

Instructor: Ms. Melissa A. Bell  
Mon-Thur. 3:30-6:45 p.m.  
Tydings 1111 (classroom)  
Office Hours: Tuesday 12-2pm, or by appointment  
Tydings 2126 (Office location)  
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**GVPT 170**  
**Introduction to American Government**  
**Department of Government and Politics**  
**University of Maryland**  
**Winter 2009**

This course is an introductory course to the study of the American political system. We will examine the American concepts of equality and liberty and the inherent tension between the two; the Constitution; the way people can influence government through political parties, elections, interest groups and the media; Congress, the presidency, and the courts.

***Course Requirements:***

20%: Participation/Class Preparedness  
15%: Cross-fire  
15%: Presentation  
25%: Midterm  
25%: Final Exam

***Participation and Class Preparedness:***

Students will be expected to come to class prepared and contribute to class discussion. Students will be expected to have done the assigned reading for each class and come prepared with thoughtful comments and questions and engage with one another in class discussion. Remember, participation is worth 20% of your final grade. This is a small class and our collective success in the classroom will depend on everyone coming prepared with comments and questions. Due to the time constraints of a Winter term course, students on average will be expected to read a lot per day. I highly advise students to keep up with the assigned readings so as to not fall behind. It would be very difficult to catch up if one begins to fall behind in the readings for some reason. Therefore my simple advice is this: don't fall behind in the readings.

***Cross-Fires:*** Throughout the semester students will sign up to participate in a cross-fire. The cross-fire is an in-class debate that will fall under the rubric of the topic of the day. The cross-fire may be a debate based on historical arguments (such as the Federalists vs. the Anti-federalists) or a debate on a contemporary political issue. One student will be assigned the affirmative position and the other the negative. Students will be expected to draw on the readings from class, as well as some light outside research for support. Students will then need to submit a one page outline of their argument the day of the cross-fire in class (please remember to include citations on the outline if appropriate.)

**Presentation:** The textbook provides a broad approach to the introduction of American Politics; however, supplemental reading will be needed to appropriately cover each topic. Because students are asked to read a lot per day I have decided it would be more efficient to ask each student to read and report on one supplemental reading as opposed to assigning a bunch of the supplemental readings to everyone. Students will be allowed to choose an article (or book chapter) to report on to the class. The article (or book chapter) must be relevant to the day's topic. This assignment shall be approached as a mini-book report. Students will also be asked to submit a 2-3 page summary. The summary and presentation will provide the reader with background, summarize the main points of the reading, as well as include an assessment of the argument made in the reading. The paper will be due on the day of the presentation in class. Please see me for suggestions if you are unsure what to choose to report on.

**Exams:**

Students will take two exams throughout the semester: a midterm and a final exam. Both of the exams will consist of multiple choice questions and an essay question. The final exam will be cumulative. Students will be expected to bring a pencil with a working eraser to class for the exam since we will be utilizing scantrons for a portion of the test. It is not the responsibility of the instructor to provide you with a pencil and/or eraser.

**Required Texts:**

O'Conner, Karen and Larry Sabato. *Continuity and Change: American Government*. Pearson. 2009 edition.

**Expectations of Students:**

While the following section is *not* an exhaustive list of expectations for student conduct experience has taught me that there are some common mistakes that should be addressed at the beginning of the semester.

- 1) Punctuality: Students are expected to arrive for class on time. While it is understood that sometimes events happen beyond our control that may cause tardiness, chronic lateness is inexcusable. Class begins at 3:30 p.m., which means I begin exactly at 3:30p.m.and expect you to be in your seats, prepared to take notes.
- 2) Electronic Communication: The University has supplied you with an official email address. You are responsible for checking that e-mail regularly. When you email me please make it a point to always address the e-mail, provide a proper subject, and ALWAYS sign your email. I would also advise against using slang that may be common "text language" or "instant message" language. This is something you should always keep in mind when communicating electronically with a professor.
- 3) Personal Responsibility: Remember you are in charge of your education. If you are unclear about something it is up to you to: a) seek out the answer for yourself in a timely manner; and then b) follow up with me during office hours or through e-mail if you are still unclear. In addition, directions are to be taken seriously. For

example, if I ask you to bring a pencil to an exam then you should come prepared with a pencil for the exam.

- 4) Academic Dishonesty: All work must be done in strictest accordance with the letter of the honor code of the University of Maryland. All violations will be prosecuted. If you have any doubts or questions whatsoever as to what constitutes a violation, feel free to speak to me ahead of time. It is always better to be safe than sorry if you are unsure. For more information please see: <http://www.bsos.umd.edu/for-students/advising/academic-integrity-honor-pledge-and-legal-aid-.aspx>
- 5) Absences: Campus Senate policy requires students who are absent due to illness/injury to furnish documentary support to the instructor. I require students to contact me by email or by phone prior to class time in which you indicate that you have an illness or an injury. You must provide written documentation verifying your illness/injury immediately upon your return to class. You will not be allowed to turn in missed assignments or make up quizzes, tests, papers, etc. if you have not provided this documentation. Documentation not presented to me in a timely manner will not be accepted. In addition, if it is found that you have falsified the documentation provided, I will refer you to the University's Student Conduct Office.

