POLI 327
United States Politics 2

Term: Winter 2018
Instructor: Simon Langlois-Bertrand
Office, office hours & phone: Please see MyCourses for up-to-date information
Class Time: Tuesday and Thursdays 10:05am to 11:25am (STBIO N2/2)
E-mail: simon.langlois-bertrand@mcgill.ca (please put POLI327 in the subject)

For conference and teaching assistant information, please see 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

The emphasis in this course will be on the political process in the United States, especially political culture and participation, including through a discussion of the electoral system, voting behavior, political parties, interest groups, and the media. These discussions will serve as building blocks for the second part of the course, where different aspects of the political context in which political action and participation occurs will be analyzed.

The course is built around three main objectives, ensuring that students will:
1. Learn the basic historical and technical elements underpinning many current affairs topics and debates in American politics;
2. Develop skills to identify the key arguments, the multiple sources of given disagreements, and complexity in the resolution of political clashes associated with these topics;
3. Think critically about how these debates relate to both their immediate context and the larger cultural, political, economic, and social forces that shape them.

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 10:05 to 11:25. Later in the term we will switch to one-hour lectures, with the exception of the midterm examination session on March 1st.

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>March 1st</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research paper</td>
<td>April 6th</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conference participation</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<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 classes. Note that although the paper is due on April 6th, 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 grade will be provided in the first week of the semester.

**Mid-term and final exam.** The mid-term will be held in class on March 1st. The cumulative final exam will be held during the exam period. A description of each exam 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 – January 9th and 11th**

**Introduction: political participation, civic engagement, and the openness of the U.S. political system**

Readings:
- Wilson et al., Chapter 8 (Political participation)

**Week #2 – January 16th and 18th**

**Political culture and public opinion**

Readings:
- Wilson et al., Chapter 4 (American political culture) and Chapter 7 (Public opinion)
- Lasser, Chapter 5 (Political culture and public opinion)
Week #3 – January 23rd and 25th
The Electoral system, primaries, and voting behaviour

Readings:
- Wilson et al., Chapter 10 (Elections and campaigns)
- Lasser, sections 8.2, 8.3 and 8.4

Week #4 – January 30th and February 1st
Political parties and interest groups

Readings:
- Wilson et al., Chapter 9 (Political parties) and Chapter 11 (Interest groups)
- Lasser Chapter 6 (Interest groups) and section 8.1 (Why Parties)

Week #5 – February 6th and 8th
The media and popular culture

Readings:
- Wilson et al., Chapter 12 (The Media)
- Lasser, Chapter 7 (The Media)

Week #6 – February 13th and 15th
Civil rights, protests, and free speech

Readings:
- Wilson et al., Chapter 6 (Civil Rights)
- Lasser, Chapter 4 (Civil Rights)
Week #7 – February 20th and 22nd
Public policy and the relationship between the President and Congress

Readings:
- Wilson et al., Chapter 17 (Domestic Policy)
- Lasser, Chapter 13 (Public Policy)
- Louis Fisher (2007), Chapter 7 (The Power of the Purse), in Constitutional Conflicts between Congress and the President, University Press of Kansas, 192–219

Week #8 – February 27th and March 1st
Scandals and presidential crises

No readings.
Mid-term on March 1st

***No classes or tutorials between March 5th and 9th – Reading week

Week #9 – March 13th and 15th
Politics after 9/11: privacy, cybersecurity and whistleblowing

Readings:
- Lasser, section 3.3
- Louis Fisher (2007), Chapter 9 (The War Power), in Constitutional Conflicts between Congress and the President, University Press of Kansas, 249–286

Week #10 – March 20th and 22nd
Myths, science, education and politics

Readings:
- Nate Silver 2017, The Media has a probability problem https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-media-has-a-probability-problem/
Week #11 – March 27th and 29th
Politics across state lines: Energy, the environment and large infrastructure projects

Readings:

Week #12 – April 3rd and 5th
Political action and the legal system

Readings:
- James Morone and Rogan Kersh (2017), Chapter 16: The Judicial Branch, in By the People: Debating American Government, Oxford,

Week #13 – April 10th and 12th
Perspectives on the system

Readings:
- Wilson et al., Chapter 20 (The old versus the new system)

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.

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). (Approved by Senate on 29 January 2003)