

Government 201

Spring Quarter, 2013
MWF 10-10:50 a.m. (S01)
MWF 11-11:50 a.m. (S02)
Morton Hall 40
Blackboard Course Website
Facebook Group Page

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 2-4, or by
appointment

Introduction to American Government and Politics

A recent Public Policy Polling opinion poll found that when asked to compare the favorability of Congress to the favorability of a series of institutions, people, processes, groups, and other things, the American people rate Congress lower than root canals, head lice, cockroaches, and used-car salesmen.¹ Yet, in the 2012 election, more than 90% of incumbent members of Congress were re-elected.

Puzzles such as this frustrate the public and generate hours of cable news coverage but can often be explained parsimoniously by thinking about how political institutions shape the preferences and behaviors of voters and the people they elect to represent them. The goal of this course is to help you better understand the incentives and motivations of these various actors in the American political system so that you can interpret what you read and hear about American politics in a more analytical fashion. Consequently, this course serves simultaneously as both an introduction to American government and an introduction to the theories and methods of studying political science more generally.

We will focus on applying the ideas and theories generated by scholars in the discipline to understand the contemporary political and policy issues facing our country, including the rise of the Tea Party, the legal debate over gay marriage, the “fiscal cliff” debacle, and the conflicting opinions about the health care reform now known both affectionately and derisively as “Obamacare.” We will discuss these and other current topics in order to address broader questions about American politics, including:

- How do the constitutional “rules of the game” structure the choices that political actors make?
- Why have debates about the proper role of the federal government persisted for over 200 years?
- Why is Congress so dysfunctional?
- What is the relationship between the public and their elected representatives?
- How has growing polarization altered the political behavior of both elected officials and voters?

Teaching Philosophy

The subject matter of a course serves as a tool to help you develop skills to become a better thinker and communicator. As a professor, in all of my courses, I hope that my students will improve their ability to:

Ask good questions. Learning necessitates curiosity.

Assess and synthesize information. Use the course material to arrive at informed opinions.

¹ Fortunately for Congress, it has a higher approval rating than telemarketers, the ebola virus, meth labs, and Lindsay Lohan. More information can be found [here](#) and [here](#)

Engage in analytical reasoning. Respectfully discuss and deliberate ideas.

Communicate effectively. Continue to improve the skills necessary to write or present a clearly argued and well-developed discourse.

Course Philosophy

The goals of this particular course are multi-faceted.

To serve its function as a required, entry-level course in the Government Department—and as the foundational course in American politics required by many upper-division classes—the course is designed to teach you a set of fundamental concepts about the structure and function of American government. It should give you the cognitive infrastructure and vocabulary to put your future course material in context. The primary purpose of the three Concepts Tests (described elsewhere) is to assess your progress on this dimension—the mastery of key ideas and terms in the course.

To serve its function as a course in a liberal arts curriculum, this course is designed to facilitate critical thinking and communication skills. Long after you've forgotten what the line item veto is, for example, I hope that what will endure is what you learn in this course about how to think analytically, how to read effectively, and how to write clearly. This is the secondary dimension on which I will be able to evaluate your progress in the course, but the gains on this dimension will be most visible only to you and to your professors in future courses.

Finally, to serve its function as preparation for your post-collegiate life, this course is designed to help give you the tools to be an engaged member of society. Only you will be able to evaluate yourself on this dimension. I hope this course motivates you to action—whether that is working “inside the Beltway” in Washington, D.C., helping to register people to vote, or applying what you learn about how our government functions to help your friends and family move beyond the simplistic conclusion that “the system is broken” to articulate why the system operates the way it does.

My Expectations

I aim to make class worth your time, and I ask for the same in return. I expect that you will read the course material before the beginning of class and come prepared to participate in the discussion. I have posted a variety of handouts on Blackboard that I hope will help you get the most out of the course. Attendance every day and active class participation are essential components of this class. However, I recognize that GOVT 201 is only one of your classes in a full course load, and that many of you have important work and family obligations outside of school. If you take your education seriously and communicate with me (with plenty of advance notice) about obstacles or challenges that may affect your performance in the course, I am happy to work with you to find solutions to help you succeed.

