AMERICAN POLITICS

This course aims to deepen your understanding of the theory and practice of American politics. I want you to leave the course with the analytic tools with which to critically evaluate claims about American politics. In this class we will focus particular attention on evaluating both existing American political institutions and proposals to reform those institutions. To use the education establishment’s jargon, the “student learning outcomes” are to be able (1) to evaluate how well American governmental institutions, practices, and processes measure up to normative and constitutional theories, and (2) to analyze the efficacy and desirability of alternative institutional arrangements and political reforms.

The first half of the course focuses on elections, the primary institution through which citizen preferences are translated into public policy. Questions to be addressed here include: Who votes, who doesn't, and does it matter? What should we do, if anything, to encourage more people to vote? How well does the current electoral system work? Should we change the nominating process? And in light of the 2016 election, should we at last abolish the electoral college?

The second half of the course examines the major national political institutions: Congress, the presidency, and the Supreme Court. We will ask how well these institutions work and whether they could be made to work better. How can we make Congress more competitive or more responsive to popular preferences? Do we even want a more responsive legislature? Would term limits help? What about proportional representation? Or should we change the way we do redistricting? And what about the Senate, with its institutionalized anti-majoritarianism? Should we finally abolish the filibuster? And how democratic is it anyways to have a national legislature based on states rather than people? Has the presidency grown too powerful, or is the real problem that the president lacks the power to do what the people elected him to do? And is it fair or prudent to have Supreme Court justices elected for life? Does the constitutional structure created over two hundred years ago needs to be fundamentally changed? Is it time perhaps for a new constitutional convention?

Your grade will be based on a midterm (worth 20%) a final exam (30%), short response papers (25%), and class participation (25%). More than one unexcused absence will result in a full letter grade deduction from the final course grade; more than two unexcused absences will result in a deduction of two full letter grades; more than three unexcused absences will result in failing the class. If you are frequently late to class that may also result in a grade deduction.

Students who miss a class, whether excused or unexcused, must write a 500 word paper analyzing the reading that was assigned for the day they miss. Your class participation grade will be lowered by a full grade for every 500 word paper you do not turn in within a week of your return to class. The makeup paper must be turned in to me in class and submitted electronically via email, saved as a Word document.

Required texts are available for purchase at the Willamette Bookstore. The other readings indicated in the syllabus are available as pdfs on the class WISE page. The two books to be purchased are: Richard J. Ellis and Michael Nelson, Debating Reform: Conflicting Perspectives
on How to Fix the American Political System (CQ Press, 2017; 3rd ed.) and Martin Wattenberg, Is Voting for Young People? (2016; 4th ed.). In addition, you should register with the online version of the Washington Post and read it daily.

Readings available on WISE must be printed out and brought to class. In class you should always have the reading for that day on the desk in front of you. Sorry, but no laptops or other electronic devices may be used during class. Hopefully it goes without saying that no texting should take place during class.

Willamette's Credit Hour Policy holds that for every hour of class time there is an expectation of 2-3 hours work outside of class. Thus, you should anticipate spending roughly 6-9 hours each week outside of class engaged in course-related activities, such as studying, reading, and writing. Please tell me about any disabilities that will affect your participation in this course and any accommodations authorized by the Office of Disabilities Services. I expect you to be familiar with Willamette’s Plagiarism and Cheating Policy (http://www.willamette.edu/cla/catalog/resources/policies/index.php# plag).

My office is Smullin 324. Office hours are TH 10:30-12:30, and by appointment (my email is rellis@willamette.edu).

Schedule of Class Topics and Readings
1-1. (Jan. 17) Introduction: Politicians in the Public Mind

1-2 (Jan. 19) The Adults’ Lament: Why Don’t the Young Know More About Politics?
Wattenberg, Is Voting for Young People?, introduction and chapters 1-3 (pp. 1-88)
Watch John Oliver clip at https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=bq2_wSs Dw kQ

2-1 (Jan. 24) Is There a Turnout Problem?
Wattenberg, Is Voting for Young People?, chapters 4-6, 8 (pp. 89-150, 171-197)

2-2 (Jan. 26) Is There a New Civic Engagement?
Wattenberg, Is Voting for Young People?, chapter 7 (pp. 151-170)

3-1 (Jan. 31) Trust in Government and Democracy
Nathaniel Persily and Jon Cohen, “Americans are losing faith democracy—and in each other,” Washington Post, October 14, 2016

3-2 (Feb. 2) Should We Require National Service
Larry Sabato, A More Perfect Constitution (Walker & Company, 2007), 154-156, 166-178
Tod Lindberg (Con) debates “Resolved, the government should require national service for all

