

**Introduction to American Politics**  
**Department of Political Science**  
**POLI 1100**  
**MW 3:30 – 4:45 PM**  
**66 Schaeffer Hall**

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<b>Office</b>	314 Schaeffer Hall
<b>Office Hours</b>	Monday & Wednesday 1:00-2:30

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is an introduction to American politics at the college level that is intended to serve both majors and non-majors. In this course we will discuss the origins of the current governmental system in America and how theories of American government apply to current events and problems the government and citizens face today. We will work toward understanding our complicated and contentious political environment by exploring the system from two perspectives: political institutions, or the structure of the United States' government, and political behavior, or the actions and motivations of political actors.

It is my hope that you leave the semester knowing more about American government and politics, able to think critically about political interactions in contemporary American politics. Furthermore, I hope that this course inspires greater engagement in public affairs by connecting political science to live questions in American politics.

## **REQUIRED TEXTS**

Barbour, Christine and Gerald C. Wright. *Keeping the Republic : Power and Citizenship in American Politics*. 12th Edition. Sage Publishing. ISBN: 9781071929933

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS**

Students who complete this course will have a thorough understanding of the origins, development, structure, and functions of American government and political processes.

Because this is a smaller class, there will be a greater emphasis on discussion and interactive class sessions than a typical POLI 1100 course. Therefore, classes will contain a mix of lecture, active learning, and discussion. Students are expected to take an active role in their learning by completing readings before class, coming to class ready to participate directly

with classmates, and asking questions as they arise, either from readings or the lecture material. You will be held responsible for all material from the readings and lectures, even if you miss a class.

During our class time, we will frequently engage in group discussions about course content and current events. American politics is full of “hot topics” that you and your classmates may have strong opinions about. Our aim in this course is not to discuss the merits of our beliefs. Instead, we will focus on discussing how theories and concepts apply to current events from an analytical perspective. I encourage you to engage with viewpoints that differ from your own, and I require that you do so in a respectful and productive way. An open environment will allow us to approach the ideas presented in the course as analytical, critical thinkers so that we can form, challenge, and develop theories and evidence about the issues we discuss.

## ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Grades will be calculated as follows:

A+ 98.00-100  
A 93.00-97.99  
A- 90.00-92.99  
B+ 87.00-89.99  
B 84.00-86.99  
B- 80.00-83.99  
C+ 77.00-79.99  
C 74.00-76.99  
C- 70.00-73.99  
D+ 66.00-69.99  
D 62.00-65.99  
D- 60.00-61.99  
F 0-59.99

The following components will make up your final grade:

### **2 Exams (40%)**

Exams will be taken in class and consist of multiple-choice and short-answer questions. The first exam will be taken in class on Wednesday, March 11th. The second exam will be taken in class on Wednesday, May 6th. Neither of the exams are cumulative, and each is worth 20% of your final grade.

### **Current Events Presentation (10%)**

You must give a short, 3 to 5-minute presentation on a current event. For the assignment, you will pick a concept we have learned about in class from the previous three weeks and a corresponding news article written after June 1st, 2025 (ideally more recent). You will be tasked with briefly summarizing the article, explaining the concept or theory we have

learned in class, and relating the concept or theory to the current event article to explain what happened. You will sign up for a time slot during the first week of classes. Presentations will start on February 9th with a maximum of three presentations per day. This assignment will be graded on a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory basis. For details on the full assignment, please see the information posted on ICON.

### **Research Paper (30%)**

Throughout the semester, you will complete a research paper with multiple assignments that will serve as progress check points. Each student will sign up for a congressional election race with an incumbent for the 2026 midterm elections. For the paper, you will be responsible for discussing the incumbent, the dynamics of the upcoming race, and any other historical and/or current information about the district and the other candidates running. As I previously mentioned, you will be completing the paper in steps. This is meant to help you learn the process of writing a research paper, as well as producing a better final paper. The following will make up the components of the paper (see Canvas for full assignment details):

1. Outline and Sources (15% of Paper Grade): Due March 25th at 11:59pm
2. Rough Draft (15% of Paper Grade): Due April 22nd at 11:59pm
3. Final Paper (70% of Paper Grade): Due May 11th at 11:59pm

Final papers should be 6-8 pages in length, double-spaced, with 12-point font and 1-inch margins. The paper must include a complete works cited/references list that includes all sources used in the paper. These should match the style of your in-text citations, which are also required. Any citation format can be used in the paper if it is used consistently throughout. The works cited list does not count toward the 6-8 page length requirement. Excellent writing free from grammatical errors and typos will be expected.

