



Political Science, Lyon College

## POL 105-04: The American Experience

SPRING 2024

Derby 16 — Tue & Thu 1:00-2:15 PM

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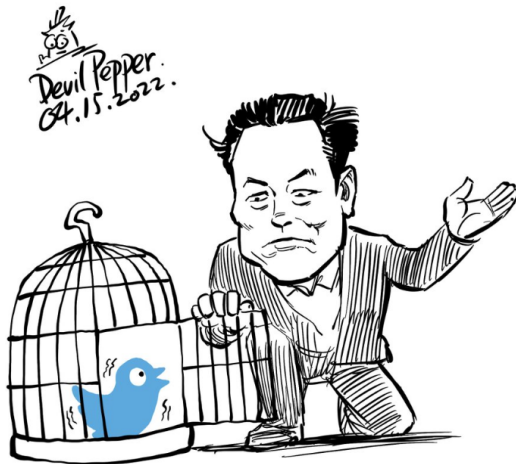
**Instructor:** Brendan Connell

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**Office Hours:** M 2-3:30; T/R 11-12

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### Course Description

The American Experience is designed to introduce all first-year students to the main institutions and ideas of the American political tradition in order to enhance their ability to perform the duties of citizenship within that tradition. Throughout the term, we will focus on the ideas that drove the creation of American democracy, how authority is distributed between different branches and levels of government, and how different societal actors fit in with the functioning of representative democracy. This course is also designed to provide students with knowledge and skills that enable them to positively contribute to the everyday political process.

## Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, successful students will be able to:

1. Describe the U.S. political system and its evolution throughout history
2. Think critically and fairly consider both sides of an argument based on empirical evidence prior to forming answers to a question
3. Defend their position on political issues in class debates
4. Collaborate and be part of a cohesive team on a group project
5. Communicate their ideas clearly and concisely through both opinionated and policy-oriented style writing
6. Communicate their ideas orally and through visual presentation (such as PowerPoint)
7. Improve the civic life of their community and beyond

## Required Materials

- **Textbook:** Barbour, Christine. 2021. *American Government: Long Story Short*. Second Edition. CQ Press. **ISBN:** 978-1071808979
- All other readings will be posted on Canvas in PDF form.

## Grading

Letter grades for the course are computed as follows: **A** = 90-100; **B** = 80-89; **C** = 70-79; **D** = 60-69; **F** = < 60.

Your grade for the course is comprised of the following criteria:

1) Exam 1 (Feb 29) .....	20%
2) Exam 2 (May 7) .....	25%
3) Class Participation/Attendance .....	10%
4) In-Class Quizzes .....	10%
5) Editorial Response (due Feb 22) .....	15%
6) Group Project .....	20% Total
Policy Brief (due May 2) .....	15%
Group Presentation (Week 16) .....	5%

**Exams (45% Total).** There are two non-cumulative exams for this course. Exam 1 counts as 20% toward your final grade while Exam 2 counts as 25% toward your final grade. Both exams will consist of three parts. For the first part, you will answer a series of True/False questions. For the second part, you will be given a set of terms and be asked to define them in 2-3 sentences. For the third part, you will be given a choice of short response questions to answer in 1-2 paragraphs. Generally, the exams will test your knowledge of key concepts as well as your ability to relate the concepts and course material to real world problems. I will distribute a study guide prior to each exam. The study guide will contain a complete list of terms and short response questions that may show up on the exam.

**Class Participation (10%).** Attendance and participation are essential for doing well in this course. I take attendance at the beginning of each class. More than two unexcused absences will result in a lower attendance grade. In addition, I evaluate the quality/quantity of your participation throughout the semester. Generally speaking, students that attend class but do not participate can expect to receive a “C” for this portion of their grade. Your compliance with the course technology policy (see below) also affects your participation grade.

**In-Class Quizzes (10%).** Throughout the semester, I will administer six unannounced quizzes at the beginning of class. These quizzes are intended to be brief (3-5 minutes) and will test you on the required readings for that day and/or material from the previous class. At the end of the semester, I will drop your lowest quiz grade. Additional time for quizzes will not be granted to students who arrive late to class.

**Editorial Response (15%).** To encourage critical thinking and teach more opinionated-style writing, all students are required to write a 500-750 word response to an editorial with which they disagree with. First, read several editorials to get a feel for political opinion writing. Some great spots to look include *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *USA Today*, *Wall Street Journal*, etc. Choose *one* editorial with which you disagree. Make sure the editorial addresses a political topic of interest that relates to American politics. Then, in the space of 500-750 words, briefly summarize the author’s position and provide your own response or critique of that position. In other words, why are you right and why is the author wrong? Stronger papers will bring in outside sources to defend their position. If you do bring in outside sources, make sure your sources are correctly cited in text with a bibliography attached to the back (the bibliography does not count toward the word count).

**Please staple a copy of the editorial to your essay and provide a word count at the top of the page.** You may submit your editorial response at any point during the first six weeks of the semester, but the deadline for this assignment is by class time on **Thursday, February 22nd**. Late papers will be penalized 10 percentage points for every day late. Papers that exceed the word limit will also be penalized 10 percentage points.

**Group Project (20% Total).** All students are required to collaborate on a group project where they will research an issue in U.S. politics, compile a comprehensive written report on the issue, and present their work in front of the class during the last week of the semester. The purpose of this exercise is to develop students' writing and presentation skills, while also encouraging students to become an expert on a real-world policy issue that interests them. The paper is worth 15% of your final grade and the final presentation is worth 5% of your final grade. Please refer to the separate assignment sheet for step-by-step instructions and specific grading criteria. Late papers will be penalized 10 percentage points for each day late.

