

GOV 1100

Introduction to American Government

Fall 2019
VAC-Beam Classroom
Monday, Wednesday, Friday: 10:40am-11:35am

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Office Hours:

Tuesday, 2pm-3pm
Thursday, 9:30am-11am
And by appointment

This course is an introduction to the workings of American government. For many, politics and government are uninteresting, unimportant, and even dreadfully boring. For others, political and partisan struggles are off-putting and uncomfortably confrontational. As such, it is en vogue to lament the state of American politics, often without thought or reflection, as either too base to warrant participation or too dull to bother. This course is not intended to make you politicians nor convince you that one partisan or ideological perspective is best. It is, however, designed to teach and inform you about the American democratic system and give you the tools to make reasoned and thoughtful assessments about politics and political struggles. Should you come to believe – as a consequence of this course – that American democracy is doomed, or (for that matter) that it is superior to all other alternatives, it will ideally come from having read carefully and reflected deeply about all viewpoints and alternatives. It is my hope that you leave this class with a stronger understanding of American politics, and a keener sense of the complex debates that characterize our democratic development.

Course Requirements

There are 4 major components to your grade:

1. **Two Exams** (30 points each) – take-home exams that are NOT cumulative; both exams are open book and open note. Your final exam is the second of these, and the midterm is scheduled for October 16th. The format will be four short essays, and essay topics will be derived from readings and lectures. Exams will be transmitted to you electronically and you will have a specific time (two hours) and page limit (six total pages—double spaced, 12-point font). More information will be provided as we approach the exam.
*The six-page limit will be strictly enforced. I will not read past Page 6.
**You are NOT allowed to work with another student on the completion of these exams. ANY evidence of collaboration during the test is grounds for failure of the class. (You are, of course, allowed to study with others in preparing for the exam.)
2. **Participation** (15 points)—this includes attendance AND class participation. Attendance is REQUIRED, and I will take regular note of who is and who is not in class. I understand that people get sick, have doctor's appointments, and so on, but I only grant excused absences in rare circumstances. Be advised, simple attendance is not sufficient.
**See the Mock Congressional Outline at the end of the syllabus for important information.*
3. **Self-Assessments** (15 points)— Two short papers, one due at the beginning of the semester and one due at the very end.
**See the Mock Congressional Outline at the end of the syllabus for important information.*

4. **Weekly Quizzes** (10 points)—There will be one quiz every week, starting on the week of September 9th. The quiz will randomly be on either Monday or Wednesday and will focus on the readings for that day. It will consist of 1-3 very short questions on the readings.

Readings

There are two books for this course, and both are available through the campus virtual bookstore (<https://bowdoin.ecampus.com/>).

1. Robert Dahl. *How Democratic is the American Constitution*. 2nd Edition. Yale University Press. 978-0300095241
2. Theodore J. Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere. *American Government: Power and Purpose*. Brief 14th Edition. 978-0393283778

Other Issues

1. I expect all students to abide by the Bowdoin Academic Honor Code, which can be accessed online at: <https://www.bowdoin.edu/dean-of-students/student-handbook/the-academic-honor-code-and-social-code.html>. If you have any concerns or questions about how to cite work appropriately, please consult a reference librarian or me.
2. If you have chosen to take the class as Credit/D/F, I will only grant a Credit grade if the student has completed all of the work for the class.
3. I am not allowing the use of laptops during class time (Mondays and Wednesdays). Old-fashioned notebooks and pens/pencils are recommended for note taking. Laptops are allowed during our Friday “Mock Congress” sessions.

September 4—Introductions and Expectations

September 6—Origins of the American Idea

- Lowi, Ginsberg, Shepsle, and Ansolabehere [LGSA], Chapters 1 and 2

September 9—Federalism

- LGSA, Chapter 3

September 11—Separation of Powers

- LGSA, Chapter 3

September 13—Mock Congressional Session (Set-up)

September 16—Congress

- LGSA, Chapter 5

September 18—Congress, cont.

- LGSA, Chapter 5

September 20—Mock Congressional Session (Committee Meetings)

2-page self-assessment due (see Mock Congress outline)

September 23—How Democratic is the American Constitution

- Dahl, Chapters 1-4

September 25—How Democratic is the American Constitution, cont.

- Dahl, Chapters 5-8

September 27—Mock Congressional Session (Committee Meetings)

September 30—Presidency

- LGSA, Chapter 6

October 2—Presidency, cont.

- LGSA, Chapter 6

October 4—Mock Congressional Session (Floor Debate)

October 7—Bureaucracy

- LGSA, Chapter 7

October 9—Bureaucracy, cont.

- LGSA, Chapter 7

October 11—Mock Congressional Session (Committee Meetings)

October 14—no-class (fall break)

October 16—***Mid-term Exam***

October 18—Mock Congressional Session (Committee Meetings)

October 21—Courts

- LGSA, Chapter 8

October 23—Court, cont.