### **In-Class Participation (20%)**

As this grade indicates, a successful student will be physically present during class and prepared to engage with the material. Beyond showing up, active participation in this course is vital for success, both for the class and your development as a student. Class participation can take many forms, such as speaking and listening to others during small and large group discussions, raising questions for classmates to consider, or completing occasional brief assignments before or during class. I will let you know well about these assignments well in advance. They will primarily foster discussion related to the week's readings and take less than 10 minutes. I expect both quality and quantity concerning class participation, and your participation should illustrate that you are thinking critically about the topics we cover and the assigned readings.

It should go without saying if you do not regularly attend class, you cannot do well on your participation grade. You will be permitted three excused absences throughout the semester, and you do not need to justify why you are missing class. Each additional absence will result in a 10-point reduction in your participation grade, unless a make-up assignment is completed. Exceptions to this policy will be made in the case of multiple absences due to prolonged illness, religious holidays, military service obligations, and University-sponsored

activities. If there are legitimate reasons you anticipate missing more than three classes throughout the semester, please come discuss this with me during office hours.

## **COMMUNICATION**

I am very happy to meet with students outside of class time. Whether it be to discuss concerns about the course, questions about the material, or to engage further with the topic, please feel free to come to office hours. I will be holding office hours in 314 Schaeffer Hall. If you cannot meet during my office hours, which are listed at the top of this syllabus, please email me to set up an alternative time. Office hours are an important resource that should be utilized to improve understanding of material or ask more personalized questions. Before writing assignment due dates, I will be available during office hours to read over paper outlines or talk through ideas and provide feedback. Please do not bring completed papers; be advised office hours before paper deadlines may be busy.

Outside of office hours, e-mail is the easiest way to contact me. I will typically respond to email within 24-48 hours. If I do not respond to your email in this time frame, please send a follow-up. If you have extensive questions requiring a longer conversation, please visit my office hours or stay after class. I will frequently send emails about the course material, upcoming assignments or activities, and general reminders. I expect you to check your UI email regularly to stay on top of these updates.

## **COURSE POLICIES AND OTHER INFORMATION**

### **Attendance, Absences, and Late Work**

Attendance in the course is mandatory and will be taken each class. Each student is allowed 3 absences per semester with no deduction to attendance grades. These can be used for any reason and do not need to be discussed with me. No make-up assignments will be required for the first 3 absences. Should you need additional excused absences, as outlined in university guidelines below, please contact me in advance via email or during drop-in hours whenever possible. We will discuss make-up opportunities to help you earn your attendance and participation points. These will generally involve short essays covering that week's material.

University regulations require that students be allowed to make up examinations that have been missed due to illness, religious holy days, military service obligations (including service-related medical appointments), or other unavoidable circumstances or University-sponsored activities. Students should work with their instructors regarding making up other missed work, such as assignments, quizzes, and classroom attendance. Students with UI-authorized activities must discuss their absences with the instructor as soon as possible. Religious obligations must be communicated within the first three weeks of classes. If you miss an exam due to an excused absence, we will work to reschedule a make-up exam. Please contact me via email as soon as possible after the missed exam to discuss the make-up.

Late assignments will be given a penalty of -5 points per day that it is past due. Assignments submitted more than two weeks late will not receive credit.

### **Academic Honesty and Misconduct**

Academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarism, or any instance of taking credit for work that is not your own, will not be tolerated in this course. All students in CLAS courses are expected to abide by the college's standards of academic honesty. Undergraduate academic misconduct must be reported by instructors to CLAS according to these procedures.

This course assumes that work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves. This means that the following would be considered violations of academic integrity: a student has another person/entity do the writing of any substantive portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write essays and drafts and/or other assignments research-based or otherwise, and using large language models, like ChatGPT and Microsoft Co-Pilot. I will permit you to use AI tools to help you revise and edit your work (e.g., to help identify grammatical errors, spot confusing or underdeveloped paragraphs, or fix citations).

### **Mental Health Resources & Student Support**

Students are encouraged to be mindful of their mental health and seek help as a preventive measure or if feeling overwhelmed and/or struggling to meet course expectations. Students are encouraged to talk to their instructor for assistance with course-related concerns. For additional mental health support, please see the guidance and resources at [mental-health.uiowa.edu](http://mental-health.uiowa.edu), including the 24-7 UI Support and Crisis Line, which is available any time via chat, phone, or text at 844-461-5420.

