

Political Science 104  
Prof. J. Coleman  
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I, 2009-10  
Syllabus  
T, Th 9:30-10:45  
125 Agricultural Hall  
www.polisci.wisc.edu/coleman

## **Introduction to American Politics and Government**

This course introduces central features of American politics and government at the national level. The objectives of this course are for students to recognize major changes in American politics, to understand its basic “building blocks,” to assess conventional assumptions about that politics, and to understand the role of government in American development. We will consider why Americans are so often unhappy with their politics and politicians, and the challenges faced by public officials as they attempt to meet a broad array of demands from the public. Students completing the course will be well prepared for other courses in political science and should have a good grasp on key questions that confront any citizen or potentially active participant in day-to-day politics. Knowledge of government and politics are relevant for any line of work—given the extent of government’s activities in American society, there are few fields of study or lines of work, if any, that do not intersect in some way with American government. My hope is that as you build an analytical perspective on American government that is informed, critical, realistic, and that examines causal claims carefully using the skills and tools of social science, you do not resort to simplistic and self-defeating cynicism, no matter how trendy such cynicism may seem. Although American politics and government can often be frustrating and deserving of criticism, they can also instigate dramatic change and solve or at least address problems that may have once seemed intractable.

### ***Requirements and Policies:***

*The first requirement: Read this syllabus thoroughly.*

**Composition of grade:** Grades will be determined by a combination of in-class examinations and section activities (attendance, preparation, participation, and assignments). Final course grades will depend 75% on the exams and 25% on section activities. For the exams, I will count your two better exams at 27.5% each and your least spectacular exam at 20%.

The examinations will be primarily or exclusively multiple choice. The second and third exams cover the course material since the previous exam. Make-up exams will be given only in rare, documented situations—for example, you have been nominated to the Supreme Court and must attend your confirmation hearings—that are arranged with me prior to the exam. *Do not* miss an exam and assume that you can make it up. Students affiliated with the McBurney Center should see me about exam arrangements and any other accommodations.

On the course website at [learnuw.wisc.edu](http://learnuw.wisc.edu), you will find a list of questions that will help you as you prepare for exams (found under Content/Lecture Material). You will find it most useful if you answer these questions as we are moving through the semester, rather than trying to

answer them all a day or two before an exam. For example, after each class in which we discuss the presidency, or after we have completed all the lectures on the presidency, make sure you can answer the questions in the list. This way, the information is still fresh in your mind. You should also find that this reduces the amount of time you will need to prepare for the exam because you will already have a set of study notes prepared.

The majority of your grade on the exams will be determined by material presented in class, but there will also be questions specifically focused on the reading. The readings often discuss matters that I do not directly cover in class; these will be reviewed in section.

If you believe there is a computational problem with the grading on your exams or other assignments, you will have three days from your receipt of the grade to make your *specific* concerns known to your TA. We will not negotiate points on exams or assignments.

Grade thresholds are as follows: below 60=F, 60 and up=D, 70 and up=C, 78 and up=BC, 83 and up=B, 88 and up=AB, 93 and up=A. Grades are normally not curved for individual exams or assignments, but there may be some upward adjustment of final grades if I believe the grade distribution is excessively low (for example, the minimum A grade might become a 92, minimum AB an 87, and so on). You should not assume such an adjustment will take place. Please note that *I may adjust your final discussion section grade either up or down* in order to ensure that grading standards are comparable across sections.

**Completion of requirements:** Course requirements are *requirements*. This means they are *not* optional. You must hand in all of the required work, no matter how small a percentage of the course or section grade. This also includes assignments that you are asked to resubmit because your first attempt was unsatisfactory. You *do not* have the option to “take a zero” on an assignment. Not submitting all the required work will result either in a final grade of Incomplete until the work is submitted or an F for the course. Unless your TA indicates otherwise, assignments must be printed out and handed in rather than sent by e-mail attachment.

**Attendance and preparation:** The syllabus indicates the projected dates on which particular topics will be covered in class. Some students find that they get more out of class if they have the assigned reading done before lecture; other students find that they get more out of the reading if they attend class first. I will leave the choice to you. No matter which you decide, you *must* have the reading done by the date you will be discussing it in your section.

**Discussion sections:** Sections begin on Tuesday, September 8. Your TA will explain the section requirements during your first meeting.

**E-mail list:** The TAs and I will distribute items of interest by e-mail (you will be on a course e-mail list and a section e-mail list), and we welcome. Check your e-mail frequently. It would be appropriate for you to use the lists to arrange a study group; *it is not appropriate use to send out a mass advertisement asking people for their notes or offering your notes*. If you are unsure whether something is appropriate to post to the class or section email list, ask me first. If you do send a message to a class or section list, tone and language should be appropriate for a

public discussion.

**Office hours:** My office hours are listed at the top of the syllabus. TAs will announce their office hours in section. Please feel free to come by or call during office hours. You can send e-mail to discuss course-related or other matters at any time.

**Website:** I maintain a website for this course at [learnuw.wisc.edu](http://learnuw.wisc.edu). The site contains copies of some of the material distributed in class (this syllabus, for example), outlines of class material, and some material for exam preparation. There will also be some lecture podcasts placed on the site. The website also contains a document listing things that students wished they knew when they first arrived at UW. Those of you who are here for your first semester might find it useful.