Course Requirements

Part of my teaching philosophy is that students should have choice and flexibility in the course assignments and should take ownership over their learning. Thus, in addition to flexibility and choice on which assignments to complete, you will have options on the weight assigned to the various elements of the course. You will complete a Grading Contract due on Monday, January 28th, which will be a binding commitment of the assignments you plan to do, the weight of those assignments, and the due dates of those assignments.

1. Participation and Engagement: A total of 25% of your overall grade will come from requirements related to your active participation in the course. This includes participation in-class (during class debates and day-to-day class meetings) and your engagement out of class (posting on the course Facebook page) as well as one required short (2-3 double-spaced pages) response paper.

2. Core Comprehension: The remaining 75% of your grade will be composed of the conceptual examination and written assignments in the course. There will be three concepts tests, a final exam essay, and an independent assignment (5-7 double-spaced pages).

See the Grading Contract handout for more information about the assignments.

Grading Policies

I reserve A's for excellent work. B's are for solid, above-average work while C's are for work of average quality. D's indicate work that is below average, and F's indicate work that is substantially below expectations.

I will collect assignments at the beginning of class. Assignments turned in after the first 20 minutes of class will be considered late (5% deduction). Assignments turned in after class will be penalized an additional half-letter grade (5%) for each day (or fraction there of) they are late until the maximum grade possible is a 60. Weekend days count. So, if you turn in an assignment after class but before midnight on the day the assignment is due, the maximum grade possible is a 90. An assignment turned in the day after the due date will receive a maximum score of 85; two days late will receive a maximum of 80; three days late, 75, etc. I will not accept assignments after the Friday of the last week of classes. Computer malfunctions will not be considered a legitimate excuse for the late submission of assignments, so plan accordingly.

Part of the Grading Contract is the opportunity to request an extension on one of the two written assignments. Because I give you this option in advance, I do not grant extensions on assignments except in the case of a university-approved reasons: a documented illness, religious observance, death in the family (or similarly grave family emergency), or a W&M-sponsored travel commitment that you have discussed with me before the assignment is due. In fairness to everyone, students who arrive late for an exam may not work overtime. The only valid reasons for missing and rescheduling an exam are due to the reasons outlined above, or, during final exams only (as W&M allows), you have several exams in a row. If you miss an exam for another reason, you can take a makeup exam for which the maximum grade you can earn is a C (75%).

Extra credit will not be available. Consequently, it is imperative that you do your best on each and every assignment. I do not communicate about grades over email. If you are not in class the day an assignment is passed back, it is your responsibility to come to my office hours or make an appointment to pick it up.

Class attendance is required, though participation points will not be awarded simply for showing up. You have three unexcused absences; each unexcused absence after the third will result in a two-point deduction in your participation grade. Habitual tardiness to class bothers me and extreme cases can affect your participation grade; if you anticipate that you will be late with some frequency (for example, if you have a class on the other side of campus with a long-winded professor), please make me aware of the situation and plan to sit near the door.

If you are dissatisfied with your grade on an assignment, you can choose between two options. If you want to talk about your work and discuss ways you can improve on *future* assignments, I am happy to meet with you in office hours or by appointment. You cannot appeal your grade after we have this conversation. Therefore, if you are positive that you want to appeal your grade, you need to write a one-page double-spaced explanation of why you think your work merits a higher grade. After reading your appeal, I will re-grade your assignment. Your grade can go up, stay the same, or go down. We will *then* schedule a meeting to talk about your work.

Plagiarism

I assume that students take the Honor Code and plagiarism as seriously as I do and that academic misconduct will not become an issue in this class. For any questions about policies regarding cheating, plagiarism, or other types of academic dishonesty, please see the William and Mary Honor Council's web site and the discussion of the Honor Code and plagiarism in the Student Handbook. I will initiate an Honor Council proceeding for any student whom I judge to have plagiarized any part of their work or to have cheated in any way, and at a bare minimum, I will recommend that the student receive an F for the course.

Course Materials

I recommend that you purchase the following books, although there will be copies of the book available on reserve in the library. While they are on sale in the campus bookstore, I am confident sleuthing on Amazon, half.com, or abebooks.com will result in used copies at lower cost. I encourage you to get the current editions of the book as substantial changes have been made from earlier editions.

