

Course Syllabus

GOVT-110: Politics in the United States

Summer 2019

Instructor Information

	Simon Heuberger
	Email: sh6943a@american.edu
	Office hours: Via Skype by appointment
	Response time for questions: 24-48 hours
	Assignment feedback turnaround time: 2-3 days

Instructor Bio:

I am a PhD candidate and Adjunct Lecturer in Political Science at American University in Washington, DC, with concentrations in American Government and Quantitative Methods. My research focuses on the psychological underpinnings of public opinion and the statistical advancement of survey methodology tools. I also conduct data analysis on causal inference and work as the official replicator for Political Analysis. I'm from Germany but have lived all over (UK, Australia, Egypt, Nigeria). If you would like to know more about me, please feel more than free to visit [my website](#).

We can't have real office hours, so if you have any questions please email me any time. I am also happy to arrange meetings via Skype.

Course Information

Description

If there was any time to study American politics, this is it. An understanding of the U.S. Constitution, the institutions it created, and the rights it provides is crucial as the United States moves forward in this highly polarized era. Here, we will explore all of these topics and other features of our political system that affect how American citizens interact with their government. This course is designed to help you become critical, informed observers and participants in the American political system.

By the end of this course students will be able to use this understanding of the formal and informal institutions of American politics to explain how individuals, with and without authority, may affect outcomes. Further, you will be able to apply an understanding of politics to a controversial decision, election, or policy outcome; a necessary skill in today's political environment. Finally, students will be able to communicate coherent analytical arguments about politics in the US in writing and in speech.

Course Format and Structure

This is an asynchronous online course, meaning that our course materials (readings, discussion boards etc.) are provided on the Blackboard platform. We don't have regular live sessions, so you can work through the

material at your own pace, abiding by periodic deadlines set by me (details below). You will submit all assignments on Blackboard.

Unlike a traditional in-person class, this course will rely heavily on self-directed learning. You control when you are exposed to the material and how you engage with the assigned readings. In this regard, the class will rely largely on student centered discussions and several writing assignments.

I will always be available for questions or concerns throughout our seven weeks together. If you get stuck with a concept or topic, reach out immediately. Our truncated schedule makes it imperative that we quash any problem immediately.

Instructional Technologies

In this course, students will use the following systems and tools:

- **Blackboard Learning Management System:** Participants will use their AU credentials to log in at <https://blackboard.american.edu>. AU's Blackboard Support team recommends using Chrome or Firefox to optimize your experience and avoid incompatibility issues that can occur when accessing Blackboard with other browsers. **Do not use Internet Explorer.**

Textbooks and Materials

Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore Lowi, Caroline Tolbert, and Margaret Weir. 2017.

We the People. 11th Essentials Edition. New York, NY: W. W. Norton and Company.

Either the e-book or the hardcopy is fine, just make sure you are purchasing the condensed **essentials edition**. You don't need to get the online *Inquizitive* access. However, I can highly recommend it to supplement your learning as you go through the material.

PowerPoint slides for each week are posted on Blackboard under the corresponding weeks, as are any additional readings listed below.

Guidelines and Expectations

Expectations for Course Participation

Given this class is taught entirely online, you will have the opportunity to express your ideas to a much greater extent than in the traditional classroom setting, where numerous students are vying to speak in a limited time. True, the class never meets in the traditional sense of regularly scheduled weekly meetings. However, the class meets regularly in cyberspace on the discussion boards on our class Blackboard site.

You will quickly become an active and involved participant in the class if you log on regularly. You will find that although you may not know what your fellow classmates look like, you will know them all far better than you know most classmates in face-to-face classes. In fact, you will quickly learn to recognize their "voices" as they speak to you on the discussion boards. Therefore, to accomplish this, you must be prepared to:

- Ensure technical access to the online classroom via an appropriate Browser. Technical requirements are posted immediately below.
- Invest a minimum of 10 hours each week in the course (for the 7 weeks of class meetings). This works out to the same amount of time in a regular semester course; it's just spread out over 15 weeks there.

Late Work Policy

Because this is a short course, it is very important to keep up on assignments. Late assignments will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade each day it is late (in other words, a B+ becomes a B, a B- becomes a C+, etc.). If you have an issue with turning an assignment in on time, please contact me as soon as you become aware of a potential problem.

Extensions

I understand that this is a summer course, and you may be traveling, working, and attending to other responsibilities. However, you should make sure to submit all assignments on time, just like you would in a face-to-face class. Extensions will thus only be granted in very specific circumstances.

