

**U.S. Politics
PLAW 151
Fall 2024**

Section 1: 9:30–10:45 AM
Section 2: 11:00 AM–12:15 PM
Tuesdays and Thursdays
Buckman ###

Professor: Be Stone
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Office: Buckman 307
Office Hours: Mondays 2:00–3:00 PM and Thursdays 12:30–1:30 PM or by appointment

Course Description and Learning Objectives

This is an introductory course to the institutions, processes, and history of the American government. We will review the foundational concepts and landmark debates in the development of the American political system and relate these concepts and debates to current political issues. On completion of the course students should have:

- Knowledge about the foundations of the U.S. political system.
- Knowledge of all major American political institutions and processes.
- Critical thinking skills including the capacity to assess the kind and quality of evidence writers use to support claims.
- Analytical writing skills including the ability to summarize the main points of an argument succinctly and demonstrate command of some political science terminology.
- Oral communication skills developed through class discussions and presentations.

Texts

You do not need to buy a textbook for this class, all of the readings are on Canvas. **You are required to bring a printed copy of the readings to class with you. There are no computers or cellphones in the classroom.** (Unless you have a specific learning accommodation for an electronic device through Student Accessibility Services.) This is to enhance your engagement with each other and the assigned readings and to minimize distractions. If you need assistance with printing, please let me know.

Lecture Slides

The PowerPoint presentations for each class are posted on Canvas under “Pages” and then “Lectures.” These slides do not include everything covered in class and should not be your only resource when studying for the exams. You will need to take additional notes during class to supplement these slides.

Canvas

You are required to log into Canvas regularly to access class readings, submit assignments, and check for announcements. Please ensure that you have access to Canvas

the first week of class. The syllabus can be found on the “Syllabus” page. All of the required readings and assignments are available on the Homepage, organized by date.

Grading & Class Requirements

Your grade is based on the five requirements for this course:

1. Class Participation (20% of class grade)

- Absences may be excused if you notify me in advance, but in all other cases, absences will be unexcused and will negatively affect your grade.
- Attendance includes being on time and staying for the duration of the class. Attendance will be marked during the first five minutes. Students arriving after that will be marked “late.” Two “lates” are equivalent to one absence.
- If you miss class it is your responsibility to get notes and assignments from a classmate. After you have received the notes from a classmate, you may schedule a meeting during office hours if you have questions for me.
- Participation in class discussion is a critical part of the learning process. You are expected to come to every class having read all of the readings, prepared to contribute to class discussion and participate in class activities.
- You are required to bring a printed copy of all the readings to each class. Failure to do so will negatively affect your grade.

2. Weekly Reading Responses (20% of class grade)

- To foster your thinking outside of class and to facilitate discussion in class you are required to submit weekly reading responses. Response papers should be between 300–400 words in length and include three parts. See the handout (available on Canvas under “Pages”) for details.
- Reading responses are due via Canvas at 7:00 AM on Tuesdays OR Thursdays (half the class will be assigned Tuesday, the other half Thursday). We will determine Tues/Thurs assignments during our first class. Late responses will receive no more than ½ credit

3. Profile Your Politician Presentation (20% of class grade)

- For this assignment you will conduct research, write notes, and present to the class a profile of a politician of your choice who represents the area where you live. See the handout (available on Canvas under “Pages”) for details.
- Confirm your politician and presentation date by Thursday, September 5. Presentation dates are Tues Sept 10–Thurs Oct 10, politicians and dates are first-come-first-served.

4. Midterm Exam (20% of class grade)

- The midterm exam will be held in class on Tuesday, October 15.

5. Final Exam (20% of class grade)

- The final exam will be held on DATE, TIME TBA.

Exams are in-person, hand-written tests including multiple choice, identifications, and short essay questions. You will receive a study guide in the class period preceding the exam. We will not review for the exam during class time. The exam will include content from the assigned readings and class lectures. Reading the assigned readings, taking notes during lectures, and fully participating in class discussions is the best way to prepare for the exam. If you have to miss an exam due to illness or emergency you must inform me by email before the exam is held. Otherwise, you will not be permitted to take a make-up exam. I do not grant extensions for exams.

