**Introduction to American Government**

**790:104**

**Instructor**: Kyle Morgan

Department of Political Science

Rutgers University

**Dates**: Online September 1st - December 17th

**Office Hours:** By appointment, via Sakai chat room or email

**Course Website:** [http://sakai.rutgers.edu](http://sakai.rutgers.edu/), “Introduction to American Government”

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**Introduction:**

With the 2016 Election looming and candidates starting their campaigns it is an important time to understand the foundations and structure of our government in order to fully and effectively participate. This course will introduce you to ideas about institutional structures, political actors, and constitutional debates in American government and politics. We will explore the historical development and founding of the United States, discuss major debates about the structure of our republican form of government, connect the three branches of government to contemporary politics and elections, examine the role of race and gender in American politics, and critique the American constitutional system. In doing so, we will place ourselves as citizens, activists, and policy-makers within the current American political system.

This course will be divided into three sections. In the first part of the class we will cover the history and foundations that will guide our discussions for the rest of the semester. The second part of the course will cover the three branches of government as well as the formal and informal actors that shape politics today. Finally, we will wrap up with a discussion of public opinion, domestic, and foreign policy. This will give you an overview of the various parts of American politics and give you a level of knowledge to allow you to meaningfully participate in this and future elections.

**Course Objectives:**

The department’s learning goals for the political science major are also advanced through this course. Since this is an introductory course, it will expose students to the structures, institutions, actors, and debates in American politics, encourages students to engage in critical thinking on these topics, and prepares them for future courses on these and other topics as well as engaging in their own independent research.

For the department’s learning goals please visit <http://polisci.rutgers.edu/undergraduate/2014-10-10-12-19-17/learning-goals>

By the end of this course students should be able to:

* Describe the role of the formal and informal institutions that shape American politics.
* Define the theories of government that have played a role in shaping the United States and describe their lasting influence.
* Compare and contrast American government and politics to the European system.
* Using an issue discussed in the course follow its evolution and progress through the various formal and informal political institutions.

**Required Texts:**

*These books can be purchased from the campus bookstore or online. Be very careful buying them online, though – if they are shipped media mail, they might not arrive until after your first readings/quizzes.*

1. *We the People: An Introduction to American Politics (Tenth Essentials Edition).* [Benjamin Ginsberg](http://www.google.com/search?tbo=p&tbm=bks&q=inauthor:%22Benjamin+Ginsberg%22&source=gbs_metadata_r&cad=4), [Theodore J. Lowi](http://www.google.com/search?tbo=p&tbm=bks&q=inauthor:%22Theodore+J.+Lowi%22&source=gbs_metadata_r&cad=4), [Margaret Weir](http://www.google.com/search?tbo=p&tbm=bks&q=inauthor:%22Margaret+Weir%22&source=gbs_metadata_r&cad=4), [Caroline J. Tolbert](http://www.google.com/search?tbo=p&tbm=bks&q=inauthor:%22Caroline+J.+Tolbert%22&source=gbs_metadata_r&cad=4), [Robert J. Spitzer](http://www.google.com/search?tbo=p&tbm=bks&q=inauthor:%22Robert+J.+Spitzer%22&source=gbs_metadata_r&cad=4).

*Your book should have this cover:*



1. *America the Unusual.* John W. Kingdon (Worth Publishers: 1999).

**Electronic Readings:**

Electronic versions of the readings not from these textbooks can be found on the course's Sakai site, which can be located at http://sakai.rutgers.edu. You can find readings by week (1, 2, 3, etc) under the “Resources” tab.

**Sakai Website:**

Students are required to familiarize themselves with the course Sakai site by the first week of classes (<http://sakai.rutgers.edu>).

**Class Organization:**

Introduction to American Government is organized by week. Even though we won’t meet together as a class you will be expected to have the reading done and the lecture watched early in the week so you can then take your reading quizzes, write your forum post, read your peers’ posts, and post the responses. The time you spend on your forum posts should roughly correspond to the amount of time you would be in class each week.

For each week, I will post necessary materials under the “Resources” tab. Each normal week will consist of a lecture, reading, reading quiz, forum post, and forum response. Some weeks may have additional assignments due so please pay attention to the syllabus.

**(1) The week’s required readings:** All readings, except for *America the Unusual* and *We the People* will be posted as pdf documents online.