Academic Integrity Code

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the university's [Academic Integrity Code](#). By registering for this course, students have acknowledged their awareness of the Academic Integrity Code and they are obliged to become familiar with their rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly and disciplinary action will be taken should violations occur. This includes cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism.

SafeAssign: In this course, one or more assignments may be submitted to the instructor using the SafeAssign plagiarism detection tool, which is integrated into Blackboard. SafeAssign uploads the submitted work to the AU SafeAssign database for comparison against other student papers, as well as academic articles and internet resources, to generate an "Originality Report" that identifies areas of potential overlap. In addition to discouraging academic dishonesty, this tool can create opportunities for students to learn how to properly cite and paraphrase sources. Neither Blackboard nor AU claim any copyright ownership of work submitted through SafeAssign.

Student Code of Conduct

The central commitment of American University is the development of thoughtful, responsible human beings in the context of a challenging yet supportive academic community. The [Student Code of Conduct](#) is designed to benefit the American University community and to assist in forming the highest standards of ethics and morals among its members. By registering for this course, students have acknowledged their awareness of the Student Code of Conduct and they are obliged to become familiar with their rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code.

Grading and Assessment

Grading Scale

Exemplary		Good		Acceptable		Unacceptable	
A	94%-100%	B+	87%-89%	C+	77%-79%	D	65%-69%
A-	90%-93%	B	84%-86%	C	74%-76%	F	Under 65%

Exemplary	Good	Acceptable	Unacceptable
	B- 80%-83%	C- 70%-73%	

Final Grade Calculation

Assignment	Percentage	Due Date
Weekly Discussion Board Question and Response	15%	Every Thursday and Sunday evening
Weekly Quizzes	25%	Every Sunday evening
Survey Assignment	20%	June 2 (week 3)
The Future of the American Parties	20%	June 9 (week 4)
Letter to Congress	20%	June 30 (week 7)

Assignment Overview

Weekly Discussion Board – 15%. Each week, you will post one analytical discussion question based on the week’s readings. This has to be a substantive question that initiates a debate/discussion – NOT a generic question in the sense of “How to the US primaries work?”. Three days later, you will engage with one of your classmates’ responses.

Weekly Quizzes – 25%. 7 quizzes will be given. Top 6 grades will count. Given that this course is online and everything is open book, there will be no formal exams. Instead, we will have weekly timed quizzes to test your comprehension of the week’s materials and ensure you’re on track.

Survey Assignment – 20%. A good portion of the readings from this week focus on the potential problems with surveys and public opinion polling. For this assignment, you will find a recent opinion poll and analyze the results given what we have learned. Is the poll sample accurate? Did they rely on online respondents or RDD? Is the question clear? Etc. The paper will be 500-750 words long.

The Future of the American Parties – 20%. This week’s readings demonstrate that both parties continue to struggle with maintaining a strong coalition of support. For this assignment, you have been hired as the Director of Outreach for the DNC and the RNC. You have been tasked with coming up with a plan for the 2020 presidential election to grow the base and win the presidency. You will draft a one-page memo to the DNC and a one-page memo to the RNC about their strategies going forward. What groups should they target? How should they do so/what policy positions should they adopt? What candidates might you recommend? (For example, should the RNC reach out to Hispanics or women? Or both?) The paper will be 500-750 words long.

Letter to Congress – 20%. You will pick one policy issue and write a letter to your (or a) member of Congress on the topic. You should demonstrate substantial knowledge about the policy issue, the position you’ve taken, and the role they will play in the passing (or opposition) of legislation related to your position. Keep in mind that you will be unable to write on the legalization of marijuana or abortion. These restrictions do not apply more broadly. For instance, you can write on other women’s issues or on issues pertaining to criminal justice reform. The paper will be approximately 3-5 pages. The paper will be 750-1,000 words long.

What Your Week Will Look Like

The following is a sample of what a typical week in the course will look like. The **due dates are set for 12pm EDT** (i.e. midnight). You are of course welcome (and in fact encouraged!) to submit any time before that.

