Political Science 113 – American Government

Fall 2016

Professor Jeffrey L. Bernstein

Class meets Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30 A.M. to 10:45 A.M., 426 Pray-Harrold

Who I Am and What I’m Trying to Do

I have been a professor in the Department of Political Science at Eastern since 1997. I love teaching this class because I enjoy helping students see how much their lives are affected by the political system, and how they can affect the political world more than they think. I’m glad you’ll be sharing this journey with me, especially at such an interesting time in American politics.

I’m a husband (married to Lisa) and father of two boys (Zachary, 17, and Solomon, 12), a long-time fanatically-devoted fan of the New York Mets and New York Islanders, and I have watched Apollo 13 and 12 Angry Men way more than thirteen times each. I’m a juggler (balls, rings, rubber chickens, clubs, flaming torches, etc.) I spend a lot of my time these days thinking about baseball and trying to contain my sorrow about this Mets season, and yet also hoping for a miracle finish! I like to laugh, so I’m going to try to make class as fun and interesting as possible for all of us.

My mission statement. I provide the scaffolding to help you reach great heights.
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How to Contact Me:

Office: 601E Pray-Harrold, 487-6970
Office Hours: Monday, 10 A.M. – 12 P.M.;
             Tuesday and Thursday, 11 A.M. – 12 P.M.;
             Thursday 3:00 P.M. – 5:00 P.M.; and by appointment
E-mail: jeffrey.bernstein@emich.edu

I’m usually not hard to find. I’m on e-mail all the time, and will try to check my voice mail at least once a day. I welcome visitors during office hours – this is your time, and I enjoy the company and the chance to get to know you. If you’d like to talk in person but my office hours don’t work for you, let me know and we can find a different time that works for both of us. Please do not hesitate to be in touch if you have any concerns about the class, or if you want to talk about other stuff.

I’ve been teaching for a while, and I know class is more fun when students do well. So, I will devote my effort this term to helping you make this happen. I’ll meet you halfway – I’ll plan the best class sessions I can, administer fair and reasonable exams, create interesting learning activities (see below) and make myself available to you for help when you need it. You, however, will need to come to class, do the readings, study, participate in class, and ASK FOR HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT. Just like at Hogwarts, help will always be given to those who ask for it. You do your part, I’ll do mine, and hopefully everyone will end up happy and successful! 😊

A quick note on my teaching style: I believe very much in the concept of “messiness” when it comes to teaching and learning. I have little patience with approaches to teaching that would require me to stand in front of you each day, give you all the answers and ask you to spit them back to me on the test. That’s too neat, too sterile, too boring. And, it’s not learning – with enough bananas, I could train a monkey to get an A in this type of class. My approach, in contrast, is to give you the questions and ask you to struggle – with yourself, with me and with each other – to come up with the best possible answers. We grapple with hard questions here – that’s what makes this subject matter interesting. This will be messier than giving you simple answers to simple questions. But, when you’re done, you will have learned political science. And, you will have built your own skills that you can later use to make the political system work for you!
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Four Big Things This Semester

Lots of stuff is happening in American politics this semester, which makes teaching a class like this a particular challenge. So, to help us keep track of all the goings-on this semester, here is a quick box to explain the highlight of what we’ll be doing in here.

- A Standard American Government Class – we’ll spend some time this term covering the nuts and bolts – the Constitution, how people form political views, how political parties function, the legislative process, etc.
- Big, Unsettled Questions (Supreme Court Simulations) – we will take two controversial political issues and explore them using a Supreme Court simulation – the idea is to explore issues with no clear, easy answers.
- The Presidential Election – the presidential election will occupy our attention for the first nine weeks of the course – we’ll explore who is winning, why, and develop theories for how the election will turn out.
- Fixing the System – American politics is broken in many ways. As a major research project this term, you will work in teams to develop proposals to reform American politics, and will do a presentation on this proposal.

These items are listed separately above but, as you might imagine, they all intersect with each other. We’ll spend time this semester considering each of these things in isolation, but also attempting to fit them together and see how doing that can help us understand American politics better.

What You Can Expect in Here

In Class

Class meets twice a week. I expect you will be there all the time. You are paying far too much money for college not to attend; moreover, I assume that since you are here to learn, you will want to come to class so you can do so. (If you are not here to learn, you should be asking yourself far bigger questions about why you are here!). This is a serious class for serious students; I thank you in advance for treating my class this way.

