



On-Campus Course Syllabus

POL 203

Introduction to American Politics

Spring 2024

Class Information

Day and Time: Mondays 8-10:45am

Room Number: E207

Contact Information

Instructor Name: Dr. Brandon Seitzler

Instructor Email: bseitzler@criswell.edu

Instructor Phone: 214.818.1309

Instructor Office Hours: [Tuesdays: 10:45-11am, 12-1:45pm; Wednesdays 9-11am – schedule meetings at \[www.calendly.com/bseitzler\]\(http://www.calendly.com/bseitzler\)](#)

Course Description and Prerequisites

An examination of the history, branches, and functions of the United States government, as well as how the public interacts with the government. (This course satisfies for a Social/Behavioral Science course.)

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to think about historical and contemporary questions and problems in American government and politics using the tools and methods of political science. This course places a heavy emphasis on analyzing current political events and debates within a political science framework.

Required Textbooks

American Government: Power and Purpose. Lowi, Ginsberg, Shepsle, Ansolabehere, Han. Core Edition. 17th Edition. 2022.

Readings in American Politics. Ken Kollman. 6th Edition. 2022.

Recommended Reading

- The Economist
- The Wall Street Journal
- www.khanacademy.org

Course Requirements and Assignments

- 25% - Weekly Reading Quizzes in Canvas. These quizzes are open book and must be completed individually. You may attempt each quiz as many times as you would like. Only the highest grade for each reading quiz will count for that week's grade. No late quizzes are allowed.
- 25% - Weekly Discussion Questions. Write a response to the end-of-chapter questions presented at the end of each chapter of "Readings in American Politics." You may not use ChatGPT or any other generative AI application to answer the discussion questions..
- 25% - Midterm Exam
- 25% - Final Exam

Course/Classroom Policies and Information

- The ideas expressed by readings, resources, and outside guests in this course should not be interpreted as implying the instructor's or college's endorsement. Course materials and outside speakers are selected for their perceived value in helping to meet the course goals and objectives.
- At all times and especially when we are working in and with the community you are expected to exhibit the college's graduate profile:
 - **Ambassadors** who communicate effectively across various platforms and contexts.
 - **Cultivators** who seek to understand diverse populations and develop purposeful relationships.
 - **Peacemakers** who pursue truth and righteousness through mercy and reconciliation.
 - **Problem-solvers** who think critically, creatively, and collaboratively.
 - **Professionals** who demonstrate competence in their field of study and intentionality in their vocation.
- You may not have your cell phone anywhere in sight during class.
- The one exception to my cell phone rule is using your cell phone as a calculator or to look something up online as a part of class participation. Other than these two exceptions, phones belong in bags.
- You may not use your laptop during class for anything other than class-related activities.
- Instructors work closely with the Student Success Manager. To help provide resources to students who may need it most, I will communicate the names of students who have two consecutive absences, low grades, or any other signs that they may be struggling. The Student Success Manager will reach out to these students and help find appropriate resources.
- The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.

Class Attendance

Students are responsible for enrolling in courses for which they (1) anticipate being able to attend every on-campus class session on the day and time appearing on course schedules, or (2) participating in academically related activities as identified in online-course schedules including synchronous class sessions conducted remotely by video, and then making every effort to do so. When unavoidable situations result in absence or tardiness, students are responsible for acquiring any missed information. Professors are not obliged to allow students to make up missed work. Per their independent discretion, individual professors may determine how attendance affects students' ability to meet course learning objectives and whether attendance affects course grades. Professors apprise students of such information in course syllabi.

Students receiving grants, loans, or scholarships must meet specified requirements of various departments at the college and should consult relevant sections of the *Academic Catalog*. To ensure such funds will not be forfeited, students are responsible for contacting the proper departments to ascertain any specific course participation requirements and consequences of not meeting such requirements. Students receiving grants, loans, or scholarships should consult the Financial Aid office.

While Criswell College is a non-attendance taking institution, it nevertheless must demonstrate that students begin their courses in order to comply with Federal Aid regulations. Accordingly, students must participate in academically related activities during census periods. Failure to meet this requirement will result in students being administratively dropped from courses.

Academically related activity is defined as any course-related activity that may be used as evidence of attendance. Examples include:

- physical presence in a classroom during a class session with the instructor present,
- participation in a synchronous remote video class session with the instructor present,
- submission of an academic assignment, quiz, or exam,
- participation in an interactive tutorial or computer-assisted instruction,
- participation in a study group or discussion board that is assigned by the instructor,
- documentation showing that the student and a faculty member corresponded about the academic subject of the course.