Kernell, Sam, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser. 2012. *The Logic of America Politics*, 5th Edition. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

I encourage all students to use the website set up for *Logic* (<http://college.cqpress.com/sites/logic/Home.aspx>). The website has useful links to chapter study guides, quizzes, flash cards, and vocabulary crossword puzzles. The site also links to the *Logic of the News* (<http://logicofthenews.wordpress.com>), which relates the course material to current events.

In the second half of the course, we will read this book:

Mann, Thomas E. and Norman J. Ornstein. 2012. *It's Even Worse than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism*. New York: Basic Books

In addition to these two texts, additional original research articles and readings will be available via the course website on Blackboard.

I also encourage you to regularly read the news from a reliable source, such as the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or the *Wall Street Journal*. There are dozens of other good sources of information. The website below has links to many of these sources:

<http://www.onlinecolleges.com/top-10/a-political-science-majors-resources.html>

Readings and Calendar

I reserve the right to make minor modifications to the assigned reading but I will not increase the reading load¹

Books

- Kernell, Sam, Gary Jacobson, and Thad Kousser. 2012. *The Logic of America Politics*, 5th Edition. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.
- Mann, Thomas E. and Norman J. Ornstein. 2012. *It's Even Worse than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism*. New York: Basic Books

Articles and Book Excerpts (available on Blackboard)

- Abrajano, Marisa and Michael Alvarez. 2010. *New Faces, New Voices: The Hispanic Electorate in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Epstein, Lee and Thomas G. Walker. 2009. *Constitutional Law for a Changing America: Rights, Liberties, and Justice*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press
- Gelernter, David. "Back to Federalism: The Proper Remedy for Polarization." *The Weekly Standard*. April 10, 2006.
- Green, Donald, Bradley Palmquist and Eric Schickler. 2002. *Partisan Hearts and Minds*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Hetherington, Marc J. 2009. "Review Article: Putting Polarization in Perspective." *British Journal of Political Science* 39: 413-448.
- Jacobs, Lawrence and Suzanne Mettler. 2011. "Editor's Introduction." *Journal of Health Policy, Politics and Law* 36(6): 911-916.
- Malhotra, Neil. 2008. "Partisan Polarization and Blame Attribution in a Federal System: The Case of Hurricane Katrina." *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 38(4): 651-670.
- Olson, Mancur. 1982. *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation, and Social Rigidities*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Ostrom, Elinor. 1990. *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Price Foley, Elizabeth. 2012. *The Tea Party: Three Principles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Skocpol, Theda and Vanessa Williamson. 2012. *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Strickland, April A., Charles S. Taber and Milton Lodge. 2011. "Motivated Reasoning and Public Opinion." *Journal of Health Policy, Politics and Law* 36(6): 935-944.

Topic

Readings

I. Introduction

Jan 16

Intro Day

Class logistics
How does the media evaluate the functioning of American politics?
What are popular conceptions about how American politics works?

Bring in a newspaper article that evaluates the performance of some aspect of government

¹ *** and blue font indicates a discussion day related to polarization
ALL CAPS and red indicates a due date or aberration to the schedule

Jan 18	The Logic of American Politics <i>Class logistics</i> <i>What are the different ways political scientists approach the study of American politics?</i> <i>How does the textbook approach the study?</i> <i>What are the key ideas underpinning this approach to the study of American politics?</i>	Logic, "A Note to Students" (p. xi-xii) Logic, Chapter 1, up until Collective Action Problems (pp. 3-10)
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II. Nationalization of Politics

Jan 21	NO CLASS	
Jan 23	Collective Action Problems and Solutions <i>What are collective action problems?</i> <i>Why are they prevalent in politics?</i> <i>How do we solve collective action problems?</i>	Logic, Chapter 1 (pp.11-38)
Jan 25	Applying the Logic of Collective Action to Contemporary American Politics <i>How do we apply the logic of collective action to the study of politics?</i> <i>What institutions exist to overcome these problems?</i> <i>What collective action problems have we not solved?</i>	Olson 1982 (excerpt) Ostrom 1990 (excerpt)
Jan 28	Context and the Build Up to the Constitution <i>What were the design flaws in the Articles of Confederation?</i> <i>What were the key problems facing the country before the Constitution was ratified?</i>	Logic, Chapter 2 (pp. 41-60)
Jan 30	Key Provisions in the Constitution <i>What were the major points of disagreement among the Framers?</i> <i>What compromises were made in the Constitution? How does the U.S. Constitution compare to the constitutions in other advanced democracies?</i>	Logic, Chapter 2 (pp. 61-84)
Feb 1	Key Debates in the Constitution <i>What was the debate about between the Federalists and Antifederalists?</i> <i>What were the concerns of the Antifederalists?</i>	The Federalist No. 10 The Federalist No. 51 The Declaration of Independence U.S. Constitution
Feb 4	CONCEPTS TEST 1	
Feb 6	Federalism <i>What is federalism? How is it structured in the Constitution?</i> <i>Why would we want federalism?</i> <i>What are the benefits and drawbacks of federalism?</i> <i>How does federalism solve some--and create other--collective action problems?</i>	Logic, Chapter 3 (pp. 89-106) Logic, Chapter 9 (pp. 401-413)

