Description.
How does the American political system operate? What sorts of dynamics illuminate its intricacies, epitomize its challenges, and explain its outputs? This course provides an introduction to American political ideas, institutions, behaviors, and processes. Topics include (among other things) the Constitution, political culture, Congress, the presidency, mass media, civic participation, and public policy. Although we will cover the “nuts and bolts” of American government, our focus is less civics than political science, our task less memorizing names and dates than analyzing and interpreting political phenomena.

Objectives.
**Thinking Politically.** Above all else, politics is about power—who wants it, who has it, how they get it, and what they do, could do, and should do with it. As such, to think politically is to think in terms of the sources, distribution, manifestations, uses, abuses, limitations, and ramifications of power. With the political fight over and exercise of power as our overarching theme, we will examine structures and rules, investigate incentives and interests, explore causes and conditions—all so that we may begin to unpack both the art and science of contemporary American politics.

**Thinking Holistically.** Political actors and institutions do not operate in isolation but, rather, in a complex system where the actions of one affect the choices available to another. Although we will study different features of the political system individually, our goal is to understand both the interactions between and the environment surrounding them. Even as we delve deeply into particular points of inquiry, remember that our task is to develop a composite and richly contextual understanding of the nature of American politics in the early twenty-first century.

Format.
Class will combine elements of lecture and open discussion. In order to facilitate broad participation, I will both accept volunteers and call on students directly. In either case, there will be ample opportunity for you to ask questions, share your views, and interrogate the course material.

Materials.
- The Constitution of the United States of America (handout) (Const)
- PSCI 201 course packet (in three volumes) (CP)***

* Joe Bianco ’16 (jab5@williams.edu), a stellar course alumnus, will join me as a teaching assistant. He will hold office hours Sundays 8-9pm and Thursdays 7-8pm on Level 1 of Sawyer Library; he is also available by appointment.
** Available for purchase at Water Street Books.
*** The first volume is available for pickup at the Class of ’37 House (51 Park Street) from 9am to 3:30pm M-F; the remaining volumes will be distributed shortly.
Contributions.*

Op-Eds (10% each for a total of 20%). Two 2-3 page opinion pieces on assigned topics—one near the start of the course, one near the end of it.

Essays (20% each for a total of 40%). Two 4-6 page analytic essays due largely on dates of your own choosing and selected from an array of assignments throughout the semester. The assignments are purposely diverse in style, but all require, albeit in distinct ways, broad, systematic, and creative thinking about the material and themes of the course. Regardless of the specific form of writing, your challenge is neither to embark upon outside research nor to summarize the views of others but, rather, to analyze the assigned material, reflect on the issues at hand, and articulate—and then support with evidence and analysis—an argument that answers the question.

Final Exam (25%). A cumulative exam consisting of identifications and essays. Provided sufficient interest, I will be glad to hold a review session at the conclusion of the semester.

Class Participation (15%). A process of active engagement that entails more than simply showing up. Accordingly, participation grades are not a “free 12%” but, rather, a reflection of my holistic assessment of your performance in class.

Evaluation.

Written Work. Good writing is good thinking—that is to say, writing well first requires thinking well. The manner in which and the depth with which you approach writing and thinking will be the determining factors in your grade. More specifically, I base grades for written work on the following three factors: the extent to which you make a clear, compelling, and original argument; the extent to which you support that argument through close analysis and consideration of primary and secondary source evidence; and the extent to which you organize and articulate your thoughts in a logical and sophisticated structure. Needless to say, proper mechanics of writing—including features such as grammar, capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and so forth—are assumed; be sure to proofread your work in order to catch any errors along these lines.

Written work in the A range is characterized by a strikingly creative, perceptive, and persuasive argument; comprehensive synthesis and trenchant analysis of an abundance of course material; straightforward yet sophisticated organization of thoughts; and clear, cogent, fluid, and error-free prose. Written work in the B range is characterized by a sound, original, and reasonably thoughtful argument; competent analysis of various course material; logical and intelligible organization; and clear, cogent, and error-free prose. Written work in the C range is characterized by a relatively underdeveloped, simplistic, or derivative argument; partial, inconsistent, or faulty analysis of course material; convoluted organization; and awkward, stilted, or otherwise distracting prose. Written work in the D range is characterized by an incoherent or extremely confusing argument; superficial or fleeting engagement with the course material; chaotic or irrational organization; and distorted, error-riddled prose. Written work that lacks any argument or analysis, fails to engage the course material, or is any way incomprehensible earns an F.**

Participation. Three factors contribute to class participation grades: the degree to which you demonstrate analytic or critical understanding of the course material, the degree to which you articulate thoughtful or original questions and arguments in response to the course material, and the degree to which you succeed in advancing discussion by responding meaningfully to what others

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* I reserve the right to fail any student who fails any element—op-ed, essays, final exam, class participation—of the course.

