

POL 1100 C: Politics of the US – Fall 2021
Meeting Time: Mon/Wed. 9:30 am – 10:45 am

Classroom: Deegan Hall West, 1-3

Instructor: Dr. Kirstie Lynn Dobbs

Office: Cushing Hall 17b

Office Hours: M/W 11:00 am - 12:00 pm, Tues. 11:30 am - 12:30 pm; also by appointment

Office Hours Sign Up [Link](#)

Office Hours Zoom Link

<https://merrimack.zoom.us/j/99900279201>

Email: dobbsk@merrimack.edu

Course Description

This course is designed to help students understand how politics and the American government apply to their everyday lives and how citizens participate in achieving positive change in their communities. Throughout this course, students will explore their identities while connecting their lived experiences with the roles of individual citizens. The intent is to emphasize how individual participation matters and how young people can make a difference. We will also focus on sharpening our digital media literacy skills (i.e., identifying fake news and bias) and developing our ability to talk across political differences. To achieve these objectives, I have chosen a textbook that focuses on collective political participation.

The pedagogical method applied to this class is a mixture of a lecture-based and active model of teaching. Students are expected to take notes during lectures and are also expected to be actively engaged in classroom activities and discussions. On Mondays, students can expect to engage in a Socratic circle, where they will talk with their peers about a current event/issue in U.S. politics - sometimes in the form of a debate. We will also engage in various simulations where students take on various types of roles as political actors.

Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. If a student is more than 15 min late without notice, they will be counted as tardy. Be on time!

Readings

[Textbook] Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline Tolbert, Andrea Campbell, and Robert Spitzer. (2021). *We the People: An Introduction to American Politics*. W.W. Norton & Company. New York, NY.

In addition to this book, supplemental readings will be available on the course's blackboard course page. Readings should be completed *before* coming to class to enhance and facilitate lectures and class discussion. You should anticipate approximately 60 - 100 pages of reading per week.

Email Correspondence

I am very flexible and more than happy to accommodate students based on their needs. Students may email me during any day of the week to ask for extensions or other accommodations.

However, please give me at least 24 hours to respond. Also, I typically do not answer emails on the weekends. If you email me Friday night after 5:00 pm, please do not expect a response till Monday morning. If you email me after 5:00 pm during the week, please do not expect an email till the following day. I am not your mother, your doctor, or a policewoman, so I am sure nothing you have to contact me about constitutes an emergency :)

Participation and Engagement

Students are expected to attend the course synchronously each week. If you miss class, the PowerPoint lectures will be available for two weeks after the class has ended. My powerpoints are interactive, and students gain weekly engagement points by participating during the lectures. If you miss class, you can still make up these points by completing the activities in the PowerPoint on your time within two weeks after missing class. The links to the powerpoints and the access codes will be available on Blackboard.

Missing Class

If you miss class, you are still expected to complete ALL asynchronous assignments in the module by SUNDAY at midnight of that module week. Accommodations can be made, but you need to alert me that you need an extension before the assigned due date!

Credit Justification Statement

In this course, students will be expected to do the following amount of work:

- Classroom hours: 1.5 per week
- Reading per week: 4-5 hours per week (on average)
- Prep work for class-based discussion: 2-3 per week (on average)
- Research and writing: 2-3 per week (on average)
- Civic Engagement Portfolio Project: 1-2 per week (on average)
- Exam preparation: 1 hour per week (on average)
- Total: 11.5-15.5 hours per week

Access to Blackboard

All course materials will be uploaded to Blackboard. This includes links to class powerpoints (available for two weeks), rubrics, and assignment sheets. Grades will also be posted on this site. To access Blackboard, go to <https://blackboard.merrimack.edu/ultra/institution-page> and use your Merrimack login credentials to access the course site.

Learning Outcomes

The main goal of this course is to help students feel more **empowered** regarding their ability to understand and be active in U.S. politics. After completing the course, each student should:

- ❖ Explore American political identity and what it means to you, your community, and the country;
- ❖ Investigate the roots and evolution of diversity in America, allowing you to more knowledgeably evaluate how and why demographics are changing and the implications for U.S. policy moving forward;

- ❖ Understand the policymaking process in the United States;
- ❖ Understand how our particular form of democracy and elections work;
- ❖ Recognize and evaluate the essential debates and issues in American government and American political history;
- ❖ Explain and critically assess the formal and informal political institutions and their respective roles in American politics;
- ❖ Critically evaluate media and improve upon digital media literacy skills
- ❖ Identify and describe the key functions of the three branches of government; and
- ❖ Assess the causes and consequences of different forms of political participation, and outline how individuals and groups can affect political outcomes in the United States.