Feb 8 **Federalism - Changes Over Time** Logic, Chapter 3 (pp. 106-130)
How has federalism evolved over time?
Why has federal power grown? Was this growth inevitable?
Why is federalism relevant today?
What things should be handled by local or state governments and what things should be handled by the federal government?

Feb 11 *****Polarization Discussion #1: Public Opinion about the Role of the Federal Government***** Malhotra 2008 (pp. 651-657, 658-661, 666-667)
How does the American public view the role of government?
To what extent are there fundamental, competing notions about the role of the federal government?
Could stronger federalism help remedy polarization? Gallup Poll results
Gelernter 2006

Feb 13 **The Tea Party, the Constitution, and Federalism** Price Foley 2012 (excerpt) OR Skocpol and Williamson 2012 (excerpt)
What is the Tea Party advocating?
How do the views of members of the Tea Party differ from those of the general public?
How do we assess the Tea Party's claim that the federal government has exceeded its constitutional powers?

RESPONSE PAPER DUE

Feb 15 **Key Concepts about Civil Liberties and Civil Rights** Logic,
What is the difference between civil liberties and civil rights? Chapter 4 (pp. 138-139, 146-147)
How are the concepts "civil rights" and "civil liberties" interpreted, expanded, or limited? How is that decided? Chapter 5 (pp. 191-203, 231-235)
What are the key concepts the Supreme Court uses to make decisions about civil rights and liberties? Chapter 9 (pp. 417-427, 437-438)
OPTIONAL: Background (Chapter 4 135-172; Chapter 5 204-230)

Feb 18 **Civil Rights and Liberties of Same Sex Marriage** Logic, Chapter 4 (pp. 172-186)
What is the legal history of gay rights? Epstein and Walker excerpts
What is the background of the two court cases the Supreme Court will hear this spring about gay rights? "In Class Debate" resources sheet

Feb 20 **Civil Rights and Liberties of Same Sex Marriage**
*****IN CLASS DEBATE*****

Feb 22 **Civil Rights and Liberties of Same Sex Marriage**
*****IN CLASS DEBATE*****

[OPTIONAL] DEBATE NOTE DUE

III. Institutions of Government

Feb 25 **Legislative Organization** Logic, Chapter 6 (pp. 239-243, 257-267, 283-298)
How did the Framers intend for legislation to be made?
What collective actions problems does Congress need to overcome? What rules and/or structures exist to help solve these problems?

Feb 27 **Historical Presidency**
What are the institutional powers of the presidency?
How has the presidency changed over time?
Why has the staff in the institutional presidency grown so large? Logic, Chapter 7 (pp. 305-333, p. 342-347)

Mar 1 **Political Parties and Interest Groups**
What is the function of political parties?
Why do we have only two political parties?
How was the party system functioned historically?
What are interest groups supposed to do? Logic, Chapter 12 (pp. 533-560)
Logic, Chapter 13 (pp. 587-599)

SPRING BREAK

Mar 11 **Electoral Connection and Going Public**
If Americans hate Congress so much, why do incumbents get re-elected at such high rates?
What powers does the President have?
What is the connection between public opinion and lawmaking? Logic, Chapter 6 (pp. 243-256, 298-301)
Logic, Chapter 7 (pp. 333-342)

Mar 13 **Strategic Manipulation of Rules in Congress**
Why can't Congress seem to get anything done?
What's the deal with the filibuster? Logic, Chapter 6 (pp. 268-282)
Mann and Ornstein Chapter 2 (pp. 31-58); Chapter 3 (pp. 81-91)