I expect you will observe common courtesy when you are in class. Please come on time. Please put away cell phones. I do not teach in your bedroom; therefore, please do not sleep in my classroom. I expect you to be mentally present as well as physically present in class; this is the best way to ensure that you learn the course material. I do allow you to use laptops for note-taking in class, but reserve the right to withdraw this permission (individually or collectively) if I find laptops are distracting you from learning, or if I find students surfing on inappropriate websites. For example, any student found on <www.yankees.com> while in my class forfeits Internet rights for the semester. 😊

I will run class in a variety of formats. There will be some interactive lecturing, some small group exercises or discussions, some larger discussions, and some simulations. At all times, my aim will be to help you to achieve deep understanding of the material. Since so much of what I want you to learn will be dealt with only in class, it is important that you attend.

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Readings

I have ordered one book for this class, which should be available at all campus-area bookstores, as well as through various online sources. The book is:


I tend to be a minimalist with the textbook; the textbook is just to provide background information. The other readings and assignments, and class discussions, are where the real meat of our learning will come. To this end, I have placed a small number of other readings on the course website, accessed through the Canvas system (EMU’s course management system). I will use Canvas for a variety of course functions, including posting readings, accepting written assignments, and posting grades. I will let you know more details at the very beginning of the term regarding how to access this material for getting course readings and for submitting papers.

I have tried to choose articles for you to read that are informative and (sometimes) entertaining. Please remember it is my firm expectation that you do the readings (and listen to lectures) before the class in which we discuss them. I also recommend, especially for the more complex readings, that you review them after the class in which they are discussed as well.

One final word on readings. I reserve the right to assign additional, small readings. Some will be assigned as a result of the class simulations (for instance, to help everyone understand more complex points that arise in the simulations). Others might be added as I read interesting commentaries on the political goings-on in the world. These additional readings will not be unduly burdensome, but will be necessary for success in the course.

Exams

I will give you two exams this semester. The midterm will be held in class on Tuesday, October 25, and the final exam will be held on Thursday, December 15, from 9:00 A.M. to 10:30 A.M. The final will concentrate largely on material from the second half of the course. It will, however, include one essay that draws on material from the entire semester. Possible essay questions will be distributed on our first day on class.

My exams will include some items in which I ask you to identify a key term and discuss its significance. The bulk of the exam, however, will consist of questions in which I ask you to think about course material and apply what you have learned. My exam questions are not going to ask you to regurgitate details, but rather will focus on using what you learned. I might, for example, ask you to apply a particular theoretical argument to a novel situation. Or, I might ask you to outline how you might structure a speech on a particular issue. We’ll talk much more about the exams as they approach – I will do my utmost to make sure you are well-prepared for them!

I want you to study for the exams, and be well-prepared for them. I try not to make my exams high-stress situations – by making them as straightforward as I can, I aim for them to be times to “check-in” on how you are doing with the course material. Do the readings, come to class, participate actively, and you’ll find the exams are totally manageable!

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A First Assignment

At the beginning of the semester, you will receive a very brief First Assignment. This will be given to you on the second day of class (Tuesday, September 13), and will be due the following class (Thursday, September 15). The assignment will ask you to connect some of the theories we are learning about in class (either the collective action problem, or the concept of power) and apply it to a situation in your everyday life. This assignment will give you a chance to start applying the lessons of the class to “the real world.”

Simulations

On two occasions this semester, we will devote time in class and out of class to controversial political issues, and to simulating how they might play out in the political system (particularly in the Supreme Court). The issues we will discuss are listed below:

- Simulation #1 Teachers, Free Speech, and Social Media (October 6) – paper due 9/29
- Simulation #2 LGBTQ Rights and Religious Freedom (November 22) – paper due 11/17

For each of these issues, you will be asked to do reading before the simulation, and will also be given a role to play in the simulation. You will then write a short paper exploring the issue from this role. Following each exercise, I will also ask you to reflect on the exercise and address the issues you confronted. Trust me; you’ll love it!

In doing these exercises and giving you these assignments, I have three goals. The first is to expose you to some interesting and important issues in American politics. At the very least, I find these issues interesting and important. 😊 I hope you will as well. Second, I hope to get you to consider various ways in which the political system attempts to resolve complicated issues, and to reflect on the most effective ways to deal with these issues. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I hope to build your appreciation of the “unsettled” nature of political science – these are controversial issues about which reasonable people can disagree. In doing so, I also hope to build your skills at working through multiple, competing arguments, and using evidence to support and critique arguments.

Reforming the Political System

As you probably know, on November 8, 2016, we will be electing a president. We will spend a good bit of time this term discussing how we got here, specifically how Donald Trump beat out sixteen other Republicans, and how Hillary Clinton beat back Bernie Sanders’ challenge. We’ll also talk about who’s winning, and why, at various points of the semester. Most importantly, we’ll talk about how we have come to a point where we have two largely unpopular candidates, lots of anger in the electorate, and a campaign that is not quite inspiring anyone with its high-mindedness.

