

# Political Science 102: Introduction to American Government

**Class Time:** Tuesday & Thursday 5:30pm-6:50pm

**Class Location:** Staller Center, 113

**Instructor:** Professor Elizabeth C. Connors

**Office:** Social and Behavioral Sciences, S749

**Office Hours:** Monday 2:30-3:30pm; Tuesday 11am-12pm; Thursday 11am-12pm; or by email

**Email:** elizabeth.connors@stonybrook.edu

**Teaching Assistant:** Julia Guthy, julia.guthy@stonybrook.edu; make appointments by email

## Course Description

What the informed citizen and specialist should know about the organization of American government, including the Constitution and what it means today, the Congress, political parties, pressure groups, growth of the Presidency, the Supreme Court, judicial review, federalism, separation of powers, and the Bill of Rights. May not be taken for credit in addition to POL 105.

## Learning Objectives

This course is an introduction to American politics focusing on the constitution, the institutions of the United States' government and the processes and bodies that determine public policies. The objectives of the course include providing students with:

- Understanding of the philosophical origins and political implications of the American constitution
- Ability to understand how the United States political system works
- Understanding of major theories and approaches to American politics
- Understanding of the American electoral system and electoral politics
- Ability to think critically about political issues

For most of you, this is your first political science course and you may not be exactly sure what political science is. Briefly, political science is a social science that attempts to develop rigorous theories and explanations of political phenomena. When possible, political scientists use data such as survey results or economic data to test and support their theories. Most political scientists attempt to make their theories as objective as possible rather than promote some particular philosophy or ideology. It may help to understand what political science is by understanding what it is *not*. Political science is *not* history, although history is often useful for our understanding of previous and contemporary political questions. Political science is *not* social studies or civics, in that its goal is not to make you better citizens—although being better informed is an objective. Political science is *not* current events, news, or journalism, although these things are helpful in our understanding of political phenomena and trends. Political science is *not* partisan politics or trying to promote a particular ideology, although we will study political parties and ideologies.

## Required Text

Geer et al. *Gateways to Democracy, The Essentials, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*. ISBN: 978-1-285-85857-9

## Course Requirements

You are expected to attend class regularly and be prepared by reading the assigned material *before* class. You should also take notes during the lecture—you can do this with either a laptop or a notebook—I have no preference, but there is research that suggests taking notes by hand is more effective than by typing. *And*, not having a laptop saves you from yourself (e.g., going on Facebook or watching cat videos during class).

The exams are comprised of the reading material and lectures, so make sure to pay attention to *both* of these! The best way to do well in this course is to read the assigned material carefully and before class, attend every class session, take notes each lecture, and, obviously, study before the exams. You are encouraged to bring your textbooks to class, as my lectures neatly coincide with the book—both reading the textbook and listening to my lectures will help you do well on the exams. Also, feel free to ask questions during class or slow me down if you do not understand something—I want you to learn!

### Grading:

4 Exams—all cumulative, all 50 multiple choice questions, *each worth 200 points (800 points in total)*. To help you, I will email out a review sheet to help you study for the exam—once you receive it, please go through it and—on the day of the “review session”—bring to class any questions you have.

Exam 1—February 28<sup>th</sup>, in class

Exam 2—April 6<sup>th</sup>, in class

Exam 3—April 27<sup>th</sup>, in class

Exam 4—Cumulative, date/time/location TBD

Attendance, *worth 200 points*

At end of randomly chosen classes, write your name on sheet of paper and pass in

Extra credit opportunity

Opportunities for extra credit points will be announced in class at later date

### Final Grading Scheme:

935 - 1000 points	A
895 - 934	A-
865 - 894	B+
835 - 864	B
795 - 834	B-
765 - 794	C+
735 - 764	C
695 - 734	C-
665 - 694	D+
595 - 664	D
0 - 594	F

### Makeup Exam Policy

It is essential that you understand the following policy for the course since *no exceptions will be made*. No exams may be taken early for any reason. A student who misses an exam must provide

a *very* good reason supported by evidence such as a hospital admittance form. If you are ill prior to an exam, let me know as soon as possible beforehand if you may miss the exam. Makeup exams will consist entirely of long essays. Failure to write one of the exams without providing a sufficient excuse will result in a grade of zero for that exam.