Additionally, the Office of the Dean of Students can help students navigate personal crisis situations. They can provide one-on-one support, help with identifying options, and access to basic needs resources (such as food, rent, childcare, etc.). Student Care and Assistance: 132 IMU, [dos-assistance@uiowa.edu](mailto:dos-assistance@uiowa.edu), or 319-335-1162 and more info: [dos.uiowa.edu/assistance](http://dos.uiowa.edu/assistance).

### **Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

The university is committed to providing an educational experience that is accessible to all students. If a student has a diagnosed disability or other disabling condition that may impact the student's ability to complete the course requirements as stated in the syllabus, the student may seek accommodations through Student Disability Services (SDS). SDS is responsible for making Letters of Accommodation (LOA) available to the student. The student must provide a LOA to the instructor as early in the semester as possible, but requests not made at least two weeks prior to the scheduled activity for which an accommodation is sought may not be accommodated. The LOA will specify what reasonable course accommodations the student is eligible for and those the instructor should provide. Additional information can be found on the SDS website.

### **Free Speech and Expression**

The University of Iowa supports and upholds the First Amendment protection of freedom of speech and the principles of academic and artistic freedom. We are committed to open inquiry, vigorous debate, and creative expression inside and outside of the classroom. Visit the Free Speech at Iowa website for more information on the university's policies on free

speech and academic freedom.

### **Absences for Religious Holidays**

The university is prepared to make reasonable accommodations for students whose religious holy days coincide with their classroom assignments, test schedules, and classroom attendance expectations. Students must notify their instructors in writing of any such Religious Holy Day conflicts or absences within the first few days of the semester or session, and no later than the third week of the semester. If the conflict or absence will occur within the first three weeks of the semester, the student should notify the instructor as soon as possible. See Policy Manual 8.2 Absences for Religious Holy Days for additional information.

### **Absences for Military Service Obligations**

Students absent from class or class-related requirements due to U.S. veteran or U.S. military service obligations (including military service-related medical appointments, military orders, and National Guard Service obligations) shall be excused without any grading adjustment or other penalty. Instructors shall make reasonable accommodations to allow students to make up, without penalty, tests and assignments they missed because of veteran or military service obligations. Reasonable accommodations may include making up missed work following the service obligation; completing work in advance; completing an equivalent assignment; or waiver of the assignment without penalty. In all instances, students bear the responsibility to communicate with their instructors about such veteran or military service obligations, to meet course expectations and requirements.

### **Non-discrimination Statement**

The University of Iowa prohibits discrimination in employment, educational programs, and activities on the basis of race, creed, color, religion, national origin, age, sex, pregnancy (including childbirth and related conditions), disability, genetic information, status as a U.S. veteran, service in the U.S. military, sexual orientation, or associational preferences. The university also affirms its commitment to providing equal opportunities and equal access to university facilities. For additional information on nondiscrimination policies, contact the Senior Director, Office of Civil Rights Compliance, the University of Iowa, 202 Jessup Hall, Iowa City, IA 52242-1316, 319-335-0705, ui-ocrc@uiowa.edu. Although not required, students have the option to share their pronouns and chosen/preferred names in class and through MyUI. Instructors and advisors can find information about a student's chosen/preferred name in MyUI.

### **Classroom Expectations**

Students are expected to comply with University policies regarding appropriate classroom behavior as outlined in the Code of Student Life. While students have the right to express themselves and participate freely in class, it is expected that students will behave with the same level of courtesy and respect in the virtual class setting (whether asynchronous or synchronous) as they would in an in-person classroom. Failure to follow behavior expectations as outlined in the Code of Student Life may be addressed by the instructor and may also result in discipline under the Code of Student Life policies governing E.5 Disruptive Behavior or E.6 Failure to Comply with University Directive.

## **Sexual Harassment/Misconduct & Supportive Measures**

The University of Iowa prohibits all forms of sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, and related retaliation. The Policy on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Misconduct governs actions by students, faculty, staff and visitors. Incidents of sexual harassment or sexual misconduct can be reported to the Office of Civil Rights Compliance or to the Department of Campus Safety. Students impacted by sexual harassment or sexual misconduct may be eligible for academic supportive measures and can learn more by contacting the Office of Civil Rights Compliance. Information about confidential resources can be found on the Office of Civil Rights Compliance website.