In addition to discussing the election, we will discuss the need for reform in the political system. The political system that the founders created all those years ago has many virtues, as you might expect in a system that has lasted over two hundred years. But some things may be broken:

a. Does money play too big a role in elections?
b. Should Supreme Court Justices be able to serve for life?
c. Should there be term limits for members of Congress?

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d. Do presidential campaigns take too long?
e. Are political parties too powerful?
f. Should the Senate filibuster be reformed, or eliminated?
g. Should presidents only be eligible to serve one term? Or more than two terms?
h. Has the federal government gotten too much power at the expense of the states?

These are just a few ideas; there are obviously many others you could play around with.

During the course of the semester, you will work in a group with two other students on proposing a reform idea to help the political system work better. You and your group will write a short proposal for me, which will be due on Thursday, October 27. The final paper will be due on Monday, December 5 (submitted by email) – this will be a short piece, of absolutely no more than 5 pages. On Tuesday, December 6 and Thursday, December 8, you and your group will do a presentation of the idea to me, and to a small panel who will comment and discuss your ideas with you. The reform proposals should demonstrate the nature of the problem you wish to solve, how your idea would solve it, and what other consequences might be of this idea. We’ll talk much more about this, but suffice it to say, this will be a very significant piece of the work we do this semester.

Course Grading

OK, so you want to get a good grade in this class. That’s good – grades can be an excellent motivator for you to put forward your best work. Thus far, I’ve already told you the things that you’ll be doing in here. I’ll put a chart below to tell you how these assignments will count toward your grade for the course. Please note that I will give you at least the grade promised to you by the table below. But, if I have reason to raise your grade, I will be most happy to do so. These reasons might include strong work during the simulations, extraordinary effort, improvement over the term, etc. Please give me a reason to treat you kindly at grade time!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date Due</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>% of Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>October 25</td>
<td>Midterm Examination</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 15</td>
<td>Final Examination</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 15</td>
<td>First Assignment is due</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 29</td>
<td>Written Paper for Simulation #1 is due</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 17</td>
<td>Written Paper for Simulation #2 is due</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 27</td>
<td>Political Reform Proposal is due</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>December 5 (Mon)</td>
<td>Political Reform Written Materials are due</td>
<td>Ungraded</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 6 or 8</td>
<td>Political Reform Presentation</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>All semester</td>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>5</td>
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A Few Other Notes

Let me make a couple of other comments here. First of all, academic integrity. Here at the university, there are few issues that are more important. Academic dishonesty, including all forms of cheating and/or plagiarism, will not be tolerated in this class. Anyone caught engaging in academic dishonesty will receive a grade of zero for the assignment in question and may, at my discretion, receive a failing grade for the entire course. In addition, you may be
referred to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards for discipline that could result in suspension or permanent dismissal from the university. If you are not sure whether something constitutes academic dishonesty, talk to me.

For students with disabilities, if you wish to be accommodated for your disability, EMU policy requires that you first register with the Disability Resource Center in room 240K of the Student Center. You may contact the DRC by phone at (734) 487-2470; their website is http://www.emich.edu/drc/. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with DRC soon as you will only be accommodated from the date you register with them forward. No retroactive accommodations are possible. I am more than willing to offer you all accommodations to which you are entitled, but I emphasize this is not something I can do on my own. If you have any questions, talk to me or the Disability Resource Center.

I am willing to make all reasonable accommodations for absences caused by religious observation. I do ask that you keep me posted when situations like this occur. Like most people, I am familiar with religious observances in my own faith, but know less about other religions. Perhaps your informing me of your absences, should they be necessary, will give me an opportunity to learn something new!

For purposes of this course, when I need to reach all of the students, I will use e-mail, specifically e-mail sent to your emich.edu address. Please make sure that all messages sent to this account are accessible by you and, if you use a different account, that you are able to forward EMU e-mails to your other account. I will consider you to have been informed about something connected with the course if I e-mail it to you at your emich.edu address.

Finally, this course fulfills the requirements for a Social Science course in the EMU General Education Program. I am required to print the “Rationale” for the course on my syllabus:

Political Science 113 meets the Social Science requirement under Knowledge of the Disciplines because it provides students critical exposure to the methods used by social scientists in creating knowledge. Political Science 113 provides a thorough grounding in American government. It also provides a strong introduction to the discipline of political science. In this course, students gain exposure to how knowledge is generated in the social sciences through the lens of one content area, that of American government. Through material covered in the course, students gain practice in asking important questions about the political world and answering them using the methods practiced in this social science discipline.

