



POLS& 202: American Government

Bellevue College, Winter 2021 (Item 5417)

Course Details

Class Sessions: Online and asynchronous

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Office: working remotely from home

Instructor: David Spataro, PhD

Office Hours: M: 130PM – 230PM

W: 1200PM – 230PM

F: 9AM – 1030AM

Course Description

This course will familiarize students with the study of U.S. government. Students will gain a critical understanding of the structure of U.S. government and develop the ability to identify and analyze the most significant problems confronting U.S. politics. The class is divided into three major sections: 1) the U.S. Constitution, 2) institutions and elections, and 3) contemporary issues.

Course Learning Outcomes

After completing this class, students should be able to:

1. Evaluate the basic nature of Constitutional government in the United States.
2. Understand concepts such as separation of powers and checks and balances as outlined in the U.S. Constitution.
3. Recall and define problems of individual rights, popular representation and responsible leadership.
4. Identify roles of the executive branch, Congress, and the judiciary.
5. Understand the public policy making process in the United States.
6. Demonstrate ability to analyze U.S. politics according to the ideals of American democracy.

Books and Required Materials

There is no textbook for this class. Instead, the readings will be available in our Canvas site as PDF documents.

Grading

Graded Assessments	Percentage
Twice weekly reading assessments	50%
Weekly reflection papers	30%
Final takeaway project	15%
Facilitating weekly discussion	5%
Total	100%

Letter Grade	Percentage
A	92 - 100%
A-	90 - <92%
B+	88 - <90%
B	82 - <88%
B-	80 - <82%
C+	78 - <80%
C	72 - <78%
C-	70 - <72%
D+	68 - <70%
D	60 - <68%
F	<60%

Twice Weekly Reading Assessments: The class readings are due on Wednesdays and Sundays, and students are assessed on the readings. The assessments are open-book, untimed and consist of ten multiple-choice questions and one short answer question (one to two paragraphs of writing). I designed these assessments as scaffolding for reading, and I encourage students to complete them *while* they complete the reading. The lowest grade will be dropped. There is one additional 10-point assignment in this grade, which is not a quiz. This 10-point assignment assesses your participation on the “asking for a friend” discussion boards during the quarter. Details of this assignment can be found in Canvas.

Weekly Reflection Papers: The weekly reflection papers are short (500-word) writing assignments that require students to use metacognition (thinking about your thinking) and reflection techniques to analyze their process of learning during the previous week. There is no paper due at the end of week one. The reflection paper due at the end of week two will be “graded” for feedback purposes only, not for an official grade. Students will complete a reflection paper for eight of the remaining weeks. *I will select three of the eight reflection papers at random to grade.*

Final Project: The final project for the class is an open-ended assignment that explores what each individual will take (“takeaway”) from this class. For this project students choose both the medium (photovoice, short podcast, short vlog, blog, paper, zine) and the topic. I encourage students to choose a medium that is relevant to skills they currently have or wish to develop for current/future academic or career paths. In addition to delivering the end product, this project includes a short proposal (worksheet with questions to answer), a brief meeting with me to go over the proposal, check-ins with peers, and a presentation post on the course’s closing discussion board (roughly finals week).

Facilitating Weekly Discussion: Students will have weekly small-group discussions about the course material. Each student will lead and facilitate the discussion once during the quarter,

and I will grade students on their leadership and facilitation of the discussion. In short, students will only lead once, and they will only be graded on the week that they lead. The leader's role is to begin the discussion in Canvas with a thoughtful post (1-2 paragraphs) that includes engaging questions. Throughout the week, the leader's role is to follow-up with replies to keep the discussion flowing, and to check in with group members who have not posted to encourage them to participate.

Late work and Classroom Policies

*These policies may apply differently to students with DRC accommodations. I will be working with all students individually to meet their accommodations.