4-1. (Feb. 7) The Politics of Ballot Access
Michael Nelson (Pro) and Keith Bentele and Erin O'Brien (Con) debate “Resolved, States should enact voter ID laws and reduce early voting,” *Debating Reform*, 99-117

4-2 (Feb. 9) No class (I’m in Long Beach for an APSA Teaching and Learning Conference on Civic Engagement)

5-1 (Feb. 14) Should We Enfranchise the Disenfranchised?
Ron Hayduk (Pro) and Stanley Renshon (Con) debate “Resolved, residents who are not citizens should be granted the right to vote,” in Richard J. Ellis and Michael Nelson, *Debating Reform: Conflicting Perspectives on How to Fix the American Political System* (CQ Press, 2011), 265-281.
Erika Wood (Pro) and Roger Clegg (Con) debate “Resolved, Congress should pass the Democracy Restoration Act restoring the right to vote in federal elections to people with criminal records,” *Debating Reform*, 78-98

5-1 (Feb. 16) Two More Solutions: Compulsory Voting and Deliberation Day
Wattenberg, *Is Voting for Young People?* chapter 9 (pp. 198-212)
Jason Brennan (con) debates “Resolved, the United States should adopt compulsory voting,” *Debating Reform*, 146-154
Bruce Ackerman and James Fishkin, *Deliberation Day* (Yale, 2004), 3-14, 17-39

6-1 (Feb. 21) Choosing a President: The Nomination Process
Caroline Tolbert (Pro) and David Redlawsk (Con) debate: “Resolved, political parties should nominate candidates for president in a national primary,” *Debating Reform*, 173-195

6-2 (Feb. 23) Choosing a President: The Electoral College
George C. Edwards III (Pro) and Gary L. Gregg II (Con) debate “Resolved, the electoral college should be abolished,” *Debating Reform*, 286-305

7-1 (Feb. 28) Study for Midterm

7.2 (March 2) Midterm
8-1 (March 7) Ruling on the Voting Rights Act
*Shelby County v. Holder* (2013)

8.2 (March 9) Race and Redistricting

9-1 (March 14) The Politics of Congressional Redistricting
Elaine C. Kamarck (Pro) and Justin Buchler (Con) debate “Resolved, the redistricting process should be nonpartisan,” *Debating Reform*, 229-249

9-2 (March 16) Proportional Representation
Douglas Amy (Pro) and Brendan Doherty (Con) debate “Resolved, proportional representation should be adopted for U.S. House elections,” *Debating Reform*, 210-228

10-1 (March 21) The Undemocratic Senate
Bruce I. Oppenheimer (Pro) and John J. Pitney, Jr, (Con) debate “Resolved, the Senate should represent people not states,” *Debating Reform*, 250-265

10-2 (March 23) Repeal the 22nd Amendment
David Crockett (Pro) and Michael Korzi (Con) debate “Resolved, the Twenty-second Amendment should be repealed,” *Debating Reform*, 306-323

Spring Break (no class, March 28, 30)

11-1 (April 4) Make Government Less Transparent
Bruce Cain (Pro) and Gary Bass, Danielle Brian, and Norman Eisen (Con) debate “Resolved, American democracy needs less sunshine and more closed-door negotiations,” *Debating Reform*, 19-38

11-2 (April 6) Congress Should Bring Back Earmarks
Scott A. Frisch and Sean Q Kelly (Pro) and Jeffrey Lazarus (Con) debate “Resolved, Congress should bring back earmarks,” *Debating Reform*, 195-209

12-1 (April 11) Make Government More Responsible
12-2 (April 13) Abolish the Filibuster
Steven S. Steven (Pro) and Wendy Schiller (Con) debate “Resolved, Senate Rule XXII should be amended so that filibusters can be ended by a majority vote,” Debating Reform, 266-286

13-1 (April 18) Mending the Judicial Appointment Process
David Yalof (Pro) and John Maltese (Con) debate “Resolved the president has too much power in the selection of judges,” in Richard J. Ellis and Michael Nelson, eds., Debating the Presidency (CQ Press 2015, 3rd ed.), 246-265

13-2 (April 20) End Lifetime Tenure for Supreme Court Justices
David Karol (Pro) and Ward Farnsworth (Con) debate “Resolved, the terms of Supreme Court Justices should be limited to eighteen years,” Debating Reform, 341-361

14-1 (April 25) Getting Back to the Original Intent
George Will, “Progressives are wrong about the essence of the Constitution,” Washington Post, April 16, 2014

14-2 (April 27) Amending the Constitution
Sanford Levinson (Pro) and David Kyvig (Con) debate “Resolved, Article V should be revised to make it easier to amend the Constitution and to call a constitutional convention,” Debating Reform, 1-19

Final Exam: Saturday, May 6, 2017, from 2-5 pm