

# **Political Science 113 – American Government**

**Fall 2018**

**Professor Jeffrey L. Bernstein**



*Class meets Tuesday and Thursday, 12:30 P.M. to 1:45 P.M., 213 Porter*

## **We most assuredly live in interesting times.**

I have been teaching political science for over twenty years, and have never observed political times as interesting as what we are seeing now. After a bitterly contested election, fought by two candidates of unprecedented unpopularity, we have a controversial president who has governed like nobody in recent history. The level of anger in the country is dialed up to levels I've never seen, and like many of you, I'm sometimes scared to check the news in the morning.

More than ever, it is imperative that we understand government. It is imperative that we understand how our political system was set up, that we understand what is at stake in the current political battles, and that we understand the need to be intelligent, engaged participants. Being able to ignore the political world is something none of us can afford to do, no matter where we stand on the political spectrum. I hope this class will give you the tools to understand more about

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American government, and to find your voice in the cacophony that represents our current political scene.

### 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, and that we'll have a chance to puzzle through challenging issues together.

I'm a husband (married to Lisa) and father of two boys (Zachary, 19, and Solly, 14), a long-time fanatically-devoted fan of the New York Mets, 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. I like to laugh, so I'm going to try to make class as fun and interesting as possible for all of us.



#### How to Contact Me:

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 11 A.M. – 12 P.M.;  
Wednesday, 11 A.M. – 1 P.M.;  
Thursday, 2:00 P.M. – 4:00 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

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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 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, and 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 is messier than giving you simple answers to simple questions. But, when you're done, you will have *learned* political science. In addition, you will have built your own skills that you can later use to make the political system work for you!

## 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, and 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 encourage you to use laptops for notetaking in class if you wish, 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.

### 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:

Wasserman, Gary. 2015. *The Basics of American Politics*, 15<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: Pearson. **Hereafter referred to as Wasserman.**

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

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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 *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 first, which I have termed a “mini-term” exam, will be held in class on Tuesday, October 2. This will be based on just a small amount of material, and is intended as a way for us to check in and make sure you are understanding what is expected of you in the class. The more traditional “midterm” exam, will be held on Thursday, November 1, and will cover all material from the first half of the course. The final exam will be held on Tuesday, December 18, from 11:30 A.M. to 1:00 P.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 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 focus on asking 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 will 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 ready 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!

## Supreme Court Simulation

Early on in the semester, we will do a Supreme Court simulation, in which you will take on roles of justices, litigants, and interest groups in a case. The case will focus on public school teachers, free speech, and social media. The Court will hear the case on Thursday, October 4.

As part of the case, you will be asked to do reading before the simulation, and will write a paper (due on Sunday, September 30, by 9 A.M.) exploring the issue from the perspective of your role in the simulation. Following the case, you will write another paper (due on Tuesday, October 16) in

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which you respond to the court decision, once again from the perspective of the role you played in the case. Role assignments will be done well in advance of the simulation, and I will also make myself available to help you excel in your role. Trust me; you'll love it!

In doing this simulation 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

The American political system is broken. This is not a partisan statement, but rather a statement that the way the system was designed, hundreds of years ago, was imperfect. The evolution of the system has not always been smooth – as the world has changed, the political system has changed, not always in a good way. Below, I have listed some of the larger questions I have about how the political system operates. Each of them, and others I have not listed, would open the door to wonderful questions about how things work in reality, how we might ideally want them to work, and how we can move from our current reality to a better future. Think about each of these items:

- a. Does money play too big a role in elections?
- b. Should we be doing more to foster widespread political participation?
- c. Should Supreme Court Justices be able to serve for life?
- d. Should there be term limits for members of Congress?
- e. Do presidential campaigns take too long?
- f. Are political parties too powerful? Not powerful enough?
- g. Should the Senate filibuster be reformed, or eliminated?
- h. Should presidents only be eligible to serve one term? Or more than two terms?

These are just a few ideas; any of them, and many others, would lead to great discussion, and to a wonderful project.

During the course of the semester, you will work in a group with two or three 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 25. Your (individual) final paper on the reform project will be due on Thursday, November 29. On Tuesday, December 4 or Thursday, December 6, you and your group will do a presentation of the idea to the class. The reform proposals should demonstrate the nature of the problem you wish to solve, how your idea would solve it, and what the 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

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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; the following table tells 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 exemplary class participation, strong work during the simulation or reform project, extraordinary effort, improvement over the term, etc. Please give me a reason to treat you kindly at grade time!

