

American Politics: Principles, Processes and Powers

PLSC 001
Fall 2019

TR 1:35 PM – 2:50 PM
Forum Bldg. 108

Instructor

Prof. Michael Nelson
E-mail: mjn15@psu.edu
Office: Pond Lab 232
Office Hours: W 3:00-5:00 PM
(and by Appointment)

Teaching Assistants

Mr. Kyle Bedu
kab1035@psu.edu
Pond 224
M 12:30-2:30PM

Mr. Michael Burnham
mlb6496@psu.edu
Pond 224
W 1:00-3:00PM

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Who has a voice in American politics and why are some political actors more influential than others? Do the electoral and policy making processes uphold democratic values? How responsive is the United States government to public wants? How does the media influence citizens' political preferences and behavior? To the untrained observer, American government can often seem confusing, frustrating, mean-spirited, and dominated by self-interested elites. However, politics is a process by its very nature designed to take these preferences and combine them with those of everyone else, enacting policy decisions without the need for violent conflict. Given this goal, what expectations should we have of our political system and how well do we believe it represents the will of the public?

This course examines the American democracy by looking at the dynamic interaction between the founding ideals of the United States government, the institutions established by the Constitution, and the ongoing contest for power within and through those institutions. Students will learn how Congress, the Presidency, and the Supreme Court shape law and public policy; how the electoral process influences the decisions of voters and political parties; and how the media, interest groups, political action committees, and public opinion impact political outcomes.

The course both provides a foundation for further study of politics and equips students with the capacity to act politically on their own behalf and in concert with their communities. Students are empowered to interpret and pursue their interests, rights, and opportunities within the US political system in relation to the values of democratic equality and liberty the system was organized to secure, and to influence the process through which policies that shape their lives in critical ways are made.

OBJECTIVES

The goal of this course is to introduce you to political science as a discipline while teaching you the fundamentals of government and politics in the United States. The aim of this class is not to teach you *what* to think about politics nor a venue for you to attempt to convince others of your political views. Rather, the goal of this class is to teach you *how* to think about politics. At the end of this course, you should understand the systematic forces—the rules, structures, and procedures—that structure politics as practiced in the United States. Moreover, you should have the tools to assess critically causal claims made by politicians and journalists, to be a conscientious consumer of polls, and to understand how political parties, the media, and interest groups interact with political institutions to affect policy change in the United States. To these ends, this course is organized around several motivating questions:

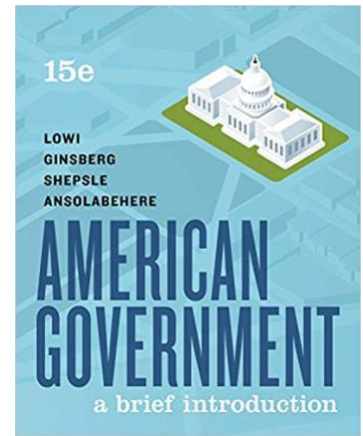
- Why does government appear so contentious and unproductive?
- What does the Constitution say about the rights of citizens and role of states?
- How do the institutions of American government share and exercise power?
- What does the American public know and believe about government and politics?
- What role do parties, interest groups, and the news media play in American politics?

To be successful in this course you will be responsible for meeting the following objectives:

- Attend all classes on time, prepared to actively participate in discussions and activities. This includes bringing your Clicker, ensuring it is working properly, and responding to all questions asked during each period.
- Complete all readings and assignments on time, correctly answering questions about key concepts and theories.
- Demonstrate your ability to define, recall, combine, and distinguish between course concepts and theories on exams and assignments. This includes the ability to explain material, give examples of its use in national politics, and differentiate it from related terms and theories.

COURSE MATERIALS

- 1) Ansolabehere, et al. 2019. *American Government: A Brief Introduction*. 15th Edition. W.W. Norton. ISBN 9780393674934.
- 2) i>Clicker. You must purchase and register your i>Clicker to receive participation credit.
- 3) A series of supplementary readings is available on Canvas.



COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Be certain to record all your grades and double-check your final semester score to ensure your work was correctly entered. I do not “give” grades. You earn your grade in this course. Exams, quizzes, and in-class participation are your chances to exhibit your knowledge and command of the literature and grow as a student of political science. There are 475 possible points in this course. Your grade in this course will be determined using the following formula:

Exams (3)	300 Points
Chapter Quizzes	100 Points
Research Participation	25 Points
Participation	50 Points

Exams. There will be three one-hour exams given in this class. The first two will be administered in the Pollock Testing Center and the date and location of the third will be scheduled by the University during finals week. About one week prior to exams one and two you will receive an email asking you to register for a time to complete the test. I strongly suggest you submit this form as soon as possible as slots fill on a first-come-first-served basis. On the day of the exam report to the Pollock Building with your Penn State Student ID and a pen or pencil (all other materials will be provided). If you bring a cell phone, smart watch, notes, or any other materials, please ensure they are put away throughout the exam. Failure to follow these procedures may result in disciplinary action.

The material for each exam will be obtained from the readings and in-class lectures. Questions will be written to assess your understanding of the concepts and theories presented as well as your ability to integrate these ideas together and link them to practical politics. Most exam questions will be written as multiple choice, true/false, and/or fill-in-the-blank questions.

Finally, you **must** complete the third exam during the period established by the University. Do not plan to leave campus before final exams have been announced – there will not be an opportunity to take this test early. You will be awarded a zero if it is missed.

Chapter Quizzes. You will complete short quizzes assessing your understanding of the material covered in our textbook. These questions are designed to ensure you grasp the key points, become familiar with the history of American politics that may not be covered in class, and realize when you may want to seek help understanding the material. Each chapter quiz will be administered on Canvas and consist of approximately 10 questions drawn from the textbook. You may retake these quizzes as often as you like until the deadline has passed. There are 12 possible quizzes. **I will count your best 10 (out of 12) chapter quizzes toward your final grade.** The deadline for each assignment is 11:59 p.m. EST (midnight) on the date indicated in the course schedule.

Research Participation. Students enrolled in this class are required to serve as a research participant or complete an alternative exercise. This assignment is graded complete/incomplete. The purpose of experimental research is the acquisition of knowledge. A great deal of what we know about human behavior is based on studies conducted at universities like Penn State. Taking part as a subject in an experiment provides students with a unique experience and direct insight into political science research. The descriptions of experiments that appear in research, such as those assigned readings, textbooks, and journals in our classes describe only the high-level details of the experiment. They omit a great deal of information about what research is really like. Serving as a research participant thus complements what you learn in class by giving you a behind-the-scenes look at research.

The first step in this process is to sign up for the Research Pool. Use the link on Canvas to [Register for the Social Science Experimental Lab](#) (SSEL) and register by answering the questions asked. **This should be completed by the end of the fourth week of class.** The second step is to take part in two studies over the course of the semester. Students cannot complete this second step until they receive an email from the SSEL with their unique ID (takes about 2 weeks after

registration). Students can look up [Active Studies at the SSEL](#) and take part in any studies listed. Experimenters may also wish to contact you directly to ask you to take part in their study. They will not have student's direct email, but instead an anonymized link to student emails. **You must complete your two studies by the Tuesday after Thanksgiving Break.**

Take Seriously being a Participant. Research studies at the SSEL are exercises for the experimenters. Rather, they will publish the results. So, answer questions honestly, take the study seriously. In order for students to learn how to conduct experiments, why studies are valid or not, the problems researchers face, the time it takes to answer a study etc., they must understand exactly the demands placed on participants. Being a participant does not mean racing through the study! Rather, please take the study as seriously as you would want others to take your study.

Alternative Assignment. Any student that does not wish to take part in the experimental subject pool may opt for the alternative assignment. Students can fulfill the research requirement by summarizing reports of research provided by the class instructor. Completion of each abstract will give you 1/2 research credit. Thus, four abstracts will fulfill the two-experiment requirement. To complete this alternative assignment:

1. Use Google Scholar to find research published in the *Journal of Politics*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *American Political Science Review*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *American Politics Research*, *Journal of Experimental Political Science*, *Political Behavior*, *Journal of Law and Courts*, or *Political Psychology* that use experimental methods.
2. Students write a two-page summary of the article. The abstract should include the central issue of the article, the research procedures used, and the results of the study, and a critique of what is unique and important about the study as well as concerns, and methodological limitations of the study. Each abstract must also include a complete reference for the article, including the author, title, name of journal, publication date, and page number at the top of the abstract.

In-Class Participation. You are required to purchase an i>Clicker remote for in-class participation. The i>Clicker device has been adopted as the standard used throughout the University and allows you to answer questions posed during class. During each class period, I will ask you a variety of questions to determine how well the material is understood and to engage you in a conversation with one another. You are responsible for bringing your clicker to each class, ensuring it has been registered online, and that it has been tuned to the appropriate frequency for our room.