** The following adjectives capture the essence of what individual grades mean in this course: truly exceptional (A+), outstanding (A), excellent (A-), very good (B+), good (B), satisfactory (B-), fair (C+), sub-par (C), poor (C-), seriously deficient (D+), minimally acceptable (D), borderline unacceptable (D-), completely unacceptable (F).
have said. The emphasis here is on quality, not quantity. Select insightful offerings are infinitely more valuable than a multitude of derivative or mediocre ones. Worry not: provided you attend class, complete the reading, and think carefully about the themes of the course, you will be in an excellent position to contribute thoughtfully to discussion.

Participation grades in the A range are reserved for those students who consistently come to class with questions and comments, engage others in a respectful manner, and generally elevate the level of discussion. Participation grades in the B range are earned by those students who participate but do not stimulate discussion, adequately listen to their classmates, or relate their comments to the direction of the conversation. Participation grades in the C range are for those students who are infrequent or unwilling contributors to discussion. Participation grades of D and F, respectively, are for those students who do not arrive adequately prepared for class and for those who disrupt and detract from the overall quality of the course.

Responsibilities.

Attendance. Put simply, I expect you to be in class each and every day. I do not formally call roll, but I notice—and make a mental note!—when you are absent. Besides avoiding my undying wrath, you should plan on full attendance for three reasons. First, participation, which counts for 15% of your final grade, is impossible if you are not present. Second, the lectures and discussions that occur in class will be crucial elements of your learning in this course. Third, and most importantly, by choosing to take this class, you are making a commitment to me, to your classmates, and to yourself that you will be an active and engaged participant in our academic community. Class will go on without you, but everyone’s learning will suffer as a consequence of your absence. If you know in advance that missing class will be unavoidable, please have the courtesy to let me know.

Punctuality and Preparedness. As part of your aforementioned commitment to me, your classmates, and yourself, you are expected to arrive in class on time, prepared, and without technological distractions. This means, first, that you have thoroughly and carefully read the material before class and, second, that you have thought about that material and are willing and ready to contribute your thoughts to discussion. (On occasion, I may also ask you to complete a brief exercise or assignment in order to enrich the day’s discussion.) Of course, I recognize that students lead busy lives, have commitments (both academic and otherwise) in addition to this course, and may occasionally be affected by unforeseen events and unpredictable circumstances that make adequate preparation difficult. Even in those instances, I still urge you to come to class and encourage you to let me know—either through an email in advance of class or a quick comment upon entering class—that you were unable to prepare as fully as you had hoped. Not only will you not be penalized for your disclosure, but I agree not to call on you for that period. I trust you not to abuse my generosity by availing yourself of this option more than twice.

Discourse and Decorum. You are responsible for conducting yourself appropriately—both in your own comments and in your responses (verbal or otherwise) to the comments of your peers. As respectful discourse is the norm, criticism should be reserved for ideas, arguments, and opinions rather than for people; ad hominem comments will not be tolerated.

Submitting Work. You will receive three “extension days”—literally, three twenty-four hour extensions—to be used as you wish and without penalty. Whether to spend one day on each of three assignments or conserve all three days for one assignment is entirely up to you, but I urge you to use your days wisely because they are the only extensions I will grant. Since I will neither consider ad hoc extension requests nor accept late work, assignments that are not accompanied by one or more of your extension days must be submitted—in class and in person (unless otherwise specified)—by the due date in order to receive credit.
Academic Honesty. I hope—frankly, I expect—this will not be an issue, but it is worth repeating that all work you do in this course is governed by the College’s Honor Code. (If you have any questions about how the Honor Code applies, do not hesitate to ask!) I take scholarly integrity very seriously, and any suspected violations will be pursued to the fullest extent. No exceptions.

Contact Information.

Email. The most efficient way to reach me is via email. As a general rule, emails received before 9pm will usually receive a reply that day; emails received after 9pm will likely receive a reply on the following day.