**Lectures:** Before we begin a topic in class (for example, before we begin covering Congress), I will post on the website an outline of the lecture material on that topic. The outline for a topic will remain on the website for a day or two after we finish a topic and will then be removed. The outlines give you the framework of the lecture but do not give you the entire script. (Research shows that individuals learn and remember better when they write things down themselves.) If you wish, you can print these outlines and bring them with you to class to use as a base for notetaking. Regarding notetaking, *make sure you take notes that will be meaningful to you later* when you are reviewing your notes, rather than focusing only on transcribing the slides verbatim. Convert the points on the slide into terms that make sense to you. I have read student notes that are precise copies of the slide text, but with no additional notes that explain the material. Make sure you do not lapse into that habit. If examples that I mention in class help make the point more clear to you, jot down a note to remind yourself about the example. Please note that the posted outlines will closely match the slides I show in class, but there may be times where I have revised the slides after putting the outline online.

**Honesty:** Any instance of academic misconduct will be taken seriously and may result in failure of the course. [Students.wisc.edu/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html](http://Students.wisc.edu/saja/misconduct/UWS14.html) has the details about what constitutes academic misconduct and is well worth reviewing. Misconduct will result in notification to the Dean of Students. Don't gamble away your reputation or disrespect your fellow students, UW, or the Wisconsin taxpayers and UW alumni and friends whose contributions in the form of taxes or gifts make this institution possible, by engaging in misconduct. If you are having a problem it is *much* better to talk to a TA or me about it. We want you to learn and do well in this course—talk to us if you are having a problem so we can work out a solution.

### ***Reading Material:***

The following required books are available for purchase at University Book Store (likely elsewhere as well) and are on reserve at College Library:

John J. Coleman, Kenneth M. Goldstein, and William G. Howell,

*Understanding American Politics and Government*, Brief Edition (2009)

David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (2008)

## ***Outline and Reading List:***

### ***I. FOUNDATIONS***

#### **Introduction (9-8)**

#### **Political Culture and the Framework of American Politics (9-8, 9-10)**

*Understanding American Politics and Government*, chs. 1-2

*The Enduring Debate*, articles 1-5 (in *The Enduring Debate*, read the editors' introductory comments to each assigned article and read the comments introducing the "Debating the Issues" section if an assigned article is in that section of the chapter)

Complete Section Assignment posted at Learn@UW

#### **The Constitution and Federalism (9-15, 9-17, 9-22)**

The following three readings should be read prior to class. Do not read these to memorize but to get a sense of each document as a whole:

- Declaration of Independence, *Understanding American Politics and Government*, pp. 555-56
  - *Note how the Declaration tries to establish common ground among the colonists and build a shared sense of nationhood.*
- Constitution of the United States, *Understanding American Politics and Government*, pp. 563-76
  - *Where the Declaration is building a sense of nation, the Constitution is building a governance framework.*
- Federalist no. 10, *Understanding American Politics and Government*, pp. 557-59
  - *James Madison provides a justification for the Constitution based on principle and theory.*

*Understanding American Politics and Government*, chs. 3-4

*The Enduring Debate*, articles 6, 12, 14-15

#### **Civil Liberties and Civil Rights (9-24, 9-29, 10-1)**

*Understanding American Politics and Government*, ch. 5

*The Enduring Debate*, articles 17, 18, 19-20

**\*\*FIRST EXAMINATION\*\*** (10-8, 9:30am: Political Culture through Civil Liberties & Civil Rights)

### ***II. INSTITUTIONS***

#### **Congress (10-6, 10-13)**

*Understanding American Politics and Government*, ch. 11

*The Enduring Debate*, articles 22-26

#### **Presidency (10-15, 10-20)**

*Understanding American Politics and Government*, ch. 12

*The Enduring Debate*, articles 27-29

**Courts** (10-22, 10-27)

*Understanding American Politics and Government*, ch. 13  
*The Enduring Debate*, articles 37-40

**III. ACCESS AND INFLUENCE**

**Interest Groups** (10-29, 11-3)

*Understanding American Politics and Government*, ch. 10  
*The Enduring Debate*, articles 59-62

**\*\*SECOND EXAMINATION\*\*** (11-10, 9:30am: Congress through Interest Groups)

**Public Opinion and the Media** (11-5, 11-12, 11-17)

*Understanding American Politics and Government*, chs. 6, 8  
*The Enduring Debate*, articles 41-46

**Elections and Voting** (11-19, 11-24, 12-1)

*Understanding American Politics and Government*, ch. 7  
*The Enduring Debate*, articles 47-48, 51-52

**Political Parties** (12-3, 12-8)

*Understanding American Politics and Government*, ch. 9  
*The Enduring Debate*, articles 55-57 (including response to 57)

**Bureaucracy and Public Policy** (12-10, 12-15)

*Understanding American Politics and Government*, chs. 14-15  
*The Enduring Debate*, articles 32, 64, 66, 72, 73

**\*\*THIRD EXAMINATION\*\*** (12-19, 5:05pm: Public Opinion and the Media through  
Bureaucracy and Public Policy)