Your exams and assignments are graded on the following scale:

- A 100–93
- A- 92–90
- B+ 89–87
- B 86–83
- B- 82–80
- C+ 79–77
- C 76–73
- C- 72–70
- D 69–65
- D- 64–60
- F 59 or below

Classroom Conduct and Community Standards

Politics is personal. Discussing political topics can challenge deeply held or unexamined beliefs. Expect to be challenged in this class to think critically about the ideas presented in the readings and common assumptions made about the American government. Given the difficult, sensitive, and political nature of the material to be discussed in this course, students are expected to conduct themselves in a mature and respectful manner. This requires both thoughtfully voicing your own perspective on the materials covered in class as well as respectfully listening to and responding to the perspectives of others. The ultimate goal of this course is to further develop your critical thinking skills in order to construct and voice informed opinions on complex issues. You are not expected to know how to do this perfectly when you walk into the classroom. We will be learning in real time, together. We will make mistakes. I ask that we be generous with each other and to acknowledge when we have fallen short of our community standards. If you feel you will not be able to adhere to these standards please come talk to me immediately. All students are encouraged to talk to me about any challenging or difficult issues that come up in class materials or in class discussion. You can do this during class, before/after class, during my office hours, or by appointment.

Current Events

Our academic study of American politics will be enhanced by following relevant news in the media. To that end, you are expected to read at least one daily newspaper while taking this course, and to draw upon material from this newspaper during class discussions. Rhodes offers all students a free subscription to *The New York Times* and *The Wall Street Journal* online:

NYT (sign up with your Rhodes email address):

myaccount.nytimes.com/grouppass/access

WSJ (sign in to ProQuest with your Rhodes email to access articles):

relay.rhodes.edu:2048/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/publication/10482

Email policy

Email is the best method for getting in touch with me. My policy is to respond to email within 48 hours. I do not respond to emails on evenings, weekends, or national holidays. Please include “PLAW 151” in the subject line, and if your email address is not a variation of your name, indicate in the body of the email who you are.

Access and Accommodations

It is the policy and practice of Rhodes College to create inclusive, equitable, and accessible learning environments for all students. If you have already established accommodations with Student Accessibility Services (SAS), please communicate your approved accommodations to me as soon as possible so we can discuss your needs in this course. If you have not yet established services through SAS but have a condition that requires accommodations (conditions include but not limited to mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or chronic health), please contact SAS at sites.rhodes.edu/accessibility. SAS offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and temporary conditions.

Academic Integrity

All Rhodes College students pledge to uphold the Honor Code: “As a member of the Rhodes community, I pledge I will not lie, cheat, or steal, and that I will report any such violation that I may witness.” The Rhodes Student Handbook states: “‘Cheating’ includes plagiarism. Plagiarism is an act of academic dishonesty. A student must not adopt or reproduce ideas, words, or statements of another person without appropriate acknowledgment.” See the Writing Center’s resources on what plagiarism is and how to avoid it: rhodes.edu/academics/majors-minors/english/writing-center/plagiarism.

You may not submit work generated by an AI program as your own. Doing so is plagiarism. If you include material generated by AI, it should be cited like any other reference material (with consideration for the quality of the reference, which may be poor). No more than 10% of any assignment may be generated by AI. You may use AI programs to help generate ideas and brainstorm. However, you should note that the material generated by these programs may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic, and may stifle your own independent thinking. **Any assignment found to have been plagiarized—including submitting AI-generated text without proper citation—or that is the product of cheating or any other act of academic dishonesty, will automatically receive a zero grade and you will not be given an opportunity to repeat the assignment for a passing grade.** Ignorance of the Honor Code or of what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, or any other form of academic dishonesty is not an acceptable excuse.

Weekly Course Schedule

All dates, readings, and assignments are subject to change

Part I: Founding Principles

Introduction, Foundations of American Government

Thurs Aug 29:

- Welcome and Introduction
- The Media Bias Chart (in-class viewing).

