

# POSC 100: CONTEMPORARY U.S. POLITICS

FALL 2014

Dr. Jack D. Collens

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*Course Time:* 8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.  
Monday, Wednesday, & Friday  
117 Siena Hall

*Office Hours:* 2–4pm Mon. & Wed.  
9–11am Tues. & Thurs.  
321C Siena Hall

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The study of government is the study of our daily lives. Politics pervades everything we do, see, hear, and even taste and touch. This course is designed to help students recognize the importance not only of the outcomes of policy makers' decisions, but also the processes that help to create them. By the end of this course, students should be informed consumers of political information. In particular, this class will focus on the underlying logic of American constitutional design, the roles and powers of our political institutions, and the various ways in which voters and citizens connect to their government. Furthermore, this class will help students gain a better understanding of current issues and debates in American politics through designated debate/discussion periods.

## Texts

The texts below are **required** and can be found in the Siena College bookstore or online. Note that both are also available as eBooks or for rental via Amazon or the publisher's website. Both are often cheaper options than purchasing the books. Other required readings can be found on the course Blackboard page or via links in the syllabus.

Lowi, Theodore J., Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere. 2014. *American Government: Power and Purpose, Thirteenth Core Edition*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. (ISBN: 978-0393922455).

Canon, David T., John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer. 2014. *The Enduring Debate: Classic & Contemporary Readings in American Politics, 7th Edition*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co. (ISBN: 978-0393921588).

## Learning Goals

This course addresses the following college, school, and departmental learning goals:

### *Siena College Learning Goals*

1. INFORMED REASONING: Students will think critically and creatively to make reasoned and informed judgments. Through engagement with contemporary and enduring questions of human concern, students will solve problems in ways that reflect the integration of knowledge across general and specialized studies, and they will demonstrate competence in information literacy and independent research.
2. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: Students will read texts with comprehension and critical involvement, write effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences, speak knowledgeably, and listen with discernment and empathy.
4. REGARD FOR HUMAN SOLIDARITY AND DIVERSITY: Students will affirm the unity of the human family, uphold the dignity of individuals, and delight in diversity. They will demonstrate intercultural knowledge and respect.

### *School of Liberal Arts Learning Goals*

1. Apply evaluative thinking skills to investigate the complexities of the human past and its connections to artistic, ethical, sociopolitical, moral, and spiritual dimensions of contemporary life.
3. Utilize effective oral, written, and artistic communication relevant to academic disciplines.
7. Develop a perspective that recognizes diversity within and among cultures.

### *Major/Program Learning Goals*

The Political Science program aims to provide students with:

- A foundation for future careers;
- A solid theoretical, empirical, and methodological foundation for future graduate study;
- A knowledge and awareness, as citizens, of the responsibility that membership within a democratic society entails;
- A sensitivity to the cultural and political diversity within the United States and the world community.

## **Learning Outcomes**

To accomplish these goals, students in this class will:

- ☑ Learn about our Constitution and how political institutions and actors interact to change the course of public policy
- ☑ Hear and contribute a diversity of opinions in a classroom environment which mimics the pluralistic nature of our society
- ☑ Improve their critical thinking, oral communication, and writing skills through carefully designed course discussions, debates, and writing assignments
- ☑ Learn to use the [Chicago style](#) of citation and reference management (author-date style)
- ☑ Become better informed consumers of political information

## **Student Responsibilities & Assessment**

### *Attendance*

Reading is necessary for a successful college experience, but it is far from sufficient. Class attendance is more than mere reinforcement of material you may have read in the assigned readings. As such, students must attend class regularly, take comprehensive notes, ask for clarification when necessary, and participate in discussion. I will draw test questions from the texts, lectures, and discussion material, so you must pay attention. I will take attendance each day and will only forgive two unexcused absences; additional unexcused absences will reduce your attendance grade by 5 points each. Attendance is worth 10 percent of the final course grade.

