POLI 325
United States Politics 1

Term: Fall 2018
Instructor: Simon Langlois-Bertrand
Office, office hours & phone: Please see MyCourses for up-to-date information
Class Time: Wednesdays and Fridays 8:35am to 9:55am (DUFF THTR 1)
E-mail: simon.langlois-bertrand@mcgill.ca (please put POLI325 in the subject)

Conference and teaching assistant information can be found on MyCourses

Prerequisite: POLI 200 or POLI 212 or written permission from the instructor.
Restrictions: Not open to students who have taken POLI 325D1/D2

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to U.S. politics. It discusses the founding of the American political system, with emphasis on the major documents, the Constitutional Convention, and the Federalist Papers, as well as the development of the constitutional system over time. Other fundamental characteristics, including political thought and federalism, will be examined. The main institutions, including the presidency, Congress, and the Supreme Court, will receive attention.

The course is built around three main objectives, ensuring that students will:
1. Learn the key historical and technical elements underpinning the U.S. political system and its institutions;
2. Understand the constraints that these elements put on the political institutions and their capacity to resolve political and public policy issues;
3. Think critically about how this capacity to resolve public problems and the perspectives it provides for the future of U.S. politics.

MyCourses and communication

Students will be provided with detailed instructions and guidelines for each assignment in class and via MyCourses. Students are responsible for getting this information and contacting the instructor or their teaching assistant for any precisions they feel necessary. Regular updates will be posted on MyCourses, so students are strongly encouraged to check the website on a daily basis for updates, as well as ensuring that their McGill email works properly.
All assignments will be submitted through the MyCourses platform.

**Course format and text**

This course combines lectures and conferences. At the beginning of the term, lectures will be held from 8:35 to 9:55. Later in the term we will switch to one-hour lectures, with the exception of the midterm examination session on October 19th.

Announcements will be made during class and on MyCourses regarding registration for conferences and when they will begin.

All assigned readings are mandatory. Many of the readings are from the following two texts:


The two books are available in the Bookstore as a bundle. All other readings will be posted on MyCourses, with links through the library website when applicable.

**Evaluation**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mid-term examination</td>
<td>October 19th</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research paper</td>
<td>November 27th</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conference participation</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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**Policy on late assignments.** All assignments are due online through MyCourses, before 11:59pm on the night of the due date. No email copy will be accepted, no paper copy will be accepted. Exceptions on these criteria must be justified with the instructor ahead of the due date, in which case alternative arrangements will be made if necessary. Late assignments will be penalized by 5% a day, up to a maximum of 10 days (50%). The midnight cut-off always applies to determine the number of days to be counted in the late penalty. Assignments submitted after 11:59pm on the night of the tenth day following the due date will automatically be given a grade of 0.

Extensions/exceptions will not be granted except on medical grounds, with appropriate documentation. These rules are enforced to ensure fairness across the large number of students registered in the course.

**Research paper.** Instructions for the research paper will be provided in class during the first week of the semester. Note that although the paper is due on November 27th, the research question must be approved by the instructor before the end of week #4.
Conference attendance and participation. Information on conference schedule and participation grades will be provided in the first week of the semester.

Mid-term and final exam. The mid-term will be held in class on October 19th. The cumulative final exam will be held during the exam period. A description of each exam’s format and content will be provided in class.

Topics and schedule

The following list of topics is offered as a tentative schedule only. Flexibility being essential in order to cover the course material at a pace that works for both the students and the instructor, some changes may be made at the discretion of the latter. Please refer to MyCourses throughout the semester for an up-to-date list of readings and topics.

Week #1 – September 5th and 7th
Introduction and historical background

Readings:
- Wilson et al., Chapter 1
- Familiarize yourself with the highlights of American political history, and study the declaration of independence

Week #2 – September 12th and 14th
Emergence of the Constitution

Readings:
- Wilson et al., Chapter 2
- Lasser, Chapter 1
- Federalist papers #37, #70, #78
- Study the US Constitution carefully

Week #3 – September 19th and 21st
Political thought

Readings:
- J.A. Morone and R. Kersh (2018), By the People, 3rd edition, Oxford University Press, Chapter 2: The ideas that shape America, pp. 22–55
• Chris McGreal (2017), “‘The S-word’: how young Americans fell in love with socialism”, *The Guardian* (September 2nd), online
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/02/socialism-young-americans-bernie-sanders

**Week #4 – September 26th and 28th**  
**Congress**

Readings:
• Wilson et al., Chapter 13
• Ross K. Baker (2008), *House and Senate*, W.W. Norton, Chapter 3: Raw numbers and concurrent majorities, pp. 65–82
• Lasser, 9.1, 9.2, 9.4 and 9.5

**Week #5 – October 3rd and 5th**  
**The Presidency**

Readings:
• Wilson et al., Chapter 14
• Lasser, 10.1 to 10.5

**Week #6 – October 10th and 12th**  
**The Judiciary**

Readings:
• Wilson et al., Chapter 16
• Lasser, Chapter 12

**Week #7 – October 17th and 19th**  
Mid-term review and mid-term examination.
Week #8 – October 24th and 26th
Federalism

Readings:
- Wilson et al., Chapter 3

Week #9 – October 31st and 2nd
Bureaucracy

Readings:
- Wilson et al., Chapter 15
- Lasser, 11.2 and 11.3

Week #10 – November 7th and 9th
Civil rights and civil liberties

Readings:
- Wilson et al., Chapter 5
Week #11 – November 14th and 16th
Foreign policy

Readings:
• Wilson et al., Chapter 19

Week #12 – November 21st and 23rd
The Constitution and its influence today

Readings:

Week #13 – November 28th and 30th
Conclusion and perspectives

Readings:
McGill University regulations

Language of Submission:
In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded. This does not apply to courses in which acquiring proficiency in a language is one of the objectives.

Academic Integrity:
McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures” (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).