Grading

Civic Engagement Portfolio Project 42%

Chapter Quizzes 26%

Weekly Engagement Points 28%

Portfolio Project Final Reflection 4%

Grading Scale

A 93-100

A- 90-92

B+ 87-89

B 83-86

B- 80-82

C+ 77-79

C 73-76

C- 70-72

D+ 67-69

D 63-66

D- 60-62

F 59 and below

Assignments

Civic Engagement Portfolio Project (42%)

This project is designed to help you think through your role as a citizen and how you might affect positive change in your community. This project aims to help give you a deeper understanding of civic engagement and how you might apply it to your everyday life.

To complete this project, you will complete five steps on becoming a student activist. These steps include pinpointing your passion, educating yourself, determining your goals, identifying resources, and creating an action plan. You will be rewarded points for each step of the project. Each step has a due date and is not to be completed all in one sitting. At times, we will tackle pieces of this project together in class. At other times, you will complete parts of the project on your own time. Each step of the project will be available to you on Blackboard when it is assigned. More detailed information can be found on the Civic Engagement Portfolio Project word document located on Blackboard.

Semester Quizzes (26%)

You will take 13 reading quizzes throughout the semester. These quizzes are available on Blackboard within each course module. You are expected to take this quiz by midnight the Sunday before the class officially lecturing on that module. The quizzes are open book, open note, and untimed.

Weekly Engagement Points (28% - 1% per class)

Each week, you will be awarded engagement points for responding to discussion questions, polls, quiz questions, and other activities in class. All of these activities are accessible in the Nearpod presentation used to guide the lecture in class. If you cannot attend class, you will complete the Nearpod lecture at your own pace via an accessible link on Blackboard. You have **two weeks** after your missed class to make up the missing work. These links are located in the Nearpod presentation folder. The access codes associated with each presentation are also located in the folder.

Portfolio Project Final Reflection (4%)

For your final in this course, you will complete a final reflection (2-3 pages) on how your perception/definition of civic engagement has evolved (or not) throughout this course. The prompt for this final will be available on Blackboard after our final class and will be due by the end of our final exam period.

Suggested News Outlets

- *The Washington Post*
- *The New York Times*
- *The Economist*
- CNN
- NPR Politics Podcast; NPR's Up First
- New York Times' The Daily
- BBC Global News Podcast

Due Dates and Late Policy:

All assignments must be turned in on their due date through Blackboard. Students must be present for exams and group presentations. Only unforeseen emergencies with valid documentation will permit students to remake exams and their group presentations. Any assignments turned in late will receive a 5 percent deduction for each day (24 hours) that the assignment is tardy.

Assignments five days late will no longer be accepted, and you will receive a zero on the assignment.

Please anticipate all possible contingencies (computer failure, printer issues, etc.), and please contact me before or as soon as possible if a problem arises. If a student contacts me about an issue after the assignment is due, I can no longer make accommodations for that assignment.

Missed classes/Late Assignments: Severe illnesses and family emergencies are the only justifiable reasons for missing a class or exam or handing in an assignment late. In either case,

you must use both 1) notify me of your situation promptly and 2) provide appropriate documentation. Assignments handed in late without documentation will be penalized by 10% for each date they are late.

Statement of Community Standards

The following statement is taken from Merrimack College's Student Handbook under Community Standards.

Before all else, the students, faculty, staff, and administration of Merrimack College form an Augustinian community that supports and challenges its members in the pursuit of truth. We declare and celebrate our common purpose and commit ourselves:

- to serious study, generous service, and courageous leadership
- to academic integrity and personal growth
- to civilized discourse in the exchange of ideas
- to friendship, diversity, and mutual respect
- to the primacy of conscience and the spiritual life
- to responsibility for the common good, and
- to pride in our school and ourselves

Students have the right to express their views so long as there is neither use nor threat of force nor interference with the rights of others to express their views (Faculty Handbook 2016, 50).

