

**GOV1100: Intro to American Gov**  
Spring 2019  
VAC Beam  
T/Th 10.05-11.30

**Professor Maron W. Sorenson**  
Office: 301B Dudley Coe  
Office Hours: T/Th 2.45-3.45; W 11.00-12.00  
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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION<sup>1</sup>**

This course provides an overview of the politics of American government. The topics covered are the historical development of American politics, federalism, political participation, institutions, and public opinion. We explore the many ways in which political behavior impacts institutions and the interactions between political actors in the United States.

## **OBJECTIVES**

The goal of this course is to introduce you to political science and to 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 critically assess 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.

## **REQUIRED TEXT:**

- Abernathy, Scott F. *American Government: Stories of a Nation*. 2nd edition. Sage CQ Press. 2019. ISBN: 9781544327556

## **GRADES:**

**Grading Scale.** The course will follow a standard grading scale:

97-100 A	87-89 B+	77-79 C+	67-69 D+
93-96 A	83-86 B	73-76 C	63-66 D
90-92 A-	80-82 B-	70-72 C-	60-62 D-

**Midterm Exam [25% of the course grade].** The midterm exam will consist of a hypothetical set of case facts relevant to the first half of the semester. You will write a legal opinion as if you're the Court's swing justice.

**Final Exam [25% of the course grade].** The final exam will test on your knowledge of key terms and themes or concepts and landmark cases so identified in class. You will **not** be expected to know dates or names of the voluminous cases in the text or mentioned in class. The exam will include essay questions.

**Quizzes [20% of course grade]** You will complete four quizzes over the course of the semester – two before and two after the midterm. The first and third quizzes will be purely multiple choice/fill in the blank. Quizzes two and four will additionally contain a short answer question requiring supported arguments. More details will be given leading up to the quizzes.

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<sup>1</sup> Revisions: reading schedule updated 1/28/19 for new text book.

**Current Events Reflection & Connection Papers [20% of course grade]** One of the key objectives of this course is to make students more aware and more actively engaged citizens. To this end, students will prepare two essays that link a current event news story to our readings and course themes. More information about the reflection papers will be given in class and specific prompts and rubrics for the reflection papers will be available on Blackboard.

**Class Participation [10% of course grade]** Presence in class is a minimum requirement for class membership. You are expected to read and understand the assignments and contribute to class discussions. For some, constructive participation will mean speaking more than you are naturally inclined to do. For others constructive participation may mean speaking a bit less than usual and encouraging others to contribute. Participation in class might involve any of these things:

- Answering questions posed in class,
- Challenging or distinguishing points made by others,
- Offering textual evidence for or against a claim.

## CLASS EXPECTATIONS

**Use Staples.** I know this seems like an odd one, but staples are required in multi-page assignments. Any multi-page document that is not stapled will be treated like several assignments: I will grade only one.

**Be Punctual.** Tardy arrivals are distracting and disruptive; promptness is appreciated.

**Have Integrity.** One of the great goals of education is to learn to conduct oneself honorably in intellectual affairs. This means you are responsible for understanding and following Bowdoin's Academic Honor Code. Plagiarism, the unacknowledged appropriation of another person's words or ideas, is a serious academic offense. It is imperative that you hand in work that is your own, **and that you cite or give credit to others whenever you draw from their work.** If you have questions concerning plagiarism please ask me or consult [Bowdoin's Academic Honor Code](#).

**Practice Engagement.** Come to class ready to discuss readings and engage in discussion. Since good discussions require a variety of voices, I expect all participants to be present both physically and mentally. **Because of this, the use of electronic devices will not be allowed during lectures. Students should turn off and put away all electronic devices, including cell phones, tablets, and laptops.**

**Communicate Clearly.** Class announcements may be sent out via email, and you are therefore expected to use your Bowdoin email account, or to have email from that account forwarded to the account that you use on a regular basis. Also make sure to check the BB site on a regular basis in case of changes. I can be reached via email or during office hours and generally check my email three times a day: morning, early afternoon, and evening. I will do my best to respond to emails within 24 hours on weekdays and 36 hours on weekends. If I do not respond in that time period, please resend your email as it might have been inadvertently missed.

**Be Open to Changes.** I reserve the right to make reasonable alterations to the syllabus and the class policies during the semester. I will email you an updated syllabus as appropriate.

## COURSE OUTLINE/READING ASSIGNMENTS

Date	Topic	Readings	Due
	<b><u>Part I: The American Constitution</u></b>		
1/22	Syllabus Day: Defining Interests		
1/24	Foundations 1: The American Dream	Abernathy2019 Ch 1	
1/29	Foundations 2: Collective Action Problems	Olson1965; Hardin1968	
1/31	The Constitution 1: Confederal System	Abernathy2019 pp 32-51	
2/5	The Constitution 2: Ratification	Abernathy2019 pp 52-61; Federalist Papers 10, 51	
2/7	The Constitution 3: Federalism	Abernathy2019 Ch 3	Quiz 1
	<b><u>Part II: American Governing Institutions</u></b>		
2/12	Congress I	Abernathy2019 Ch 12	
2/14	Congress II	TBA	News 1
2/19	Presidency I	Abernathy2019 Ch 13	
2/21	Presidency II	TBA	
2/26	Judiciary I	Abernathy2019 Ch 15	
2/28	Judiciary II	TBA	Quiz 2
3/5	Midterm Review		
3/7	MIDTERM		Midterm
	<b><u>Part III: Political Behavior and Mass Politics</u></b>		
3/26	Political Participation I: Personal Involvement	Abernathy2019 Ch 6	
3/28	Political Participation II: Interest Groups	Abernathy2019 Ch 11	
4/2	Public Opinion I	Abernathy2019 Ch 7	
4/4	NO CLASS MPSA		
4/9	Public Opinion II	TBA	
4/11	The Media I	Abernathy2019 Ch 8	Quiz 3
4/16	The Media II	TBA	
	<b><u>Part IV: Parties, Elections, and Policy</u></b>		
4/18	Political Parties I	Abernathy2019 Ch 9	
4/23	Political Parties II	TBA	News 2
4/25	Campaigns & Elections I	Abernathy2019 Ch 10	
4/30	Campaigns & Elections II	TBA	
5/2	Policy I: Domestic	Abernathy2019 Ch 16	Quiz 4
5/7	Policy II: Foreign	Abernathy2019 Ch 18	
5/13	Final exam, 8.30-11.30		

**TBA Readings** will be posted to Blackboard at least a week in advance. TBAs are intentional so that I can adjust the syllabus to current events.