



MERRIMACK COLLEGE

Syllabus: Politics of the US

Instructor: Dr. Kirstie Lynn Dobbs

Office Hours Sign Up [Link](#)

Office Hours Zoom Link

<https://merrimack.zoom.us/j/99900279201>

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Course Description

This course is designed to help students understand how politics and the American government apply to their everyday lives and how citizens participate in achieving positive change in their communities. Throughout this course, students will explore their identities while connecting their lived experiences with the roles of individual citizens. The intent is to emphasize how individual participation matters and how young people can make a difference. We will also focus on sharpening our digital media literacy skills (i.e., identifying fake news and bias) and developing our ability to talk across political differences. I have chosen a textbook that focuses on collective political participation to achieve these objectives.

The pedagogical method applied to this class is a mixture of a lecture-based and active teaching model. Students are expected to take notes during lectures and are also expected to be actively engaged in classroom activities and discussions. Students can expect to engage in Socratic discussions, where they will talk with their peers about a current event/issue in U.S. politics - sometimes in the form of a debate. This classroom also incorporates a “flipped” learning model, where students take reading quizzes to explore course content *before* coming to class. This allows us more time to engage directly with the content in critical and analytical ways.

Attendance will be taken at the start of each class. If a student is more than 15 min late without notice, they will be counted as tardy. Be on time!

Readings

[Textbook] [Textbook] Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline Tolbert, Andrea Campbell, and Robert Spitzer. (2021). *We the People: An Introduction to American Politics*. W.W. Norton & Company. New York, NY.

**You can purchase the physical book or the ebook. You will need access to inquisitive assignments.

In addition to this book, supplemental readings will be available on the course's blackboard course page. Readings should be completed *before* coming to class to enhance and facilitate lectures and class discussion. You should anticipate approximately 60 - 100 pages of reading per week.

Email Correspondence

I am very flexible and happy to accommodate students based on their needs. Students may email me on any day of the week to ask for extensions or other accommodations. However, please give me at least 24 hours to respond. Also, I typically do not answer emails on the weekends. If you email me Friday night after 5:00 pm, please do not expect a response till Monday morning. If you email me after 5:00 pm during the week, please do not expect an email till the following day. I am not your mother, your doctor, or a policewoman, so I am sure nothing you have to contact me about constitutes an emergency :)

Participation and Engagement

Students are expected to attend the course synchronously each week. If you miss class, you will be responsible for making up the engagement points for that week. The activity for the engagement points will be available in our weekly course modules on Blackboard. You have two weeks to make up any missing engagement points for excused absences, no exceptions. If your situation for missing class requires a longer leave of absence, please contact me or the college ASAP.

Missing Class

If you miss class, you are still expected to complete ALL asynchronous assignments in the module by SUNDAY at midnight of that module week. Accommodations can be made, but you need to alert me that you need an extension before the assigned due date! **If you do not reach out within two weeks of the missed class, accommodations will NOT be made for missing assignments.**

Credit Justification Statement

In this course, students will be expected to do the following amount of work:

- Classroom hours: 1.5 per week
- Reading per week: 4-5 hours per week (on average)
- Prep work for class-based discussion: 2-3 per week (on average)
- Research and writing: 2-3 per week (on average)
- Civic Engagement Portfolio Project: 1-2 per week (on average)
- Exam preparation: 1 hour per week (on average)
- Total: 11.5-15.5 hours per week

Access to Canvas

All course materials will be uploaded to Canvas. This includes links to engagement point activities (available for two weeks), rubrics, and assignment sheets. Grades will also be posted on this site. To access Blackboard, go to <https://blackboard.merrimack.edu/ultra/institution-page> and use your Merrimack login credentials to access the course site.

Learning Outcomes

The main goal of this course is to help students feel more **empowered** regarding their ability to understand and be active in U.S. politics. After completing the course, each student should:

- ❖ Explore American political identity and what it means to you, your community, and the country;
- ❖ Investigate the roots and evolution of diversity in America, allowing you to more knowledgeably evaluate how and why demographics are changing and the implications for U.S. policy moving forward;
- ❖ Understand the policymaking process in the United States;
- ❖ Understand how our particular form of democracy and elections work;
- ❖ Recognize and evaluate the essential debates and issues in American government and American political history;
- ❖ Explain and critically assess the formal and informal political institutions and their respective roles in American politics;
- ❖ Critically evaluate media and improve upon digital media literacy skills
- ❖ Identify and describe the key functions of the three branches of government; and
- ❖ Assess the causes and consequences of different forms of political participation, and outline how individuals and groups can affect political outcomes in the United States.