Day	Event
Monday	The week's readings are posted on Blackboard
By Thursday evening	Post discussion board question
By Sunday evening	Post one discussion response Complete quiz

Course Schedule

Week/ Topic	Readings, Media & Resources	Assignments
Week 1 Introduction and the Constitution	<i>We the People</i> , Chapters 1 & 2. Madison, James. 1788. "Federalist 10." <i>Federalist Papers</i> . Madison, James. 1788. "Federalist No. 51." <i>Federalist Papers</i> . Wolf, Stephen. 2016. "Is America's presidential system doomed?." <i>New Republic</i> , February 16.	Discussion board question: Thursday, 12pm Discussion board response: Sunday, 12pm Quiz: Sunday, 12pm
Week 2 Federalism, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights	<i>We the People</i> , Chapters 3 & 4. Klein, Ezra. 2014. "The ugly truth: Why presidential leadership can't solve gridlock." <i>Vox</i> , April 28. Somin, Ilya. 2016. "Trump, federal power, and the Left – why liberals should help make federalism great again." <i>Washington Post</i> , December 5. Lincoln's proclamation suspending Habeas Corpus. Murray, Cecil. 2016. "It's 2016 and the civil rights era hasn't Ended." <i>LA Times</i> , August 7. Izadl, Elahe. 2016. "Black Lives Matter and America's long history of resisting	Discussion board question: Thursday, 12pm Quiz: Sunday, 12pm Discussion board response: Sunday, 12pm

Week/ Topic	Readings, Media & Resources	Assignments
	<p>civil rights protesters." <i>Washington Post</i>, April 19.</p> <p>Downes, Larry. 2016. "Apple waves the civil liberties flag – but for how long?." <i>Washington Post</i>, March 22.</p>	
<p>Week 3</p> <p>Public Opinion and the Media</p>	<p><i>We the People</i>, Chapters 5 & 6.</p> <p>Silver, Nate. 2016. "The state of the polls." <i>FiveThirtyEight.com</i>, June 2.</p> <p>Cohn, Nate. 2016. "How polling can go wrong." <i>New York Times</i>, June 30.</p> <p>Clement, Scott. 2016. "The 2016 national polls are looking less wrong after final election tallies." <i>Washington Post</i>, December 30.</p> <p>Bonazzo, John. 2018. "And now, this: How John Oliver's 'legally spicy' show has changed the media landscape." <i>Observer</i>, March 23.</p> <p>Barkan, Ross. 2018. "The only thing worse than Trump's attack on a journalist is its timing." <i>Guardian</i>, October 19.</p> <p>Bell, Emily. 2019. "At White House press conferences, no questions Allowed." <i>The Atlantic</i>, January 13.</p>	<p>Discussion board question: Thursday, 12pm</p> <p>Quiz: Sunday, 12pm</p> <p>Discussion board response: Sunday, 12pm</p> <p>Survey assignment: Sunday, 12pm</p>
<p>Week 4</p> <p>Campaigns, Political Parties, and Interest Groups</p>	<p><i>We the People</i>, Chapters 7 & 8.</p> <p>Millhisier, Ian. 2016. "Third parties ruin everything, according to political science." <i>Think Progress</i>, August 1.</p> <p>Yglesias, Matthew. 2015. "Why the NRA is so powerful." <i>Vox</i>, December 4.</p> <p>Roarty, Alex. 2016. "EMILY's list strategy questioned after big losses." <i>Roll Call</i>, May 1.</p> <p>Noel, Hans. 2010. "Ten things political scientists know that you don't." <i>The Forum</i>, 8(3), 12.</p>	<p>Discussion board question: Thursday, 12pm</p> <p>Quiz: Sunday, 12pm</p> <p>Discussion board response: Sunday, 12pm</p> <p>The Future of the American Parties: Sunday, 12pm</p>