To register your clicker, visit <http://clickers.psu.edu/> and fill-in the required fields.¹ While this information will be pre-populated on the registration form, be certain to use your Access ID (i.e. xyz123) as your Student ID rather than the 9-digit number you have also been assigned. Your Remote ID is located on the back of your device. To link your clicker to the room's base station please follow the instructions listed on the back of your clicker:

- Press and hold the ON/OFF button on the clicker until the Power light flashes
- Release the power button, and type in the assigned frequency, one letter at a time
- If the frequency is entered correctly, the Vote Status light will briefly turn green

Grading Participation. Your grade is the product of your participation in clicker questions, not a function of those you get right or wrong. There will be two points possible during each class period: you will earn full credit (3 points) if you answer all of the questions posed during class, partial (2 points) if you respond to some, but not all, of the questions, and no credit (0 points) if you fail to respond to any. You will also receive 5 points for registering your clicker. You must bring an operational clicker to class to earn credit; therefore, I urge you to put this device somewhere where it will not be forgotten (i.e. your bag) with an extra set of batteries. **“Clicking in” your friend is a violation of academic integrity and will be dealt with as such.**

Grading will begin during Week 3 (September 6th) and continue throughout the remainder of the semester. Because there will likely be days when you cannot attend class (for excused or unexcused reasons), days when you might forget your clicker, or other days when it fails to work, I count “full credit” as receiving 50 clicker points. Except in the case of serious illness (lasting more than a week) there is no need to contact us regarding your participation grade as this will simply be counted toward your “free” days.

¹ Your clicker can only be registered to one user at a time. Please be aware it cannot be shared among multiple people during the same semester as responses will not be recorded correctly.

EXPECTATIONS/PROCEDURES

RESPECT. In this course, we are all engaged in the endeavor of building a stronger understanding of the American political system. Everyone comes to this course with a different background in our subject and different views of the implications of many of the topics that we discuss. It is important that we all treat each other with the utmost respect.

OFFICE HOURS. Please come. The TA's and I are here to help. If our office hours conflict with another commitment, please e-mail us to find a time that works to meet. I'm really serious about this.

EXTENSIONS. Extensions will be granted in only the most severe circumstances. If you foresee the need for an extension, one needs to be requested and granted at least 24 hours before the due date. No one is entitled to an extension; they will be offered only at my discretion.

ATTENDANCE. It is not necessary to contact us if you are ill, have a family emergency, or any other reason that causes you to be absent for a particular day - this is why you are afforded "free" days.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY. I take violations of the University's academic dishonesty policy very seriously; it is printed on the next page. Please review the policy and let me know if you have any questions.

GRADING SCALE. The course will follow a standard grading scale:

93-100	A	87-89	B+	77-79	C+
90-92	A-	83-86	B	70-76	C
		80-82	B-	60-69	D

REGARDING GRADES. I do not *give* grades. You *earn* grades. It is essential that you are proactive regarding your performance in this course; *do not wait* until grades are posted and then ask how your grade could be improved. At that point, barring a mathematical error on my part, it cannot be. If, at any point, you are unsure of your current standing in the course, please come to my office hours. I may (or may not) offer extra credit assignments to the entire class during the semester. I am sometimes asked about extra-credit or additional assignments after the final grades have been tallied by students who are unhappy with their grades. I will not offer such assignments to the class or individual students.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY. The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one's work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor.

In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in-class or take-home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.

Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts. More information on academic integrity and procedures followed for violation can be found at: <http://www.la.psu.edu/current-students/student-services/academic-integrity/academic-integrity>

NOTE TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. The Student Disability Resources Web site provides [contact information for every Penn State campus](#). For further information, please visit the [Student Disability Resources Web site](#).

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, [participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation](#). If the

documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your [campus's disability services office](#) will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early in your courses as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES. Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

[Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park \(CAPS\)](#): 814-863-0395
Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400
Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

Educational Equity and Reporting Bias Incidents. State takes great pride to foster a diverse and inclusive environment for students, faculty, and staff. Acts of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment due to age, ancestry, color, disability, gender, gender identity, national origin, race, religious belief, sexual orientation, or veteran status are not tolerated and can be reported through Educational Equity via the [Report Bias webpage](#). You may also contact one of the following offices:

University Police Services, University Park:	814-863-1111
Multicultural Resource Center, Diversity Advocate for Students:	814-865-1773
Office of the Vice Provost for Educational Equity:	814-865-5906
Office of the Vice President for Student Affairs:	814-865-0909
Affirmative Action Office:	814-863-0471

Call 911 in cases where physical injury has occurred or is imminent.

