

# American Government

PLSC 110-02  
Tuesdays and Thursdays  
3:00-4:20pm  
UV 210

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

How does the American government actually work? Who governs, how does American politics work, and who are we in this process? This is an introductory course on American Government that will advance your knowledge of civics as well as provide a platform to engage in critical analysis of democratic principles and how they are practiced. We will examine the institutional structures, political actors, and vital constitutional debates that shape and define American government and politics. By exploring the historical development and founding of the United States, discussing major debates about the structure of our republican form of government, connecting the three branches of government to contemporary politics and elections, and critiquing the American constitutional system, students will deepen their individual and collective sense of citizenship. In doing so, we will explore how the people, whether they be lobbyists, judges, citizens, activists, and/or policy-makers work within the current American political system to achieve their objectives. In this class, we will also pay special attention to the role of identity politics and analyze how global factors affect American political decisions. We will explore how the US Constitution applies to everyday life. This course will also leverage technology as well as offer dynamic methods to practically apply the themes discussed, such as through mock policy debates, campaign competitions, and an independent research project.

### Whittier College Mission Statement (reminder):

Whittier College is a residential four-year liberal arts institution that prepares students from diverse backgrounds to excel in a complex global society. Through challenging, interactive courses, taught by accomplished professors, students learn to make connections across disciplines, understand cultural perspectives, and integrate learning with practical application. Inspired by a Quaker heritage, the Whittier education equips students to be active citizens and effective communicators who embrace diversity and act with integrity.

## TEXTBOOKS

- ❖ James A. Morone and Rogan Kersh. *By the People: Debating American Government*. Oxford University Press, 2014. Referred to BTP in the course reading schedule Additional Readings (available on Course Moodle).
- ❖ **OPTIONAL:** Paula D. McClain and Steven C. Tauber. *American Government in Black and White*. Oxford University Press, 2012.

Textbooks—both required and recommended—are on reserve in the Whittier College Library. You are expected to purchase the required textbook at Whittier College Bookstore or via your preferred online bookstore. Additional readings will be distributed by the instructor at least a week before the class. All readings and links to readings (outside of the required textbook) will be available on the course Moodle page. Moodle will be the primary method of communication for the course so please take some time to familiarize yourself with the program.

## REQUIREMENTS

**Grade.** Your final course grade will be a weighted average of the following:

**Participation and Attendance: 25%**

**Midterm Exam: 25%**

**Final Research Paper: 25%**

**Civic Engagement Reflection Paper: 15%**

**American Government Matters Presentation: 10%**

***Participation and Attendance (25%).*** Physical attendance and mental presence is required. If you are more than 5 minutes late, you will be considered absent. For the concept of mental presence to be counted, you must be focused on our learning environment. This means no cell phones, laptops, or side conversations that are not related to the learning goals. You get one warning. After that, I will count you as absent, because you are no longer present mentally in class. If this will be a problem, I suggest dropping the course. Consider this class also an exercise in professional development. Communication skills are necessary in most professions. Each week is worth roughly 1% of your grade. You are expected to complete the assigned reading before attending class and to actively participate in class discussions to receive full credit. **I will use pop quizzes if necessary. If you miss class, you cannot make up a pop quiz.** If a serious illness, major event or religious observance prevents you from attending classes, please let me know at least one week in advance to make alternative arrangements.

You can miss two classes with no penalty. There are no excused absences, just absences. Your grade will be lowered by one third for each absence after the first (free) two. If you have 100 percent attendance by the end of the term, you will get 3 extra credit points toward your final research paper grade. Being present in class requires both your body and mind. If you are not focused on the class material/exercises (texting, facebook, sleeping, face painting, etc.), I will count you as ½ absent that day. You will get one warning. **All quizzes, group work, policy debates, campaign profiles, and in-class activities are part of this 25 percent.**

***Midterm Test (20%).***

**The midterm exam for this course will be on Thursday, March 10th, 2016.** It will be composed of fill-in-the-blank, short answer, and multiple-choice questions. Midterm Review Sheets will be posted before the exam.