**(2) Lectures:** Each week a power point and audio lecture will be posted on Sakai. These lectures will not replace the readings for the week but rather build upon them and expand on certain concepts.

**(3) Forum post assignment (for more information, see “forum” below).** Please see description below under “Class Components.” You must complete blog posts activities **every week** unless otherwise indicated.

**Additionally, you will be responsible for a weekly reading quiz designed to make sure you understand the readings’ main ideas. Those will be posted under Quizzes on Sakai.**

**Submitting Class Work:** All class work will be submitted on the Sakai website. Please refer to the instructions on each assignment, which will instruct students on how to submit work on the Sakai site.

**Netiquette:**

As the Internet is ubiquitous in school, at home, and at work, we often overlook how visible our written words, images, and videos are to others. Growing up with these technologies makes them seem natural to all of us—we’ve surfed websites, posted photos to Facebook, and commented on bulletin boards. “Netiquette” is a portmanteau of the words “network” and “etiquette”: much like how our real life, face-to-face interactions require rules of civility and respect (shaking hands and saying hello to meet someone new, or saying thank you, for example), our online interactions also require rules of civility and respect.

In this course, we will be discussing political issues that will garner as many different reactions as there are students in class. As we live during a volatile and dynamic period in American political history, I welcome full student participation and disagreement—specifically participation and disagreement situated in the reading and topics for that class. During all class work, treat your peers and your instructor with civility and respect, no matter the similarities and differences you may encounter.

**Office Hours and Contact:**

I am here to help! If you have questions, concerns, or need extra discussion for readings and assignments, I am your resource. Please email me (**Kyle.Morgan@rutgers.edu**) with any questions or to schedule a chat.

Students can reach me on weekdays, Monday through Friday. Please note that I check my email periodically between 9 AM and 5 PM; depending on the complexity of the question and day it was emailed, allow one to two days for a response, Monday through Friday.

**Late Policy:**

With the exception of serious illness, a death in the family, or other serious personal event, late assignments will not be accepted. Quizzes, tests, and the final essay cannot be submitted past the due date and time, and blog posts and responses will not be graded if they are submitted past the due date and time. Any late assignment will be given a zero.

**Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism and cheating are taken very seriously at Rutgers University. All statutes of the Academic Code of Conduct apply for this course. A detailed discussion of this policy can be found at <http://cat.rutgers.edu/integrity/policy.html>.

**I. Reading Quizzes (15%)**

The readings and lectures for the course will serve as the spring board for the class discussions (via the blogs). Each week, there will be a reading quiz posted on Sakai that will test your understanding of the reading and lectures for the week. The reading quizzes will consist of several multiple choice questions from the readings. Each reading quiz is due on Wednesday by midnight. The Reading Quizzes will be available online under Tests and Quizzes, and will be timed (you will have 10 minutes for the entire quiz). **You will not be able to take the quizzes late. Your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.**

**II. Online Forum Posts (40%)**

Each week you will be posting a response to a question that I pose to the class in a post on the Sakai forum. The question each week will connect the course material to what is happening in American politics at the time. Your own weekly posts will count as 20% of your grade. In addition to your own individual posts you will be required to respond to one comment or question one of your peers posted in response to your post (10%) and you will also be required to comment on at least one of your peers posts (10%).

1. Forum Posts (20%): After reading my question for the week, you will answer with post. **Your blog post must be posted online by midnight every Wednesday.** Your post should answer the question to the best of your ability as informed by the week’s readings. Your post must have the following to receive full credit:
* Your post must be 2—3 paragraphs long. This translates to 200 to 300 words.
* Your post must be on topic and respond to the question posed by the instructor.
* Your post must use at least **one** quote or piece of evidence from the readings that is cited as such.
* Your post must be checked for grammar and spelling.
* **Your post must be posted online by midnight every Wednesday.** Late posts will not be given credit.

2) Response(10%): After the responses have been posted, you will respond to ONE of your peer’s posts. **Your response to a peer’s post must be posted online by midnight every Friday.** Your response must have the following to receive full credit:

* Your response must be 1—2 paragraphs long. This translates to 100 to 200 words.
* If you can, you should comment on a post no one has commented on yet.
* Your response must be on topic and reflect a consideration of your peer’s post.
* Your response cannot be a simple agreement or disagreement with your peer’s posts (“I agree with Amy that the unilateral executive is a bad thing!”). Add details, expand the point, and make an argument. Simple agreements will receive no credit.
* Your response must use at least **one**quote or piece of evidence from the readings that is cited as such.
* Your response must be checked for grammar and spelling.
* **Your response must be posted online by midnight every Friday.** Late responses will not be given credit.