STUDENT CARE & ADVOCACY OFFICE. College presents a number of challenges for students, and Penn State maintains an office of Student Care & Advocacy that can point you in the right direction if you are facing any of the following issues:

- Death of an immediate family member
- Family crisis
- Mental health concern
- Self-injurious behavior
- Food insecurity
- Housing insecurity
- Medical emergency and/or hospitalization
- Local natural disaster
- Academic distress
- Unexpected events or challenges

If you have questions, concerns, or need more information, please do not hesitate to contact that office by phone at 814-863-2020 or by email at StudentCare@psu.edu. They encourage you to call or e-mail ahead.

EXTENDED ABSENCES. During your enrollment at Penn State, unforeseen challenges may arise. If you ever need to miss an extended amount of class in such a circumstance, please notify your professor so you can determine the best course of action to make up missed work. If your situation rises to a level of difficulty you cannot manage on your own with faculty support, reach out to the Student Care & Advocacy office by phone at [\(814-863-2020\)](tel:814-863-2020) or email them at StudentCare@psu.edu. Office hours are Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

SCHEDULE

Below, you'll find a list of all class meetings, the topic we'll discuss, the reading assignment, and some questions to consider as you prepare for class and as you study for exams. You should complete the reading assignment before you come to class and bring any questions that you have with you to our class meetings. In the event that deviations from this schedule are necessary, they will be announced in class.

Part I: Principles

Week 1

Aug. 27: Introduction to the Course

What does government do in America? What are the conclusions you will draw from this class? What do you need to do to be successful in this class?

- No readings

Aug. 29: No Class (APSA Meeting)

Week 2

Sept. 3: Understanding Politics: Creating a Language to Understand What's Happening

What is politics and why is it necessary? Why are institutions important to the operation of American government? Why is it difficult for groups to reach agreement (i.e. collective action problems)? How can collective action problems be overcome?

- LGSA, Chapter 1

Sept. 5: The Constitution: Developing a Governing Document

How does Home Rule influence the Articles of Confederation? How do the Articles influence the Constitution? Who wrote the Constitution and what motivated their decisions?

- LGSA, Chapter 2, Pages 22-32
- Skim:
 - The Declaration of Independence [LGSA pg. A3-A6]
 - The Articles of Confederation [LGSA pg. A7-A12]
- **Chapter 1 Quiz Due**

Week 3

Sept. 10: The Constitution: What Did the Founders Create?

What concerned the framers when drafting the Constitution and how did they solve their problems? What type of government did our Founders create? What does the Constitution say and how should it be interpreted?

- LGSA, Chapter 2, Pages 32-51
- The U.S. Constitution [LGSA pg. A13-A31]

Sept. 12: The Constitution: Ratification and The Problem of Factions

How did the Federalists convince the states to ratify the Constitution? What were the major arguments for and against ratification? Is the Constitution still relevant today?

- Federalist #10 & #51 [LGSA pg. A32-A39]
- Brutus, Anti-Federalist Paper #1 (October 18, 1787).
- Levinson, Sanford. 2006. "It Is Time to Repair the Constitution's Flaws." *Chronicle of Higher Education* 13 Oct. [Read the condensed version on Canvas].
- **Chapter 2 Quiz Due**

Week 4

Sept. 17: Dividing Power: The Separation of Powers

What is the separation of powers and why is it present in the United States? How is power divided among the three branches of government? How has the separation of powers changed over time?

- LGSA, Chapter 3, Pages 71-76

Sept. 19: Dividing Power: Federalism

What is federalism and why is it present in the United States? How is power divided between state and federal governments? How has federalism changed over time? Can federalism make national movements easier?

- LGSA, Chapter 3, Pages 52-70
- **Chapter 3 Quiz Due**
- **Research Participation Registration Due**

Week 5

Sept. 24: Political Parties: Why Parties?

What are political parties? What role do they play in the operation of government and politics? Are parties necessary in American politics?

- LGSA, Chapter 11, Pages 328-350

Sept 26: Political Parties: America's Evolving Party System

Why does the US have a two-party system? How have the parties and their platforms changed over time?