- LGSA, Chapter 8

First Participation grades allocated

October 25—Mock Congressional Session (Floor Debate)

October 28— Bill of Rights, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights

- LGSA, Chapter 4

October 30—Bill of Rights, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights, cont.

- LGSA, Chapter 4

November 1—Mock Congressional Session (Floor Debate)

November 4— Bill of Rights, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights, cont.

- LGSA, Chapter 4

November 6—Public Opinion and the Media

- LGSA, Chapter 9

November 8—Mock Congressional Session (Committee Meetings)

November 11— Public Opinion and the Media, cont.

- LGSA, Chapter 9

November 13—Elections and Voting

- LGSA, Chapter 10

November 15—Mock Congressional Session (Committee Meetings)

November 18— Elections and Voting, cont.

- LGSA, Chapter 10

November 20—Tracking Election Data

- No readings

Second Participation grades allocated

November 22—Mock Congressional Session (Floor Debate)

November 25— Political Parties

- LGSA, Chapter 11

November 27 and November 29—no class (Thanksgiving)

December 2— Political Parties, cont.

- LGSA, Chapter 11

December 4— Interest Groups

- LGSA, Chapter 12

December 6—Mock Congressional Session (Floor Debate)

December 9— Interest Groups, cont.

- LGSA, Chapter 12

December 11—Foreign Policy

- LGSA, Chapter 14

5-page self-assessment due (see Mock Congress outline)

Final Participation grades allocated

Final Exam: Friday, December 20, 8:30am

Mock Congress Outline

The Goal: To simulate a Senate congressional session consisting of 51 participants (50 students and your professor). This is an educational tool to convey the process of passing legislation.

Our Senate is split into 26 Republicans and 25 Democrats (reflecting the proportions of the real U.S. Senate). Students will be assigned a party, state, and committee. These will be announced at the beginning of class on September 9th. Your professor will serve as the Majority Leader (a Republican from the great state of Wisconsin).

Although unseen by us, we will operate in a political context where the House of Representatives (controlled by the Democrats) and President Donald Trump are also advocating for certain pieces of legislation. Whatever we pass out of the Senate could stall in the House or be vetoed by the President.

The Process: We will attempt to follow the actions of the real U.S. Senate. This means filibusters, cloture votes, holds, and unanimous consent agreements are all valid and will be used this semester.

Introducing Legislation

Students are responsible for drafting and introducing legislation. When drafted, they should print a copy of the bill and turn it in to Professor Franz at the start of any class session. The student is also responsible for posting the bill to the relevant Committee forum on the class's Blackboard Discussion Page. This is where students read and comment on proposed legislation outside of scheduled committee hearing class days.

Keep in mind—it's possible that the Senate will also consider legislation passed by the House. In practical terms, this will be legislation drafted by your professor.

How should you draft legislation? You can propose anything you wish (removal of all troops from Afghanistan; a constitutional amendment banning abortion; the renaming of the Brunswick post office to the "Tom Brady Post Office Building"). It must be presented to me in a specific format, however, which we'll discuss later. You can browse legislation under consideration by Congress currently or passed into law previously at: <https://www.congress.gov/>. (I have linked this site on Blackboard.) Of course, a lot of legislation considered by Congress is often lengthy and complicated. I recommend keeping your drafted bills fairly short and straightforward (about 2 pages). We do not have enough time to consider the intricacies of bill drafting.

A piece of advice—the Senate is a highly individualized legislative body, as we will see. Any member can disrupt the flow of legislation at any time. As such, bipartisan efforts often have the best chance of passing. Consider reaching across the aisle and co-sponsoring a piece of legislation. On the other hand, your party leaders will expect a fair amount of party discipline. If you are too bi-partisan, you risk being ostracized by your party. This is especially true when it comes to voting on controversial pieces of legislation.

Committee Meetings

Committees will most often consist of 9 student members (the Majority Leader will not serve on a committee). The Republicans will have 5 members, and the Democrats will have 4. For every committee, the Republicans will choose a chairperson, and the Democrats will choose a ranking member.

The chair of the committee is responsible for moving (or not moving) on legislation referred to the committee. We will discuss this more in class. I have posted Discussion Boards on Blackboard for each committee. Chairs can use the Discussion Board to ask for comments and arguments from other committee members. Committees can vote on legislation either through the Board, or during one of our many class sessions devoted to committee hearings. Committee members can choose to vote or abstain on any legislation.

Anything passed out of committee will be put on a calendar for consideration by the entire Senate. Of course, the timing of such consideration is at the discretion of the Majority Leader. Once we take up a piece of legislation on the Senate floor, the committee chairperson and ranking member should be ready to advise the Majority Leader on the structure of debate.

Floor Sessions

We will have regular sessions most every Friday. Sometimes, these will simply be committee meetings, where the class will break up into their committees and discuss legislation assigned to them. Other Fridays we will meet as a whole Senate, and debate legislation passed out of committee.