## Course Technology Policy

In the interest of creating an optimal environment for learning, **the use of laptops and cell phones are banned during class time**, barring exceptional circumstances. Please plan to bring paper and something to write with in order to take notes. Noncompliance with this policy will result in a lower participation grade while perfect compliance with this policy will push your participation grade upward.

The learning management system (LMS) we will utilize throughout the semester is Canvas. All course material (e.g., syllabus, assignment instructions), readings, grades, class slides, and other useful resources will be posted on Canvas. Students will also use Canvas to submit all writing assignments. Please let me know if you have trouble accessing Canvas at any point throughout the semester.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

**Note:** “AmGov” refers to your textbook. Unless otherwise noted, readings for the week should be completed before Tuesday’s class.

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### Week 1 (Jan 16 & 18): Introduction

*Key Questions: What is politics versus “political science”? Why have a (democratic) government?*

 Readings:

- Course Syllabus
- Group Project Instructions
- Read for Thursday:** Declaration of Independence [Posted on Canvas]

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### Week 2 (Jan 23 & 25): The Origins of American Government

*Key Questions: What were the major compromises involved in drafting a constitution? How does the Constitution navigate the trade-off between ineffective and unlimited government?*

 Readings:

- AmGov, Chapter 2

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### Week 3 (Jan 30 & Feb 1): Federalism

*Key Questions: What are the advantages and disadvantages of a federal system? How has federalism evolved over time in the United States?*

 Readings:

- Federalist Papers #10 & #51
- SoRelle, Mallory E. and Alexis N. Walker. “Both Democrats and Republicans Care About ‘States’ Rights’ — When It Suits Them.” *Washington Post*. June 23, 2017.

Pick **one** article to read for Thursday:

- Greene, Jamal. “Federalism Worsens Divisions Over Abortion in America.” *The Economist*. June 22, 2022.
- Watkins, William J. “Federalism Can Solve the Abortion Fight.” *The Hill*. September 3, 2019.

### **Week 4 (Feb 6 & 8): Civil Liberties**

*Key Questions: What are the limits of civil liberties? To what extent should civil liberties be interpreted or read literally from the Constitution?*

 Readings:

- AmGov, Chapter 3 up until Section 3.5
- Bokan-Lindell, Spencer. "What the Joe Rogan Backlash Reveals About How We Handle Misinformation." *New York Times*. February 1, 2022.

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### **Week 5 (Feb 13 & 15): Civil Rights**

*Key Questions: How have different groups been discriminated throughout U.S. history? Why do social inequalities persist in the U.S. despite the Constitution?*

 Readings:

- Rest of AmGov, Chapter 3

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### **Week 6 (Feb 20 & 22): The Legislature**

*Key Questions: Why is it so hard for Congress to pass bills, especially those that serve the interest of the nation? How does institutional design affect democratic representation?*

 Readings:

- AmGov, Chapter 4
- Simulation Instructions

**!** Important Dates:

- Editorial Response Paper Due in Class on Thursday, February 22nd**

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### **Week 7 (Feb 27 & 29): The Legislature (Cont'd) & Exam 1**

*Key Questions: What is going to be on the exam?!*

 Readings:

- Exam 1 Study Guide

**!** Important Dates:

- Exam 1 in Class on Thursday, February 29th**

**Week 8 (Mar 5 & 7): The Presidency**

*Key Questions: What factors limit and expand executive power? What affects presidential popularity?*

 Readings:

- AmGov, Chapter 5 up until Section 5.4

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**Week 9 (Mar 12 & 14): The Bureaucracy**

*Key Questions: Why is the federal bureaucracy so big? Do Americans need more bureaucracy or less?*

 Readings:

- Rest of AmGov, Chapter 5

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**WEEK 10**

**NO CLASS — SPRING BREAK**

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**Week 11 (Mar 26 & 28): The Courts**

*Key Questions: Where do the powers of the Supreme Court come from? Is there any room for politics in the judicial branch?*

 Readings:

- AmGov, Chapter 6
- Rivkin Jr., David B. and James Taranto. "Samuel Alito, the Supreme Court's Plain-Spoken Defender." *Wall Street Journal*, July 8, 2023.

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**Week 12 (Apr 2 & 4): Public Opinion**

*Key Questions: How can public opinion be measured? What factors drive Americans' policy preferences and voting behavior?*

 Readings:

- AmGov, Chapter 8

### **Week 13 (Apr 9 & 11): Parties & Interest Groups**

*Key Questions: Why do we have political parties? Are special interests beneficial or detrimental to American democracy?*

 Readings:

- AmGov, Chapter 7
- Levitsky, Steven, and Daniel Ziblatt. 2018. *How Democracies Die*: Chapter 2.

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### **Week 14 (Apr 16 & 18): The Role of the Media**

*Key Questions: How much is/should the media be regulated? How do news sources shape political narratives?*

 Readings:

- AmGov, Chapter 9

Pick **one** article to read for Thursday:

- Vladeck, Steve. “Elon Musk’s Basic Misunderstandings of Free Speech Are a Problem for All of Us.” *MSNBC*. December 11, 2022.
- Rosen, Jeffrey. “Elon Musk Is Right That Twitter Should Follow the First Amendment.” *The Atlantic*. May 2, 2022.

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### **Week 15 (Apr 23 & 25): U.S. Public Policy**

*Key Questions: How much should the U.S. government be involved in tackling problems? What role do the different branches of government play in domestic and foreign policy-making?*

 Readings:

- AmGov, Chapter 10

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### **Week 16 (Apr 30 & May 2): Student Presentations**

 Readings:

- No Readings

**!** Important Dates:



- Group Policy Briefs Due Thursday, May 2 (in Class)**

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**Week 17 (May 7): Final Exam**

 Readings:

- Exam 2 Study Guide

 Important Dates:

- Final Exam in Class on May 7th**