(3) Follow up response (10%): You must respond to the questions or issues one of your classmates raised in response to your post.

**This means that you will be expected to make your post by Wednesday and by Friday you should respond to a peer and to a comment on your post.**

***Extra Posts:*** I’d like the forum in the class to be fun, interesting, and dynamic. To this end, I would also like you to use the forum to post things you find interesting or worth discussing over the course of the semester. Consider posting political cartoons, clips from shows like *The Daily Show,* newspaper articles, etc. **Students who use the forum in this way, and who actively comment on their classmates’ posts, will also be eligible to earn extra credit.**

**III. Civic Engagement (15%)**

Democracy works only as well as voters are willing to participate and if we want to hold our elected officials responsible we have to at least inform them of our views on the issues. Therefore, you will be writing two letters to your elected officials, one to your Member of Congress and one to one of your Senators. Your letters can be on any two issues that are important to you. These letters must be on two different issues, be 3-4 paragraphs (300-400) words, checked for spelling and grammar, and bring in something you have learned through the course. **FOR THIS ASSIGNMENT YOU WILL HAVE TO CARBON COPY (cc) ME ON THE EMAIL**, that way I can ensure that you have completed the assignment. You can write on any issue you believe is important and take any position you like, you will be graded on the quality of the letter not the position that you take. The first letter will be due by the end of week 5 and the second letter before week 15.

**IV. Exams (15% Each)**

Exam 1 for this course will be held via Sakai on Week 6, and exam 2 will be held on Sakai on Week 16. The first exam will be posted at 6 pm on Wednesday, October 7th, and is due at midnight on Friday, October 9th. You will have TWO HOURS from the time you download the exam until the time you complete the exam to turn it in. All questions must be answered on Sakai – you will not email the exam to me. Exams will be composed of essay questions based on the course readings and discussions. A date for the second exam will be determined by the end of September, it will follow the same format as the first exam. Both exams will be open book.

 **Important:** I recommend that you type your exam in Word or something similar and then copy and paste the answers into Sakai to make sure that Sakai doesn’t crash and eat your work. Because the exam is timed, make sure you are somewhere quiet, without distraction, with a reliable computer and internet access.

**Class Schedule:**

**Week 1: Introductions:**

Get familiar with Sakai and post an introduction to the week 1 forum, respond to one of your peer’s posts, and respond to a response to you.

**Week 2: Citizens, Government, The Founding, and the Constitution:**

Reading: Chapter 1 and 2 in We The People

Assignments: Weekly posts to forum on Sakai

**Week 3: Federalism:**

Reading: Chapter 3 in We The People

Assignments: Weekly posts to forum on Sakai

**Week 4: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights:**

Reading: Chapter 4 in We The People

Assignments: Weekly posts to forum on Sakai

**Week 5: Political Parties, Participation, And Elections:**

Reading: Chapter 7 in We The People

Assignments: Weekly posts to forum on Sakai, and your first letter to an elected official is due by the end of this week.

**Week 6: Midterm!**

No readings this week.

Midterm will be posted on Sakai.

**Week 7: Congress:**

Reading: Chapter 9 in We The People

Assignments: Weekly posts to forum on Sakai

**Week 8: The Presidency:**

Reading: Chapter 10 in We The People

Assignments: Weekly posts to forum on Sakai

**Week 9: The Federal Courts:**

Reading: Chapter 12 in We the People

Assignments: Weekly posts to forum on Sakai

**Week 10: The Media:**

Reading: Chapter 6 in We The People

Assignments: Weekly posts to forum on Sakai

**Week 11: The Bureaucracy:**

Reading: Chapter 11 in We The People

Assignments: Weekly posts to forum on Sakai

**Week 12: Public Opinion:**

Reading: Chapter 5 in We The People

Assignments: Weekly posts to forum on Sakai

**Week 13: Domestic Policy:**

Reading: Chapter 13 in We The People

Assignments: Weekly posts to forum on Sakai

**Week 14: Foreign Policy:**

Reading: Chapter 14 in We The People

Assignments: Assignments: Weekly posts to forum on Sakai

**Week 15: FINAL!**

No Readings

Final will be posted on Sakai