- **Canvas:** Students are required to use Canvas for this course. Additionally, I will communicate to the class using Canvas's "Announcements" function. It is necessary that students edit Canvas notifications to ensure that my announcements in Canvas end up in their preferred location (email or text). I will use Canvas announcements for unexpected issues such as being out sick or changes to the weekly schedule. **Students should be aware that using Canvas solely through the "Calendar" function (which shows you only things that have a due date) may result in missing key information located in Canvas announcements, pages, and undated assignments.** While the Canvas calendar is helpful for due dates, I advise students NOT to solely use the Calendar for this class, due to the likelihood of missing key information in announcements and modules.
- **Collaboration and no shaming/judging:** This "classroom" is a no shaming, no judgment zone. We will not be shaming or looking negatively upon others for mistakes, for their political beliefs, or for any other reason. This class is based upon the principles of cooperation and collaboration. Students who develop strong community bonds in college tend to succeed. All areas of life—including employment, family, community, and politics—involve working together. We will model this behavior in an authentic manner in the classroom. Everyone in class wishes to succeed, and everyone can participate in making that goal a reality.
- **Attendance and Participation:** There is no attendance or participation grade. This means that participation on weekly discussions is required but there isn't a separate category in the weighted grading system for your participation. Each activity in the course has a unique system for assessing required participation, so please pay close attention to assignment instructions for details.

I will contact students who are not participating with a supportive check-in to see what's going on. I will work with students individually who are having reasonable issues with participation (such as illness, pandemic-related hardships, work-scheduling issues, etc.).

I REPEAT: I will work with you to create a personalized participation plan to meet your needs. You have my permission to ask about this.

- **Late work:**

- **Twice Weekly Reading Assessments:** These assessments can be completed up to one week after they are due, for 80% of the grade. These have a relatively short window of opportunity because other students cannot see the graded assessments until they are officially closed.
- **Weekly Reflection Papers:** These papers can be turned in late at any time until the end of the quarter, for 80% of the grade. Late papers receive minimal feedback.
- **Final Takeaway Project:** The final project can be turned in late at any time until the end of the quarter, for 80% of the grade.
- **Facilitating Weekly Discussion:** This assignment must be completed on time because other students are relying on the discussion leader. If the leader misses the Monday night deadline, please contact me as soon as possible.

NOTE: If you are falling behind due to emergency/unforeseen circumstances, you can work with me to create an individualized plan. You have my permission to reach out to make that plan.

- **If English is not your first language:** Please check in with me about the course to discuss how I can best support you.
- **Electronic recordings:** The course includes some audio and video recordings that I've created, or will create during the quarter. These recordings are only available to students in the class. Unless otherwise granted, I do not consent to students sharing recordings outside of the class.
- **Plagiarism/Cheating:** Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses that violate BC's student code of conduct. Students who violate the school's policies are required to meet with me for a one-on-one meeting. I will report violations to BC's CARE Team. Please be in touch with me if you are unsure of what constitutes this type of violation.
- **Appointments, Email and Canvas Conversations:** Students can contact me through my BC phone (which goes to my email inbox), my BC email, or the Canvas mail function (Conversations/Inbox). I may check these at odd hours, such as at night or over the weekend. But I will not reply outside of regular business hours. On my end I will be answering your messages swiftly during business hours. However, if I do not answer your

inquiry in about a day, you should feel comfortable to follow up. Don't be shy if I haven't followed up. It is likely due to other tasks taking priority.

- **Office Hours:** Office hours are a set time when I am available to help students with class content, or with course logistics, or with Bellevue College resources more generally. I have five hours of office hours each week. These hours are set at the beginning of the quarter and remain fixed throughout the quarter. During office hours, students are free to pop in to visit me on Zoom without any prior appointment. For students who are unavailable during my regularly scheduled office hours, I am happy to set up personalized appointment times. Please message me with your availability and I will follow up.

Occasionally, I will need to move or adjust an office hour due to a scheduling issue. If this occurs, I will notify students via Canvas announcement.