Grading

Civic Engagement Portfolio Project

- Midterm Paper 21%
- Final Project 25%

Chapter Quizzes 26%

Engagement Points 28%

Grading Scale

A 93-100	C 73-76
A- 90-92	C- 70-72
B+ 87-89	D+ 67-69
B 83-86	D 63-66
B- 80-82	D- 60-62
C+ 77-79	F 59 and below

Assignments

Civic Action Project (46%)

This project is designed to help you think through your role as a citizen and how you might affect positive change in your community. This project aims to help give you a deeper understanding of civic engagement and how you might apply it to your everyday life. To complete this project, you will write a midterm paper and complete a final project representing a component of your civic action plan. At times, we will tackle pieces of this project together in class. You will complete parts of the project on your own time at other times. More detailed information can be found on the Civic Engagement Portfolio Project word document located on Canvas.

Midterm Paper (21%)

The midterm paper is 3-5 pages where students will pinpoint their passion, and educate themselves on their topic. Students are required to provide eight legitimate sources for conducting their research. A full reference page in APA format is required.

Final Project (25%)

Students will use what they learned from their research in their midterm paper to develop a short-term, intermediate, and long-term goal for their civic action project. Students will also identify important resources, and create an action plan. The students must produce their short-term goal and present it to the class.

Semester Quizzes (26%)

You will take 13 reading quizzes throughout the semester. These quizzes are available on Canvas within each course module. You are expected to take this quiz by midnight the Sunday before the class officially lecturing on that module. The quizzes are open book, open note, and untimed.

Engagement Points

You will be awarded engagement points for completing various activities throughout the semester. These activities include responding to discussion questions, polls, quiz questions in the Nearpod PowerPoint, completing documentary worksheets, group work, and simulations. All of these activities are accessible in the Canvas module for each week. If you cannot attend class, you will complete these activities by Sunday of that week. No exceptions. If you have an excused absence, you have **two weeks** after your missed class to make up the missing work.

Suggested News Outlets

- *The Washington Post*
- *The New York Times*
- *The Economist*
- CNN
- NPR Politics Podcast; NPR's Up First
- New York Times' The Daily

- BBC Global News Podcast

Due Dates and Late Policy:

All assignments must be turned in on their due date through Blackboard. Students must be present for exams and group presentations. Only unforeseen emergencies with valid documentation will permit students to remake exams and their group presentations. Any assignments turned in late will receive a 5 percent deduction for each day (24 hours) that the assignment is tardy.

Assignments two weeks late will no longer be accepted, and you will receive a zero on the assignment.

Please anticipate all possible contingencies (computer failure, printer issues, etc.), and please contact me before or as soon as possible if a problem arises. If a student contacts me about an issue after the assignment is due, I can no longer make accommodations for that assignment.

Missed classes/Late Assignments: Severe illnesses and family emergencies are the only justifiable reasons for missing a class or exam or handing in an assignment late. In either case, you must use both 1) notify me of your situation promptly and 2) provide appropriate documentation. Assignments handed in late without documentation will be penalized by 5% for each date they are late.

Statement of Community Standards

The following statement is taken from Merrimack College's Student Handbook under Community Standards.

Before all else, the students, faculty, staff, and administration of Merrimack College form an Augustinian community that supports and challenges its members in the pursuit of truth. We declare and celebrate our common purpose and commit ourselves:

- to serious study, generous service, and courageous leadership
- to academic integrity and personal growth
- to civilized discourse in the exchange of ideas
- to friendship, diversity, and mutual respect
- to the primacy of conscience and the spiritual life
- to responsibility for the common good, and
- to pride in our school and ourselves

Students have the right to express their views so long as there is neither use nor threat of force nor interference with the rights of others to express their views (Faculty Handbook 2016, 50).

Academic Integrity Policy

For undergraduate courses:

All work for this class must be your original work. Presenting material from other sources, either print or electronic, as one's own work constitutes plagiarism. Please review [Merrimack College's Academic Integrity Code](#) and consult the [library's web site](#) for a discussion on academic integrity.