Prior to each class session designated as a floor debate, however, I will post on Blackboard a short number of “unanimous consent” agreements. This will set out the agenda for the floor session. According to the Senate:

“These agreements are usually proposed by the Majority Leader or floor manager of the measure, and reflect negotiations among Senators interested in the measure. Many are ‘time agreements,’ which limit the time available for debate and specify who will control that time. Many also permit only a list of specified amendments.... Many also contain other provisions, such as empowering the Majority Leader to call up the measure at will or specifying when consideration will begin or end.”

ANY Senator can object to these agreements, which effectively kills consideration of that bill. This disagreement is called a “Hold.” This gives tremendous power to individual Senators, but it can also be very disruptive. Be very careful about when and if to use such a Hold. If you plan to do so, please email me before class (or tell me prior to the beginning of class), and I can potentially work out a compromise.

If the unanimous consent agreement is acceptable, and if the agreement does not contain specific rules about debate on a bill, a filibuster is possible. In truth, even with a unanimous consent agreement that puts a limit on the time of debate, a filibuster is possible. Once a Senator holds the floor, he or she can keep talking for as long as they like, stalling consideration of legislation. The Majority Leader may attempt a cloture vote, which requires 60 percent of all Senators. The cloture vote ends the filibuster. If 60 percent is not obtained, the filibuster effectively kills consideration of the bill.

We will only consider legislation directly voted out of committee, but unlike the House of Representatives, amendments to legislation need not be germane to the bill (unless specified in a unanimous consent agreement). So, if your bill is stalled in committee, and you want to force consideration of it, it is valid to offer your bill as an amendment to ANY legislation debated during a floor session.

Press Releases

I have posted on Blackboard a Discussion Board for press releases. Although only the class will be able to read them, elected officials often attempt to secure favorable press coverage. You can use the Discussion Board to signal publicly something you deem important. I recommend this strategy as a possible signal to other members about anything you deem important.

The Participants:

Majority Leader (1 member)—Michael M. Franz (R-WI)

Majority Whip (1)—TBA

Minority Leader (1)—TBA

Minority Whip (1)—TBA

President pro tempore (1)—TBA

Vice President of the United States—all tied votes on the Senate floor are broken by the Vice President (currently Mike Pence). For our purposes, if a floor vote is tied, the deciding vote will be determined by the majority position of the Republican members. In other words, we'll use Republican members to infer how Pence *probably* would have voted.

Committee chairs (6) and ranking members (6)—TBA

Armed Services (Comprising of 5 Republican members [including the chair] and 4 Democratic members)

Energy and Natural Resources (5 Republican members, 4 Democratic members)

Foreign Relations (5 Republican members, 4 Democratic members)

Appropriations (5 Republican members, 4 Democratic members)

Commerce, Science, and Transportation (5 Republican members, 4 Democratic members)

Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (3 Republican members, 2 Democratic members)

Important Additional Notes:

Participation

15 percent of your final grade is determined by your participation in the class. This includes class attendance to ALL lectures, and attendance at ALL floor sessions. In addition, your participation in the Mock Congress is crucial to securing a good grade.

How will I assess participation? Students can participate in a variety of ways—by introducing legislation, contributing to committee debates on legislation, contributing to floor debates, and performing well in a leadership post (available posts include: majority whip, minority leader, minority whip, 6 committee chairs, and 6 committee ranking members). *I will pay close attention to the quality of that participation (i.e., I will not reward poorly written bills).*

Participation SHOULD include contributing to the overall production of the Senate. This includes, but is not limited too, asserting your perspective on legislation. Students who choose only to vote on bills during floor sessions will NOT receive a good grade for participation. We'll discuss this more in class.

To help with monitoring your progress (and to improve if initial performance is lacking), I have scheduled three dates to assign you PART of your participation grade. After the October 18 floor session, I will assign 5 of the 15 participation points (assessing participation up to that point in the semester). After the November 15 floor session, I will assign 5 more of the 15 participation points. Your final 5 points will reflect participation for the remainder of the semester.

Self-Assessments

Keep in mind, also. You are assigned a party and state. These assignments might not be to your liking (i.e., you may, in the real world, be a liberal student from Massachusetts assigned to be a Republican from Wyoming). Your representation style is at your discretion (whether you choose to be bi-partisan, highly partisan, liberal, conservative, etc), but you should look up and research the real Senators from your assigned state. There are two requirements to this portion of your grade.

First, on September 20th, you will turn in a 2-page (double-spaced) assessment of the two Senators from your assigned state. Are they liberals, conservatives, or moderates? What policies have they pushed in recent years?

Second, on December 11th, the last day of class, a 5-page (double-spaced) self-evaluation is due in class. The evaluation should compare your approach to representing that state with the representation offered by the real Senators. Were you more liberal than them? Did you offer similar legislation as them? I will not grade you on how similar that representation is, but on how well and how thoroughly you assess your style in comparison to theirs.

There is one final option. You might be interested in changing parties. Arlen Specter (D-PA) did this in 2009. If you want to switch your party affiliation, you may do so. But you must also write a 7-page paper describing the reasons for the switch, and how it will better serve the constituents of your state. This paper does not secure you extra credit, however.