Our Schedule

What follows below is our tentative schedule. I reserve the right to make adjustments to the schedule as the term proceeds; if, for example, some topics generate more interest, we can spend additional time on them. We’ll also be sure to follow current political events and incorporate them into our discussions. I invite your input – if something is interesting, tell me!

For each day on the schedule, I tell you what we’ll be doing, what you’ll need to read (before class!) and where you should be with your assignments, as applicable.

Thursday, September 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Topic:</th>
<th>Course Introduction; Legal and Scientific Reasoning</th>
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<tr>
<td>What to Read:</td>
<td>United States Constitution, Amendment I.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>What to Read</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday, September 20</td>
<td>Constitution: The Bill of Rights</td>
<td>Read the Bill of Rights (First Ten Amendments to the Constitution of the United States of America), in Wasserman, pages 295-296. Reading Packet on Free Speech Rights of Teachers – available on Canvas.</td>
<td>We will spend some time today working on preparing you to write your papers for Simulation #1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, September 29</td>
<td>Finishing up the Constitution: Talking about the 2016 Election</td>
<td>No reading for today</td>
<td>The Written Paper for Simulation #1 is due today. We will spend some time introducing the Political Reform Assignment today. You will receive the assignment sheet.</td>
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Tuesday, October 4 – No Class Today (Rosh Hashana)

Thursday, October 6

Simulation #1: Teachers, Free Speech, and Social Media

Tuesday, October 11

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The Topic:</th>
<th>Public Opinion and This Great Experiment with Democracy</th>
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Thursday, October 13

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<tr>
<th>The Topic:</th>
<th>Political Participation</th>
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Tuesday, October 18 – No Class Today

Use the time today to work on the Political Reform Assignment.

Thursday, October 20

<table>
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<tr>
<th>The Topic:</th>
<th>Campaigns and Elections</th>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment:</td>
<td>We’ll spend some time today discussing the Political Reform Assignment.</td>
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**********Tuesday, October 25: Midterm Examination**********

Thursday, October 27

<table>
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<th>The Topic:</th>
<th>Interest Groups</th>
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<tr>
<td>Assignments:</td>
<td>Your Political Reform Assignment Proposal is due today.</td>
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Tuesday, November 1

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<tr>
<th>The Topic:</th>
<th>Politics, the Mass Media, and the Sharing of Political Information</th>
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## Thursday, November 3

**The Topic:** Political Parties

**What to Read:** Wasserman, pages 208-233.

**Assignment:** The Written Assignment for Simulation #2 will be handed out today.

## Tuesday, November 8

**The Topic:** Election Day – let’s talk about what will happen

**What to Read:** “Religious Freedom.” *CQ Researcher*, January 2016, pages 1-24. Read some material about how the election will go tonight.

**Assignments:** We will spend some time today working on preparing you to write your papers for Simulation #2.

## Thursday, November 10

**The Topic:** Post-Election Day – let’s talk about what happened

**What to Read:** Read everything you can get your hands on regarding how the election went on Tuesday night!

## Tuesday, November 15

**The Topic:** Congress and the Legislative Process; Preparing for the Simulation

**What to Read:** Wasserman, chapter 4.

**Assignments:** We’ll spend some time today discussing the Political Reform assignment.

## Thursday, November 17

**The Topic:** The Legislative Process Meets the Electoral Process

**What to Read:** Bernstein, Jeffrey L.  2001. “What High School Government Teachers Should Know about Congressional Elections.” Published on the CongressLink website of the Dirksen Congressional Research Center. Can be found at the following URL: [http://www.congresslink.org/print_expert_congressionalelections2.htm](http://www.congresslink.org/print_expert_congressionalelections2.htm)


**Assignments:** The written paper for Simulation #2 is due in class today.

## Tuesday, November 22

**Simulation #2: LGBTQ Rights and Religious Freedom**

## Thursday, November 24 – No Class Today (Thanksgiving Break)
Tuesday, November 29

| The Topic: | The Presidency and the Executive Branch |
| What to Read: | Wasserman, Chapter 3.  

Thursday, December 1

| The Topic: | Courts and the Judicial Branch |
| What to Read: | Wasserman, Chapter 5.  

Monday, December 5

Political Reform Written Materials Due by Noon

Tuesday, December 6 and Thursday, December 8

Reform Day: Presentation of Political Reform Papers

Thursday, December 10

| The Topic: | Conclusion of the Course |

*******Thursday, December 15: Final Examination*******

The exam will take place between 9:00 A.M. and 10:30 A.M.

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