Date Due	Assignment	% of Grade
October 2	"Mini-Term" Examination	10
November 1	Midterm Examination	15
December 18	Final Examination	20
September 30	Pre-Paper for Supreme Court Simulation	15
October 16	Post-Paper for Supreme Court Simulation	10
October 25	Political Reform Proposal is due	Ungraded
November 29	Political Reform Paper is due	20
December 4 or 6	Political Reform Presentation	10

## 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 (as it will be for me during this semester) will give me an opportunity to learn something new!

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:

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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.

Finally, 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.

## 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 6

<b>The Topic:</b>	Course Introduction; Legal and Scientific Reasoning
<b>What to Read:</b>	<i>United States Constitution, Amendment I.</i>

### Tuesday, September 11: No Class Today (Rosh Hashana)

### Thursday, September 13

<b>The Topic:</b>	The Bill of Rights
<b>What to Read:</b>	Read the <i>Bill of Rights</i> (First Ten Amendments to the <i>Constitution of the United States of America</i> ), in Wasserman, pages 295-296. Reading Packet on Free Speech Rights of Teachers – available on Canvas. Lund, Nelson and Adam Winkler. “The Second Amendment.” National Constitution Center. <a href="https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendments/amendment-ii">https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendments/amendment-ii</a>
<b>Assignment:</b>	Today, I will give out the pre-assignment for the Supreme Court simulation. The paper will be due on Sunday, September 30.

### Tuesday, September 18

<b>The Topic:</b>	Rules and Power; Rational Choice and Collective Action
<b>What to Read:</b>	Wasserman, chapter 1. Wuffle, A. 1984. “Should You Brush Your Teeth on November 6,

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	1984? A Rational Choice Perspective.” <i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i> 17: 577-581.
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### Thursday, September 20

<b>The Topic:</b>	Majority Rule and Minority Rights; Development of the U.S. Constitution
<b>What to Read:</b>	Guinier, Lani. 1993. “Second Proms and Second Primaries: The Limits of Majority Rule.” <i>Penn Law Journal</i> 28:14-17. Wasserman, chapter 2. <i>The Declaration of Independence</i> in Wasserman, pages 285-287. Skim the <i>Constitution of the United States of America</i> in Wasserman, pages 288-302.

### Tuesday, September 25: No Class Today

We will not be meeting today. Instead, I will schedule meetings with each of you, or groups of you, to discuss the first paper, and the upcoming simulation.

### Thursday, September 27

<b>The Topic:</b>	Constitution: Separation of Powers; Checks & Balances
<b>What to Read:</b>	Once again, skim the <i>Constitution of the United States of America</i> in Wasserman, pages 288-302.
<b>Assignments:</b>	-You should be preparing for the Mini-Term Exam, which is on Tuesday. -You should also be finishing up the pre-simulation paper, which is due on Sunday.

### Sunday, September 30: Your Pre-Simulation Paper Is Due at 9 A.M.

### Tuesday, October 2: Mini-Term Examination

### Thursday, October 4

### Supreme Court Simulation: Teachers, Free Speech, and Social Media

### Tuesday, October 9

<b>The Topic:</b>	Constitution: Representation; Federalism
<b>What to Read:</b>	Frantzich, Stephen E. 2005. <i>Citizen Democracy: Political Activists in a Cynical Age</i> , Second Edition. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield. Chapter 2. Broder, David. S. 2000. <i>Democracy Derailed: Initiative Campaigns and the Power of Money</i> . Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Inc. Introduction.
<b>Assignments:</b>	You should be working on the post-simulation paper, which is due on Tuesday, October 16.

### Thursday, October 11

<b>The Topic:</b>	The Constitution and Reform: Thinking about Change
<b>What to Read:</b>	Rauch, Jonathan. 2016. “How American Politics Went Insane.” <i>The Atlantic</i> , July/August 2016 Issue.

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<b>Assignment:</b>	You will receive the Political Reform Assignment today.
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## Tuesday, October 16

<b>The Topic:</b>	Public Opinion
<b>What to Read:</b>	<p>Luker, Kristin. 1984. <i>Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood</i>. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapter 7.</p> <p>Cramer, Katherine J. 2016. “For Years, I’ve Been Watching Anti-Elite Fury Build in Wisconsin. Then Came Trump.” <i>Vox</i>, November 11, 2016.</p>
<b>Assignment:</b>	<p>-The post-simulation paper for the court case is due today.</p> <p>-Today you will form groups for the political reform today.</p>

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**Thursday, October 18**

<b>The Topic:</b>	Measuring Public Opinion (Badly), and a Cool Class Exercise
<b>What to Read:</b>	Seife, Charles. 2010. <i>Proofiness: The Dark Arts of Mathematical Deception</i> . New York: Viking. Chapter 4. Hopkins, Dan. 2016. “Voters Really Did Switch to Trump at the Last Minute.” Published on fivethirtyeight.com, December 20, 2016.
<b>Assignment:</b>	You will get a cool assignment today, with the opportunity to win donuts.

