SYLLABUS: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS
Spring Semester, 2016

The goal of this course is to provide students with an understanding of the contemporary American political system. In addition, the course will introduce students to some of the methods that political scientists use to study political institutions, processes and behavior. The course will examine the major institutions of American national government including Congress, the Presidency, and the Supreme Court, and the relationships among these institutions. In addition, the course will investigate the role of non-governmental groups and actors in the political process including voters, political parties, interest groups, and the mass media. We will spend some time looking back at the results of the 2012 and 2014 elections and their consequences as well as looking ahead to the 2016 presidential and congressional elections. A recurring theme throughout the course will be the rise of partisan polarization and its consequences for a political system based on checks and balances.

Requirements and Grading

Final grades will be based on a midterm examination (25%), final examination (40%), a research paper (25%), and lecture attendance (10%). The midterm and final examinations will consist of both objective (multiple choice) and essay questions based on assigned readings and material covered in the lectures and discussion sections. The final examination will be comprehensive.

Lecture attendance will be taken every day and one point will be deducted for every unexcused absence. Signing the attendance sheet for another student is considered a violation of the Emory Honor Code.

The following grading scale will be used:

- 93-100 A
- 90-92 A-
- 87-89 B+
- 83-86 B
- 80-82 D-
- 77-79 C+
- 73-76 C
- 70-72 C-
- 67-69 D+
- 60-66 D
- 0-59 F
Disabilities Services

Emory University is committed under the Americans with Disabilities Act and its Amendments and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to providing appropriate accommodations to individuals with documented disabilities. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, provide the instructor(s) with an accommodation notification letter from Access, Disabilities Services and Resources office. Students are expected to give two weeks notice of the need for accommodations. If you need immediate accommodations or physical access, please arrange to meet with instructor(s) as soon as your accommodations have been finalized.
Research Paper

Choose one of the states with a competitive Senate election in 2014 and write a 2500 word (approximately 8-10 double-spaced pages) paper analyzing the race and its results. The length requirement excludes all notes, tables, graphs, and references. The paper is due in class on Monday, April 13.

The states with competitive Senate races included Alaska, Colorado, Georgia, Iowa, Kentucky, New Hampshire, North Carolina and Virginia.

1. Your paper should address the following questions:

a. What are the politically significant characteristics of the state? What kinds of people live in this state and what are their political views? How have they voted in recent elections including, especially, the 2008, 2010 and 2012 elections? What economic, demographic, and political trends are evident in the state and how did they affect the 2014 election?

b. Who were the candidates and what are their strengths and weaknesses? Was there a running incumbent and, if so, how did the incumbent’s record affect the election?

c. What were the most important issues? What strategies did the candidates use to appeal to voters in the state and what groups of voters did they try to appeal to? How did national issues such as the economy, health care reform and President Obama’s popularity affect the election?

d. What role did money play in the election including spending by outside groups and political parties?

e. Explain who won and why? What implications do the results have for future elections including the 2016 presidential election?

2. Information sources—use a variety of sources including:

a. Local newspapers and/or the major daily newspaper for the state. Use lexis-nexis to search for newspaper articles on the Senate election: www.lexis-nexis.com/universe. In addition, almost all major daily newspapers now have their own web sites.

b. The Almanac of American Politics 2012 and/or Politics in America include political and demographic profiles of every state and every senator. Both should be available in the reference room of the library. The Almanac is also available online at www.nationaljournal.com.

c. On-line information sources. These are almost limitless, but the quality varies widely.

www.washingtonpost.com
www.nytimes.com
www.nationaljournal.com (the National Journal Hotline and other resources)
www.realclearpolitics.com (poll results and articles on current events)
www.pollingreport.com (national poll results)
www.huffingtonpost.com/news/pollster (poll results and analyses)

d. Exit poll data. These are readily available online from a variety of sources including CNN, Fox News, the Washington Post and the New York Times.
3. Format:

a. Cite all sources using in-text references. Internet sources should be cited by web address, date, and (where applicable) author.

b. Include a list of references at the end of the paper.

c. Include a cover page with your name and the title of the paper. Staple the paper together. Do not use a binder or folder.

4. Grading:

Your paper will be graded on the basis of content, organization, clarity, and style. Edit carefully for spelling, usage, and grammar.
Readings

All of the assigned readings are from the following books, which can be purchased at the University Bookstore:


Blackboard Website

All PowerPoint files and materials distributed in class including the syllabus, paper guidelines, and study guides will be available on the blackboard website for the class.
Schedule

I. The Context of American Politics (Jan. 18-27)

  Reading Assignment: O’Connor et al., chapters 1-3; Kernell and Smith, chapters 2-3.

  A. The Constitution: A Contested Plan for Governance
  B. The Evolution of the Constitution
  C. American Society in Transition: The Impact of Demographic and Economic Change
  D. American Political Culture: Stability and Change

II. Public Opinion, the Mass Media, and Democratic Citizenship (Feb. 1-15)

  Reading Assignment: O’Connor et al., chapter 10; Kernell and Smith, chapters 10, 14;
  Abramowitz, chapters 1-5.

  A. Political Engagement and Citizenship
  B. Sources of Political Beliefs: Political Socialization and the Mass Media
  C. Opinion Formation, Organization, and Change: The Rise of Polarization

III. Political Parties, Campaigns, and Elections (Feb. 17-March 2)

  Reading Assignment: O’Connor et al., chapters 11.1-11.4, 12; Kernell and Smith, chapters 11-
  12; Abramowitz, chapter 7.

  A. The American Party System
  B. Choosing the Candidates: Primary Elections and Nominations
  C. Candidates, Campaigns and Voter Decision-Making
  D. The Results of the 2012 and 2014 Elections and the Outlook for 2016

Spring Break
March 7-11
MIDTERM EXAM: MONDAY, MARCH 14

IV. Interest Groups, Lobbying, and American Democracy (March 16-23)

Reading Assignment: O'Connor et al., chapter 11.5-11.7; Kornell and Smith, chapters 1, 13.

A. Interest Groups and the Logic of Collective Action
B. Resources, Strategies, and Influence

V. Congress and the Legislative Process (March 28-April 6)

Reading Assignment: O'Connor et al., chapter 6; Kornell and Smith, chapter 6.

A. Choosing Congress: Congressional Constituencies and Elections
B. Representation in the House and Senate
C. The Rise of Polarization and Conditional Party Government
D. Leadership, Organization, and Decision-Making in the House and Senate

PAPERS DUE, WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6

VI. The Presidency and the Executive Branch (April 11-18)

Reading Assignment: O'Connor et al., chapters 7-8; Kornell and Smith, chapters 7-8.

A. The Public Presidency
B. Presidential Leadership: Resources, Potential and Limitations
C. The Federal Bureaucracy and American Politics

VII. The Courts and American Politics (April 20-25)

Reading Assignment: O'Connor et al., chapter 9; Kornell and Smith, chapter 9.

A. The Federal Judiciary: Organization and Selection
B. Courts, Politics, and Public Policy

FINAL EXAMINATION: WEDNESDAY, MAY 4, 3:00-5:30 PM