### **What is Expected from Students**

I expect every student to come to class fully prepared. That means you have read the required reading prior to class. This will make much of the lecture review for you and you will find class to be a good time to raise questions you may have about the reading. Class discussion is usually more interesting than lectures and is greatly enhanced by well-informed questions and comments. I hope that you feel free to voice your comments and to question my lectures. However, you are expected to be respectful of me and the other students in the class, especially when it comes to discussing issues with which people may have strong feelings.

Staying informed with current events is a good way for you to apply what you are learning in class to the real world. The textbook also supplies suggested readings at the end of each chapter to provide you with more in-depth information about subjects that may interest you in general. While many of you will never take another political science class, this is an opportunity to get to know a lot more about the country where you may spend the rest of your lives.

In terms of grades, there is no substitution for hard work. Review sessions will be given the class before each exam and students may ask any relevant question that is *not* phrased as: “Will \_\_\_\_\_ be on the test?” Test questions will be fair, though difficult, and will come from textbook or lecture material. If you have questions or require additional help, please let me know.

### **Subject to Change Notice**

All material, assignments, and due dates are subject to change (with prior notice of course). It is your responsibility to review the course site regularly to stay up to date on any potential changes.

### **Disability Support Services (DSS) Statement**

If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services (631) 632-6748 or <http://studentaffairs.stonybrook.edu/dss/>. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential. Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information go to the following website: <http://www.stonybrook.edu/ehs/fire/disabilities/asp>.

### **Academic Integrity Statement**

Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person’s work as your own is always wrong. Faculty are required to report any suspected instance of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at <http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/>

## Critical Incident Statement

Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, and/or inhibits students' ability to learn.

## Schedule

*\*Note: Readings are due the **day of class**—Each day I lecture on a chapter, I expect you to have read it.*

### **Class 1: Tuesday, January 24<sup>th</sup>**

- Have assigned textbook
- Check SBU email because I will be sending any announcements there (no excuse later on if you don't receive emails)
- Lecture – Introduction to class

### **Class 2: Thursday, January 26<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 1 (Introduction to Politics)

### **Class 3: Tuesday, January 31<sup>st</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 1, 2 (The Constitution I)

### **Class 4: Thursday, February 2<sup>nd</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 2 (The Constitution II)

### **Class 5: Tuesday, February 7<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 2 (The Constitution III)

### **Class 6: Thursday, February 9<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 3 (Federalism I)

### **Class 7: Tuesday, February 14<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 3 (Federalism II)

### **Class 8: Thursday, February 16<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 4 (Civil Liberties I)

### **Class 9: Tuesday, February 20<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 4 (Civil Liberties II)

### **Class 10: Thursday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>**

- Lecture – Review Session

### **Class 14: Tuesday, February 28<sup>th</sup>**

- *Exam 1 (covering chapters 1, 2, 3, 4)*

### **Class 15: Thursday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 5 (Civil Rights I)

### **Class 16: Tuesday, March 7<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 5 (Civil Rights II)

### **Class 17: Thursday, March 9<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 6 (Public Opinion and The Media I)

### **Class 18: Tuesday, March 14<sup>th</sup> & Thursday, March 16<sup>th</sup>**

- *Enjoy your break!*

**Class 19: Tuesday, March 21<sup>st</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 6 (Public Opinion and The Media II)

**Class 20: Thursday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 7 (Interest Groups)

**Class 21: Tuesday, March 28<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 8 (Political Parties I)

**Class 22: Thursday, March 30<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 8 (Political Parties II)

**Class 23: Tuesday, April 4<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Review Session

**Class 24: Thursday, April 6<sup>th</sup>**

- *Exam 2 (covering chapters 5, 6, 7, 8)*

**Class 25: Tuesday, April 11<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 9 (Elections and Campaigns I)

**Class 26: Thursday, April 13<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 9 (Elections and Campaigns II)

**Class 27: Tuesday, April 18<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 10 (The Legislative Branch)

**Class 28: Thursday, April 20<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 11 (The Executive Branch)

**Class 29: Tuesday, April 25<sup>th</sup>**

- Lecture – Review Session

**Class 30: Thursday, April 27<sup>th</sup>**

- **Exam 3 (covering chapters 9, 10, 11)**

**Class 31: Tuesday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>**

- Lecture – Chapter 13 (The Judicial Branch)

**Class 32: Thursday, May 4<sup>th</sup>**

- Review Session for Final Exam

**FINAL EXAM [CUMULATIVE] (date, time, location TBD)**