Office Hours. For my regularly scheduled office hours, no sign-up or prior notice is necessary, nor is a specific course-related question or concern. (If you wish to schedule an appointment for another time, you should let me know a few days in advance.) Although I am obviously available to discuss any issues that may arise in class or in the reading, you are also more than welcome to stop by and join me for some friendly conversation. Indeed, I encourage you to do so; really—come see me. I am interested in learning about you and your thoughts, and I never (well, ok, hardly ever) tire of talking about American politics.

Phone. Though email is, as noted above, the easiest way to reach me, you should feel free to call me in the office at any time. If, between the hours of 8am and 6pm, you have a question that requires urgent attention, you may also contact me at home.

Some Final Thoughts.

I take teaching seriously, and I hope you will reciprocate by taking learning seriously. That said, I intend for our classes to be enjoyable—both for you and for me. This course revolves around rich, interesting, and controversial debates that help to animate the character and complexities of American political life. So expect to teach each other and to learn from each other, but also expect to enjoy yourself; for my part, I promise to do the same.

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Introduction

1. Witnesses, Weather, and Why This Course Won’t Have a Textbook (September 4)

2. (Political) Arts and Sciences (September 8)
   CP: Bachrach and Baratz, “Two Faces of Power”
   Lukes, “The Three-Dimensional View” from *Power: A Radical View*
   Riordan, selections from *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*
   Matthews, selections from *Hardball*

I. Foundations

3. First Principles (September 11)*
   CP: The Declaration of Independence
   The Articles of Confederation
   Const: the whole thing!
   CP: Ellis, “The Generation” from *Founding Brothers*
   SL: Madison, *The Federalist* 10 (10)
   CP: Dahl, “Is the Constitution Democratic?”

4. Powers, Separate and Shared (September 15)
   SL: Madison, *The Federalist* 51 (15)
   Const: Articles I, II, and III
   CP: *Immigration and Naturalization Service v. Chadha*
   W. Wilson, *Congressional Government*
   J.Q. Wilson, “Does the Separation of Powers Still Work?”

5. The Central State and the Many States (September 18)
   SL: Madison, *The Federalist* 39 and 46 (18)
   Const: Article I, Section 8, Clause 18 (the last one – beginning with “--And To make”)
   Article I, Section 10
   Articles IV, V, VI, and VII
   10th and 11th Amendments
   CP: *McCulloch v. Maryland*
   Grodzins, “The ‘Marble Cake’ Theory of Federalism”
   Peterson, “Who Should Do What?”

* Quite remarkably, the College owns original copies of the nation’s founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the Constitution, *The Federalist*, and the Bill of Rights. Although the documents will ultimately be housed in the Chapin Library (on the fourth floor of Sawyer Library), they are currently on display—with a touring copy of the Magna Carta—at the Clark Art Institute (a short walk past Garfield and Agard on South Street). While I will not require you to visit, I cannot recommend strongly enough that you choose to do so either before or soon after this session. (The Clark also has a beautiful new reflecting pool—complete, I’m told, with frogs! Oh, and lots of world-renowned art, too.)
SL: Karch, *Democratic Laboratories* (20)
CP: Belluck, “The Not-So United States”
   Walters and Kettl, “The Katrina Breakdown”
   Meyerson, “Fed Up With Federalism”
   Epstein and Loyola, “The United State of America”

6. Truth, Justice, and the American Way  (September 22)
   Const: Preamble
   1st-10th Amendments
   CP: Tocqueville, excerpts from *Democracy in America*
       Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America*
       Smith, “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz”
       Hochschild, “What is the American Dream?”
   SL: Kammen, *People of Paradox* (6)
   CP: Brooks, “One Nation, Slightly Divisible”

II. Institutions

7. The Zoo on the Hill  (September 25)
   Const: Article I
   16th and 17th Amendments
   CP: Madison, *The Federalist* 53
       Madison, *The Federalist* 62
       Madison, *The Federalist* 63
       Baker, “Politics of Scale” from *House and Senate*
       Wilson, *Congressional Government*
       Packer, “The Empty Chamber”

8. Of Party and Policy, Constituents and Career  (September 29)
   SL: Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (22)
       Fenno, *Home Style* (23)
   CP: Dodd, “Congress and the Quest for Power”
       Fiorina, “The Rise of the Washington Establishment”
       Arnold, “Explaining Congressional Action” from *The Logic of Congressional Action*
   CP: Hamilton, “The Case for Congress”

