

POLS 103: Introduction to American Politics
Spring 2014

Professor Bianco
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Office Hours: T/TR 12:00 – 1:00 and by appointment

This course is an introduction to American national politics. The central premise is that nothing in politics happens by accident – everything you see is the result of the choices people make. The goal is to understand American politics by examining these choices and their consequences.

The secondary emphasis is on facts, both to provide basic information about American politics and to demonstrate that there is evidence behind the theories and arguments presented in the class. The class will be ruthlessly contemporary, emphasizing the political issues, campaigns, and controversies that are part of our everyday life.

While the class covers both the science of politics and the politics of the real world, it does not put a partisan spin on events. The class will focus on explaining how politics works without taking a position on whether one set of opinions or preferences are better than another. You are expected to follow this rule in your class participation and assignments.

The sole text is *American Politics Today* (third edition), which has been ordered for the class as an online text via CourseLoad. If you wish to purchase a hard copy, the ISBN for the paperback version is 0393913260. Please purchase the full edition, not the core edition, the essentials edition or the Texas edition. And do not purchase the first or section edition.

There will be a total of five exams – four during the semester and one during finals. Two of the exams (2 and 4) will be taken on-line (that is, you can take the exam at home and do not have to show up for class on exam day); the remaining exams will be taken in-class. Exam 1 counts for 10 percent of your grade, exams 2 and 3 count for 15 percent, and exams 4 and 5 count for 20 percent. 5 percent of your grade will be determined by participation in chapter pretests. The final 10 percent of your grade will be determined by attendance in lecture and section.

Excused absences require a compelling reason – serious illness, a personal crisis that requires your immediate and undivided attention, or official university business. I reserve the final decision on whether an absence is excused or unexcused.

Finally, you are responsible for learning about and following IU's policy on academic dishonesty, including the proper use of sources in written material. I take these policies extremely seriously. Do not expect lenience if you violate these policies.

Course Outline

- 1/14 Intro Lecture: Politics and Conflict (APT chapter 1)
1/16 How and Why Rules Matter
- Sections: Introduction
Pretests: chapter 2
- 1/21 Intro Constitution (APT chapter 2)
1/23 Constitution as Institution
- Sections: Key terms from APT chapter 2
Pretests: chapter 3
- 1/28 Federalism (APT chapter 3)
1/30 Civil Liberties (APT chapter 4)
- Sections: Key terms from APT chapter 3, 4
Pretests: chapter 7
Assignment: Correct pretests for chapters 2, 3, 4
- 2/4 Exam 1 (chapters 2, 3, 4) – in class
2/6 The Logic of Collective Action
- Sections: No sections this week (review sessions TBA)
Pretests: chapter 9
- 2/11 American Political Parties (APT chapter 7)
2/13 What Do Parties Do?
- Sections: Key terms from APT chapter 7
Pretests: chapter 5
- 2/18 Interest Groups (APT chapter 9)
2/20 Interest Groups and American Democracy
- Sections: Key terms from APT chapter 9
Pretests: chapter 5
Assignment: Correct pretests for chapters 7,9

2/25 No Class - Exam 2 (chapters 7, 9) – taken online
2/27 Opinions and Actions in American Politics (APT chapter 5)

Sections: No sections this week (review sessions TBA)
Pretests: chapter 8

3/4 Election Rules and Procedures (APT chapter 8)
3/6 The Media (APT chapter 6)

Sections: Key terms from APT chapter 8
Pretests: chapter 6
Assignment: Correct pretests for chapters 5, 6, 8

3/11 Campaigns and Vote Decisions
3/13 Exam 3 (chapters 5, 6, 8) – taken in class

Sections: No Sections (review sessions TBA)
Pretests: APT chapter 10

3/25 Congress: The Electoral Connection (APT chapter 10)
3/27 Congressional Parties

Sections: Key terms from APT chapter 10
Pretests: chapter 15

4/1 Congressional Rules and Procedures
4/3 Economic Policy (APT chapter 15)

Sections: Key terms from APT chapter 15
Pretests: chapter 12

4/8 Budget Deficits and Economic Growth
4/10 The Executive Branch (APT chapter 12)

Sections: No sections (review sessions TBA)
Pretests: Chapter 11
Assignment: Correct pretests for chapters 10, 15

4/15 No Class; Exam 4 (chapters 10, 15) – taken online
4/17 The President (APT chapter 11)

Sections: Key Terms from APT chapter 12
Pretests: chapter 17

4/22 Control of the Bureaucracy
4/24 Foreign Policy (APT chapter 17)

Section: Key terms from APT chapter 11
Pretests: chapter 13

4/29 The Supreme Court (APT chapter 13)
5/1 Sum-up, evaluations

Section: No sections this week (review sessions TBA)
Assignment: Correct pretests for chapters 11, 12, 13, 17

Final exam during exam week (chapters 11, 12, 13, and 17)