Mar 15 **Congressional-Presidential Relations: Negotiation and Bargaining Given Polarization in Congress**
How do the President and Congress negotiate?
How do we measure polarization in Congress? Logic, Chapter 7 (pp. 334-335, 348-352)
Mann and Ornstein Chapter 1

Mar 18 *****Polarization Discussion #2: The Fiscal Cliff*****
Why did the "fiscal cliff" happen?
What is the effect of polarization on the ability of Congress to legislate? Readings re: the "fiscal cliff," TBA

INDEPENDENT ASSIGNMENT OPTION A DUE

Mar 20 **Interest Groups - Hyperpluralism and Unequal Voices**
Are interest groups valuable for democracy?
Which kinds of interest groups are most successful? Logic, Chapter 13 (pp. 600-614, 621-625)
Mann and Ornstein (pp. 67-80)

Mar 22 **Principal-Agent Problems in the Bureaucracy**
Who controls the bureaucracy?
What incentives do bureaucrats have?
What are the implications of the "revolving door" between government, industry, and "K Street?" Logic, Chapter 8 (pp. 355-398)

Mar 25 **Judiciary and Nominations**
Why have judicial nominations become so polarized? Logic, Chapter 9 (pp. 427-437)
Mann and Ornstein (pp. 91-103)

IV. Political Behavior

- Mar 27 **Media**
How do changes in technology and society affect the way news is produced and consumed?
Logic, Chapter 14 (pp. 629-646)
- Mar 29 **Media**
Is the media biased?
How does the news media contribute to polarization?
What incentives encourage the media to cover politics the way it does?
Logic, Chapter 14 (pp. 646-670)
Mann and Ornstein (pp. 58-67)
- Apr 1 **Campaign and Elections**
How does election law and party rules affect campaigns?
Why do candidates air so many negative ads?
Logic, Chapter 11 (pp. 487-491, 506-514)
Chapter 12 (pp. 560-586)
- Apr 3 **Campaign and Interest Group Spending**
What was the impact of the Citizens United case on campaign finance?
Does money buy influence?
Logic, Chapter 11 (pp. 515-529)
Logic, Chapter 13 (pp. 615-621)
- Apr 5 **CONCEPTS TEST 2**
- Apr 8 **Political Attitudes - Public Opinion and Political Knowledge**
How do people form opinions about the political world?
Do people have stable and coherent opinions?
What kind of information do people have about politics?
What kind of information do people need to make good political decisions?
Logic, Chapter 10 (pp. 441-483)
- Apr 10 **Partisanship and Ideology**
What is partisan self-identification?
How are partisanship and ideology different?
Logic, Chapter 10 (pp. 449-452)
Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002 (excerpt)
- INDEPENDENT ASSIGNMENT OPTION B DUE**
- Apr 12 **CLASS CANCELLED**
- Apr 15 **Public Opinion on the Health Care Reform Debate**
Is public opinion meaningful?
How do we interpret public opinion?
How do ideological and psychological processes affect the formation of public opinion?
Jacobs and Mettler 2011
Strickland, Taber and Lodge 2011
- Apr 17 *****Polarization Discussion 3: Polarization in the Mass Public*****
Is the mass public polarized?
If so, what caused them to be polarized?
What are the consequences of increased polarization in the public?
Hetherington 2009 (skim pp. 413-429, read carefully pp. 429-448)

Apr 19 **Turnout and Participation** Logic, Chapter 11 (pp. 492-506)
 Why do people turnout to vote? Abrajano and Alvarez 2010
 What unique factors affect the turnout decisions of racial and (excerpt)
 ethnic minorities?

V. Conclusions

Apr 22 **Institutional Reform** Logic, Chapter 15 (pp. 673-699)
 What are the main problems with the American political Mann and Ornstein Chapter 4
 system?
 What institutional fixes have been proposed for various
 problems in the American political system?

INDEPENDENT ASSIGNMENT OPTION C DUE

Apr 24 **Institutional Reform** Mann and Ornstein Chapter 5
 What solutions are likely to be most effective? Why? and 6
 Are institutional changes the right approach to fixing our
 problems?

Apr 26 **Polarization Review Day**

Apr 30/
May 2 **CONCEPTS TEST 3 and FINAL EXAM**