## **Student Complaints**

Students with a complaint about a grade or a related matter should first discuss the situation with the instructor and/or the course supervisor (if applicable), and finally with the DEO (Chair) of the department, school or program offering the course. Sometimes students will be referred to the department or program's Director of Undergraduate Studies (DUS) or Director of Graduate Studies (DGS).

Undergraduate students should contact CLAS Undergraduate Programs for support when the matter is not resolved at the previous level. Graduate students should contact the CLAS Graduate Affairs Manager when additional support is needed.

## **Course's College (Administrative Home)**

For undergraduate courses: The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) is the home of this course, and CLAS governs the add and drop deadlines, academic misconduct policies, and other undergraduate policies and procedures. Other UI colleges may have different policies.

For graduate courses: The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS) is the home of this course, and CLAS governs the policies and procedures for its courses. Graduate students, however, must adhere to the academic deadlines set by the Graduate College.

## **Drop Deadline for this Course**

You may drop an individual course before the drop deadline; after this deadline you will need collegiate approval. You can look up the drop deadline for this course here. When you drop a course, a "W" will appear on your transcript. The mark of "W" is a neutral mark that does not affect your GPA. To discuss how dropping (or staying in) a course might affect your academic goals, please contact your Academic Advisor. Directions for adding or dropping a course and other registration changes can be found on the Registrar's website. Undergraduate students can find policies on dropping CLAS courses here. Graduate students should adhere to the academic deadlines and policies set by the Graduate College.

The final examination date and time will be announced by the Registrar generally by the fifth week of classes, and it will be announced on the course ICON site once it is known. Do not plan your end of the semester travel plans until the final exam schedule is made public. It is your responsibility to know the date, time, and place of the final exam. The Registrar's Office website details which types of schedule conflicts qualify for make-up exams and the

processes students should follow to request make-up exams. Not all conflicts qualify for make-up exam times, and requests must be made by the deadlines listed.

### **UI Email**

Students are responsible for all official correspondences sent to their UI email address (uiowa.edu) and must use this address for any communication with instructors or staff in the UI community. For the privacy and the protection of student records, UI faculty and staff can only correspond with UI email addresses.

To access the course site, log into Iowa Courses Online (ICON) using your Hawk ID and password.

### **Class Recordings**

Students may be enrolled in a class where some sessions will be recorded or live-streamed. Such recordings/streaming will only be available to students registered for the class. These recordings are the intellectual property of the instructor and they may not be shared or reproduced without the explicit, written consent of the instructor. Further, students may not share these sessions with those not in the class or upload them to any other online environment. Doing so would be a breach of the Code of Student Conduct, and, in some cases, a violation of state and federal law, including the Federal Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

The unauthorized video or audio recording of academic activities (e.g., lectures, course discussions, office hours, etc.) by a student is prohibited. Students with a reasonable accommodation for recording approved by Student Disability Services should notify each instructor and provide the Letter of Accommodation prior to using the accommodation. A student may record classroom activities with prior written permission from the instructor and notice to other students in the class that audio or video recording may occur. Any and all classroom recording must be for personal academic use only. The distribution, sharing, sale, or posting of recordings on the internet (including social media), in whole or in part, is prohibited and doing so may be a violation of the Code of Student Life and/or state or federal privacy, copyright, or other laws.

### **Conflict Resolution**

The Office of the Ombudsperson is a confidential, impartial, informal, and independent resource for any member of the university community with a problem or concern. The Office of the Ombudsperson offers a safe place to discuss conflicts or concerns. Students are encouraged to reach out for assistance. The office will brainstorm with students to help identify options, answer any questions, and provide referrals to other offices as appropriate. More information about the Office of the Ombudsperson, including how to schedule an appointment, can be found at [ombudsperson.org.uiowa.edu](http://ombudsperson.org.uiowa.edu).

### **Basic Needs and Student Support**

It can be difficult to maintain focus and be present if you are experiencing challenges with meeting basic needs or navigating personal crisis situations. The Office of the Dean of Students can help. Contact us for one-on-one support, identifying options, and to locate and

access basic needs resources (such as food, rent, childcare, etc.).  
Student Care and Assistance 132 IMU dos-assistance@uiowa.edu 319-335-1162  
Basic Needs info:

- Food Pantry at Iowa
- Clothing Closet
- Basic Needs and Support Resources

## REQUIRED READINGS

Jan 19	No Class (MLK Day)
Jan 21	Introduction: The State of American Politics <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Syllabus</li><li>• Levendusky, Matthew. Our Common Bonds: Using What Americans Share to Help Bridge the Partisan Divide. The University of Chicago Press, 2023. Pgs 1-5; 12-24 <b>Icon</b></li></ul>
Jan 26	Why Government? and Constitution I <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• KTR Ch 3</li><li>• The U.S. Constitution <b>Icon</b></li></ul>
Jan 28	Constitution II <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Federalist No. 10 and 51 <b>Icon</b></li></ul>
Feb 2	Federalism I <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• KTR Ch. 4</li></ul>
Feb 4	Federalism II <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Blakeman, Bradley A. “States are the laboratories of democracy.” The Hill. May 7, 2020. <b>Icon</b></li><li>• Pocasangre, Oscar. “The Flaws of Federalism: On ‘Laboratories Against Democracy’.” New America. May 23, 2023. <b>Icon</b></li></ul>
Feb 9	Civil Rights and Liberties I <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• KTR Ch.5 (skim)</li></ul>
Feb 11	Civil Rights and Liberties II <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• KTR Ch 6 (“Rights denied on basis of Race” subsection up to “The Citizens and Civil Rights” subsection)</li><li>• Liptak, Adam. “In Narrow Decision, Supreme Court Sides With Baker Who Turned Away Gay Couple.” The New York Times. June 4, 2018. <b>Icon</b></li></ul>

Feb 16	Congress I: Overview and Elections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTR Ch 7 (up to “Congressional Organization” subsection)</li> </ul>
Feb 18	Congress II: Redistricting and Gerrymandering <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kenny et al. “Widespread partisan gerrymandering mostly cancels nationally, but reduces electoral competition.” PNAS (2023). <b>Icon</b></li> </ul>
Feb 23	Congress III: Overview and Elections <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTR Ch 7 (“Congressional Organization” subsection to end of chapter)</li> </ul>
Feb 25	Congress IV: Productivity and Polarization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lee, Frances. Insecure Majorities. The University of Chicago Press, 2016. Pgs 1-17 <b>Icon</b></li> <li>• Pearlstein, Steven. “Opinion: The Root Causes of Congressional Dysfunction.” Politico. December 30, 2024. <b>Icon</b></li> </ul>
Mar 2	Public Opinion I: The Basics & Political Attitudes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTR Ch 11 (up to “Measuring and Tracking Public Opinion” subsection)</li> </ul>
Mar 4	Public Opinion II: Polling & Election Forecasting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTR Ch 11 “Measuring and tracking public opinion” subsection</li> </ul>
Mar 9	Review
Mar 11	<b>Exam I</b>
Mar 16	<b>No Class (Spring break)</b>
Mar 18	<b>No Class (Spring break)</b>
Mar 23	Elections I: Voters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTR Ch 14 (up to “Presidential Campaigns” subsection)</li> </ul>
Mar 25	Elections II: Campaigns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTR Ch 14 (“Presidential Campaigns” subsection to end of chapter)</li> <li>• <b>Paper Outline and Sources due at 11:59pm</b></li> </ul>
Mar 30	Elections III: The Electoral College <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Douthat, Ross. “A Case for the Electoral College” The New York Times. March 23, 2019. <b>Icon</b></li> <li>• West, Darrell M. “It’s Time to Abolish the Electoral College.” The Brookings Institute. October 15, 2019. <b>Icon</b></li> </ul>
Apr 1	<b>Writing day</b>
Apr 6	Presidency I: Presidential Power <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTR Ch 8 (up to “Presidential Politics” subsection)</li> </ul>
Apr 8	Presidency II: Today’s Powerful Presidency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTR Ch 8 (“Presidential Politics” subsection up to “Presidential Personality” subsection)</li> </ul>

Apr 13	Bureaucracy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTR Ch 9</li> </ul>
Apr 15	<b>Paper Workshop</b>
Apr 20	Supreme Court I: The Institution <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTR Ch 10 (up to “The Supreme Court” subsection)</li> </ul>
Apr 22	Supreme Court II: Judicial Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTR Ch 10 (“The Supreme Court” subsection)</li> <li>• <b>Paper Rough Draft due at 11:59pm</b></li> </ul>
Apr 27	Political Parties I: Overview <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTR Ch 12 (up to “What do Parties do” subsection)</li> </ul>
Apr 29	Political Parties II: Why Parties? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTR Ch 12 (“What do Parties do” subsection to end of chapter)</li> </ul>
May 4	Mass Media & Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• KTR Ch 15</li> </ul>
May 6	<b>Exam II</b>
May 11	<b>Final paper due at 11:59pm</b>