### *Active & Informed Participation*

Attendance is not sufficient to earn a satisfactory participation grade. This course requires *active* and *informed* participation. As such, students are expected to speak up in class and contribute to Friday discussions and debates with relevant points. Note that this approach emphasizes quality of participation over quantity. I will monitor your contributions each week and provide you with a current participation

grade at the midpoint of the semester. This will not affect your final participation grade, but will provide you with an assessment of your current progress in the class, thereby allowing students to adjust their participation accordingly. Participation is worth 10 percent of the final course grade and will assess students' critical thinking and oral communication skills.

### *Exams*

You will receive three exams—two midterms and a *non-cumulative* final. These exams will consist of multiple choice and short answer questions. I shall draw exam questions from lectures, discussions, and the required texts. Be punctual on test days, as you will have no extended time. Makeup exams will differ significantly from the original exam and will only be granted with a valid, college-recognized excuse.

### *Reaction Papers*

Ten percent of your final grade will come from two short reaction papers, due on specific dates assigned to each student. In these papers, students will address the debates featured in the debate readings, discussing and supporting their own stances with relevant material from readings, lectures, and any outside sources that may be relevant. Papers will be due **before** we discuss the readings in class. Specific guidelines for these assignments will be provided in the first week of class. These papers will assess students' critical thinking and writing skills, as well as their abilities to use the Chicago style of citation and reference management.

### *Quizzes*

There will also be six reading quizzes administered during the semester. These will cover material you will be expected to read for the date the quizzes are offered. Three of these are announced in this syllabus, while three are unannounced. Note that quizzes will **never** be assigned for discussion dates—the ultimate effect of this is that quizzes will almost always be on Mondays and Wednesdays. These quizzes will constitute 10 percent of your final grade. I will drop the lowest quiz grade at the end of the semester, so no makeup quizzes of any kind will be offered.

## **Grading**

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.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Midterm Exam I	20 percent
Midterm Exam II	20 percent
Final Exam	20 percent
Attendance	10 percent
Participation	10 percent
Reading Quizzes	10 percent
Reaction Paper 1	5 percent
Reaction Paper 2	5 percent
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100 percent</b>

## **Availability**

The best way to contact me is via email. Please include the course number and time in your subject line (“POSC 100 – 8am”). If your question requires more than a few sentences to ask, please feel free to visit my office hours. My door is always open. If you have concerns about your grade, I highly recommend that you come to see me as soon as possible. I am available to help you, but it is your responsibility to demonstrate to me that you want to improve your performance. If you cannot meet during office hours,

feel free to email me to schedule another time. Note, however, that failure to appear during any meetings scheduled outside of my regular office hours will count against your participation grade.

## **Disabilities & Illnesses**

Students with disabilities of any kind are strongly encouraged to notify me and the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities at the beginning of the semester, so the appropriate accommodations can be made. Please note that I am willing to work with students who contract illnesses, but it is the student's responsibility to contact me as soon as they are aware of the illness to plan their coursework for the duration of the illness. I can help you during and immediately after any illnesses, but I cannot help you if you wait until the end of the semester to make up any missed work.

## **Academic Honesty**

All Siena College policies relating to academic honesty will be upheld in this course. An outline of the college's Academic Integrity Policy is available at <https://www2.siena.edu/pages/2667.asp>. Please note that I have a "zero tolerance" policy towards cheating and plagiarism. It is your responsibility to know what constitutes plagiarism and cheating.

## **Assistance**

Students requiring assistance with their writing may see me in my office or contact the Siena College [Writing Center](#). As you will not be allowed to rewrite any assignments, I suggest you take advantage of the resources available to help you with your writing before turning in any written assignments.

## **Laptop Policy**

The current generation of college students grew up in the connected age; as such, computers are as much a part of your learning experience as textbooks and pens. However, the [most current research](#) on laptop and tablet use in classrooms suggests that significant majorities of students who use laptops in class spend more than 10 minutes in class on social networking sites and non-course related sites, that these types of activities can distract those around you, and that taking notes by hand is a far more effective strategy than using a laptop. As such, I require that any students who choose to use laptops must sit in the back half of the classroom. Students taking notes by hand may sit in the front half of the classroom, free from the distractions of their neighbors' favorite YouTube clips and cat photos.

