

**POLI 2051: Introduction to American Government**  
**Spring, 2016**  
**MWF, 8:30-9:20**  
**324 Hodges**

**Instructor**

John Kitch  
239 Stubbs  
Office Hours: MWF 9:30-10:30 and by appointment  
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**Course Description:**

This course will introduce some of the most important structures, trends, and actors in American government. In order to provide students with a broad foundation of knowledge the course will survey seven important topics. These topics overlap at points, but each one provides an important and unique perspective on American politics. To best show how the story of American government has unfolded examples from the past, as well as the present will be used throughout the semester.

**Required readings:**

*The Contemporary Congress, Sixth Edition* by Burdett Loomis and Wendy Schiller, ISBN: 978-1442249684, Please be sure to purchase the sixth edition of this work, as we will be using specific essays that are only present in this edition.

For most sections of the course readings will be posted on Moodle. You will be able to find the readings by accessing the current topic's section then clicking on the date of the next class meeting. For example, clicking on the "Parties" section and then clicking on "January 15<sup>th</sup>" will take you to that day's assigned readings.

**Course Requirements:**

The course will be a mix of lectures and discussions. Students are expected to attend class, demonstrate a serious presence each day (presence is achieved by being respectful, attentive, and engaged in the class, not merely by physical attendance), and participate in class discussions. Discussions will sometimes include the entire class and, at other times will take the format of small group discussions, which will then report findings back to the full class. Students will not be penalized for asking "bad" questions, or for disagreeing with others. To help facilitate class discussions it is important that students read the assigned material for the day, come willing to ask questions and share ideas, and be prepared to listen and react to the ideas of others.

**Attendance Policy:**

Students are allowed up to three unexcused absences for the semester. If your absence is excused, or if you think that it may be excused please contact me as soon as you can to discuss it. The university classifies absences as excused for several

reasons including illness, family emergency, and religious obligations. You should consult LSU's official absence policy statement for further information. Beginning with your fourth unexcused absence your final grade will drop by 2 points, per unexcused absence, up to ten full points. Conversely, if you limit your unexcused absences to three or fewer you will earn ten full points of your final grade.

**Plagiarism Cheating Policy:**

You should familiarize yourself with LSU's Code of Student Conduct, which can be found online, as it pertains to academic dishonesty. Students who are suspected of plagiarism or cheating will be referred to the Office of Student Advocacy and Accountability for an investigation and possible penalty. This investigation could result in a zero for the assignment in question or a failing grade for the course. A second violation (for your full LSU career, not only in this course) could result in a suspension or expulsion from the university. If you plagiarize or cheat on an assignment I am required to report the matter. The process is out of my jurisdiction going forward. Please keep this in mind and realize that it does not matter why you cheat or plagiarize, doing so for any reason and under any conditions will trigger the university's investigative and disciplinary process for academic dishonesty.

**Grading Scale:**

A+=97-100  
A=94-96  
A-=90-93  
B+=87-89  
B=84-86  
B-=80-83  
C+=77-79  
C=74-76  
C-=70-73  
D+=67-69  
D=64-66  
D-=60-63  
F=0-59

**Assignments:**

Attendance: 10%  
Quizzes: 30%  
Mid term test: 30%  
Final exam: 30%

Attendance: Refer to the above course attendance policy.

Quizzes: There will be 10 quizzes throughout the semester. The dates will usually not be announced ahead of time, though students may make the quiz up in the case of an excused absence. Quizzes will be short and will cover the reading for the day.

Students who make a good faith effort to read for the day will be prepared to succeed. The quizzes will not have trick questions and will not be meant to confuse. They will, though, cover important points from the day's readings and be difficult for those who did not read before class.

Mid-term test: The test will cover the material of the first half of the course. The format of the test will be discussed and determined at a date closer to the mid-term examination day.

Final Exam: This test will be given on **Friday, May 6<sup>th</sup> at 7:30am in our regular classroom.** The university sets the exam schedule and it cannot be changed. If you have three or more finals on the same day you are allowed to move one of them to an alternate time. Please speak with me if this is your situation.

### **Course Calendar:**

#### **Jan.**

- 13: Introduction day
- 15: **Parties:** Formation of the original parties
- 18: **MLK Day, University Holiday**
- 20: Jacksonian democracy and its legacy
- 22: 1856 and 1860: Free Soilers and Republicans
- 25: The Democratic South
- 27: Party Realignment
- 29: Culture wars and beyond

#### **Feb.**

- 1: **Voting and Elections:** Decline of the Swing Voter
- 8: **Mardi Gras Break, University Holiday**
- 10: **Mardi Gras, continued.**
- 12: Presidential Primaries
- 15: The Voting Rights Act
- 17: Debates over Voter ID laws
- 19: Renewed Populism
- 22: **State and Local Govt.:** Trust levels in state govt.
- 24: The workings of state govt.: Louisiana, an example
- 26: States as labs of democracy
- 29: Public education

#### **Mar.**

- 2: **Mid-term exam**
- 4: **Congress:** Loomis and Schiller, Ch. 3
- 7: L and S, Ch. 4
- 9: L and S, Ch. 6
- 11: L and S, Ch. 7

14: L and S, Ch. 8  
16: **Supreme Court:** The principle of judicial review  
18: A New Deal Shift  
21: **Spring break begins**  
23: **Spring break, continued**  
25: **Spring break, continued**  
28: Issues of race  
30: The Right to privacy

**Apr.**

1: Developments in Criminal Justice  
4: **Presidency:** Eisenhower and Little Rock, an introduction to presidential crisis management  
6: President as rhetorical leader  
8: President as leader of domestic affairs  
11: President as chief diplomat  
13: The growth of the Executive Office of the President (EOP)  
15: **Foreign Policy:** Washington, Adams, and Jefferson on foreign affairs  
18: Wilsonian Idealism and the balance of power in Europe  
20: Early Cold War  
22: Later Cold War  
25: Legacy of the Cold War  
27: Post 9/11  
29: **2016 and Beyond**