

Contemporary American Politics

Fall 2020 semester

Instructor: Prof. David Green
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Office Hours: *by appointment*

Meeting day and time: Mondays, 16:30 – 18:00*

**This class will be conducted fully online for the Fall 2020 term with pre-recorded lectures uploaded every Monday*

Goals: Although American political influence is arguably on the decline in recent years, the US remains the closest thing to a hegemon in the international system. The inner workings of the American political system are also somewhat unique compared to other countries. This course aims to provide students with a basic understanding of how politics work in the US, explaining the legislative, executive and judicial processes, as well as discussing other major players in the American political system and some current political issues. This not only helps to understand the workings of one of the world's major powers, but can serve as a useful comparison to the political workings of other countries.

Objectives: Stemming from comparative politics, this course aims give students a broad understanding of American politics and the American political system. We will review the major political components of the US, including the executive, legislative and judicial branches of government, non-governmental actors, and cover some current events in the latter part of the course.

Course Text:

Jillson, Cal. 2018. *American Government: Political Development and Institutional Change*, 9th edition. New York: Routledge.

NOTE: There is no need to purchase the text. PDF files of the assigned readings will be uploaded to NUCT weekly.

Additional course materials will be distributed in class or online as necessary.

Requirements for taking the course: No prerequisites are required. However, students should have a good command of the English language and come to class willing to discuss the week's topic.

Evaluation Methods:

30% Short assignments

30% Midterm Exam

40% Final Exam

Course Schedule:

October 5

1. Course Introduction

- Overview of course syllabus
- Explanation of reading materials
- Introduction to American politics

October 12

2. Origins of the US political system

- Declaration of Independence
- The US Constitution
- Bill of Rights

Jillson, Chapter 1: the origins of American political principles, p. 1-24

October 19

3. US political culture

- American exceptionalism
- Civic engagement
- Political participation

Jillson, Chapter 4: political socialization and public opinion, p. 88-118

October 26

4. Congress

- Congressional system
- Congressional elections
- The House and Senate

Jillson, Chapter 9: congress – partisanship, polarization and gridlock, p. 262-298

November 2

5. The Presidency

- Presidential powers
- Presidential change over time
- Running for President

Jillson, Chapter 10: the President – governing in uncertain times, p. 299-336

November 9

6. The Courts

- The US Supreme Court
- Marbury v. Madison
- US court system

Jillson, Chapter 12: the federal courts – activism versus restraint, p. 366-403

November 16

7. The Bureaucracy

- Regulatory commissions
- Policy implementation
- Accountability

Jillson, Chapter 11: bureaucracy – redesigning government for the twenty first century, p. 337-365

November 23 – Holiday

November 30

8. **Midterm Exam**

December 7

9. Voting and elections

- Patterns of voting in the US
- Major political ideologies
- Current issues in voting

Jillson, Chapter 8: voting, campaigns, and elections, p. 224-261

December 14

10. Political parties

- Democrats
- Republicans
- Third parties

Jillson, Chapter 7: political parties – winning the right to govern, p. 186-223

December 21

11. Interest groups

- Lobbyists
- NGOs and politically active groups
- Grassroots groups

Jillson, Chapter 6: interest groups – the politics of influence, p. 153-185

December 28 – Holiday

January 4 – Holiday

January 11 – Holiday

January 18

12. The media

- Free speech history
- Major media groups
- “Fake news”

Jillson, Chapter 5: the mass media and the political agenda

January 25

13. Current issues #1 – civil disobedience

Readings to be distributed later

February 1

14. Current issues #2 – the presidential election

Readings to be distributed later

February 8

15. **Final Exam**