Academic Integrity Policy

For undergraduate courses:

All work for this class must be your original work. Presenting material from other sources, either print or electronic, as one's own work constitutes plagiarism. Please review [Merrimack College's Academic Integrity Code](#) and consult the [library's web site](#) for a discussion on academic integrity.

Academic Accommodations from the Accessibility Services Office

Merrimack College provides reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities through the Accessibility Services Office. Students who have, or think they may have, a disability are invited to contact the Accessibility Services Office via the online request form found on the Accessibility Services Office [website](#), [email](#) or by visiting their office on the third floor of McQuade Library.

Students are encouraged to contact the office as soon as possible to ensure adequate time to meet and create a plan. Students already registered with the Accessibility Services Office are

encouraged each semester to request their letters to be emailed, and students are responsible to then email the letter to their instructors personally. While it is understood that some students will not use all accommodations in all courses, accommodations can not be made retroactively.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week of 8/30 Introduction to Course

- Week 1 (in-class)
 - Course Syllabi and expectations
 - Active Listening Activity
 - What is 'politics?'
 - What is our American political identity?
 - Identity Tree Activity
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 5
 - Read We the People Ch. 1
 - Ch. 1 Quiz
 - Finish Identity Tree

Week of 9/6 The Citizen and Government

- Week 2 (in-class)
 - Values Continuum Activity
 - Class Lecture
 - How to Debate Respectfully
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 12
 - Read We the People Ch. 2
 - Ch. 2 Quiz

Week of 9/13 The Founding and the Constitution

- Week 3 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 19
 - Read We the People Ch. 3
 - Ch. 3 Quiz
 - Civic Engagement Portfolio Project Step 1 Due

Week of 9/20 Federalism

- Week 4 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 26
 - Read WP Ch. 4
 - Ch. 4 Quiz

Week of 9/27 Civil Liberties

- Week 5 (in-class)
 - Class lecture

- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY OCTOBER 3
 - Read WP Ch. 5
 - Ch. 5 Quiz

Week of 10/4 Civil Rights

- Week 6 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
 - Watch *After Selma* Documentary
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY OCTOBER 10
 - Read WP Ch. 6
 - Ch. 6 Quiz

Week of 10/11 Public Opinion

- Week 7 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
- Asynchronous Work Quiz DUE SUNDAY OCTOBER 17
 - Read WP Ch. 7
 - Ch. 7 Quiz
 - Civic Engagement Project Step 2 Due

Week of 10/18 The Media

- Week 8 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY OCTOBER 24
 - Read WP Ch. 8
 - Ch. 8 Quiz

Week of 10/25 Political Parties and Interest Groups

- Week 9 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
 - Watch *Dark Money*
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY OCTOBER 31
 - Read WP Ch. 9
 - Ch. 9 Quiz

Week of 11/1 Participation, Campaigns, and Elections

- Week 10 (in-class)
 - Finish *Dark Money*
 - Class lecture
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY NOVEMBER 7
 - Read WP Ch. 10
 - Ch. 10 Quiz
 - Civic Engagement Project Steps 3 and 4 Due

Week of 11/8 Congress

- Week 11
 - Class lecture
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY NOVEMBER 14
 - Read WP Ch. 11
 - Ch. 11 Quiz

Week of 11/15 The Presidency

- Week 12 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
- Asynchronous work DUE SUNDAY NOVEMBER 21
 - Read WP Ch. 13
 - Ch. 13 Quiz

Week of 11/22 The Federal Courts

- Week 13 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY NOVEMBER 28
 - Read WP Ch. 14
 - Civic Engagement Project Step 5 Due

Week of 11/29 Domestic Policy

- Week 14
 - Class lecture
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY DECEMBER 5
 - Read WP Ch. 15
 - Ch. 15 Quiz
 - Upload Civic Engagement Project Portfolio Project Presentations

Week of 12/6 Foreign Policy

- Week 15
 - Class Lecture
 - Civic Engagement Portfolio Project Presentations
- Asynchronous Work DUE DATE TBD
 - Civic Engagement Portfolio Project Final Reflections