

POLS 103: American Politics (Spring 2019)

Monday, Wednesday, & Friday 11:00-11:50am

Classroom: CSB 272

Instructor: Andre P. Audette

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Andre's Office: CSB 330

Politics Party Time (Office Hours): 1:30-3 MWF, 11-12:30 Tues-Thurs, and by appointment

"Democracy is not about words, but action." – Eleanor Roosevelt

Course Description

Citizens, candidates, and commentators of all sorts throughout the history of the United States have acclaimed the virtues of democracy in America. Some have even called the U.S. the world's leading democracy. But are these words reflected in the reality – that is to say, the actions – of our government? The question of the extent to which our government is democratic is the fundamental question in American politics, and the one which we will address in this course. Do we have too much democracy? Too little? Or perhaps the right amount? Have we always been a democracy, have we ever, or will we be in the future?

In order to answer these questions, we will examine the institutions, culture, and people that are part of the American political system. To help you develop skills in thinking about and talking about politics, we'll also address a variety of ongoing political debates to think about how you fit into American politics today. Ultimately, *it's up to you to decide*: is the United States truly a representative democracy?

Course Objectives

After successfully completing this course, you will be able to:

- Understand the basic components of American politics and government
- Evaluate whether the United States has a democratic system of governance
- Articulate your position on important ongoing debates in American politics
- Think critically about politics, beyond what we hear in the news
- Better synthesize and intelligently express your own points of view, both orally and in writing

Required Texts

The following books are available in the campus bookstore or through other online retailers. Please be sure to purchase the correct edition.

- Bond & Smith. 2012. *The Promise and Performance of American Democracy*, 10th ed.
- Dahl. 2003. *How Democratic is the American Constitution?*, 2nd ed.

You will notice that these books are now a few years old. This is for three reasons: 1) to save you money, 2) these books capture the central question of the class in a way that new textbooks do not, and 3) this allows us to discuss recent changes in American politics in class and to think critically about whether the readings still explain the way politics works.

Other course materials will be made available on Moodle or via email. Additionally, plan to stay up to date on U.S. politics by reading a newspaper, visiting online news sites or apps, or otherwise procuring the news of the day. Talk to me about good sources for doing this!

Course Requirements

To help you achieve the course objectives, final grades will be assessed through the following evaluations:

- 3 Exams (35%, 10% for the first two and 15% for the final exam)
- 3 Debate Reactions (35%, 10% for the first two and 15% for the final reaction)
- Final Paper (20%)
- Participation (10%)

Further information on these course requirements will be distributed in class

Exams

There will be three in-class, closed-book exams this semester. They are not cumulative, and will include fill-in-the-blank, multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions. Exams will cover material from lectures, reading assignments, and discussion.

Debate Reactions

Nearly every week we will discuss an ongoing debate in American politics. Three times throughout the semester, you will be asked to choose one of the debates to write a short reaction defending one side of the issue. These reactions should be no more than 1500 words (about 5 pages, double-spaced).

First, you will briefly describe both sides of the debate before offering a thesis as to why one side of the debate is more correct than the other. The main focus should be your critique of the arguments, arguing for or against one side, and/or offering a perspective not

taken by either side. Keep the summarizing to a minimum – only enough to show that you understand the debate. The main goal of these papers is to help you develop arguments based on logic and facts rather than unsubstantiated claims and opinions. You are not required to do any outside research (but please cite your sources if you do), and you will not be graded on which side of the debate you take. Papers should be turned in via email and hard copy in class as listed below.

Final Paper

The question for the final paper is the theme of the class: to what extent does American politics and government meet the requirements of democracy? (*Do we have too much democracy? Too little? Or perhaps the right amount? Have we always been a democracy, have we ever, or will we be in the future?*) You should develop an argument in 2000 words or less and cover what you believe to be the main issues in support of your argument and defending against the main critiques of your argument. Papers should be turned in via email and hard copy in class as listed below.

