

PSC 121: American National Government and Politics

Syracuse University

Spring 2021 | Session II

Synchronous Live Sessions: Thursdays 6:30 – 8:00 PM via Zoom

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Office Hours: Tuesdays 2 – 4 PM via Zoom; or by appointment

CATALOG DESCRIPTION

American political institutions. Basic principles embedded in structure and practices of American government. Practical consequences of this political system for the citizen.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course serves as an introduction to the major political institutions in the United States, as well as the political behavior of its citizens. We will discuss topics ranging from how Congress, the presidency, the courts, and the bureaucracy operate to how citizens develop political preferences and use those preferences to make decisions in the American democratic system. Relatedly, a running theme in this course will be how democratic American politics is and how American democracy has developed over time.

More importantly, we will be reading and engaging with fundamental theories of American politics from the political science literature. We will be applying these theories to both past and present phenomena in American political institutions and behavior.

AUDIENCE

Political science majors and minors; Students who are interested in American politics and/or whose major fields are related to issues of American government and politics.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After taking this course, students will be able to:

- Identify American political institutions, their development, and their function today.
- Describe and analyze how citizens interact with, shape, and are shaped by the political system.
- Explain how American politics have developed over time.
- Read and analyze political science research and apply theories from that research to contemporary political events through written assignments.
- Participate in academic discussions grounded in class material.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Exams: The majority of your grade in this class will be based on two exams: a midterm and a final exam. These exams will *not* be cumulative. These exams will consist of multiple-choice questions and short essays that will require you to describe American political institutions and behavior discussed in class.

As this is an online class, you will have access to your notes and class materials while you are taking these exams. At the same time, these exams will be timed so it is in your interest to prepare sufficiently for the exams.

Synchronous Session Attendance: You are expected to be present for every live session. Students must request approval to miss a live session due to an unavoidable conflict. Students that receive approval to miss a live session will be expected to complete an assignment in place of the live session. The assignment should be completed before the next live session.

Any sessions missed without approval will result in the student receiving a zero for that week's live session grade. Any student that enrolls in the class after the start of the first live session will be able to submit an alternate assignment for the first session only as provided by the faculty.

Please note: For online courses, holidays are not observed. If your live session is scheduled on a holiday, the session will be held on an alternate date that is mutually agreeable to the instructor and a majority of class members.

This course will be conducted online with eight synchronous 90-minute sessions.

Class Participation:

Synchronous Session Participation: You will be expected to fully participate in discussion during synchronous session. Actively engaging with the course material through discussion with fellow students is crucial to your understanding of the material. As a rule of thumb, you should be speaking, on average, at least once per session in order to receive a B for participation. Speaking more than this will ensure a higher grade. Conversely, if you habitually fail to contribute to discussion, you can expect your participation grade to decrease. Two-thirds of your participation grade will come from participation in the live sessions.

Discussion Boards: After completing the required readings and lectures for each week, you will be required to participate in a weekly discussion board. These discussions will be used to prepare for our live sessions on Thursday evenings. This is the forum where you can ask questions about aspects of the week's content that you don't fully understand or want more clarification on. It is also a place where you can begin to form your own analytical questions about the course content and/or respond to your fellow classmates' questions.

It can be difficult for everyone to be able to participate frequently during the live sessions, so these discussion boards will also serve as a means of class participation. Each week you need to make at least two posts by Wednesday evening. In these posts, **you need to (1) respond to the prompt posted by the instructor and (2) respond to one or more of your fellow**

classmates' posts. In addition, you can post analytical and/or clarifying questions if you have any. I will gather both the analytical and clarifying questions you all post and incorporate some of them into our live session the following evening.

Grade Determination

Component	Worth
Midterm Exam	30%
Final Exam	30%
Synchronous Session Attendance	5%
Synchronous Session Participation	10%
Weekly Discussion Boards	25%

At the end of the course, your grade will be assigned based on the following scale: A (94-100); A- (90-93); B+ (87-89); B (83-86); B- (80-82); C+ (77-79); C (73-76); C- (70-72); D (60-69); and F (0-59).

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

University Attendance Policy: Attendance in classes is expected in all courses at Syracuse University. Students are expected to arrive on campus in time to attend the first meeting of all classes for which they are registered. Students who do not attend classes starting with the first scheduled meeting may be academically withdrawn as not making progress toward degree by failure to attend. Instructors set course-specific policies for absences from scheduled class meetings in their syllabi.

It is a federal requirement that students who do not attend or cease to attend a class to be reported at the time of determination by the instructor. Instructors should use “ESPR” and “MSPR” in Orange Success to alert the Office of the Registrar and the Office of Financial Aid.

Students should also review the university’s [religious observance policy](#) and make the required arrangements at the beginning of each semester.

Did Not Attend Policy: If a student is flagged for non-attendance and the student does not officially drop the class(es) by the Financial Drop deadline, the student will receive an NA (“Did Not Attend”) grade on their official transcript. Note that changes to the student’s enrollment status may affect their financial aid eligibility and may result in the loss of federal financial aid.

Excusable Absence Policy: If a student misses a live (synchronous) session due to a conflict that is out of the student’s control, the student must:

- Provide proof of conflict to the instructor and request approval.
- If approved, the instructor must provide an alternative assignment.
- The alternative assignment should be completed by the next live (synchronous) session.

Each live session will be recorded and your registration and continued enrollment in this course indicates your consent.

Disability-Related Accommodations: Syracuse University values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. There may be aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion and full participation in this course. I invite any student to meet with me to discuss strategies and/or accommodations (academic adjustments) that may be essential to your success and to collaborate with the Center for Disability Resources (CDR) in this process.