9. Hail to the Chief  (October 2)
   Const: Article II
   22nd Amendment
   CP: Hamilton, *The Federalist* 69
       Hamilton, *The Federalist* 70
   CP: Kernell, *Going Public*
       Howell, “Presidential Power in the Modern Era” from *Power without Persuasion*
       Calmes, “Obama Counts on Power of Convening People for Change”
       Lincoln, “The Prerogative Theory of the Presidency”
       Roosevelt, “The Stewardship Theory of the Presidency”
Taft, “The Literalist Theory of the Presidency”

10. The Way to Rushmore (October 6)
   CP: Skowronek, “Structure and Action” from The Politics Presidents Make
   Barber, “Presidential Character and How to Foresee It” from The Presidential Character
   Greenstein, “The Person of the President, Leadership, and Greatness”

11. Bureaucracy—Just Bureaucracy* (October 9)
    Const: Article II
        Aberbach and Rockman, In the Web of Politics
    SL: Reich, Locked in the Cabinet (41)
        Wilson, Bureaucracy (42)
    CP: Kaufman, Red Tape
        Cato Institute, “Privatization” from Cato Handbook for Policymakers
        Hacker, “Bigger and Better”

12. Neither Force Nor Will… (October 16)
    Const: Articles III and VI
    11th Amendment
    SL: Hamilton, The Federalist 78 (43)
    CP: Marbury v. Madison
        Cooper v. Aaron
        Bickel, “The Least Dangerous Branch Indeed”
    SL: Rostow, “The Democratic Character of Judicial Review” (44)
        O’Brien, Storm Center (45)
    CP: Rosenberg, “The Fly-Paper Court” from The Hollow Hope
        McCloskey, “The Court of Today and the Lessons of History” from The American Supreme Court

13. …But a Whole Lot of Judgment (October 20)
    Const: 1st-10th and 14th Amendments
        Scalia, “Originalism: The Lesser Evil”
        Sunstein, “Leaving Things Undecided” from One Case at a Time
        Griswold v. Connecticut

III. Linkages

14. The Fourth Estate (October 23)
    CP: Cook, “The News Media as a Political Institution”
        podcast: This American Life, “Primary” – Act I
    CP: Boorstin, “Pseudo-Events”
    SL: Sabato, Feeding Frenzy (77)
        Mutz, “How Mass Media Divide Us” (80)

* Ummm…I’ve got nothing here; I dare you to do better!
CP: Fallows, “Why Americans Hate the Media”
   Smolkin, “What the Mainstream Media Can Learn from Jon Stewart”
   Palser, “Journalism’s Backseat Drivers”
SL: Sunstein, Republic.com 2.0 (79)

15. Vox Populi Vox Dei (October 27)
   CP: Popkin, The Reasoning Voter
   SL: Key, Public Opinion and American Democracy (57)
   CP: Lippman, The Phantom Public
   SL: Jacobs and Shapiro, Politicians Don’t Pander (59)
   CP: Bartels, “The Irrational Electorate”
   Menand, “The Unpolitical Animal”

16. Tocquevillian Dreams (October 30)
   Const: 14th, 15th, 17th, 19th, 24th, and 26th Amendments
   CP: Tocqueville, “On the Use that the Americans Make of Association in Civil Life” from Democracy in America
   Putnam, “The Strange Disappearance of Civic America”
   Skoepol, “The Narrowing of Civic Life”
   Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, “The Big Tilt”
   Jonas, “The Downside of Diversity”
   Fiorina, “Extreme Voices”
   podcast: This American Life, “This Week” (May 6, 2011) – Act III
   CP: Niedzviecki, “Facebook in a Crowd”
   Garber, “The White House Petition Site is a Joke (and Also the Future of Democracy)”

17. Madisonian Nightmares (November 3)
   SL: Madison, The Federalist 10 (10) (yes—again!)
   Tocqueville, Democracy in America (61)
   CP: Truman, “Defending Pluralist Politics”
   SL: Schattschneider, The Semisovereign People (62)
   Skinner, More Than Money (63)
   CP: Judis, “The Pressure Elite”
   Tau, “How the Gun Lobby Shot Down D.C.’s Congressional Vote”
   Barstow, “Tea Party Lights Fuse for Rebellion on Right”