***Final Research Paper (25%)***

Your final research paper will need to draw on the material covered in the second part of the semester. You will select a political topic/issue that interests you and write a well-crafted research paper on the topic. The final research paper is due no later than **7 PM on Tuesday, May 10<sup>th</sup>.**

***American Government Matters Presentation (10%)***

Each student will make one brief presentation (10-12 minutes) on a connection they make from the text of that week to a current event during the semester. Since this class also satisfies the American Constitution requirement, you can also connect your current event to the US Constitution on any week. I will provide you presentation guidelines. Consider this will as an opportunity to connect the text to

anything you find relevant and critical to our present American democracy. **Each presentation needs to end with three discussion questions for the group and requires some form of visual aid.**

### *Civic Engagement Reflection Paper (15%)*

During the course of the summer session, you are required to participate in one act of civic engagement, and write about the experience. Examples of civic engagement are:

Write a well-researched letter to the editor of a major newspaper

Write a well-researched letter to a representative (either local, state, or national)

Attend an interest group's meeting(s)

Attend a meeting of local government

Volunteer for a political party, candidate, or for a specific issue

Attend a political protest

I am also open to more nontraditional forms of political participation if YOU can make the link to how this exercise/engagement is a form of civic engagement.

To receive full credit, you must submit a minimum two-page, double-spaced, Times New Roman 12 pt. write-up of your participation. This write-up must include a description of the event, EVIDENCE of your participation in the event, and any background information on the policy issues, political institutions, and political actors that were involved in the group/event/letter.

Due May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016.

Your final grade will be calculated on a 100-point scale: A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (86-89), B (83-85), B- (80-82), C+ (76-79), C (73-75), C- (70-72), D+ (66-69), D (63-65), D- (60-62), and F (0-59). "Incomplete (INC)" grades will only be awarded with written verification of a medical or personal emergency.

Here are several important details regarding my grading policy: If you do not complete an assignment on time, you will receive a zero for the assignment. **I will not accept late assignments.** The only acceptable excuses for not completing an assignment on time are serious illness or family emergency. If either circumstance occurs, I will give you extra time only if you (1) communicate with me before the assignment is due, and (2) provide documentation of the circumstance. Bear in mind that you must do both.

## **HONOR CODE AND STUDENT INTEGRITY**

By enrolling at Whittier College, you have agreed to abide by an Honor Code, only taking credit for work you have done. Any student engaging in academic misconduct will receive an F in the course and will be reported to the Academic Integrity Committee of the department for further disciplinary action. You are responsible for being aware of what constitutes cheating and plagiarism and for avoiding both. Whittier College's policy on academic integrity is available at:

[http://www.whittier.edu/sites/default/files/media/campuslife/student\\_life\\_division/for%20Student%20Conduct%20Policy/PDF\\_StudentLifeDivision\\_StudentConductPolicy\\_AcademicHonestyAndAcademicReviewPolicies.pdf](http://www.whittier.edu/sites/default/files/media/campuslife/student_life_division/for%20Student%20Conduct%20Policy/PDF_StudentLifeDivision_StudentConductPolicy_AcademicHonestyAndAcademicReviewPolicies.pdf).

## **STUDENT DISABILITIES SERVICES**

Students desiring accommodations on the basis of physical, learning, or psychological disability for this class are to contact Disability Services. Disability Services is located on the ground floor of the Library building and can be reached by calling extension x4825.

**Course Goals:**

1. Examine how and why the American National Government is designed and the underlying tensions
2. Understand the basic principles that guide the US governing process
3. Encourage students to engage actively in classroom discussions so they may gain knowledge about the field of political science.
4. Create an environment of respect where meaningful intellectual exchange, involving critical thinking and historical and social analysis, can take place.
5. Develop students' knowledge and understanding of racial, sexual, class and cultural diversity within the US and the tensions that remain.

**Course Objectives:**

Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of American National Government.
2. Understand basic concepts in political science, including the roles that race, class, gender, and other axes of difference, play in the American political system.
3. Have a base of knowledge and understanding to serve as a foundation for future study in political science.
4. Demonstrate the ability to conduct independent research and work in a group.
5. Have greater cyber competence to evaluate online information

**The readings for each date should be read BEFORE the class meeting.**

**I have also included lists of videos or series that you may find interesting and educational. They will deepen your understandings of the texts. I have an ongoing political movie list, so if YOU have suggestions, I welcome new additions.**

## SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND CLASS WORK

<b>WEEK ONE</b>	
Thursday, 1/28/16	Welcome Back, Civic Education 101
Tuesday, 2/2/16	American Government, American Leadership, Election 2016 The Federalist Papers (Moodle)
Thursday, 2/4/16 Ideas the Shape American Politics	Chapter 1, BTP  Key Terms: Liberty, Individualism, Equality, and Freedom  WEEKEND WATCH: America: History of US. Episode 1.Rebels <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASzEuarqmB8">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ASzEuarqmB8</a> America: History of US. Episode 2. Revolutions <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-13u-MntywA">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-13u-MntywA</a>
<b>WEEK TWO</b>	
Tuesday, 2/9/16 The Constitution	Chapter 2, BTP Key Terms: Boston Tea Party, Articles of Confederation, Constitutional Convention, and the Bill of Rights  WEEKEND WATCH: <i>Movie: 1776 (the musical) or Adams (Series)</i>
Thursday, 2/11/16 Federalism and Nationalism	Chapter 3, BTP <a href="http://www.alec.org/">http://www.alec.org/</a> <a href="http://www.alecexposed.org/wiki/ALEC_Exposed">http://www.alecexposed.org/wiki/ALEC_Exposed</a> <a href="http://www.ncsl.org">http://www.ncsl.org</a> <a href="https://www.congress.gov">https://www.congress.gov</a>
<b>WEEK THREE</b>	
Tuesday, 2/16/16 Civil Liberties	Chapter 4, BTP
Thursday, 2/18/16 The Struggle for Civil Rights	Chapter 5, BTP <a href="https://www.aclu.org">https://www.aclu.org</a>  WEEKEND WATCH: <i>Movie: Selma (movie) or When the Levees Broke (Series)</i>
<b>WEEK FOUR</b>	
Tuesday, 2/23/16	<b>CIVIC DEBATE: Constitutional Convention 2016</b>
Thursday, 2/25/16 Congress	Chapter 10, BTP  WEEKEND WATCH: <i>Movie: Charlie Wilson's War or West Wing (Series)</i>
<b>WEEK FIVE</b>	
Tuesday, 3/1/16 The Presidency	Chapter 11, BTP
Thursday, 3/3/16 Bureaucracy	Chapter 12, BTP  WEEKEND WATCH: <i>Movie: Wetback: The Undocumented Documentary, or Nixon by Nixon</i>
<b>WEEK SIX</b>	

Tuesday, 3/8/16	Midterm Review
Thursday, 3/10/16	Midterm
	<b>SPRING BREAK!</b>
<b>WEEK SEVEN</b>	
Tuesday, 3/22/16 The Judicial Branch	Chapter 13, BTP
Thursday, 3/24/16	<i>No Class</i> <i>Assignment TBD</i>
	WEEKEND WATCH: <i>Movie: The People versus Larry Flynt or Anita or The Supreme Court (Series)</i>
<b>WEEK EIGHT</b>	
Tuesday, 3/29/16 Power	Being Nixon, Chapter Excerpt
Thursday, 3/31/16	<b>CIVIC DEBATE: Checks and Balances</b>
<b>WEEK NINE</b>	
Tuesday, 4/5/16 Public Opinion and Political Participation	Chapter 6, BTP
Thursday, 4/7/16	“Millennials” Play a Central Role in our Nation’s Civic Health, but Who Are They?” National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC)
	“Young voters bringing in a revolution? It’s an old story” <a href="http://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/nevius/article/Young-voters-bringing-in-a-revolution-It-s-an-6137694.php">http://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/nevius/article/Young-voters-bringing-in-a-revolution-It-s-an-6137694.php</a>
	“America’s Civic Health Index 2009” National Conference on Citizenship (NCoC) (Reserves)
<b>WEEK TEN</b>	
Tuesday, 4/12/16 The Media	Chapter 7, BTP <a href="http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/online-resources">http://www.livingroomcandidate.org/online-resources</a>
Thursday, 4/14/16	“Political Polarization & Media Habits” (reserves) <a href="http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/">http://www.journalism.org/2014/10/21/political-polarization-media-habits/</a> Baumgartner, F. R., Berry, J. M., Hojnacki, M., Leech, B. L., & Kimball, D. C. (2009). <i>Lobbying and policy change: Who wins, who loses, and why</i> . University of Chicago Press. Excerpt (Reserves)
<b>WEEK ELEVEN</b>	
Tuesday, 4/19/16 Campaigns and Elections	Chapter 8, BTP
Thursday, 4/21/16 Interest Groups and Political Parties	Chapter 9, BTP  WEEKEND WATCH: <i>Movie: Wag the Dog, The War Room, or Game Change or Battleground (Series)</i>

<b>WEEK TWELVE</b>	
Tuesday, 4/26/16 Domestic and Foreign Policy	Chapter 14, BTP  <a href="http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/f/federal_budget_us/">http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/f/federal_budget_us/</a>
Thursday, 4/28/16	<b>CIVIC DEBATE: ELECTION 2016</b>  WEEKEND WATCH: <i>Movie: Thank You For Smoking or The Candidate</i>
<b>WEEK THIRTEEN</b>	
Tuesday, 5/3/16	Readings: TBD  Civic Engagement Reflection Paper DUE
<b>FINAL RESEARCH PAPER</b>	DUE 5/10/16