Participation

A large part of our class will be based on discussion, especially during our debates; therefore, it is essential that you come to class ready to actively participate. This includes (but is not limited to): attending class regularly, carefully reading the assigned texts, sharing your thoughts, opinions, and insights in discussion, considering and raising opposing viewpoints, engaging in respectful dialogue with others, listening attentively to others' perspectives, and following the discussion policies listed in this syllabus. You will receive an advisory midterm participation grade to help you assess where you are at halfway through the course.

Course Engagement Expectations

- Classroom activities (2.5 hours/week)
- Reading and class prep (5 hours/week)
- Papers (2.5 hours/week)
- Exam prep (2 hours/week)

Total: 12 hours/week

Grade Scale

A (93-100), A- (90-92.9), B+ (87-89.9), B (83-86.9), B- (80-82.9), C+ (77-79.9), C (73-76.9), C- (70-72.9), D+ (67-69.9), D (63-66.9), D- (60-62.9), F (<60)

Course Policies and Additional Resources

Academic Honesty

It is your responsibility to be familiar with and uphold the academic honesty policy of MC, as defined in the Scots Guide (<http://ou.monmouthcollege.edu/life/residence-life/scots-guide/academic-regulations.aspx>). Any student found to have violated these policies of academic integrity will receive a failing grade on the assignment and may be subject to further penalties by the College, including suspension or expulsion. If you have any questions about avoiding plagiarism or any of the other policies, please come talk to me.

Late Work/Extra Credit

An important part of academic and career preparation is the ability to meet deadlines and fulfill the requirements of your work. Therefore, late assignments will be subject to a half-letter grade reduction for every 0-24 hour period that the assignment is late. Additionally, there will be no extra credit given on an individual basis.

Laptops and Electronic Devices

Unless instructed otherwise, you are permitted to use laptops in class for note-taking purposes only. Cell phones and other electronics should be put away during class. To do otherwise detracts not only from your learning, but from other students' as well.

Attendance

Class attendance is expected, but not required, in this course. Beware that it is difficult to pass this course if you have a number of unexcused absences, as it is impossible to participate if you do not attend class or make other arrangements with me. Furthermore, you are responsible for all of the material covered in class, and it is thus in your best interest to attend every class. If you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to get notes from another student and to contact me about any makeup work.

Discussion Policies

The goal of discussion is to understand and learn from the viewpoints and experiences of others in order to better understand our own opinions and the functioning of the world around us. Specifically, our goal in this course is to consider various components of and to think critically about American democracy. Just as multiple voices are necessary for a healthy democracy, your participation is important for the learning experiences of your fellow classmates and your instructor. Therefore, participation will be graded on the quality, and not just quantity, of your contribution to this endeavor. To create an environment where everyone has the opportunity to participate, respect for individual differences and viewpoints will be maintained at all times. In sum, you are allowed and encouraged to disagree with other students, the professor, or the texts, but disagreement should always be expressed in a respectful manner inside and outside of the classroom.

Exceptions, Extensions, and Exemptions

Exceptions to the policies and schedule on this syllabus are granted only in the cases of a true emergency. Please make arrangements with me if an emergency arises.

Disabilities and Learning Differences

Any student who feels they may need support or accommodation for a disability should visit the Teaching and Learning Center on the 2nd floor of Poling Hall to establish eligibility and coordinate reasonable accommodations. I am happy to work with you and Disability Services to provide those accommodations. For more information, visit:

<http://ou.monmouthcollege.edu/life/disability-services/default.aspx>.

Writing Center and Tutoring – take advantage of these resources!!

The Writing Center offers unlimited, free peer tutoring sessions for MC students. Peer writing tutors are trained to work with writers from any major of any writing ability, on any type of writing assignment, and at any stage of their writing processes, from planning to drafting to revising to editing. The Writing Center is located on the 3rd floor of the Mellinger Teaching and Learning Center, and is open Sunday-Thursday 7-10pm and Monday-Thursday 3-5pm on a first-come, first-served basis. No appointment necessary!

