

# American Politics

## PPL 210-01

Melissa Buis Michaux  
Politics Department  
Willamette University

Fall 2019  
Office: SML 317  
(503) 370-6293

**Purpose:** This course examines the nature of American politics, its structure and philosophical underpinnings, through an inquiry into the question: How well are our institutions functioning?

### **Student Learning Objectives:**

Students will be able to--

- Identify the sources and structures of political power in the U.S.
- Understand how our governmental system of federalism and checks and balances operate
- Evaluate how well governmental institutions, practices, and processes measure up to normative concerns and constitutional promises; and evaluate various reform ideas.

### **Course Materials:**

Stevenson, Bryan. *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (Spiegel and Grau, 2014).

Additional class readings are found on the WISE site for Poli-210-01. Please print and bring your reading to class. If you prefer not to print, make sure you are able to access the reading during class along with your notes on that reading. Further, make a habit of reading the domestic politics stories in a national newspaper—either *The New York Times* which is provided free to Willamette students or the *Washington Post* for which you can get an online subscription. I will also use non-printed materials—podcasts, visuals, lectures—to supplement the course materials on WISE.

### **Course Requirements:**

2 essay exams	50%
Final Exam	30%
Class participation and reflections	20%

**A note about class participation:** I use a variety of teaching methods because I know that one size does not fit all, that students have different learning styles with a variety of strengths and weaknesses. The reading material is difficult—why else come to college?—and so we will use the class time to help enhance your understanding of the readings and to develop your own ideas about the meanings of various arguments, political structures and expressions of power. While lecturing is a component of this course, I expect you to come to class ready to engage the material, me and your peers. You cannot do this if you do not come to class in the first place and you cannot do this well if you do not read the assigned material for the class. I do take attendance; 3 or more absences will result in class participation reductions.

If you find yourself struggling with the reading or the class assignments, let me know—connect with me before or after class, send me an email, come to my office hours and/or make an appointment.

**Reflections:** Reflections are informal writing assignments that I will ask you to complete over the course of the semester, primarily about the readings or some discussion in class. In addition, I ask that you attend 2 community events and turn in a 250 word reflection about the event. You may choose your own event; it just has to have political content.

**Willamette's Credit Hour Policy:** For every hour of class time, there is an expectation of 2-3 hours work outside of class. Thus, for a class meeting three hours a week you should anticipate spending 6-9 hours outside of class engaged in course-related activities. I have designed readings and assignments with this credit hour requirement in mind and you should plan accordingly.

**Respect for Diversity:** In pursuit of the goal of academic excellence, I seek to develop and nurture diversity, believing that it strengthens classroom engagement, stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and enriches campus life. I do not condone discrimination against any member of the school's community on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin or ancestry, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability status, health status, or veteran status. I welcome your ideas and suggestions about how to ensure the creation of such an inclusive learning community. Please note that when given advance warning, I make accommodations for religious needs and practices.

**Religious Holidays:** Willamette University recognizes the value of religious practice and strives to accommodate students' commitment to their religious traditions whenever possible. When conflicts between holy days or other religious practice and academic scheduling arise, every effort should be made to allow students to adhere to their tradition, including, when possible, excusing class absences and allowing make-up work. A student anticipating the need to miss a class for religious reasons should alert the faculty member within the first two weeks of the semester, and the two of them should determine the next course of action. Any unresolved difficulty should be referred to the Office of the Chaplains.

**Students with Disabilities:** In accordance with University policy, if you have a documented disability and require accommodations to obtain equal access to this class, please contact me at the beginning of the semester or when given an assignment for which an accommodation is required. Students must verify their eligibility through the Office of Student Disability Services in the Bishop Wellness Center. If you have any questions about this, please feel free to contact me. I will respect any accommodation authorized by the Office of Disabilities Services.

**Cheating and Plagiarism:** Representing someone else's work as your own and other forms of cheating will result in a zero for that assignment and may result in failure of the course. See: <http://willamette.edu/cla/catalog/resources/policies/plagiarism-cheating.php> for university policies. When you quote from a source, you must place that material in quotation marks and correctly cite the source of the quotation. When you paraphrase the words of another, you must provide the source from which you are paraphrasing. If you are ever unsure if some action constitutes cheating or plagiarism, ask me. Ignorance of the rules is not an acceptable defense.

