

**COURSE SYLLABUS**  
**POLI 201: AMERICAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT**

Spring 2009  
M W F 8:00 – 8:50  
Gambrell 005  
University of South Carolina

Professor Charles J. Finocchiaro  
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Course Webpage: <https://blackboard.sc.edu/>

**COURSE OVERVIEW:**

This course provides an introduction to the politics of the American system of government. Students who successfully complete the course should be able to describe the key characteristics of American politics, including the founding era, historical development, federalism, civil rights and civil liberties, political participation (voting, interest groups, parties), institutions (Congress, the courts, the president), and public opinion. Additionally, students will become familiar with basic social science theories—for instance, that political actors are strategic in their pursuit of various personal and policy goals—and be able to apply theoretical perspectives to explain political behavior and processes. The class will employ methods that are both traditional (lecture-based) and non-traditional (such as simulations) to enable students to explore and analyze institutions and interactions between individuals throughout the American political system.

**COURSE MATERIALS:**

Reading assignments will be drawn from a primary textbook and selections posted on **B**lackboard. The textbook is:

**A**merican **G**overnment: *Power and Purpose* (by Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle) Core 10<sup>th</sup> ed. with 2008 election update (ISBN: 978-0-393-11385-3). The publisher also sells an ebook for roughly half the cost: <http://www.nortonebooks.com/> NOTE: A less costly (and less current) alternative is the 9<sup>th</sup> edition (ISBN: 978-0-393-92714-6).

**COURSE EVALUATION & EXPECTATIONS:**

Grades for the course will be based in part on three in-class, non-cumulative exams (with the lowest exam weighted 20%, and the other two accounting for 30% each). Additionally, students will be expected to participate actively in classroom discussion. Toward that end, brief written assignments (mostly in the form of reaction papers) dealing with the scheduled topics will be used to form the basis of class discussion. To facilitate discussion, students are expected to attend class regularly having done the assigned readings for the topic and prepared to discuss them. This includes being able to: describe the key arguments and findings; identify the evidence, method of analysis, and potential shortcomings; and discuss the implications. In accordance with university policy, absence from more than 10% of scheduled classes is excessive, and may result in the reduction of one letter grade for the course. The writing and discussion component of the class will comprise the remaining 20% of the course grade. Each exam and assignment will be graded numerically, with scores and approximate letter grades posted on Blackboard to facilitate a running tally of progress. Other than points for attending randomly selected class periods, there are no extra credit opportunities in this course.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY, CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE, MAKE-UPS, & ACCESSIBILITY:**

Students are expected to abide by the highest standards of academic integrity. Any deviation from this expectation will result in a minimum of a failing grade for the assignment, and may result in additional disciplinary measures including referral to the Office of Academic Integrity. Violations of the University's Honor Code include, but are not limited to, improper citation of sources, appropriating another individual's work, and any other form of academic misrepresentation. Also, students are expected to conduct themselves in a professional and civil manner. This includes avoiding disruptive activity by arriving to class on time, turning off cell phones, etc. For more information, see the Carolina Community Student Handbook (<http://www.sa.sc.edu/carolinacommunity/>).

It is imperative that students plan on completing each assignment/exam as scheduled. Makeups will **not** be offered except under the most extreme circumstances, involving events of an unforeseen nature—i.e., personal illness, death of an immediate family member, and incidents of similar gravity. Written documentation and advance notice must be provided.

Any student with a documented disability (as determined by the Office of Student Disability Services at 777-6142) should contact me in order to make appropriate accommodations.

**OFFICE HOURS:** Mondays and Wednesdays from 9:00 to 10:30

**COURSE SCHEDULE\*:**

DATE(S)	TOPIC	READING
1/12	Introduction to Course	
1/14, 16	The Principles of Politics	<b>AG: 1; BI: 1</b>
1/19	<b>NO CLASS</b> – Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Service Day	
1/21	The Principles of Politics (cont.)	<b>AG: 1; BI: 1</b>
1/23, 26, 28	The Founding & the Constitution	<b>AG: 2 &amp; Appendix; BI: 2</b>
1/30, 2/2, 2/4	Federalism & Sep. of Powers	<b>AG: 3; BI: 3</b>
2/6, 9, 11	Civil Liberties & Civil Rights	<b>AG: 4; BI: 4</b>
2/13	<b>EXAM # 1</b>	
2/16, 18, 20	Congress	<b>AG: 5; BI: 5</b>
2/23, 25, 27	Presidency	<b>AG: 6; BI: 6</b>
3/2, 4, 6	Bureaucracy	<b>AG: 7; BI: 7</b>
3/9 – 13	<b>NO CLASS</b> – Spring Break	
3/16, 18, 20	Judiciary	<b>AG: 8; BI: 8</b>
3/23	<b>EXAM # 2</b>	
3/25, 27, 30	Media	<b>AG: 13; BI: 13</b>
4/1, 3, 6	Public Opinion	<b>AG: 9; BI: 9</b>
4/8, 10, 13	Elections	<b>AG: 10; BI: 10</b>
4/15, 17, 20	Political Parties	<b>AG: 11; BI: 11</b>
4/22, 24, 27	Interest Groups	<b>AG: 12; BI: 12</b>
5/5	<b>EXAM # 3</b> (9am)	

\* Readings may be added/dropped and the syllabus altered at the professor's discretion. **AG:** chapter number from textbook; **BI:** number of reading posted on Blackboard.