All students can also make a free appointment with a Teaching and Learning Center tutor or stop by during drop-in hours. Information about tutoring services is available at:

<http://ou.monmouthcollege.edu/academics/teaching-learning-center/tutoring.aspx>.

Counseling Services

Counseling Services assists students in addressing personal, social, career, and study problems that can interfere with your academic progress and success. All services are free and can include individual and group counseling, crisis consultations, and wellness groups. The Counseling Center is located in the lower level of Poling Hall, and appointments can be made by calling Student Affairs at x2114 or by email to hfisher@monmouthcollege.edu or cbeadles@monmouthcollege.edu. You can find more info online at:

<https://ou.monmouthcollege.edu/life/counseling-services/appointments.aspx>.

Syllabus Changes

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus or the course schedule if it will benefit all students. Advance notice will be provided for any changes.

Questions, Concerns, Comments

If you have any questions at any point, please do not hesitate to contact me! I encourage you to come to my office hours even if you just want to discuss politics or some other subject, and I can set up appointments if you are unable to meet during the scheduled times. (Please try to give me at least 24 hours notice if you'd like to make an appointment.)

Course Outline and Schedule

*Reading assignments are to be completed before the date they are listed.

*Please bring all assigned readings to class (paper or electronic).

Monday, Jan. 14th – What is democracy anyway (plus introductions and the syllabus)

Wednesday, Jan. 16th – More “what is democracy”: learning from the literature

- Bond & Smith chapter 1 (pgs. 3-33)

Friday, Jan. 18th – #Winning in college and this class

- Andre’s “Top 10” Advice for Writing
- Mueller & Oppenheimer – The Pen is Mightier Than the Keyboard
- Grohol – 2 Important Strategies for Effective Studying

Monday, Jan. 21st – Writing a constitution

- Bond & Smith chapter 2 (pgs. 35-70)

Wednesday, Jan. 23rd – The Constitution: A unique illusion?

- Dahl chapters 1-2, appendix A (pgs. 1-39, 179-183)

Friday, Jan. 25th – Debate 1: Which form of democracy better serves the people?

- The Constitution (Bond & Smith Appendix A1-A13)
- Madison – Federalist Paper #10 (A14-18)
- Brutus – Antifederalist Paper of Oct. 18, 1787

Monday, Jan. 28th – Federalism and states’ rights

- Dahl chapter 3 (pgs. 41-72)

Wednesday, Jan. 30th – Debate 2: Does federalism allow for marijuana deregulation?

- Firestone – Let States Decide on Marijuana
- Kamin – Marijuana Regulation and the State-Federal Balance

Friday, Feb. 1st – Pirates, privacy, and protecting your rights

- Bond & Smith chapter 4 (pgs. 107-139)

Monday, Feb. 4th – Civil rights and America’s original sin

- Bond & Smith chapter 5 (pgs. 141-176)

Wednesday, Feb. 6th – Debate 3: Are corporations people, my friend?

- Kennedy, Stevens – Excerpts from *Citizens United v. FEC*

Friday, Feb. 8th – Catch up and exam review

Monday, Feb. 11th – Learning funtime #1

- **EXAM 1**

Wednesday, Feb. 13th – Debate 4: You decide

- Readings will be selected after we decide on the topic for this debate

Friday, Feb. 15th – Under the influence?

- Bond & Smith chapter 6 (pgs. 179-215)

Monday, Feb. 18th – Party time!

- Bond & Smith chapter 7 (pgs. 217-257)

Wednesday, Feb. 20th – The fourth branch of government

- Bond & Smith chapter 8 (pgs. 259-289)

Friday, Feb. 22nd – Debate 5: Should the government put an end to fake news?