- LGSA, Chapter 11, Pages 350-354
- **Chapter 11 Quiz Due**
- **Extra Credit Assignment 1 Due**

Week 6

Oct. 1: Political Parties: The Presidential Nomination Process

How do parties select their presidential nominee? Why don't we use a national primary? Why do Iowa and New Hampshire get to go first?

- Caroline J. Tolbert and David P. Redlawsk. 2011. "Resolved, Political Parties Should Nominate Candidates for President in a National Primary." in *Debating Reform*.

Oct. 3: Exam 1

Part II: Powers

Week 7

Oct. 8: Congress: Who Serves in Congress? What do Members of Congress Do?

What are the requirements for serving in Congress? What is the process by which members of Congress are selected?

- Mayhew, David. 1974. Selection from *Congress: The Electoral Connection*.
- Fenno, Richard. 1978. Selection from *Home Style*.

Oct. 10: Congress: Organization & Rules

Who writes bills and what do they concern? How is Congress organized and what is the importance of seniority and being in the majority? Why does Congress utilize committees and how do they operate? How does a bill become law?

- LGSA, Chapter 5

Week 8

Oct. 15: Congress: Operation & Dysfunction

How does the House operate differently from the Senate? How do members of Congress determine how to vote on bills? Is Congress representative? Why doesn't Congress seem to get much done? What motivates members of Congress?

- Lee, Frances E. 2018. "The 115th Congress and Questions of Party Unity in a Polarized Era." *Journal of Politics* 80(4): 1464-73.

Oct. 17: Presidency: Presidential Powers

What is the purpose of having a president and how is the executive branch designed? How has the role of the president changed over time? How are presidents elected?

- LGSA, Chapter 6, Pages 160-174
- **Chapter 5 Quiz Due**

Week 9

Oct. 22: Presidency: Presidential Success

What are the powers of the president? How have presidents varied in their approach to the office? How influential (powerful) are presidents?

- LGSA, Chapter 6, Pages 175-188
- Edsall, Thomas B. 2019. "The Fight Over How Trump Fits in With the Other 44 Presidents." *New York Times* 15 May. Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/15/opinion/trump-history-presidents.html>

Oct. 24: The Bureaucracy: What do Bureaucrats Do?

What is a principal-agent problem? How is the executive branch organized? Who controls the bureaucracy?

- LGSA, Chapter 7
- **Chapter 6 Quiz Due**

Week 10

Oct. 29: Federal Judiciary: Jurisdiction and Process

How are federal courts different from state courts? How are criminal cases different from civil cases? Who are the chief actors in the federal court system and what is their purpose?

- LGSA, Chapter 8

Oct. 31: Federal Judiciary: U.S. Supreme Court Procedure

What is the process whereby a case arrives at the Supreme Court? How has the role and importance of the Supreme Court changed over time?

- Epstein, Lee and Thomas Walker. "Understanding the U.S. Supreme Court." Ch. 1 in *Constitutional Law for a Changing America: Rights, Liberties, and Justice*. 9th ed. **Pg. 8-22**
- **Chapter 7 Quiz Due**
- **Extra Credit Assignment 2 Due**

Week 11

Nov. 5: Federal Judiciary: Judicial Decision Making

How does the Supreme Court decide cases? How do judges make decisions?

- Epstein, Lee and Thomas Walker. "Understanding the U.S. Supreme Court." Ch. 1 in *Constitutional Law for a Changing America: Rights, Liberties, and Justice*. 9th ed. **Pg. 22-41**
- **Chapter 8 Quiz Due**

Nov. 7: **Exam 2**

Part III: Processes

Week 12

Nov. 12: Public Opinion: What is the Importance of Public Opinion?

How do people form their political beliefs? What explains variation in the public's attitudes toward politics? Why is public opinion important to understand?

- Schuman, Howard. 2002. "Sense and Nonsense about Surveys." *Contexts* Summer 2002, 40-47.
- LGSA, Chapter 9, Pages 252-273

Nov. 14: The Media: How does the Media Matter?

How do Americans learn about politics? What affects which events get covered by the media? What is the role of the media in American government and politics?

- LGSA, Chapter 9, Pages 273-285
- **Chapter 9 Quiz Due**

Week 13

Nov. 19: Interest Groups: Tactics and Influence

What tactics do interest groups use to advance their agendas? What are PACs and what is their role in American politics? How do PACs determine who to support? Do interest groups and PACs have too much influence?