**Commitment to Positive Sexual Ethics:** Willamette is a community committed to fostering safe, productive learning environments, and we value ethical sexual behaviors and standards. Title IX and our school policy prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, which regards sexual misconduct—including discrimination, harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. We understand that sexual violence can undermine students' academic success, and we encourage affected students to talk to someone about their experiences and get the support they need. Please be aware that as a mandatory reporter I am required to report any instances you disclose to Willamette's Title IX Coordinator. If you would rather share information with a confidential employee who does not have this responsibility, please contact our confidential advocate at [confidential-advocate@willamette.edu](mailto:confidential-advocate@willamette.edu). Confidential support also can be found with SARAs and at the GRAC (503-851-4245); at WUTalk - a 24-hour telephone crisis counseling support line (503-375-5353); and via the University Chaplains (503-370-6213). If you are in immediate danger, please call campus safety at 503-370-6911.

**Note: I will gladly honor your request to address you by your chosen name and gender pronoun. Please advise me of this at any point in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. I prefer to be addressed as Professor Michaux (pronounced Me-show) and I use she/her pronouns.**

8/26 (Mon) Introduction I: Being a political scientist in an age of polarization

8/28-8/30: No class. I will be out of town attending the American Political Science Association Annual meeting in Washington, D.C. While I am gone, I want you to contact at least one other person in class to meet and discuss your reactions to either the Noel article, the John Oliver video, or the Trevor Noah video. Then I would like you to send me one from the group summarizing your discussion. The summary need not be longer than a paragraph. If you want to write more, that is ok. This is just an informal summary. To the introverts in the class, I know reaching out to someone you don't know is hard; I appreciate that. Extroverts, make this easy on the introverts and initiate contact.

9/2 (Mon) Labor Day! Take the day off. You can thank the labor movement for this day that worked from about 1885-1894 to make the first Monday in September a legal national holiday.

9/4 (Wed) Introduction Part II:

Hans Noel, "Ten Things Political Scientists Know that You Don't" *Free Thoughts Podcast* September 22, 2017:  
<https://www.libertarianism.org/media/free-thoughts/ten-things-political-scientists-know-you-dont>

Watch John Oliver on the state of journalism @  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bq2\\_wSsDwkQ&app=desktop](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bq2_wSsDwkQ&app=desktop)

Bonus: Watch Trevor Noah on why young people don't vote:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_7i04G7moYI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7i04G7moYI)

### **Does federalism constrain national power or merely produce and reproduce inequality?**

9/6 (Fri) **Voting Rights:** What are the protections for voting rights and their restrictions? What is the status of the Voting Rights Act in securing those rights?  
Read only the majority opinion of *Shelby Co v. Holder* (2012) found on WISE.

9/9 (Mon) Ginsberg's dissent, which begins on page 32 of the *Shelby Co. v. Holder* pdf on WISE.

**Registrar Announcement: Last day to file Add/Drop is September 9. Please make sure you have filled out and turned in appropriate paperwork.**

9/11 (Wed) 15th Amendment: What was the original intent of the 15th Amendment? How did it change our Constitution and how have our politics evolved since then?  
"Brief of the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law as Amicus Curiae in Support of Respondents," *Shelby Co. v. Holder*. [on WISE]

9/13 (Fri) Discussion of *Shelby Co* case. No additional reading.

9/16 (Mon) **Marijuana Legalization** and federal-state relations  
Excerpts from *Gonzales v. Raich* (2005)—on WISE

9/18 (Wed) "Marijuana-Commerce clause debate" pdf [on WISE].

9/20 (Fri) The role of states in immigration policy  
Gary Reich, "Hitting a Wall? The Trump Administration Meets Immigration Federalism" *Publius: The Journal of American Federalism* 48 (May 25, 2018) 3: 375-395.

9/23 (Mon) Oregon's troubled immigration history  
Robert Bussel and Daniel Tichenor, "Trouble in Paradise: A Historical Perspective on Immigration in Oregon"  
*Oregon Historical Quarterly* 118 (Winter 2017) 4: 460-487.

9/25 (Wed) Class discussion on federalism.

9/27 (Fri) In-class essay exam. You may bring one page (8.5x11) of notes

### **Is Congress broken?**

9/30 (Mon) **Is Congress broken by design?**

Robert A. Dahl, *How Democratic is the American Constitution* 2nd edition. (Yale University Press, 2003)  
Chapters 1-2 and Appendix

10/2 (Wed) Dahl, Chapter 3: "The Constitution as a Model: An American Illusion"

10/4 (Fri) R. Shep Melnick, "Does the Constitution Encourage Gridlock?" talk delivered at Willamette University,  
Spring 2011

10/7 (Mon) Essay exams returned.

