American Politics and Government
GOVT 151
Fall 2013
PAC 002
Tuesday and Thursday
2:40–4:00 p.m.

Professor Logan Dancey
Office: PAC 102
Office hours: Wednesday, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. and by appointment
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Course Overview

This course is an introduction to American politics. We will cover both key elements of the U.S. political system and important debates about the nature of American democracy. Along with discussion of the three major branches of government, topics will include questions about the causes and consequences of political polarization, the role public opinion plays in American democracy, and the extent to which the U.S. system is truly democratic. No prerequisites are required to take this course.

Course Objectives

At the end of this course students will:

1) Have a better understanding of the central elements of the U.S. political system.
2) Have a better understanding of the enduring and contemporary debates in the study of American politics.
3) Be better able to evaluate complex issues and arguments.
4) Be able to more effectively convey their arguments in writing.

Course Structure

This course will be a mixture of lecture and discussion. Students are expected to finish the required readings for each class session and come ready to engage in a critical discussion of the arguments and evidence presented in the readings.

Required Books


Course Website

You can access the course website through moodle.wesleyan.edu. Please check the course website regularly (i.e. at least twice a week).

Assignments

Short Paper #1 (15% of grade): A 4-6 page paper analyzing an aspect of the American constitutional system is due Oct. 4 by 5 p.m. More information will be provided on Sept. 24.

Midterm (17.5% of grade): There will be one midterm exam in this course (Oct. 15), which will cover the readings through Oct. 10. The in-class exam will be closed-book, closed-note and consist of short identification and essay questions. A study guide will be passed out Oct. 8.

Poll assignment (10% of grade): A short (2-3 page) written evaluation of a media report on a public opinion poll is due Nov. 7. Students will be responsible for locating a media story and evaluating it based on course readings/discussion. More information will be provided on Oct. 29.

Short Paper #2 (20% of grade): A 4-6 page paper based on Suzanne Mettler’s *The Submerged State* and other course readings is due Dec. 6 by 5 p.m. More information will be provided on Nov. 19.

Final (22.5% of grade): There will be a final exam from 2-5 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 12. The exam will be closed-book, closed-note and consist of short identification and essay questions. You will receive a study guide for the exam.

Participation (10% of grade): You are expected to attend and participate in class. I will take attendance beginning Sept. 17. One unexcused absence will not affect your participation grade. A second unexcused absence will result in the loss of 1—out of 10—participation points. You will lose two more points for a third unexcused absence, three more for a fourth absence, and the remaining four points for a fifth absence.

You can also lose participation points for disruptive behavior (e.g., sleeping, using a laptop for non-course related purposes, texting) or failing to participate in class. See the “Technology in the Classroom” section for additional information on the acceptable use of laptops/tablets and penalties for violating policies.

I do not expect every person to have something to say every day, but semi-regular participation that indicates engagement with the course material is expected.

Moodle postings (5% of grade): Five times over the course of the semester you are required to post a short (1-2 paragraph) reaction to a reading from that day. You are only allowed to make one posting per class period. The post should describe the aspect of the reading you found most interesting and pose a follow-up question you have based on the reading. **Postings are due no later than 10 a.m. the day of the class for which the reading is assigned.** I leave it up to you to decide what five days to make a post. I encourage you to post when you find a reading particularly compelling, frustrating, or thought-provoking.
**Key Dates**

Oct. 4: Short Paper #1 due by 5 p.m.
Oct. 15: Midterm exam
Nov. 7: Poll assignment due by noon
Dec. 6: Short Paper #2 due by 5 p.m.
Dec. 12: Final exam, 2-5 p.m.

**Late Assignments**

Late papers will lose 2/3 of a letter grade for each day that they are late (e.g., a B+ becomes a B- if it is one day late). **An assignment is considered one day late if it is submitted more than 10 minutes after the specified deadline.** Unless another time is specified, all assignments are due by the start of class (2:40 p.m.) the day they are due, and assignments turned in after 2:50 p.m. will be considered late. After 24 hours an assignment becomes two days late, after 48 hours it becomes three days late, and so on. Assignments over five days late will not be accepted. Exams must be taken during the time scheduled. **Makeup exams will only be granted in rare cases (e.g., a documented medical emergency).**

**Contacting the Instructor**

I encourage you to contact me with questions and concerns about the course content and assignments. Please refer to me as Professor Dancey in all correspondence. In general, if you have a clarification question you can reach me over e-mail or on my office phone. Questions about course material, grades, or how to structure your papers are best dealt with in office hours. If my office hours do not work for you because of your class schedule, work schedule, or another important commitment, I am also available by appointment. I cannot guarantee that if you e-mail me shortly before an assignment is due that I will be able to answer your questions, so please make sure and e-mail me early if you have a time-specific question.