NOTE: Logging into a Canvas course alone and logging into a Synchronous Online class session without active participation or with the camera off are not considered attendance.

NOTE: A census period begins on the first day of a semester/term and runs through the end of the last day to drop courses. During the census period, attendance data is collected in order to demonstrate compliance with Federal Aid regulations. There is no census period for winter terms since there is no last day to drop courses.

Campus Closure

To ensure the health and safety of students and employees, college administrators may decide it is necessary on rare occasions to close the campus. Once this decision is announced, instructors will contact students to provide further details regarding the campus closure's impact on those courses. Students are responsible to watch for communication from their instructors and respond appropriately. (Unless otherwise specified by the instructor in this syllabus, this communication will be sent to the student's Criswell College e-mail account.)

In order to make progress toward the courses' objectives, instructors have the freedom during most campus closures to require students to participate in activities as alternatives to meeting on campus. An instructor may, for example, hold class remotely (through Zoom) at the scheduled time, provide a recording of a class or presentation for students to watch independently, or assign other activities that students are to accomplish

before returning to campus. Students are responsible for accomplishing these alternative activities as well as any course requirements listed in this syllabus during the period of the campus closure. If, during the period of the campus closure, personal circumstances prohibit a student from accomplishing these alternative activities or course requirements and assignment listed in the syllabus during the campus closure, the student is responsible for communicating with the instructor as soon as possible. Instructors will not penalize students who do not have the means to accomplish the alternative activities during the period of the campus's closure and will work with students whose circumstances during the campus closure prohibited their timely completion of course requirements and assignments in the syllabus.

Grading Scale

			Grade Definitions
A	93-100	4.0 grade points per semester hour	Exceptional
A-	90-92	3.7 grade points per semester hour	
B+	87-89	3.3 grade points per semester hour	
B	83-86	3.0 grade points per semester hour	Above Average
B-	80-82	2.7 grade points per semester hour	
C+	77-79	2.3 grade points per semester hour	
C	73-76	2.0 grade points per semester hour	Average
C-	70-72	1.7 grade points per semester hour	
D+	67-69	1.3 grade points per semester hour	
D	63-66	1.0 grade point per semester hour	Below Average
D-	60-62	0.7 grade points per semester hour	
F	0-59	0.0 grade points per semester hour	Unacceptable

Incomplete Grades

Students requesting a grade of Incomplete (I) must understand that incomplete grades may be given only upon approval of the faculty member involved. An "I" may be assigned only when a student is currently passing a course and in situations involving extended illness, serious injury, death in the family, or employment or government reassignment, not student neglect.

Students are responsible for contacting their instructors prior to the end of the semester, plus filing the appropriate completed and approved academic request form with the Registrar's Office. The "I" must be removed (by completing the remaining course requirements) no later than 60 calendar days after the close of the term or semester in which the grade was awarded, or the "I" will become an "F."

Academic Honesty

Absolute truth is an essential belief and basis of behavior for those who believe in a God who cannot lie and forbids falsehood. Academic honesty is the application of the principle of truth in the classroom setting. Academic honesty includes the basic premise that all work submitted by students must be their own and any ideas derived or copied from elsewhere must be carefully documented.

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to:

- cheating of any kind,
- submitting, without proper approval, work originally prepared by the student for another course,
- plagiarism, which is the submitting of work prepared by someone else as if it were his own, and
- failing to credit sources properly in written work.

Institutional Assessment

Material submitted by students in this course may be used for assessment of the college's academic programs. Since programmatic and institutional assessment is done without reference to specific students, the results of these assessments have no effect on a student's course grade or academic standing at the college. Before submitting a student's work for this type of assessment, the course instructor redacts the work to remove anything that identifies the student.

Institutional Email Policy

All official college email communications to students enrolled in this course will be sent exclusively to students' institutional email accounts. Students are expected to check their student email accounts regularly and to respond in an appropriate and timely manner to all communications from faculty and administrative departments.

Students are permitted to setup automatic forwarding of emails from their student email accounts to one or more personal email accounts. The student is responsible to setup and maintain email forwarding without assistance from college staff. If a student chooses to use this forwarding option, he/she will continue to be responsible for responding appropriately to all communications from faculty and administrative departments of the college. Criswell College bears no responsibility for the use of emails that have been forwarded from student email accounts to other email accounts.

Disabilities

Criswell College recognizes and supports the standards set forth in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and similar state laws, which are designed to eliminate discrimination against qualified individuals with disabilities. Criswell College is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualifying students, faculty, and employees with disabilities as required by applicable laws. For more information, please contact the Student Services Office.

