Course Description

This course is an introduction to modern issues in American political behavior. Over the next fifteen weeks, we will examine the positions citizens and politicians occupy in our political system (and how those positions are evolving). We will also look at changes in public opinion and partisanship over time (and what implications those changes have both for public policy and for dividing and uniting our nation).

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students should be able to address the following topics: 1) the nature of American participation in political affairs, 2) the positives and negatives of the ways in which Americans choose their elected officials, 3) how running for office in modern times differs from campaigns of the past, and 4) the extent to which Americans are and are not divided when it comes to party identification, casting votes, and the salient issues of our time.

Required Texts

The following texts are available at local bookstores (as well as through online sources).


Assignments and Grading

Your course grade will be calculated as follows:
Attendance is not mandatory, but it is strongly advised. Ideal answers to questions on the examinations will express clear knowledge of both the assigned reading materials and the content of the lectures. In addition, class will be where I deliver important information on exams and the research paper.

Tuesday class periods will be a mix of lecture and professor-driven discussion. Thursday class periods will be devoted entirely to student-driven discussion dealing with the week’s readings and lectures. The participation portion of your course grade will be based on your level of involvement in these discussions. Students who regularly take part in the debate can expect to receive full participation credit. Note, however, that there is such a thing as “negative” participation. Do not talk just for the sake of talking; have something to say (and think it through before you choose to enter the debate). Also: remember that this is a political science course and not a “politics” course; discussion is not the time for you to get up on your ideological soapbox.

The foundation for Thursday discussions will be talking points. Talking points should be the most interesting questions, thoughts, arguments, or comments you have about the week’s material. Talking points are NOT moments for you to expound on your political views, your philosophy on the world, and so forth. Talking points should not be restatements of discussions from earlier in class. They should be submitted in the form of a sentence or short paragraph. Examples of what constitute good talking points will be shared with the class during the introductory session so students will have a better idea of what the assignment entails. To receive the maximum amount of credit for talking points, you must submit a talking point by the deadline (2 PM on Wednesday) in the D2L dropbox for ten of the eleven Thursday discussions. Please put some care into your talking point submission (in other words, proofread it before submitting it). Obviously, since there are approximately forty students in the class, we will not cover all talking points every week; most weeks we will cover approximately 10 points, depending on the nature of the discussion. However, submitting a talking point by the deadline (provided it is a relatively fresh idea not already addressed in the Tuesday class period) is sufficient to receive credit, regardless of whether or not your talking point is used.

There will be three examinations in this class. The exams will contain short answer and essay questions about topics from the preceding lectures. The first exam, scheduled for February 22, will cover the first five weeks of lecture content and readings. The second exam, scheduled for April 12, will cover weeks seven through eleven of lecture content and readings. The final exam, scheduled for May 12, will cover weeks twelve through fifteen of lecture content and readings. During the session prior to each exam, I will hold a review to answer questions and highlight what topics will be covered. Note that you are eligible to take a makeup exam only if the following conditions are met: 1) you must have a documented emergency condition or University recognized excused absence, and 2) you must make arrangements for the makeup prior to the exam or within two days of the exam (depending on your situation).

Students will also write a ten page research paper on a topic of their choosing (provided the topic can be credibly tied to an issue discussed in class). Papers are due Thursday, April 28 at 3:00 PM; I require a copy submitted in person and a copy placed in the D2L dropbox. I will only accept papers via e-mail in cases where the student has a University excused absence. Despite the fact that students will pick their own paper topics, a short description of the topic must be submitted to me by March 29 so I can advise students concerning the direction of their paper; I am only looking for one paragraph of information on what the paper will examine. Students who fail to submit a paper topic by this deadline will immediately be penalized ten percent on their paper. Also, note that even though paper topics are due at the end of March, if a student wants to write about a topic that will not be discussed in class until after topics are due, I will
allow it. Students will also take part in an in-class library session to assist in the research gathering process; information about a required online tutorial will be provided near the beginning of the semester. I will read rough drafts of papers until 48 hours before papers are due. Research papers not handed in by the deadline will lose ten percent of the potential grade for each twenty-four hour period they are late. Students who do not take part in the online library tutorial will also be penalized ten percent.