Week/ Topic	Readings, Media & Resources	Assignments
	<p>Yglesias, Matthew. 2016. "The US presidential primary process, explained." <i>Vox</i>.</p> <p>Silver, Nate. 2015. "There is no blue wall." <i>FiveThirtyEight.com</i>, May 12.</p>	
<p>Week 5</p> <p>Congress and the Presidency</p>	<p><i>We the People</i>, Chapters 9 & 10.</p> <p>Chokshi, Niraj and Christopher Mele. 2016. "Tim Huelskamp, anti-establishment House Republican, loses primary in Kansas." <i>New York Times</i>, August 2.</p> <p>Drutman, Lee. 2016. "Congressional term limits are a bad idea." <i>Vox</i>, October 18.</p> <p>Lincoln, Abraham. 1862. "Reply to Horace Greeley. Slavery and the Union The Restoration of the Union the Paramount Object." <i>New York Times</i>, August 22.</p> <p>Sosnik, Doug. 2018. "Why Congress rolls over for Trump." <i>Politico</i>, August 2.</p> <p>Savage, Charlie. 2018. "Trump and his lawyers embrace a vision of vast executive power." <i>New York Times</i>, June 4.</p> <p>Dickinson, Matthew. 2016. "Obama, gun control, and the limits to executive action." <i>Presidential Power</i>, January 5.</p>	<p>Discussion board question: Thursday, 12pm</p> <p>Quiz: Sunday, 12pm</p> <p>Discussion board response: Sunday, 12pm</p>
<p>Week 6</p> <p>Bureaucracy and the Courts</p>	<p><i>We the People</i>, Chapters 11 & 12.</p> <p>Editorial Board. 2017. "Donald Trump, bureaucracy apprentice." <i>New York Times</i>, January 2.</p> <p>Toobin, Jeffrey. 2014. "The Obama Brief: The president considers his judicial legacy." <i>New Yorker</i>, October 27.</p> <p>Klein, Ezra. 2016. "Replacing Antonin Scalia will be a profound test of the American political system." <i>Vox</i>, February 13.</p>	<p>Discussion board question: Thursday, 12pm</p> <p>Quiz: Sunday, 12pm</p> <p>Discussion board response: Sunday, 12pm</p>

Week/ Topic	Readings, Media & Resources	Assignments
	<p>Ramsey, Michael. 2016. "Why the Senate doesn't have to act on Merrick Garland's nomination." <i>The Atlantic</i>, May 5.</p> <p>Barnes, Robert. 2018. "As Kavanaugh is all but confirmed, questions linger about his judicial temperament." <i>Washington Post</i>, October 5.</p>	
<p>Week 7</p> <p>Public and Foreign Policy</p>	<p><i>We the People</i>, Chapters 13 and 14.</p> <p>Carey, Kevin. 2017. "Dismal voucher results surprise researchers as DeVos era begins." <i>New York Times</i>, February 23.</p> <p>Butcher, Jonathan and Lindsey M. Burke. 2017. "School choice moves apace in the states." <i>National Review</i>, March 17.</p> <p>*SKIM ONLY* - Goldberg, Jeffrey. 2016. "The Obama Doctrine." <i>The Atlantic</i>.</p> <p>Douthat, Ross. 2019. "The Trump Doctrine." <i>New York Times</i>, January 29.</p>	<p>Discussion board question: Thursday, 12pm</p> <p>Quiz: Sunday, 12pm</p> <p>Discussion board response: Sunday, 12pm</p> <p>Letter to Congress: Sunday, 12pm</p>

Student Support & University Policies

Technical Support

AU is committed to providing a reliable online course system to all users. However, in the event of any unexpected server outage or any unusual technical difficulty that prevents a student from completing a time-sensitive assessment activity, instructors may extend deadlines and provide appropriate accommodations based on the situation.

- **Blackboard Support:** Students should immediately report any problems to their course instructor and also contact the Blackboard Support Center at blackboard@american.edu or call (202) 885-3904 for 24/7 support. Students can also log on to [Blackboard Help](#) for support.
- **AU Help Desk (focuses on all other IT issues):** Answers to your technology questions are just an e-mail, instant message, or phone call away. Contact the IT Help Desk at 202-885-2550, helpdesk@american.edu, or [the Help Desk web page](#) to reach one of our professional staff who can answer your questions and provide general troubleshooting assistance.

Academic Support Services

All students may take advantage of the [Academic Support and Access Center \(ASAC\)](#) for individual academic skills counseling, workshops, Tutoring and Writing Lab appointments, peer tutor referrals, and Supplemental Instruction. The ASAC is located in Mary Graydon Center 243.

Additional academic support resources available at AU include the Bender Library, the Department of Literature's Writing Center (located in the Library), the Math Lab in the Department of Mathematics & Statistics, and the Center for Language Exploration, Acquisition, & Research (CLEAR) in Asbury Hall. A more complete list of campus-wide resources is available in the ASAC.

Students with Disabilities

If you wish to receive accommodations for a disability, please notify me with a letter from the Academic Support and Access Center. As accommodations are not retroactive, timely notification at the beginning of the semester, if possible, is strongly recommended. To register with a disability or for questions about disability accommodations, contact the Academic Support and Access Center at 202-885-3360 or asac@american.edu, or drop by MGC 243. For more information, visit AU's [Disability Accommodations web page](#).