If you would like to discuss disability-accommodations or register with CDR, please visit Center for Disability Resources. Please call (315) 443-4498 or email disabilityresources@syr.edu for more detailed information. CDR is responsible for coordinating disability-related academic accommodations and will work with the student to develop an access plan. Since academic accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact CDR as soon as possible to begin this process.

Academic Integrity Policy: Syracuse University's Academic Integrity Policy reflects the high value that we, as a university community, place on honesty in academic work. The policy defines our expectations for academic honesty and holds students accountable for the integrity of all work they submit. Students should understand that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations. The policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. Under the policy, students found in violation are subject to grade sanctions determined by the course instructor and non-grade sanctions determined by the School or College where the course is offered as described in the Violation and Sanction Classification Rubric. Syracuse University students are required to read an online summary of the University's academic integrity expectations and provide an electronic signature agreeing to abide by them twice a year during pre-term check-in on MySlice. For more information and the complete policy, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>.

COURSE POLICIES

Classroom Culture: For this course to be fully successful, I expect two things from each student. First, I expect active engagement in classroom discussion. Relatedly, I expect you to have completed the readings and to be prepared to discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of the arguments presented in the texts. Our discussions will draw from those theoretical debates. Participation accounts for 15% of your total grade, so it is in your best interest to come prepared for class. A firm grasp of the literature will serve you well in preparation for exams in this class and in crafting a firm foundation for further classes in political science.

While preparing to discuss the course material, I suggest you read (or at least scan) a newspaper once a day. Since this is a class on politics, it is especially important to keep up on current events

since they are often direct results of the political system we will be examining. Syracuse University has an online subscription to the New York Times and Wall Street Journal. Information for accessing both can be found in the following links: [NYT](#) and [WSJ](#).

We will occasionally discuss issues that are controversial or polarizing. This is an intrinsic part of the political process, and, as such, it will certainly be a part of our discussions. While it is by no means wrong to hold an opinion on controversial views, I expect and require civility in discussions. Hateful comments will not be tolerated and will be grounds for dismissal from the class session.

In addition to being respectful with the comments you make, you also need to be respectful in *how* you comment during live sessions. It is very easy during virtual discussions to interrupt one another or talk over each other. While I want to encourage a good conversational flow, I also do not want quieter or more reserved students to be overshadowed. Thus, I expect you all to use the “raise your hand” feature in Zoom before you speak.

Respect also involves comporting yourself appropriately during live sessions. You should remain awake, be appropriately dressed, refrain from eating large meals, and **most importantly, not use technological devices that are not being utilized for class purposes**. I also prefer for students to connect via audio and webcam, but if the latter is not possible, then at least I request you include an avatar/photo for your profile so that we can recognize you when you speak.

I attempt to provide multiple ways for each student to participate in live sessions, but this is a discussion session so there is an emphasis put on verbal participation in the class. Participating in an academic discussion is a valuable skill that all of you should gain in your undergraduate careers. My goal is that you will all work on developing that skill throughout the semester.

Contacting the Instructor: The best way to get in contact with me is through email (jbkersti@syr.edu). I do my best to reply to all student emails within 24 hours and typically my replies will be much sooner than that. That being said, do not email me at midnight and expect a timely answer. In email and in person, please call me by my first name. I neither have the age nor the credentials to go by Mr., Dr., or Professor.

If your questions or concerns are substantial in nature, it is best to meet with me over Zoom rather than engage in a lengthy email exchange. I have regular office hours listed above, but if those times do not work for you, please feel free to schedule an appointment with me.

TEXTBOOK & READINGS

The required text for this course is **Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics, 8th Brief Edition** (ISBN: 978-1-5443-1621-5) by Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright (referred to as *KtR* hereafter). It is available through the SU Bookstore and online. All other course readings will be posted on Blackboard for your use. Readings are to be completed BEFORE the live sessions each week.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(Subject to change as necessary)

WEEK	TOPIC	READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS
ONE (March 29 – April 1)	Concepts and The Founding Q: Does our constitutional framework conflict with democratic ideals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>KIR</i> Chapters 1 (pp. 6-9) and 2 • Federalist 10 • Antifederalist 1
TWO (April 2- 8))	American Political Culture and Federalism Q: How are American political culture and institutions unique?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>KIR</i> Chapters 1 (pp. 27-36) & 3 • Hopkins: “All Politics Is National Because All Media Is National” • Michener: “Fragmented Democracy”
THREE (April 9- 15)	Congress and the Presidency Q: How has the balance of power between Congress and the President changed over time, and why?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>KIR</i> Chapters 6 & 7 • Lee: “Insecure Majorities”
FOUR (April 16- 22)	The Bureaucracy and the Judiciary Q: How capable are unelected federal officials of creating policy change?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>KIR</i> Chapters 8 & 9 • Rosenberg: “The Hollow Hope” <p>Midterm Exam Friday April 23</p>
FIVE (April 23- 29)	Public Opinion and the Media Q: How do the natures of public opinion and contemporary American media intersect to create divergence in American public attitudes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>KIR</i> Chapters 10 & 13 • Zaller: “The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion” • Prior: “The Real Media Divide”
SIX (April 30 – May 6)	Political Participation and Interest Groups Q: Do all Americans have an equal ability to participate in politics?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>KIR</i> Chapters 11 (pp. 376-392) & 12 (pp. 399-407) • Lerman and Weaver: “Arresting Citizenship”
SEVEN (May 7- 13)	Political Parties and Partisanship Q: How can we explain both elite and mass partisan polarization in America?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>KIR</i> Chapters 11 (pp. 355-376) & 12 (pp. 407-410) • Mason: “Uncivil Agreement”
EIGHT (May 14- 20)	Public Policy Q: How does American public policy take form and what effects does policy have on the public?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>KIR</i> Chapters 14 • Mettler: “The Submerged State” <p>Final Exam Friday May 21</p>