- Dockray – Technology Can’t Fix Fake News, But You Can With a Conversation
- Lemann – Solving the Problem of Fake News

Monday, Feb. 25th – At long last...the people

- Dahl chapter 4 (pgs. 73-89)
- **DEBATE REACTION 1 DUE VIA EMAIL AND PAPER BY 11AM
(Choose from debates 1-4, so don’t write about fake news!)**

Wednesday, Feb. 27th – Public opinion continued...

- Bond & Smith chapter 9 (pgs. 291-319)

Friday, March 1st – Friday, March 8th – NO CLASSES (SPRING BREAK)

Monday, March 11th – Debate 6: Should Americans know more about politics?

- Robinson – Party on Dudes! Ignorance is the Curse of the Information Age
- Somin: Chocolate Cows: We're All Ignorant, Though It Usually Doesn't Matter
- Finish Dahl by Wednesday (pgs. 91-183)

Wednesday, March 13th – More public opinion and starting elections

- Finish Dahl by today (pgs. 91-183)

Friday, March 15th – Debate 7: Should we abolish the Electoral College?

- Lewis – Why We Should Abolish the Electoral College
- Guelzo & Hulme – In Defense of the Electoral College

Monday, March 18th – The one with the most votes (usually) wins

- Bond & Smith chapter 10

Wednesday, March 20th – Getting involved in politics

- Bond & Smith chapter 11, part I (pgs. 375-380)
- **DEBATE REACTION 2 DUE VIA EMAIL AND PAPER BY 11AM
(Choose from debates 5-7)**

Friday, March 22nd – Not getting involved in politics

- Bond & Smith chapter 11, part II (pgs. 380-406)

Monday, March 25th – Taking stock of what we've learned so far

Wednesday, March 27th – Hurray for making learning stick!

- **EXAM 2**

Friday, March 29th – Debate 8: Is low voter turnout a problem for American elections?

- Wilkinson – Thank You For Not Voting
- Will – Federal Voting Drive Makes a Mountain Out of a Molehill
- UNC Charlotte – 10 Reasons Why You Should Vote As a College Student
- McElwee – Why Voting Matters: Large Disparities in Turnout Benefit the Donor Class

Monday, April 1st – Miley Cyrus, head lice, and Congress

- Bond & Smith chapter 12, part I (pgs. 409-440)

Wednesday, April 3rd – Just a bill

- Bond & Smith chapter 12, part II (pgs. 440-454)

Friday, April 5th – Debate 9: You decide

- Readings will be selected after we decide on the topic for this debate

Monday, April 8th – What we thought we knew about the Presidency

- Bond & Smith chapter 13, part I (pgs. 457-473)

Wednesday, April 10th – The Trump Presidency

- Bond & Smith chapter 13, part II (pgs. 473-505)

Friday, April 12th – Debate 10: You decide

- Readings will be selected after we decide on the topic for this debate

Monday, April 15th – The least dangerous branch?

- Bond & Smith chapter 15 part I (pgs. 545-569)

Wednesday, April 17th – More on the court

- Bond & Smith chapter 15 part II (pgs. 569-589)
- **Have an outline and thesis started for your final paper**

Friday, April 19th – Monday, April 22nd – NO CLASSES (EASTER BREAK)

Wednesday, April 24th - Bureaucracy: Just red tape?

- **DEBATE REACTION 3 DUE VIA EMAIL AND PAPER BY 11AM
(Choose from debates 8-10)**

Friday, April 26th – Debate 11: Political polarization and the state of American democracy

- Marcus – Polarization: Why It's Destroying Our America, Our World, and Our Lives
- Abramowitz – How Polarization Benefits Democracy
- Kenworthy – Is America Too Polarized?
- El-Erian – This Political Polarization is Really Bad for America

Monday, April 29th – Final policy assessments

- Bond & Smith chapter 16 (pgs. 591-613)

Wednesday, May 1st – The last day ☹

- **FINAL PAPER DUE VIA EMAIL AND PAPER BY 11AM**

Monday May, 6th – Final Exam

- **EXAM 3 at 6:30pm in our normal classroom**