

# Political Science 1014

## Introduction to US Government and Politics

### Spring 2014

## Course Info

**Instructor:** Steven Wilson

**Place:** Randolph 222

**Time:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:30PM - 1:45PM

**Office Hours:** 9:30AM-11:00AM Tuesdays and Thursdays in 506 Major Williams Hall

**Contact Info:** Email: slw42@vt.edu Phone: 540-231-1854

**Objectives:** This course introduces American political institutions, actors, and processes. Students will learn how and why the American political system is designed the way it is, how it has evolved over time, and acquire a working knowledge of how the system works in practice, including such topics as the presidency, Congress, elections, and other institutions.

## Textbooks

The course has one required text book, which will be supplemented by a selection of additional readings that will be available electronically throughout the semester. The required texts is:

Lowi, Theodore J., Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere. 2012. *American Government: Power and Purpose*

## Assignments & Grading

Reading will be assigned for each class. Students should come to class having read the assigned material and being ready to discuss it. Lectures will be designed to supplement the material covered in the readings, and both will be reflected on the exams. Please come to office hours (or schedule a meeting with me if you have a conflict) if you have any trouble understanding the material, or if you have any questions about the course at all as the semester progresses.

The course will have three exams (two midterms and a final), a research paper that will be completed in stages through the semester, a presentation (on current events), and a quiz. The proportion each of these is worth to the final grade is listed below:

First Midterm (15%) (Thursday, February 27th)

Second Midterm (15%) (Thursday, April 10th)

Presentation (10%) (In class, throughout semester)

Journal Entries (15%) (throughout semester)

Final Paper (20%) (Due at the start of the final class: Tuesday, May 6th)

Final Exam (25%) (Saturday, May 10th 1:05PM to 3:05PM)

## **Presentations**

Students are expected to read the news, and keep up on current events involving American politics. Beginning in the second week of the semester, each class will begin with one or two students giving presentations on current events. Each student will present once during the semester, and will be responsible for identifying two news stories involving American politics. One story should be directly related to the topic of lectures for that week, the other can be anything of importance to American politics in general. The presentation should explain each article's importance, how it fits into what we've discussed in the class, and what differing opinions are on the story.

## **Papers**

The final papers will be written in stages over the course of the semester. In the first two weeks of the semester, students will identify a research question they want to answer, and turn in a summary of the question and their approach to it. Throughout the semester, students will identify scholarly literature relevant to their question, and write journal entries summarizing the arguments and how they apply to their paper. The final paper will be 2500 words, which will include some components turned in throughout the semester.

When grading papers, if you write less than the minimum length, you will be graded out of the percent of the assignment that you did. For example, if for the 2500 word final paper you only turn in a 2000 word paper, I will grade you out of 80%.

## **Course Schedule**

The schedule for the semester is listed below, along with reading assignments from the textbook.

## **Week 1: Introduction**

Chapter 1; Appendix A3-A6

## **Week 2: Federalism**

Chapters 2, 3; Appendix A34-A42

## **Week 3: Constitution**

Chapter 4; Appendix A7-A33

## **Week 4: Civil Rights**

Chapter 5

## **Week 5: Political Parties**

Chapter 12

## **Week 6: First Midterm**

No Reading

## **Week 7: Public Opinion**

Chapter 10

## **Week 8: Media**

Chapter 14

## **Week 9: Elections**

Chapter 11

## **Week 10: Interest Groups**

Chapter 13

## **Week 11: Second Midterm**

No Reading

## **Week 12: Congress**

Chapter 6

## **Week 13: Presidency**

Chapters 7, 8, 17

## **Week 14: Courts**

Chapter 9

## **Week 15: Public Policy**

Chapters 15, 16

## **Week 16: Review**

No Reading