Intellectual Property Rights

Unless otherwise specifically instructed in writing by the instructor, students must neither materially nor digitally reproduce materials from any course offered by Criswell College for or with the significant possibility of distribution.

Research and Writing Standards

The default writing style for written assignments in Criswell College Courses is the latest edition of *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses and Dissertations* by Kate Turabian. However, instructors are free to require alternative writing styles in their courses. These styles include but are not limited to the American Psychological Association (APA), Chicago Manual of Style, Modern Language Association (MLA), and Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) writing guides.

Resources and Supports

Canvas and SONIS: Criswell College uses Canvas as its web-based learning tool and SONIS for student data. Students needing assistance with Canvas should contact the Canvas Help Support line at (844) 358-6140. Tech support is available at this number, twenty-four hours a day. Students needing help with SONIS should contact the Campus Software Manager at studenttechsupport@criswell.edu.

Student Services: The Student Services Office exists to foster and encourage success in all areas of life—physical, intellectual, spiritual, social, and emotional. Students are encouraged to reach out for assistance by contacting the office at 214.818.1332 or studentservices@criswell.edu. The Student Services Office also works with local counseling centers to ensure that every student has access to helpful mental health resources. More information is located on the college website at [Criswell College Mental Health Resources](#), and students may contact the Director of Student Services if they have any questions.

Wallace Library: Students can access academic resources and obtain research assistance by contacting or visiting the Wallace Library, which is located on campus. For more information, email the Wallace Library at library@criswell.edu. Login credentials are emailed to students near the beginning of the semester.

Tutoring Center: Students are encouraged to consult with tutors to improve and enhance their skills and confidence in any subject matter taught at the college. Tutors have been recommended by the faculty to ensure that the tutor(s) are qualified to serve the student body. Every tutor brings experience and expertise in an effort to provide the proper resources for the subject matter at hand. To consult with a tutor, students can schedule an appointment through Calendly (<https://calendly.com/criswell-tutoringcenter>) or by visiting the Tutoring Center located on the second floor in room E203. For questions, call 214.818.1373 or email at tutoringcenter@criswell.edu.

Course Outline/Calendar

	Topic	Readings and Assignments Due
Week 1 – 1/15	MLK Day – No Class	None
Week 2 – 1/22	Welcome to POL 203 Introduction to American Politics.	None
Week 3 – 1/29	Once upon a time, life for everyone was “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.” (according to Hobbes, at least) Now, for some people (and according to some people), life is a little better. What explains this? Luck, science, religion, technology...politics? We need to develop a framework to figure it out.	<u>Reading(s):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 1 Five Principles of Politics • Ch. 1 in “Readings” <u>Assignment(s):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 1 Reading Quiz • Ch. 1 Discussion Questions
Week 4 – 2/5	<p>The USA is one of the rich countries where life seems (to <i>some[?]</i> and for <i>some[?]</i>) to be a little easier and more enjoyable. The USA is coincidentally also where we live. Maybe we should start our investigation at home and at the beginning.</p> <p>The <i>very</i> beginning: Legitimacy, authority, and accountability. Why should <i>they</i> get to tell <i>me</i> what to do?</p> <p>The American founders thought they had some innovative ideas and answers to these questions.</p>	<u>Reading(s):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 2 Constructing a Government: The Founding and the Constitution • Ch. 2 in “Readings” <u>Assignment(s):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 2 Reading Quiz • Ch. 2 Discussion Questions

Week 4 – 2/12	<p>These innovative ideas started with the belief that power was dangerous and that the more you concentrate that power in a single person or persons the more likely you were to have tyranny. The last thing we want is some dictator pushing everyone around. So, while we recognize the need for a government (do we?), it would be nice to create a government with built-in mechanisms to limit itself. This led them to ideas like federalism and the separation of powers at the system level.</p> <p>But has the share of power between federal and state governments remained constant across time? If one level of government abuses its power (or its citizens) is it the responsibility of another level of government to intervene?</p>	<p><u>Reading(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 3 Federalism • Ch. 3 in “Readings” <p><u>Assignment(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 3 Reading Quiz • Ch. 3 Discussion Questions
Week 5 – 2/19	<p>This is important because governments are governing individual persons and individual persons deserve certain things simply because they are humans. What do we as humans, and citizens, deserve? Are the things we deserve things that we deserve to be provided with or protected from or both?</p> <p>Who decides?</p>	<p><u>Reading(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 4 Civil Liberties • Ch. 4.1-4.2 in “Readings” <p><u>Assignment(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 4 Reading Quiz • Ch. 4 Discussion Questions 1 and 2.
Week 6 – 2/26	<p>^^^Ditto ^^^</p>	<p><u>Reading(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 5 Civil Rights • Ch. 4.3-4.4 in “Readings” <p><u>Assignment(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 5 Reading Quiz • Ch. 4 Discussion Questions 3, 4, and 5.
Week 7 – 3/4	<p>All of this would be structured around and protected within formal institutions, starting with Congress. In theory, Congress would be where the people’s interests are represented.</p> <p>In practice, things are a little more complicated. After all, legislators are still people and people have their own interests even when they are tasked with representing the interests of others.</p>	<p><u>Reading(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 6 Congress: The First Branch • Ch. 5 in “Readings” <p><u>Assignment(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 6 Reading Quiz • Ch. 5 Discussion Questions
Week 8 – 3/11	<p>Spring Break – no class</p>	<p>None</p>