**Election 2014: The Day After** (November 5 – 12pm)*
   a joint discussion with Professor Mellow’s PSCI 201 section

18. Agents of Legitimate Opposition (November 6)
   CP: Aldrich, Why Parties?
   Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy
   Fiorina, “The Decline of Collective Responsibility in American Politics”
   SL: Brownstein, The Second Civil War (75)

* I acknowledge that Wednesday at 12pm is not a class day and time, but, provided you do not have class during this hour, your attendance is expected at what should be an enjoyable, enlightening, and informal event. Lunch will be provided.
CP: Halstead, “The Chieftains and the Church”
podcast: This American Life, “Houses of Ill Repute” – Act III
CP: Steinhauer, “A Day of Friction Notable Even for a Fractious Congress”

19. On the Trail and In the Booth (November 10)
 Const: Article I, Sections 2-4
 Article II, Section 1
 12th, 17th, and 22nd Amendments
 CP: Crowley, “Survey Says…”
 podcast: This American Life, “The Facts Don’t Matter” – Act II
 SL: Johnson, No Place for Amateurs (67)
 CP: Everline, “Notes of an Opposition Researcher”
 podcast: DecodeDC and 99% Invisible, “The Political Stage”
 CP: Freedmen, “Thirty-Second Democracy”
 Ansolabehere and Iyengar, Going Negative
 Leibovich, “Memo to Self: Do Not Run for Office”

IV. Tensions

20. Black, White, and (Way More Than Fifty) Shades of Gray (November 13)
 Const: 13th-15th Amendments
 SL: West, Race Matters (5)
 CP: Williams, “Talking About Not Talking About Race”
 Coates, “Fear of a Black President”
 Cobb, “Barack X”
 Chait, “The Color of His Presidency”
 Klein, “Republicans and Democrats Are More Divided on Race Today Than in 1985”
 Hochschild, Weaver, and Burch, “Destabilizing the American Racial Order”

21. Cents and Sensibility (November 17)
 Const: Preamble
 podcast: This American Life, “Take the Money and Run for Office”
 Mayer, “State for Sale”
 SL: Kaiser, So Damn Much Money (64)
 video: “Wealth Inequality in America”
 CP: Bartels, “The New Gilded Age” from Unequal Democracy

22. Under Siege and Supervision (November 20)
 Const: 1st-10th Amendments
 SL: Glendon, Rights Talk (55)
 Byman and Wittes, “Reforming the NSA”
 Chemerinsky, “When Fear Threatens Freedom”
 Cole and Dempsey, “Conclusion” from Terrorism and the Constitution
 podcast: DecodeDC, “How One Bill Passed In the Aftermath of 9/11 is Still Shaping U.S. Modern Warfare”
V. Outputs and Outlooks

23. A Big F*%#*ing Deal (November 24)
   video: Kaiser Family Foundation, “Health Reform Hits Main Street”
   CP: Cohn, “How They Did It”
   Morone, “Big Ideas, Broken Institutions, and the Wrath at the Grass Roots”
   Peterson, “It Was a Different Time”
   Brown, “The Elements of Surprise”
   Hacker, “The Road to Somewhere”
   Kersh, “Health Reform: The Politics of Implementation”
   Jacobs, “America’s Critical Juncture: The Affordable Care Act and Its Reverberations”

24. America the Beautiful (or Hideous, or Weird) (December 1)
   CP: Parker, “Survey: America”
   podcast: BackStory, “City Upon a Hill”
   CP: Kingdon, “Describing the Comparisons” from America the Unusual
   Wilson, “Difference” from Only in America?
   Halstead, “The American Paradox”
   Roberts, “What Americanists Don’t Know About American Politics”

Conclusion

25. Kids These Days (December 4)
   Const: Article I, Section 2, Clause 2
   Article I, Section 3, Clause 3
   Article II, Section 1, Clause 5
   26th Amendment
   CP: Pew Research Center, “Millennials”
   Thompson, “Study: Millennials Deeply Confused About Their Politics, Finances, and Culture”
   Matthews, “This Poll Proves That Millennials Have Totally Incoherent Political Views”
   Brooks, “The Organization Kid”
   Martin, “The Problem With Youth Activism”
   Seery, excerpts from Too Young To Run?
   Fournier, “The Outsiders”
   Stolberg, “Young, Liberal, and Open to Big Government”