

American Government

Spring 2017 • Borough of Manhattan
Community College • The City University of
New York • Department of Social Sciences

POL 100:1201 • Room N468
Mondays & Wednesdays, 12:30 pm – 1:45 pm

POL 100:1602 • Room N468
Mondays & Wednesdays, 4:00 pm – 5:15 pm

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Office hours: Wednesdays & Thursdays,
11:00 am – 12:30 pm

Description

This course examines how government works in the United States of America and how it came to work that way; my hope is that it also serves you well as a general introduction to political thinking. We will examine the founding of the United States and the development of American politics up to the present, paying particular attention to the institutions of government, their consequences, and the place of citizens in relation to them.

Required text and other resources

Students will need to buy the following book, which is available at the BMCC bookstore.

Cal Jillson, *American Government: Political Development and Institutional Change*, 8th edition
(Routledge, ISBN 9781138783669)

I also recommend that each student own a good dictionary, such as the *American Heritage College Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, or the *New Oxford American Dictionary*.

Assignments and evaluation

You will complete a variety of homework activities as well as two quizzes and two exams.

HOMEWORK

Reading assignments, and the dates by which they should be completed, are indicated on the course schedule at the end of this syllabus. I trust that as you read you will take notes, including notes on your reactions to and questions about the readings. If you would like advice on note-taking, feel free to ask me.

In addition to whatever notes you take while you read, you will also complete a series of daily (or almost daily) homework assignments. These assignments will ask you to write for about ten or

twenty minutes in response to each reading assignment. (I will hand out more detailed homework instructions in class.) I encourage you to complete these homework assignments as you complete the reading assignments. However, rather than collecting homeworks day by day, I will collect a homework packet or portfolio from you on each exam day. The first packet will contain all of the homeworks you have completed since the beginning of the semester; the second will contain all of the homeworks you have completed since you turned in the first packet. At the end of the semester, I will give you full credit for your homework if you have written a substantial amount for all or almost all of these assignments. Your homework will contribute 20% of your course grade.

QUIZZES

On each of the quiz days listed in the course schedule below, you will use part of our class time to complete a short quiz, after which we will use the rest of our class time to review the quiz together. Quizzes will include activities that ask you to identify or supply answers to questions about terms and ideas from the course readings. Your quiz grade will incorporate both the initial writing you do in response to the quiz as well as your participation in the review discussion. Each of the two quizzes will contribute 10% of your course grade.

EXAMS

On each of the exam days listed in the course schedule below, you will use our class time to complete an exam. Exams will include a variety of tasks, such as filling in or drawing charts or diagrams, recognizing correct answers, using key terms, explaining quotations from the course readings, or writing short essays. During the class period prior to each exam, we will review the themes of the preceding few weeks of class. I will distribute a study guide about a week before each review day. If you will not be able to take an exam on time, it is your responsibility to let me know, either in advance or as soon as possible afterwards, so that we can make appropriate arrangements. Each of the two exams will contribute 30% of your course grade.

Decorum and attendance

I expect you to conduct yourself in a courteous and scholarly manner, to attend every class session, to arrive on time (that is, *before* the time the class is scheduled to begin), and to bring with you to class note-taking materials, this syllabus, and the assigned readings for that day. Turn off cell phones and similar devices during class.

I will do you the courtesy of trusting that you will miss class only if necessary; I ask that you do me the courtesy of living up to that expectation. Thus I am not interested in making distinctions between excused and unexcused absences, and I will not generally need to see doctors' notes and the like. However, in extreme cases I reserve the right to apply the college's attendance policy:

The maximum number of absence hours is limited to one more class hour than the contact hours as indicated in the BMCC college catalog. For example, you may be enrolled in a four hour class that meets four times a

week. You are allowed five hours of absence, not five days. In the case of excessive absence, the instructor has the option to lower the grade or assign an “F” or “WU” grade.

Any student in this course who misses more than one third of the class sessions (that is, ten or more) for any reason or who is late repeatedly to an extent that I consider equivalent will receive a failing grade for the course. I am not likely to make exceptions to this policy, but if you think your case merits an exception, it is your responsibility to discuss your situation with me as soon as you realize that you have or might have an attendance problem.

How to do well in this class

READ ACTIVELY

Take your time with the readings for this class, always keeping in mind the course’s larger themes. As you read, take notes and look up words in your dictionary.

PARTICIPATE IN CLASS

Ask questions. Listen to your classmates and respond to their ideas. Take lots of notes.

DO YOUR WORK WITH INTEGRITY

Here is a BMCC statement regarding the college policy on plagiarism and academic integrity.

Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else’s ideas, words, or artistic/scientific/technical work as one’s own creation. A student who copies or paraphrases published or on-line material, or another person’s research, without properly identifying the source(s) is committing plagiarism...Plagiarism carries a range of penalties commensurate with severity of the infraction. The instructor may, for example, require the work to be redone, reduce the course grade, fail the student in the course, or refer the case to the Faculty-Student Disciplinary Committee (see Article 15.4 of the Bylaws of the Board of Trustees). Cases referred to that committee could result in suspension or expulsion from the college.

I am not merciful toward students who violate this policy. If one of your assignments includes text that you have not written but have presented as if it were your own writing, you can expect repercussions, possibly in the form of a failing grade for the assignment or even for the course.

ASK FOR HELP

The best time to find me in my office will be during my scheduled office hours, which are listed on the first page of this syllabus. I will often be on campus at other times as well. If you contact me by email, give your message a subject heading and use a letter format including a proper salutation, complete sentences with standard spelling and capitalization, and an appropriate closing including your full name.

If for any reason you are having trouble completing the assignments in this course or if you expect to miss an exam, let me know as soon as possible. If you contact me well before a due date, I will in certain circumstances be open to granting you a deadline extension or making other appropriate arrangements to make sure that you are able to do your best on the assignments. If, however, you try to offer excuses for late or missing work *after* it is due, I will not be as sympathetic.

Also, note the BMCC policy on academic adjustments for students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations or academic adjustments for this course must contact the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities. BMCC is committed to providing equal access to all programs and curricula to all students.

Let me know if you have questions about this or about anything else that I might be able to help you with.

Miscellany

The political science faculty at BMCC has agreed on the following goals for all sections of POL 100.

Students should be able to understand institutions and practices of government and politics in the United States, interact with course material and think critically about political issues and concepts, and recognize the ways that government impacts their lives and how they can influence political processes.

The writing activities and exams described above will reflect your progress toward this set of goals, and will allow you to progress toward BMCC's general education goals, especially in the areas of communications skills, social and behavioral sciences, and values. Note also that this course counts toward the "U.S. Experience in its Diversity" part of the Pathways Flexible Core.

Schedule

Except for the McWilliams essay, all reading assignments are from Jillson's *American Government*, 8th edition.

Day	Topic	Assignment
M 1/30	How (and why) to study American government	(No reading assignment)
W 2/1	Our political situation	Wilson Carey McWilliams, "Democracy as Means and End" (handout)
M 2/6	What is politics?	Chapter 1, pp. 3-14
W 2/8	The roots of American politics	Chapter 1, pp. 14-22; Chapter 2, pp. 27-33
W 2/15	The right of representation	Declaration of Independence (pp. 546-548)
W 2/22		QUIZ 1
M 2/27	Uniting the states	Chapter 2, pp., 33-45; Articles of Confederation (pp. 549-554)
W 3/1	Founding a modern republic	Chapter 2, pp. 45-49; Constitution of the U.S. (pp. 555-561)
M 3/6	Constitutions and citizens	Chapter 2, pp. 49-56; Amendments to the Constitution (pp. 561-566)
W 3/8	The great transformation	(Film in class; no reading assignment)
M 3/13	Refounding the republic?	Chapter 3, pp. 72-76; Chapter 15, pp. 476-480
W 3/15		Review discussion (no reading assignment)
M 3/20		EXAM 1 (& HOMEWORK PACKET 1 DUE)
W 3/22	Political culture and civil society	Chapter 4, pp. 91-95; Chapter 5, pp. 123-134; Chapter 6, pp. 159-171
M 3/27	The emergence of political parties	Chapter 7, pp. 192-201; Chapter 8, pp. 231-235
W 3/29	The reinvention of political parties	Chapter 7, pp. 201-204; Chapter 8, pp. 235-244
M 4/3	Political parties as networks	Chapter 7, pp. 204-226
W 4/5	Citizens, or merely voters?	Chapter 8, pp. 244-266
W 4/19		QUIZ 2
Th 4/20	Democracy and legislative power	Chapter 9, pp. 269-281
M 4/24	Can Congress legislate?	Chapter 9, pp. 281-303
W 4/26	The rise of the President's power	Chapter 10, pp. 307-323
M 5/1	The invention of bureaucracy	Chapter 11, pp. 346-356
W 5/3	The limits of the President's power	Chapter 10, pp. 323-342
M 5/8	Bureaucracy and democracy	Chapter 11, pp. 356-372
W 5/10	The history of judicial power	Chapter 12, pp. 376-395
M 5/15	Law and citizens	Chapter 12, pp. 395-410
W 5/17		Review discussion (no reading assignment)
M 5/22		EXAM 2 (& HOMEWORK PACKET 2 DUE)