**Contested Grades**

If you wish to contest a grade you must submit a written explanation of why you believe the grade is inaccurate. You must wait 24 hours from the time the assignment is returned before you submit the written explanation. I will not discuss grades until 24 hours after the assignment is passed back. If you ask me to reevaluate your grade then I reserve the right to either raise or lower your grade based on my reevaluation. This policy is meant to address disagreements with my assessment of your work. It does not pertain to calculation errors on my part. If you believe I have made a mistake adding up points, converting your points to a percentage, etc. you can let me know immediately, and I will be happy to correct any mistakes.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

Wesleyan University is committed to ensuring that all qualified students with disabilities are
afforded an equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from its programs and services. To receive accommodations, a student must have a documented disability as defined by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and provide documentation of the disability. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact Disability Resources as soon as possible.

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact Dean Patey in Disability Resources, located in North College, Room 021, or call 860-685-2332 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations.

**Technology in the Classroom**

You may use laptops, iPads, etc. in class for note taking purposes only. Refrain from using these devices for Facebook, instant messenger, e-mail checking, or anything else that may distract you, your fellow students, or me. It is obvious when someone is using his or her laptop for non-class related activities. **If you want to use a laptop in class, you should print out and sign the laptop policy statement on the course website. I will notify you if I believe you are using your laptop for non-class related activities. A second violation will result in the loss of 2 participation points and a request from me to stop bringing your laptop to class. If you bring your laptop to class after the second violation it will result in the loss of all participation points.**

**Academic Integrity**

I take plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct seriously. I strongly encourage you to review this website:

[http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/standardsregulations/plagiarism.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/studenthandbook/standardsregulations/plagiarism.html)

Suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Honor Board. I expect students to follow the Wesleyan honor code, which can be found here:

[http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/honorboard/honorcode.html](http://www.wesleyan.edu/studentaffairs/honorboard/honorcode.html)
**Course Schedule:**

Readings noted with an asterisk (\*) are from required books. The rest of the material can be found on Moodle or by going to the url listed next to the reading.

*The Kernell and Smith edited volume is abbreviated as K&S.*

**Sept. 3—Introductions**

**Sept. 5—Institutions**

- *Olson, Mancur. “Designing Institutions.” Chapter 1-1 in K&S.
- *Ackerman, Bruce. “The Citizenship Agenda.” Chapter 1-3 in K&S.

**Sept. 10—Culture**

- Smith, Rogers M. “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Mutliple Traditions in America” (Excerpt).

**Sept. 12—Constitution**

- U.S. Constitution, pp. 707-727 in K&S.
- *Brutus. “Anti-Federalist #3.” Chapter 2-2 in K&S.

**Sept. 17—Revising the Constitution?**


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1 I reserve the right to make modifications to the course schedule during the semester. If I make changes I will both announce them in class and on the website.
Sept. 19—Revising the Constitution?

- *Dahl, Robert. How Democratic is the American Constitution?* Chapters 5-8.

Sept. 24—Federalism

- *Madison, Federalist #39. Chapter 3 in K&S.*

Sept. 26—Civil Rights/Struggle for Equality

- King, Martin Luther. “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.”
- “Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act.”
- Howe, Amy. 2013. “We Gave You a Chance: Today’s *Shelby County* decision in Plain English.”

Oct. 1—Civil Liberty

- *Sunstein, Cass R. Republic.com 2.0* (Excerpt). Chapter 5-1 in K&S.
- *Roe v. Wade.* Chapter 5-3 in K&S.

Oct. 3—Congress

- *Smith, Steven S. “Congress, The Troubled Institution.” Chapter 6-1 in K&S.
- *Binder, Sarah A. “The Politics of Legislative Stalemate.” Chapter 6-2 in K&S.

Oct. 4—Paper #1 due by 5 p.m.

Oct. 8—President

- *Kernell, Samuel. Going Public (Excerpt). Chapter 7-3 in K&S.

Oct. 10—Supreme Court

- *Federalist #78. Chapter 9-3 in K&S.

Oct. 15—Midterm

Oct. 17—Bureaucracy

- Listen to This American Life’s “Taking Names.” Make sure you listen to Act Two: [http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/499/taking-names](http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/499/taking-names)

Oct. 22—No Class, Fall Break!
Oct. 24—Parties


Oct. 29—Public opinion

- *Asher, Herbert. “Analyzing and Interpreting Polls.” Chapter 10-1 of K&S.*


Oct. 31—Participation


Nov. 5—Media


Nov. 7—Polling Assignment due

- In class movie (TBD)
Nov. 12—Campaign Finance & Advertising


Nov. 14—Interest Groups/Lobbying

- Watch Frontline documentary “Obama’s Deal”: [Link](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/obamasdeal/view/)
- *Schattschneider, E.E. “The Scope and Bias of the Pressure System.” Chapter 13-1 in K&S.

Nov. 19—Social Policy

- *The Submerged State* (chapters 1-3)

Nov. 21—Social Policy, II

- *The Submerged State* (chapters 4-6)

Nov. 26—Inequality


Nov. 28—No class, Thanksgiving break

Dec. 3—Foreign Policy

• Kupchan, Charles A. and Peter L. Trubowitz. 2007. “Grand Strategy for a Divided America.” *Foreign Affairs* [http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/grand-strategy-divided-america](http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/grand-strategy-divided-america).


Dec. 5—Contemporary readings TBD

Dec. 6—Second short paper due by 5 p.m.

Thursday, Dec. 12 (2-5 p.m.): Final exam