### **Grading:**

F (59 and below): Failure; did not correctly complete all elements of an assignment or did not complete any components of an assignment to a satisfactory level.

D-/+ (60-69): Struggled with certain aspects of an assignment; some, but not all components of an assignment were completed at a satisfactory level.

C -/+ (70-79): Completed all of the components of an assignment at a satisfactory level.

B -/+ (80-89): Completed all of the components of an assignment at a more than satisfactory level; an above average performance.

A-/+ (90-100): Completed all of the components of an assignment at an exemplary level. A's are not often assigned.

### **Disabilities:**

I will make every effort to accommodate students who are registered with the Disability Support Services (DSS) Office and who provide me with a University of Maryland DSS Accommodation form.

### **Schedule of Readings:**

#### **I. Roots of the American Political System**

**Jan. 5**            **The American Political Landscape and Origins of the Constitution**  
Ch. 1& 2 (O'Conner and Sabato)

Review Syllabus

Sign up for cross-fire and presentation slots

\*No cross-fire or Presentation today

**Jan. 6**            **Federalism and State and Local Politics**  
Ch. 3&4 (O’Conner and Sabato)

Presentation: Gibilterra, Justin.

Presentation: Grant, Dale

Crossfire: Danny Berchenko and Katie Magers

As we read earlier in the semester the Federalists and the Anti-federalists disagreed over the role of the federal government. One student shall assume the role of a Federalist and the other an Anti-federalist. What are some of the concerns with a strong national government? What are the concerns about a nation of loosely affiliated states?

**Jan. 7**            **Civil Liberties and Civil Rights**  
Ch. 5 & 6 (O’Conner and Sabato)

**Presentation:** Emilie Openchowski

**Crossfire:** Nicholas Peirce and .....

Security vs. liberty is an example of competing democratic ideals the American political system has dealt with since its creation, from the Alien and Seditious Act to the contemporary issues facing policy-makers in a post 9/11 world. Ben Franklin was once quoted as saying “They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither safety nor liberty.” Do you agree with Franklin? Is Franklin’s quote still applicable to contemporary America? What is essential liberty?

**Jan. 8**            **Students will be required to go to the non-print media center in Hornbake Library and watch a documentary set aside on course reserve. Students will then be required to write a one page (double-spaced) reaction paper. This will count as the student’s class participation grade for the day. Please note the center closes by 5 p.m.**

**Part II: American Institutions**

**Jan. 12**            **Congress**  
Ch. 7 (O’Conner and Sabato)

**Presentation:** Simone Myrie

**Presentation:** Christina Ell

**Cross-fire:** As we know from the readings, incumbency is very powerful, especially for members of Congress. Some have suggested instituting term limits for members of Congress to help mediate the power of incumbency. Is this a good thing for democracy?

**Jan. 13**      **The Judiciary**  
Ch. 10 (O’Conner and Sabato)

**Presentation:** Tobi Smith-Kayode

**Presentation:** Richard Fields

**Cross-fire:** Some critics have accused the courts of making policy from the bench. Do you agree with this assessment? Is this a good or bad thing?

**Jan. 14**      **Midterm (1<sup>st</sup> half of class)**

**Executive Branch and the Bureaucracy**

Ch. 9 (O’Conner and Sabato)

**Presentation:** Michael Shaw

\*No cross-fire today.

### **Part III: American Political Behavior**

**Jan. 15**      **Voting, Elections and the Campaign Process**  
Ch. 13 & 14 (O’Conner and Sabato)

\*Guest Speaker: Aaron Ver

(Mr. Ver worked on both the 2006 Kaine Gubernatorial campaign as well as the 2008 Clinton Presidential Campaign)

**Presentation:** Danny Berchenko

**Cross-fire:** Christina El and Emilie Openchowski

How important is information in voting? Should someone vote if they are not educated on the issues? Is asking all voters to be educated on the issues a realistic request?

**Jan. 19**      **No class (Martin Luther King Day)**

**Jan. 20**      **The Presidency** (While the Presidency does belong under behavior his schedule switch was made to accommodate the topic on the day of Inauguration)  
Ch. 8

**Discuss the Presidential Inauguration**

**Presentation:** Dhakshan Rollins

**Presentation:** Sherry Benedek

**Cross-fire:** Dale Grant and Simone Myers

The founders never intended for the Presidency to be as powerful as it is today. The President is now the leader of their respective party, focuses on both domestic and foreign policy as well as maintains the duties originally intended by the Founders. Has the Presidency become too powerful?

**Jan. 21**

**Political Parties and Interest Groups**

Ch. 12 & 16

**Presentation:** Katie Magers

**Presentation:** Nicholas Peirce

**Cross-fire:** Nicholas Shaw and Justin Gibilterra

Our system is designed to encourage a two party system. Is this a good thing or a bad thing? What are some of these institutional incentives? Would we better off encouraging third party involvement?

**\*The last hour of class will be reserved for a review for the final.**

**Jan. 22**

**Final Exam**