**Is Congress broken because of the political parties? Why is it so hard for the 2 parties to agree? Why is the gap between the 2 parties growing?**

Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, *It's Even Worse than it Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided with the New Politics of Extremism* (Basic Books, 2012): Introduction and Chapter 1 [on WISE]

10/9 (Wed) Achen and Bartels, *Democracy for Realists* (Princeton University Press, 2016) Chapter 9: Partisan Hearts and Spleens: Social Identities and Political change

10/11 (Fri) TBA

### **Does the President have too much power?**

10/14 (Mon) Robert Lieberman, Suzanne Mettler, Thomas B. Pepinsky, Kenneth Roberts and Richard Valelly, "The Trump Presidency and American Democracy: A Historical and Comparative Analysis" *Perspectives on Politics* 17 (June 2019) 2: 470- 479.

10/16 (Wed) Nicholas F. Jacobs, Desmond King and Sidney M. Milkis, "Building a Conservative State: Partisan Polarization and the Redeployment of Administrative Power" *Perspectives on Politics* 17 (June 2019) 2: 453-469.

10/18 Mid-semester day. No class.

10/21 (Mon) Class discussion on partisanship and our constitutional design.

## **Policy Case Study: health care reform**

### **How do these institutions—judicial, legislative and executive work in practice during an era of polarization?**

10/23 (Wed) Politics of Health Care Reform

Jacob Hacker, “The Road to Somewhere: Why Health Reform Happened or Why Political Scientists who Write about Public Policy Shouldn’t Assume They Know How to Shape It” *Perspectives on Politics* 8 (September 2010) 3: 861-876.

10/25 (Fri) “Obamacare Basics: What is the Affordable Care Act?”

<https://healthcare.findlaw.com/patient-rights/obamacare-basics-understanding-the-affordable-care-act.html>

“Key Facts about the Uninsured Population” KFF published December 7, 2018

<https://www.kff.org/uninsured/fact-sheet/key-facts-about-the-uninsured-population/>

**Registrar Announcement: Last day to withdraw from full semester classes is October 25th.**

10/28 (Mon) **The Affordable Care Act Challenges**

Challenges to health care reform from courts and states and advocacy groups.

Elizabeth Rigby, “State Resistance to ‘ObamaCare’” *The Forum* 10 (2012) 2

“If the Affordable Care Act is Struck Down, Nearly all Americans Would be Affected in Some Way”

<https://www.kff.org/health-reform/press-release/if-the-affordable-care-act-is-struck-down-nearly-all-americans-would-be-affected-in-some-way/>

10/30 (Wed) **Trump administration changes**

Thompson, Gusmano and Shinohara, “Trump and the Affordable Care Act: Congressional Repeal Efforts, Executive Federalism, and Program Durability” *Publius: The Journal of American Federalism* 48 (May 25, 2018) 3: 396-424.

Take home exam distributed.

11/1 (Fri) Class discussion on health care reform.

11/4 (Mon) No class. Take home exam due by 11:30am posted to WISE. Late exams will be penalized with 1/3 a letter grade. No exams will be accepted that are more than 24 hours late.

### **Does the legal system deliver justice?**

11/6 (Wed) Stevenson, Introduction and Chapter 1-3

11/8 (Fri) Stevenson, Chapters 4-7

11/11 (Mon) Stevenson, Chapters 8-13

11/13 (Wed) Stevenson, Chapters 14—Epilogue (potential guest speaker)

11/15 (Fri) Dashka Slater, “North Dakota’s Norway Experiment” *Mother Jones* July/Aug 2017, found here:

<http://www.motherjones.com/crime-justice/2017/07/north-dakota-norway-prisons-experiment/#>

### **Can civic engagement save us?**

11/18 (Mon) The Power of a **Movement**

Philip Klinkner and Rogers Smith, *The Unsteady March: The Rise and Decline of Racial Equality in America* (University of Chicago Press, 1999) Chapter 8: “There Comes a Time”

11/20 (Wed) **Litigation Advocacy**: Alison Gash, *Below the Radar: How Silence Can Save Civil Rights* (Oxford University Press, 2015) Chapters 1-2.

11/22 (Fri) **Voting**: Nathaniel Persily, “The 2016 U.S. Election: Can Democracy Survive the Internet?” *Journal of Democracy* 28 (April 2017) 2: 63-76. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/653377/pdf>

THANKSGIVING BREAK—no classes Nov. 25-29

### **What reforms should we pursue?**

12/2 (Mon) Please bring one article to class that advocates for a reform idea that you support that would improve American politics and/or the policy process. Be prepared to discuss your article in a small group.

12/4 (Wed) Racial reconciliation?

“Truth and reconciliation,” a conversation with Bryan Stevenson and Sarah Lewis, October 2017  
<https://aperture.org/blog/truth-reconciliation-bryan-stevenson-sarah-lewis/>

12/6 (Fri) Conclusions and review

**Final Exam: Friday, December 13, 2019, from 8-11 am.** Note that this date and time is set by the University registrar. Accommodations for an alternative time can only be made under extraordinary circumstances. Please plan accordingly.