Week 9 – 3/18	<p>In some ways, the president, because he or she serves all Americans, acting on a unitary basis, might be more efficient than Congress and able to make better policy, even though Congress is constitutionally tasked with lawmaking.</p> <p>Whereas we tend to think of the president as politically strong this isn't constitutionally or historically the case. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the president's power has increased.</p>	<p><u>Reading(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 7 The Presidency as an Institution • Ch. 6 in "Readings" <p><u>Assignment(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 7 Reading Quiz • Ch. 6 Discussion Questions
Week 10 – 3/25	<p>The amount of government that the president oversees is reflected in the size of the executive branch which consists of departments, agencies, boards, commissions, and committees that Americans interact with daily.</p> <p>Remember though, the men and women who run these departments, agencies, etc. are not elected by citizens. They are tasked with duties and overseen by elected officials. This brings us back, full circle, to the foundational questions of legitimacy, authority, and accountability.</p>	<p><u>Reading(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 8 The Executive Branch • Ch. 7 in "Readings" <p><u>Assignment(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 8 Reading Quiz • Ch. 7 Discussion Questions
Week 11 – 4/1	<p>What happens when disputes arise between formal governmental institutions and between the government and the people?</p> <p>Without guns (like the president) or money (like congress), the courts rely on their political independence to settle disputes and maintain the rule of law.</p>	<p><u>Reading(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 9 The Federal Courts • Ch. 8 in "Readings" <p><u>Assignment(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 9 Reading Quiz • Ch. 8 Discussion Questions <p><u>Midterm Exam is Due at 11:59pm, 3/10</u></p>
Week 12 – 4/8	<p>We've talked a lot about "the people" so far. Who are they and what do they want and think?</p> <p>A controversial question: should we be encouraged or concerned that the people have a voice?</p>	<p><u>Reading(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 10 Public Opinion • Ch. 9 in "Readings" <p><u>Assignment(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 10 Reading Quiz • Ch. 9 Discussion Questions
Week 13 – 4/15	<p>How will these people make their thoughts and desires known?</p> <p>How do you make your thoughts and desires known? Are you voting well, or succumbing to bias (optimism, confirmation, in-group, or action)?</p>	<p><u>Reading(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 11 Elections • Ch. 13 in "Readings" <p><u>Assignment(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 11 Reading Quiz • Ch. 13 Discussion Questions

Week 14 – 4/22	<p>What happens when people organize into parties to organize and strategize their collective voices? Are political parties good or bad?</p>	<p><u>Reading(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 12 Political Parties • Ch. 12 in “Readings” <p><u>Assignment(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 12 Reading Quiz • Ch. 12 Discussion Questions
Week 15 – 4/29	<p>How else do people organize and identify? Nobody really likes group or identity politics, but is that because everyone views their politics as just <i>politics</i> whereas everyone else’s politics is <i>identity politics</i>? What groups are you a part of and what interests do you have that drive your political preferences? James Madison (Federalist 10) thought groups and interests were a threat to the United States but that there were solutions to the problem. Are groups and interests a problem?</p>	<p><u>Reading(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 13 Groups and Organized Interests • Ch. 11 in “Readings” <p><u>Assignment(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 13 Reading Quiz • Ch. 11 Discussion Questions
Week 16 – 5/6	<p>Is the liberal media driving the groups and interest problem? Is the conservative media driving the groups and interests problem? Would James Madison have been a social media power-user? Would Facebook or Twitter be a better place to publish the Federalist Papers?</p>	<p><u>Reading(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 14 The Media • Ch. 14 in “Readings” <p><u>Assignment(s):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch. 14 Reading Quiz • Ch. 14 Discussion Questions
Week 17 – 5/13	<p>Final Exam – no class</p>	

The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.