The Constitution and the Ratification Debates

Tues Sept 3:

- Thomas Jefferson. 1776. "Declaration of Independence."
- Howard Zinn. 1990. "A Kind of Revolution" in *A People's History of the United States*.
- Review Profile Your Politician Assignment in class

Thurs Sept 5:

- *Class canceled, Prof. Stone at conference*
- ****Last day to sign up for Profile your Politician Assignment****

Tues Sept 10:

- Second Continental Congress. 1781. "Articles of Confederation."
- Constitutional Convention. 1789. "U.S. Constitution."
- Dan Balz and Clara Ence Morse. 2023. "American democracy is cracking. These forces help explain why." *The Washington Post*.
- Profile Your Politician Presentations:
 - TBD

Thurs Sept 12:

- Federalist No. 10, 39, and 51
- Brutus No. 2 and 5
- Kenneth Dolbeare and Linda Metcalf. 1987. "The Dark Side of the Constitution" in *The Case Against the Constitution: from the Antifederalists to the Present*.
- Profile Your Politician Presentations:
 - TBD

Federalism

Tues Sept 17:

- Thomas Jefferson. 1798. "The Kentucky Resolutions."
- George Wallace. 1963. "School House Door Speech."
- Donald Kettl. 2020. "Madison's Balancing Act," in *The Divided States of America: Why Federalism Doesn't Work*.
- Profile Your Politician Presentations:
 - TBD

American Political Culture

Thurs Sept 19:

- Louis Hartz. 1955. *The Liberal Tradition in America* (excerpts).
- Rogers Smith. 1993. “Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America,” *American Political Science Review*. (excerpts)
- Richard Hofstadter. 1963. *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (excerpts).
- Profile Your Politician Presentations:
 - TBD

Capitalism and American Democracy

Tues Sept 24:

- Jeffrey Winters and Benjamin Page. 2009. “Oligarchy in the United States?”
- Aimee Picchi. 2020. “50 years of tax cuts for the rich failed to trickle down, economics study says.” *CBS News*.
- Profile Your Politician Presentations:
 - TBD

Part II: Government Institutions and Processes

Congress

Thurs Sept 26:

- David R. Mayhew. 1974. “Congress: The First Branch” in *Congress: The Electoral Connection*.
- Mary Hawkesworth. 2003. “Congressional Enactments of Race-Gender: Toward a Theory of Raced-Gendered Institutions.” *American Political Science Review*.
- Profile Your Politician Presentations:
 - TBD

The Presidency

Tues Oct 1:

- Andrew Polsky. 2012. “The Presidency at War: The Window of Agency in Wartime Presidential Leadership” in *Elusive Victories: The American Presidency at War*.
- Election-related reading TBA.
- Profile Your Politician Presentations:
 - TBD

The Supreme Court and Civil Liberties

Thurs Oct 3:

- Federalist No. 78
- The Bill of Rights
- Cass R. Sunstein. 2005. “Judges and Democracy: The Changing Role of the United States Supreme Court” in *The Judicial Branch*.
- Profile Your Politician Presentations:
 - TBD

Tues Oct 8:

- Susan Liebell. 2023. “The Politics of Law: Capricious Originalism and the Future of the Supreme Court.” *Polity*.
- Melissa Harris-Perry. 2022. “The True Power of the Supreme Court.” *NPR*.
- Gerald Rosenberg. 2022. “Abortion After *Dobbs*.” *Law & Courts Newsletter*.
- Profile Your Politician Presentations:
 - TBD

Thurs Oct 10:

- German Lopez. 2017. “Why the ACLU defends white nationalists’ right to protest – including in Charlottesville.” *Vox*.
- Jordan Howell. 2023. “Is saying ‘from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free’ protected speech under the First Amendment?” *FIRE*.
- Daniel L. Byman. 2021. “How hateful rhetoric connects to real-world violence.” Brookings Institution.
- Midterm exam study guide distributed in class.
- Profile Your Politician Presentations:
 - TBD

Tues Oct 15:

- **MIDTERM EXAM IN CLASS**

Thurs Oct 17:

- *Flex day*

Fri Oct 18: mid-term grades posted

Mon Oct 21– Tues Oct 22: Fall Recess, no class

Part III: Inclusion, Exclusion, and Contestation

Political Participation and Public Opinion

Thurs Oct 24:

- Stephen J. Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen. 2003. “The Political Logic of Political Participation” in *Mobilization, Participation, and Democracy in America*.
- Frances Fox Piven. 2000. “Does Voting Matter?” in *Why Americans Still Don't Vote, and Why Politicians Want it That Way*.