A final word on the use of laptops: Most faculty members recognize the tension between wanting to allow laptops (which will help students develop the skills they will need to incorporate technology in their future careers) and wanting to ensure adequate delivery of course material. My policy is somewhat of a compromise. Note, however, that I retain the right to alter this policy and ban laptops from my classroom (exceptions would apply to those with relevant disabilities). My goal in this class is to ensure that you become better-informed consumers of political information and are able to participate in the political process. I will work with you to ensure that you are able to use your laptops effectively to that end and will, from time to time, encourage the use of laptops or even smart phones to retrieve relevant material in class, but students should be careful not to take this as a *carte blanche* to distract themselves and others.

## Class Schedule\*

Date	Topic	Reading
09.03.14	Introduction	Course syllabus
09.05.14	Logic & Principles	LGSA, Ch. 1
09.08.14	Constitution	LGSA, Ch. 2
09.10.14	Constitution	<i>Debate</i> , 2.8–2.9
09.12.14	Constitution ( <i>Papers</i> )	<i>Debate</i> , 2.10–2.11
09.15.14	Federalism	LGSA, Ch. 3
09.17.14	Federalism	<i>Debate</i> , 3.12 & 3.14
09.19.14	Federalism ( <i>Papers</i> )	<i>Debate</i> , 3.15–3.17
09.22.14	Congress	LGSA, Ch. 6
09.24.14	Congress ( <i>Quiz</i> )	<i>Debate</i> , 5.24–5.25
09.26.14	Congress ( <i>Papers</i> )	<i>Debate</i> , 5.27–5.29
09.29.14	Presidency	LGSA, Ch. 7
10.01.14	Presidency	<i>Debate</i> , 6.30–6.31
10.03.14	Presidency ( <i>Papers</i> )	<i>Debate</i> , 6.32–6.34
10.06.14	Bureaucracy	LGSA, Ch. 8
10.08.14	<b>EXAM I</b>	[none]
10.10.14	Judiciary	LGSA, Ch. 9
10.13.14	Judiciary	<i>Debate</i> , 8.39 & 8.41
10.15.14	Judiciary ( <i>Papers</i> )	<i>Debate</i> , 8.42–8.43
10.17.14	[ <b>HOLIDAY</b> ]	[none]
10.20.14	Rights & Liberties	LGSA, Ch. 4
10.22.14	Rights & Liberties	LGSA, Ch. 5
10.24.14	Rights & Liberties ( <i>Papers</i> )	<i>Debate</i> , 4.21–4.23
10.27.14	Political Parties	LGSA, Ch. 12
10.29.14	Political Parties ( <i>Quiz</i> )	<i>Debate</i> , 11.55–11.56
10.31.14	Political Parties ( <i>Papers</i> )	<i>NYT Tea Party Debate</i>
11.03.14	News Media	LGSA, Ch. 14
11.05.14	News Media	<i>Debate</i> , 9.47–9.48
11.07.14	<b>EXAM II</b>	[none]
11.10.14	Interest Groups	LGSA, Ch. 13
11.12.14	Interest Groups ( <i>Quiz</i> )	<i>Debate</i> , 12.60–12.62
11.14.14	Interest Groups ( <i>Papers</i> )	<i>Debate</i> , 12.63–12.65
11.17.14	Public Opinion	LGSA, Ch. 10
11.19.14	Public Opinion	<i>Debate</i> , 9.44–9.45
11.21.14	Public Opinion ( <i>Papers</i> )	<i>Debate</i> , 11.57–11.59
11.24.14	<i>The West Wing</i>	[none]
*****	<b>THANKSGIVING</b>	*****
12.01.14	Voting & Elections	LGSA, Ch. 11
12.03.14	Voting & Elections	<i>Debate</i> , 10.49–10.51
12.05.14	Voting & Elections ( <i>Papers</i> )	<i>Debate</i> , 10.52–10.54
12.08.14	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>	[none]

Legend: LGSA = *American Government: Power and Purpose, Thirteenth Core Edition*, by Lowi, Ginsberg, Shepsle, and Ansolabehere

*Debate* = *The Enduring Debate* by Canon, Coleman, and Mayer

\*I reserve the right to alter the class schedule as I see fit.