Academic Accommodations from the Accessibility Services Office

Merrimack College provides reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities through the Accessibility Services Office. Students who have, or think they may have, a disability are invited to contact the Accessibility Services Office via the online request form found on the Accessibility Services Office [website](#), [email](#) or by visiting their office on the third floor of McQuade Library.

Students are encouraged to contact the office as soon as possible to ensure adequate time to meet and create a plan. Students already registered with the Accessibility Services Office are encouraged each semester to request their letters to be emailed, and students are responsible to then email the letter to their instructors personally. While it is understood that some students will not use all accommodations in all courses, accommodations can not be made retroactively.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Class on 1/20 Introduction to Course

- Week 0 (in-class)
 - Course Syllabi and Expectations
- Asynchronous Work
 - None

Week of 1/24 Introduction to Course

- Week 1 (in-class)
 - Course Syllabi and expectations
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY JANUARY 30
 - Read We the People Ch. 1
 - Ch. 1 Quiz

Week of 1/31 The Citizen and Government

- Week 2 (in-class)
 - How to Debate Respectfully

- Engagement Points: Group Work “Political Voices of Gen Z”
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY FEBRUARY 6
 - Read We the People Ch. 1
 - Ch. 1 Quiz

Week of 2/7 The Founding and the Constitution

- Week 3 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
 - Engagement Points: Civic Engagement Portfolio Project Step 1
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY FEBRUARY 13
 - Read KK Ch. 2
 - Ch. 2 Quiz

Week of 2/14 Federalism

- Week 4 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
 - Values Continuum Activity
 - Engagement Points: Federalism in Times of Crisis
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY FEBRUARY 20
 - Read KK Ch. 3
 - Ch. 3 Quiz

Week of 2/21 Civil Liberties

- Week 5 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
 - Engagement Points: Ethics Bowl
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY FEBRUARY 27
 - Read KK Ch. 4
 - Ch. 4 Quiz

Week of 2/28 Civil Rights

- Week 6 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
 - Engagement Points: *After Selma* Documentary
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY MARCH 6
 - Read KK Ch. 10
 - Ch. 10 Quiz

Week of 3/7 Public Opinion and Political Socialization

- Week 7 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
 - Engagement Points: Civics Insta Post
- Asynchronous Work Quiz DUE SUNDAY MARCH 13
 - Read KK Ch. 9
 - Ch. 9 Quiz

- Midterm Paper Due

Week of 3/21 Fake News and the Media

- Week 8 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
 - Engagement Points: Bad News Badge Game
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY MARCH 27
 - Read KK 14
 - Ch. 14 Quiz

Week of 3/28 Political Parties and Interest Groups

- Week 9 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
 - Engagement Points: *Dark Money* Documentary
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY APRIL 3
 - Read KK Ch. 11
 - Ch. 11 Quiz

Week of 4/4 Participation, Campaigns, and Elections

- Week 10 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
 - Unity in Diversity Days
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY APRIL 10
 - Read WP Ch. 13
 - Ch. 13 Quiz

Week of 4/11 Participation, Campaigns, and Elections

- Week 11
 - Class lecture
 - Engagement Points: Create Your Own Political Party
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY APRIL 17
 - Read KK Ch. 5
 - Ch. 5 Quiz

Week of 4/18 Institutions

- Week 12 (in-class)
 - Class lecture
 - Engagement Points: Civic Engagement Project Steps 3 and 4
- Asynchronous work DUE SUNDAY APRIL 24
 - Read KK Ch. 6
 - Ch. 6 Quiz

Week of 4/25 Domestic Policy

- Week 13 (in-class)
 - Class lecture

- Engagement Points: Sick Around the World Documentary
- Asynchronous Work DUE SUNDAY MAY 1
 - Read KK Ch. 12
 - Quiz Ch. 12
 - Upload Civic Engagement Project Portfolio Project Presentations

Week of 5/2 Final Wrap-Up

- Week 14
 - Class Lecture
 - Engagement Points: Civic Engagement Portfolio Project Presentations
- Asynchronous Work
 - Work on Final Paper

FINAL PAPER DUE: MAY 8TH 11:59 PM UPLOAD TO BLACKBOARD