**Tuesday, October 23**

<b>The Topic:</b>	Political Participation
<b>What to Read:</b>	Wasserman, pages 195-208. Wattenberg, Martin P. 2008. <i>Is Voting for Young People?</i> New York: Pearson Longman. Chapter 7. Issenberg, Sasha. 2012. “The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns.” New York: Crown Publishers. Chapter 7.
<b>Assignment:</b>	You will have time in class today to work on the Political Reform Assignment.

**Thursday, October 25**

<b>The Topic:</b>	Interest Groups
<b>What to Read:</b>	Wasserman, pages 235-250. Berry, Jeffrey M. 1997. <i>The Interest Group Society</i> , 3 <sup>rd</sup> edition. New York: Longman. Chapter 5. Meyer, Theodor. 2018. “The Most Powerful Lobbyist in Trump’s Washington.” <i>Politico</i> , April 2, 2018.
<b>Assignment:</b>	Your Political Reform Proposal is due today.

**Tuesday, October 30**

<b>The Topic:</b>	Political Parties
<b>What to Read:</b>	Wasserman, pages 208-233. Bernstein, Jeffrey L. 2018. “Understanding Political Parties.” Chapter 2 of draft of in-progress manuscript.

**Thursday, November 1: Midterm Examination****Tuesday, November 6**

<b>The Topic:</b>	Campaigns and Elections
<b>What to Read:</b>	Dovere, Edward-Isaac. 2016. “How Clinton Lost Michigan – and Blew the Election.” <i>Politico</i> , December 14, 2016. I will also ask you to read various things about tonight’s election.

**Thursday, November 8**

<b>The Topic:</b>	More on Campaigns and Elections
<b>What to Read:</b>	Read as much as you can find about Tuesday night’s results.

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**Tuesday, November 13**

<b>The Topic:</b>	Politics, and the Mass Media
<b>What to Read:</b>	Wasserman, pages 250-269. Putnam, Robert D. 2000. <i>Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community</i> . New York: Simon and Schuster. Chapter 1. Meyer, Robinson. 2018. “The Grim Conclusions of the Largest-Ever Study of Fake News.” <i>The Atlantic</i> , March 8, 2018.

**Thursday, November 15**

<b>The Topic:</b>	Congress and the Legislative Process; Preparing for the Simulation
<b>What to Read:</b>	Wasserman, chapter 4.

**Tuesday, November 20**

<b>The Topic:</b>	More on the Legislative Process
<b>What to Read:</b>	Bernstein, Jeffrey L. 2001. “What High School Government Teachers Should Know about Congressional Elections.” Published on the website of the Dirksen Congressional Research Center. Crile, George. 1975. “The Best Congressman.” <i>Harper’s Magazine</i> , January, pages 60-66.
<b>Assignments:</b>	We’ll allow some time in class today for groups to work on the political reform project.

**Thursday, November 22 – No Class Today (Thanksgiving Break)****Tuesday, November 27**

<b>The Topic:</b>	The Presidency and the Executive Branch
<b>What to Read:</b>	Wasserman, Chapter 3. McKibbin, Carroll R. 1993. “Presidential Initiative and Bureaucratic Response: Delivering the Mariner IV Pictures of Mars.” <i>Presidential Studies Quarterly</i> 23:727-737. Howard, Philip K. 2011. <i>The Death of Common Sense</i> . New York: Random House. Chapter 1.

**Thursday, November 29**

<b>The Topic:</b>	Courts and the Judicial Branch
<b>What to Read:</b>	Wasserman, Chapter 5. Justice Roberts’ opinion in <i>National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius</i> (the first Obamacare case), pages 1-6.

**Tuesday, December 4 and Thursday, December 6****Reform Days: Presentation of Political Reform Papers**

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**Tuesday, December 11**

<b>The Topic:</b>	Conclusion of the Course
<b>What to Read:</b>	Lupia, Arthur. 2006. "How Elitism Undermines the Study of Democratic Competence." <i>Critical Review</i> 18: 217-232. Wattenberg, Martin P. 2008. <i>Is Voting for Young People?</i> New York: Pearson Longman. Chapter 8.

**Tuesday, December 18: Final Examination (11:30 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.)**

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