Tues Oct 29:

- Rachel Kleinfeld. 2023. “Polarization, Democracy, and Political Violence in the United States: What the Research Says.” Working Paper. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (excerpts).

- Cordelia McGee-Tubb. 2016. “How to Call Your Reps When You Have Social Anxiety.” *Echo Through the Fog*.

Linkage Institutions: Parties, Interest Groups, & the Media

Thurs Oct 31:

- Marty Cohen, David Karol, and Hans Noel. 2008. “Whose Parties?” in *The Party Decides: Presidential Nominations Before and After Reform*.
- Perry Bacon, Jr. 2022. “The US has four political parties stuffed into a two-party system. That’s a big problem.” Opinion. *The Washington Post*.

Tues Nov 5:

- Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page. 2014. “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens.”
- William Horncastle. 2020. “Ten years on, the legacy of *Citizens United* still threatens representative democracy in the United States.” *LSE Blog*.

Thurs Nov 7:

- In-class discussion: 2024 presidential election results. Readings TBA.

Tues Nov 12:

- Juan González and Joseph Torres. 2011. “Introduction.” *News for All the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media*.
- FAIR. “How to Detect Bias in News Media.”
- In-class exercise: detecting bias in news media.

Social Movements

Thurs Nov 14:

- Frances Fox Piven. 2006. “The Nature of Disruptive Power” in *Who’s Afraid of Frances Fox Piven*.
- Deva Woodly. 2022. “Introduction” in *Reckoning: Black Lives Matter and the Democratic Necessity of Social Movements*.
- ACLU. “Know Your Rights: Demonstrations and Protests.”

Civil Rights and Racial Justice

Tues Nov 19:

- Frederick Douglass. 1852. “What To The Slave Is The Fourth of July?”
- Martin Luther King Jr. 1963. “Letter From A Birmingham Jail.”
- Malcolm X. 1964. “The Ballot or the Bullet.”
- Mariame Kaba. 2020. “Yes, We Mean Literally Abolish the Police.” *The New York Times*.

Thurs Nov 21:

- Ta-Nehisi Coates. 2014. “The Case for Reparations.” *The Atlantic*.
- David Remnick. 2020. “Ten Years After *The New Jim Crow*: Interview with Michelle Alexander.” *The New Yorker Radio Hour*.

- Jaweed Kaleem. 2023. “What Tyre Nichols’ death at the hands of Black officers says about race in policing.” *Los Angeles Times*.

Feminist Movements

Tues Nov 26:

- Seneca Falls Convention. 1848. “Seneca Falls Declaration.”
- Sojourner Truth. 1851. “Ain’t I A Woman?”
- Combahee River Collective. 1977. “Combahee River Collective Statement: Black Feminist Organizing in the Seventies.”
- Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor. 2022. “How Black Feminists Defined Abortion Rights.” *The New Yorker*.

Weds Nov 27–Fri Nov 29: Thanksgiving recess

LGBTQ+ Movements

Tues Dec 3:

- “LGBTQ Definitions, Terms, Concepts.” 2023. The Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- Anonymous Queers. 1990. “Queers Read This.”
- David France. 2020. “The Activists: How ACT-UP Forever Changed Patients’ Rights, Protests, and American Political Organizing.” *The New York Times*.
- Shankar Vedantam. 2019. “America’s Changing Attitudes Toward Gay People.” *NPR*.

Immigrant and Undocumented Youth Movements

Thurs Dec 5:

- ACLU. “Know Your Rights: Immigrants’ Rights.”
- Isvett Verde. 2022. “Growing Up in the Shadow of DACA.” Guest Opinion. *The New York Times*.

Split these readings with a partner:

- Patricia Fernández-Kelly and Douglas Massey. 2007. “Borders for Whom? The Role of NAFTA in Mexico-U.S. Migration.” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*.
- Walter J. Nicholls. 2013. “Introduction” in *The DREAMers: How the Undocumented Youth Movement Transformed the Immigrant Rights Debate*.

Tues Dec 10:

- Final class wrap-up, distribute final exam study guides.

DATE, TIME TBD

- **FINAL EXAM IN PERSON**



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