Center for Diversity & Inclusion

[CDI](#) is dedicated to enhancing LGBTQ, multicultural, first-generation, and women's experiences on campus and to advancing AU's commitment to respecting and valuing diversity by serving as a resource and liaison to students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy. It is located on the 2nd floor of Mary Graydon Center. (202-885-3651, MGC 201 & 202)

Counseling Center

The [Counseling Center](#) offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources. (202-885-3500, MGC 214)

Dean of Students Office

The [Dean of Students Office](#) offers one-on-one meetings to discuss academic, adjustment, and personal issues that may be interfering with a student's ability to succeed academically. The office also verifies documentation for students who have medical or mental health issues that cause them to be absent from class. (202-885-3300, Butler Pavilion 408)

International Student & Scholar Services

[International Student & Scholar Services](#) has resources to support academic success and participation in campus life including academic counseling, support for second language learners, response to questions about visas, immigration status and employment and intercultural programs, clubs and other campus resources. (202-885-3350, Butler Pavilion 410)

Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence

[OASIS](#) provides free and confidential advocacy services for students who experience sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, sexual harassment, and/or stalking. Please email or call to schedule an appointment with a victim advocate in OASIS. (oasis@american.edu, 202-885-7070, Health Promotion and Advocacy Center – Hughes Hall 105).

Writing Center

The [Writing Center](#) offers free, individual coaching sessions to all AU students. In your 45-minute session, a student writing consultant can help you address your assignments, understand the conventions of academic writing, and learn how to revise and edit your own work. (202-885-2991, Bender Library – 1st Floor Commons).

Emergency Preparedness

In the event of an emergency, American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the University be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or the use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU email and Blackboard, while students must inform their faculty immediately of any emergency-related absence. Students are responsible for checking their AU email regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal, the [AU website](#), and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean's office for course and school/college specific information.

Discrimination and Harassment (Title IX)

American University expressly prohibits any form of discriminatory harassment including sexual harassment, dating and domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The University is an equal opportunity, affirmative action institution that operates in compliance with applicable laws and regulations. AU does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, sex (including pregnancy), age, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, personal appearance, gender identity and expression, family responsibilities, political affiliation, source of income, veteran status, an individual's genetic information, or any other bases under federal or local laws in its programs and activities.

If you experience any of the above, you have the option of filing a report with the [University Police](#) (202-885-2527) or the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) (dos@american.edu or 202-885-3300). To file a [Title IX complaint](#) or for more information on your rights, contact the Title IX Program Officer (202-885-3373 or TitleIX@american.edu). Please keep in mind that all faculty and staff – with the exception of counselors in the Counseling Center, victim advocates in OASIS, medical providers in the Student Health Center, and ordained clergy in the Kay Spiritual Life Center – who are aware of or witness this conduct are required to report this information to the university, regardless of the location of the incident. For more information, including a list of supportive resources on and off-campus, contact [OASIS](#) (oasis@american.edu or 202-885-7070).

Religious Observances

Students will be provided the opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance, provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. Please send this notification through email to the professor. For additional information, see American University's [religious observances policy](#).

Sharing of Course Content

Students are not permitted to make visual or audio recordings (including livestreams) of lectures or any class-related content or use any type of recording device unless prior permission from the instructor is obtained and there are no objections from any student in the class. If permission is granted, only students registered in the course may use or share recordings and any electronic copies of course materials (e.g., PowerPoints, formulas, lecture notes, and any discussions – online or otherwise). Use is limited to educational purposes even after the end of the course. Exceptions will be made for students who present a signed Letter of Accommodation from the Academic Support and Access Center. Further details are available from the [ASAC website](#).

To supplement the classroom experience, lectures may be audio or video recorded by faculty and made available to students registered for this class. Faculty may record classroom lectures or discussions for pedagogical use, future student reference, or to meet the accommodation needs of students with a documented disability. These recordings are limited to personal use and may not be distributed, sold, or posted on social media outlets without written permission of the instructor. Unauthorized downloading, file sharing, or distribution of any part course materials, or using information for purposes other than student's own learning, may be deemed a violation of American University's Student Conduct Code and subject to disciplinary action (see Student Conduct Code VI. Prohibited Conduct).

Use of Student Work

The professor will use academic work that you complete for educational purposes in this course during this semester. Your registration and continued enrollment constitute your consent.