Final class grades will be assigned as follows:

A = 89.5-100  B = 79.5-89.4  C = 69.5-79.4  D = 59.5-69.4  F = Less Than 59.5

Questions concerning grades should be dealt with during office hours. I will not discuss grades via e-mail.

Possibilities for extra credit may occur, but are not guaranteed.

**Statement about Students with Disabilities**

The University of Oklahoma is committed to providing reasonable accommodation for all students with disabilities. Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact the instructor personally as soon as possible to discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities. Students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Disability Services prior to receiving accommodations in this course. The Office of Disability Services is located in Goddard Health Center, Suite 166, phone 405-325-3852 or TDD only 405-325-4173.

**Statement about Religious Holidays**

It is the policy of the University to excuse the absences of students that result from religious observances and to provide without penalty for the rescheduling of examinations and additional required classwork that may fall on religious holidays. Please see the instructor immediately if you will need to miss class any time during this semester.

**Statement about Course Materials/Copyright and Plagiarism**

The handouts used in this course are copyrighted. By “handouts,” I mean all products generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, web pages, multimedia files, presentations, quizzes, exams, written assignments, and in-class material review sheets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission.

Academic misconduct includes plagiarism, cheating on exams, improper collaboration, and fraud (such as submitting the same assignment for different classes or fabricating sources). See http://www.ou.edu/provost/integrity for academic misconduct policies and http://www.ou.edu/provost/integrity-rights for information on student rights with regards to misconduct.

As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one’s own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of the person. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues without which research cannot be safely communicated.

Plagiarized assignments will automatically be given a zero.
Course Calendar

Please note that I reserve the right to change the following calendar in order to ensure that we spend adequate time on each topic. Of course, if such changes become necessary, I will make an announcement in class. Also, note that I reserve the right to add and subtract readings as I see fit.

Students are expected to have read the assigned readings before class.

Week 1 January 18, 20: Introduction, Citizenship
  • Dalton, ch. 1-2

Week 2 January 25, 27: Norms, Engagement
  • Dalton, ch. 3-4
  • Talking Points Due 2:00 PM Wednesday

Week 3 February 1, 3: Tolerance, Consequences
  • Dalton, ch. 5, 8
  • Talking PointsDue 2:00 PM Wednesday

Week 4 February 8, 10: Government
  • Dalton, ch. 6-7
  • Talking Points Due 2:00 PM Wednesday

Week 5 February 15, 17: Change, The Past and The Future
  • Dalton, ch. 9, Epilogue
  • Talking Points Due 2:00 PM Wednesday
  • Exam Review February 17

Week 6 February 22, 24: Exam; Library Session
  • First Exam February 22
  • Library Session February 24

Week 7 March 1, 3: Electoral Problems, Voter Solutions
  • Wayne, ch. 1-2
  • Talking Points Due 2:00 PM Wednesday
Week 8 March 8, 10: Representation and Money

- Wayne, ch. 3-4
- Talking Points Due 2:00 PM Wednesday

Week 9 March 22, 24: Media and Elections

- Wayne, ch. 5
- Talking Points Due 2:00 PM Wednesday

Week 10 March 29 (No Class March 31): Parties and Processes

- Wayne, ch. 6-7
- Paper Topics Due 3:00 PM March 29

Week 11 April 5, 7: Communication and Outcomes

- Wayne, ch. 8-9
- Talking Points Due 2:00 PM Wednesday
- Exam Review April 7

Week 12 April 12, 14: Opinion Evolution, Part 1

- Second Exam April 12
- Olson and Green, Ch. 1-2

Week 13 April 19, 21: Opinion Evolution, Part 2

- Olson and Green, Ch. 3-4
- Talking Points Due 2:00 PM Wednesday

Week 14 April 26, 28: Opinion Evolution, Part 3

- Olson and Green, Ch. 5-6
- Talking Points Due 2:00 PM Wednesday
- Papers Due By 3:00 PM April 28
Week 15  May 3, 5: Opinion Evolution, Part 4

- Olson and Green, Ch. 7-8
- Talking Points Due 2:00 PM Wednesday
- Exam Review May 5

Final Exam: Thursday, May 12, 4:30 PM - 6:30 PM