- LGSA, Chapter 12
- Melinda Burns, “K Street and the Status Quo”

Nov. 21: No Class: Complete Experimental Lab Requirement

- Reading: None
- **Chapter 12 Quiz Due**

Nov. 26 & 28: No Class – Thanksgiving Break

Week 14

Dec. 3: Voting, Campaigns, & Elections: Electoral Institutions

Who is allowed to vote and why do we choose our leaders in elections? Why do some people turn out and vote while others stay home? How do campaigns attempt to gain support?

- LGSA, Chapter 10, Pages 286-304
- **Experimental Lab Assignment Due**

Dec. 5: Voting, Campaigns, & Elections: Voting Behavior

How do voters decide which candidate to support? What is the impact of campaign donations on elections? Do campaigns matter?

- LGSA, Chapter 10, Pages 305-327
- **Chapter 10 Quiz Due**

Week 15

Dec. 10: Civil Liberties: Finding and Defining the Rights of Citizens

What are civil liberties and where are they found? How do judges interpret the Constitution? What rights are found in the 1st - 3rd Amendments? What are the controversies that surround these amendments?

- LGSA, Chapter 4, Pages 78-97

Dec. 12: Civil Rights: Creating a More Equal Nation

Understanding civil rights through the African American experience – integration, the courts, and Congress. What lessons can we learn from the African American experience? How have other groups gained civil rights? What policy options are available to lawmakers attempting to create greater equality?

- LGSA, Chapter 4, Pages 98-121
- **Chapter 4 Quiz Due**
- **Extra Credit Assignment 3 Due**

Finals Week

Dec. 16-20: Exam 3

Date, time, and location to be scheduled by the University

Extra Credit: News Brief Assignment

The study of politics happens in real-time. The topics covered in this course are likely to appear not only in our discussions, but also in the news. Prior to each exam, you will have the option of exploring one of these issues more deeply for up to 10 additional extra credit points. To complete the optional news brief assignment, you will need to locate a current news story (within the past six months) that is relevant to our discussions and provide a critical analysis of its content. You may submit these briefs at any point prior to the due date, and I encourage you to complete the requirements early.

Your assignment must be uploaded to Canvas by 11:59 p.m. EST on the days indicated in the course schedule; no late assignments will be accepted. Furthermore, I'm going to ask that you only upload documents saved as PDFs or Word files. Below you will find information about choosing a news story, composing the essay, and how it will be graded. If you have questions about this assignment you are welcome to send us an email or stop by office hours.

Where should I look for a story?

Thanks to current technology, news is easily viewed. Your story must have been written within the last six months and published in a reputable (print) publication. Examples include, but are not limited to: *The New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Washington Post*, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Miami Herald*, *USA Today*, and the *Economist*. Do not select news stories published on news aggregating sites (i.e. Huffington Post or Drudge Report) or television networks. If you have a question about the quality of your story, please write us an email including a link to the story.

What should the topic of my story be?

You must choose an article that deals directly with the content we have been discussing in class and that you will be tested on during the next upcoming exam. Because this is a course on American politics, your story should also concern American political actors and events. Your story does not need to concern all of the topics covered on the test and will likely pertain to only one. For example, you may choose to write about an article concerning a constitutional question for Brief 1 – you are not responsible for finding something that explores all of the listed topics. While I'm primarily interested in your ability to draw connections between the story and our class, I also understand that some articles concern one (and only one) issue area. Below are the topics that may be discussed in each brief:

- Brief 1: The logic of American politics, the Constitution, federalism, the separation of powers, or political parties
- Brief 2: Congress, presidency, the bureaucracy, or the federal judiciary
- Brief 3: Public opinion, voting, campaigns and elections, interest groups, the news media, civil rights, or civil liberties

Advice: When choosing a story think to yourself, “what three concrete linkages can I draw between this news article and the concepts and theories we’ve discussed in class?” If you cannot identify three ways in which the story pertains to class move on to another article.

What do I need to write?

To help organize your paper, I am requiring that you submit an outline of your essay with the final draft. The outline should be placed on page 1 of your submission and contain:

1. The title of your story and a link to where it can be found online.
2. Your thesis statement – what are you trying to accomplish in your essay?
3. The first concept or theory from class you will examine. Provide 1-2 sentences explaining why the item is relevant to the story.
4. The second concept or theory from class you will examine. Provide 1-2 sentences explaining why the item is relevant to the story.
5. The third concept or theory from class you will examine. Provide 1-2 sentences explaining why the item is relevant to the story.

