class (starting at 11 AM)

Monday, February 27 / Wednesday, March 1 / Friday / March 3*

*Winter break – no class this week.

Monday, March 6 / Wednesday, March 8 / Friday, March 10

The Executive Branch

- Erwin C. Hargrove, “Presidential Power and Political Science,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* Vol. 31, No. 2 (2001): 245-261.
- Juan J. Linz, “The Perils of Presidentialism,” *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 1, No. 1 (1990): 51-69.

Monday, March 13 / Wednesday, March 15 / Friday, March 17

The Judicial Branch

- Christopher J. Casillas, Peter K. Enns, and Patrick C. Wohlfarth, “How Public Opinion Constrains the U.S. Supreme Court,” *American Journal of Political Science* Vol. 55, No. 1 (2011): 74-88.
- Allison P. Harris and Maya Sen, “Bias and Judging,” *Annual Review of Political Science* Vol. 22 (2019): 241-259.

Part IV. Current Issues in American Politics

Monday, March 20 / Wednesday, March 22 / Friday, March 24

Nationalization, Polarization, and Mass Media

- Daniel J. Hopkins, Eric Schickler, and David L. Azizi, “From Many Divides, One? The Polarization and Nationalization of American State Party Platforms, 1918-2017,” *Studies in American Political Development* Vol. 36, No. 1 (2022): 1-20.
- Matthew S. Levendusky, “Why Do Partisan Media Polarize Viewers?,” *American Journal of Political Science* Vol. 57, No. 3 (2013): 611-623.

Monday, March 27 / Wednesday, March 29 / Friday, March 31

Race, Gender, and Class

- Jacob M. Grumbach, Hahrie Han, and Dorian T. Warren, “Getting out the Vote in the Projects: Lessons from a Community Organizing Experiment,” *Politics, Groups, and Identities* (2022).

- Kelly L. Rolfes-Haase and Michele L. Swers, “Understanding the Gender and Partisan Dynamics of Abortion Voting in the House of Representatives,” *Politics and Gender* Vol. 18, No. 2 (2022): 448-482.

Monday, April 3 / Wednesday, April 5 / Friday, April 7*

Taxing and Spending

- Tine Paulsen, Kenneth Scheve, and David Stasavage, “Foundation of a New Democracy: Schooling, Inequality, and Voting in the Early Republic,” *American Political Science Review* (2022): 1-19.
- Rosella Cappella Zielinski and Kaija Schilde, “Hatchet or Scalpel? Domestic Politics, International Threats, and U.S. Military Spending Cuts, 1950-2014,” *Security Studies* Vol. 28, No. 4 (2019): 677-709.

*Easter break – no class.

Part IV. Conclusion

Monday, April 10* / Wednesday, April 12 / Friday, April 14

Shaping the Future of American Politics

- Andrew Sabl, “Community Organizing as Tocquevillian Politics: The Art, Practices, and Ethos of Association,” *American Journal of Political Science* Vol. 46, No. 1 (2002): 1-19.

*Easter break – no class.

Monday, April 17

Parting Thoughts

- No assigned reading – please submit course evaluations after our final session.

Final Exam/Activity Period – April 18-21 – Submit final papers by midnight on April 14.

The Fine Print

The information below is required administrative language that you should find in some form on every syllabus and that should also be available in more detail online. This is nonetheless important information that you should read if you have not already done so elsewhere. If you have any questions about these policies or how they relate to our course, please let me know.

Wartburg Honor Code

Students, faculty, and staff of Wartburg College are expected to demonstrate integrity in all endeavors. Students are expected to adhere to four essential principles:

1. Submit only original work and properly cite ideas of others, including fellow students.
2. Refrain from giving or receiving unauthorized aid on examinations and assignments.
3. Report any act that violates these principles.
4. Ask for clarification if uncertain about the expectations on a particular assignment.

Students are responsible for abiding by these principles and opposing academic dishonesty in all academic endeavors.

Source: Student Senate, March 12, 2015

FERPA and Privacy

In a blended or distance learning environment, the federal law (FERPA) continues to remain in effect, but students should think about their role in supporting the privacy of fellow students. As this course may include virtual interactions, be cognizant that shared pictures, written assignments, videos, emails, blog posts, discussion boards, etc. remain part of the content of the course, just as it would if it were shared in the face-to-face classroom setting. While the privacy of those posts cannot be guaranteed, the expectation is that each member of the class treats those materials with care and not reshare or post beyond this course.

*As noted above, you should take a similar approach in this face-to-face class that will be mediated by Canvas.

Access and Accommodations

It is the policy and practice of Wartburg College to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers due to a disability (including physical, mental health, learning, vision or hearing) you may request accommodations by contacting Nicole Willis, Disability & Access Coordinator, at (319) 352-8230, or by e-mail nicole.willis@wartburg.edu. The Academic Resource Center (ARC) offers support and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions. The ARC is located at 314 Vogel Library.

Presenting documentation of disability early is helpful and often necessary to secure needed materials in a timely way. Accommodations should be requested prior to affected assignment due dates. Accommodations will not be provided retroactively.

Wartburg College Computing Policy

The Wartburg Technology Policies can be viewed at <https://www.wartburg.edu/its/>.

There will find the purpose, definition, and authorized users. Also listed are the Wartburg College technology policies for appropriate use, personal use, privacy, electronic mail, worldwide web, and disciplinary action.

Technical Support

If you experience problems or need technical support, use the numbers below. If you are unable to participate in class or unable to turn an assignment in, you must obtain a ticket number from the helpdesk:

Wartburg College Helpdesk
Phone: 319-352-8767
Email: helpdesk@wartburg.edu
Website: www.wartburg.edu/its

Sexual Misconduct and Discrimination

Wartburg College is committed to providing a learning, working, and living environment free from all forms of sexual misconduct including, but not limited to, sex-based harassment, non-consensual sex acts, sexual exploitation, relationship violence, and stalking. Wartburg College considers sex discrimination in all forms to be a serious offense and it will not be tolerated.

The Wartburg College's Title IX, Sexual Misconduct and Discrimination Policy, following national guidance from the Office of Civil Rights, requires that faculty follow Wartburg's policy as a "mandatory reporter" of any personal disclosure of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and/or violence related experiences or incidents shared with the faculty member in person, via email, and/or in classroom settings. These disclosures include but are not limited to reports of personal relationship abuse, relational/domestic violence, and stalking. While faculty are often able to help students locate appropriate channels of assistance on campus, disclosure by the student to the faculty member requires that the faculty member inform appropriate Wartburg personnel to help ensure that the student's safety and welfare is being addressed, even if the student requests that the disclosure not be shared.

For confidential counseling support and assistance on campus, please contact:

- Wartburg College Counseling Services, 319-352-8596
- Wartburg College Campus Pastor, 319-352-8217

For private, but not confidential, resources on campus, please contact:

- Campus Security, 319-352-8372
- Title IX Coordinator, 319-504-0468
- Director of Residential Life, 319-352-8260
- VP of Student Life, 319-352-8745
- Campus Security officers and residence hall directors