Each essay must include a(n):

- 1) Introduction discussing why the story is relevant to what we’ve been learning in class and providing a thesis that explains the argument you are advancing in your paper (for example, “In discussing X, Y, and Z the article _____ illustrates many of the controversies surrounding [a theory from class].”)
- 2) A brief summary of the news article. This should be no more than two paragraphs and should explain the key points of the article (who, what, when, where, how, and why) in a way that allows the reader to understand how it is relevant to class. Remember, this is a synopsis and should be principally in your own words.
- 3) Three paragraphs each

- a. Identifying a relevant concept or theory from class
 - b. Explaining the theory or concept identified
 - c. Explaining how the theory or concept is related to the article
 - d. Discussing any similarities or differences in how political scientists think about the concept or theory and how journalists cover it
- 4) A conclusion explaining what was discovered in the essay and linking this back to the thesis.

There is no page limit on this assignment, but most successful submissions are about 4-6 double-spaced pages or 750-1200 words. You must cite your news article both in-text and in a references section as well as any other sources you use while preparing your paper. These citations should be formatted using the American Political Science Association style manual. More information about this style guide can be found at: <https://connect.apsanet.org/stylemanual/wp-content/uploads/sites/43/2018/11/Style-Manual-for-Political-Science-2018.pdf>.

Rubric for Extra Credit Assignments

	0	65%	75%	85%	100%
Outline (10%)	Missing all of the required information.	Missing most of the required information and/or lacking clarity and organization.	Contains most of the required information. Organization and clarity need improvement.	Contains all of the required information, but clarity and organization need improvement.	Contains all of the required information. Is properly organized and written clearly.
Introduction & Conclusion (10%)	Essay is missing an introduction and conclusion.	Parts of the introduction and conclusion are missing or are largely underdeveloped. Substantial revision is necessary.	The introduction and conclusion are underdeveloped or missing required information. They could be more clearly written to tie items back to the thesis.	The introduction and conclusion provide the relevant information but need to be more clearly articulated and/or explained.	The introduction is interesting, explains the relevance of the story to the class, and contains a thesis statement. The conclusion summarizes the key points and ties them back to the thesis.
Description of Story (10%)	Does not provide a synopsis of the news article.	The summary omits several details or relies heavily on direct quotes. There are several inaccuracies in discussing the piece. It is may not be clear the writer understands the story.	The summary may omit a few key details or include far too much information for a synopsis. There may be a few inaccuracies in relaying the information from the source.	The summary may omit a key detail or include too much information for a synopsis. There may be a minor inaccuracy in relaying the information from the story.	Provides 1-2 paragraphs clearly and accurately summarizing the key ideas (who, what, when, where, and why) in the news story.
Comparisons (3 x 20% = 60%)	Does not provide a concept or theory that is relevant to the story. The concept or theory provided is not applicable to the assignment.	The paragraph omits several key components, does not link the concept back to the news story, or does not appropriately analyze the story based on what was learned in class.	The paragraph may omit a few key details, a complete explanation of the concept, its applicability to the story, or its relevance to class.	The paragraph contains the necessary information but needs further development. The link between article and concept may be weak or its relevance to class may need further explanation.	The paragraph clearly and correctly identifies a relevant concept or theory from class, explains the idea, and directly links this to the news article. The relationship between the two is evaluated.
Citation & References (5%)	Does not provide or use sources	The source of the news article is not appropriate. The citations need substantial improvement or may be missing.	The source of the news article is questionable. The citations need considerable improvement.	The news article comes from an appropriate source, but citations need improvement. The errors are relatively small.	The news article comes from an appropriate source and is correctly cited both in-text and in the bibliography. The APSA citation standard is used correctly.
Grammar & Style (5%)	Writing is aimless and disorganized. There are numerous errors that make it difficult to read.	The sentence structure and tone of the essay is awkward. There are a number of grammatical errors that make it difficult to read.	Writing sometimes gets off topic and is bland. Word choice may be wrong and sentences may be awkward. There are several grammatical errors.	Writing is clear, but the tone could be improved (example: too many colloquialisms). There are few grammatical errors.	Writing is clear, natural, and appeals to emotion, reason, and facts. The paper contains correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.