Classroom Learning Atmosphere

Affirmation of Inclusion

Bellevue College is committed to maintaining an environment in which every member of the campus community feels welcome to participate in the life of the college, free from harassment and discrimination. We value our different backgrounds at Bellevue College, and students, faculty, staff members, and administrators are to treat one another with dignity and respect. ([Affirmation of Inclusion](#))

Reasons of Faith and Conscience

Reasonable Accommodations for Reasons of Faith and Conscience: Students who will be absent from course activities due to reasons of faith or conscience may seek reasonable accommodations so that grades are not impacted. Such requests must be made within the first two weeks of the course to the office of the Associate Vice President of Student Affairs. See Bellevue College [Policy 2950](#). In the event you feel you are being discriminated against based on faith or conscience, you may refer to the procedures outlined in the college's [Discrimination, Harassment and Retaliation Policy 1440P](#).

Annual Notice Non-Discrimination

Bellevue College does not discriminate on the basis of race or ethnicity; creed; color; national origin; sex; marital status; sexual orientation; age; religion; genetic information; the presence of any sensory, mental, or physical disability; or veteran status in educational programs and activities which it operates. Bellevue College is prohibited from discriminating in such a manner by college policy and by state and federal law. All college personnel and persons, vendors, and organizations with whom the college does business are required to comply with applicable federal and state statutes and regulations designed to promote affirmative action and equal opportunity.

Reports of gender and sex-based based discrimination, sexual misconduct, or retaliation by a student should be raised with the Title IX office. In cases where the impacted party is a student and the responding party is a college employee, the Title IX coordinator will direct the matter to the Office of Human Resources (HR). All other reports, including all reports where the impacted party is an

employee, should be raised with the HR. If a report is against personnel in the Title IX office or HR, it should be submitted to the president's office for referral to an alternate designee. ([Equal Opportunity](#))

Confidentiality and Mandatory Reporting

As an instructor, one of my responsibilities is to help create a safe learning environment on our campus. It is my goal that you feel able to share information related to your life experiences in classroom discussions, in your written work, and in our one-on-one meetings. I will seek to keep information you share private to the greatest extent possible. However, I am required to share with the Title IX Coordinator any and all information regarding sexual assault and other forms of sexual misconduct (e.g. relationship violence, stalking) that may have occurred on campus or that impacts someone on campus. Students may speak to someone confidentially by contacting the BC Counseling Center at (425) 564-2212. The Title IX Office can be contacted at 425-564-2641 and more information can be found at [Title IX](#). If you have any concerns, you may report to: [Report Concerns](#).

Important Resources/Services

Disability Resource Center – B132

The Disability Resource Center (DRC) serves students with a wide array of learning challenges and disabilities. If you are a student who has a disability or learning challenge for which you have documentation or have seen someone for treatment and if you feel you may need accommodations in order to be successful in college, please contact the DRC as soon as possible. If you are a student with a documented autism spectrum disorder, there is an additional access program available to you. Contact [Autism Spectrum Navigators](#). Email and phone number is on the web page. ASN is located in the Library Media Center in D125. The DRC office is located in B132 or you can call the reception desk at (425) 564.2498. Deaf students can reach the DRC by Skype: the address is **DRCatBC** (NOTE: There is no @ sign...it is actually **DRCatBC**). Please visit the website at [Disability Resource Center](#) for application information and other helpful links.

Multicultural Services – 2nd Floor of B building (above the bookstore)

Multicultural Services (MCS) is a student-centered service program on campus that is designed to support all students in general, and diverse student populations in particular. MCS is a broad program that can assist students with tutoring in Math and English as well as help students locate community resources such as food and housing assistance. Please familiarize yourself with MCS by stopping by or visiting: bellevuecollege.edu/mcs/

Counseling Center – 2nd Floor of B building (above the bookstore)

The Counseling Center provides personal, career, and academic counseling for all registered BC students. The Counseling Center can be a helpful place for locating community resources (referrals) as well as free counseling appointments with the center's staff of licensed mental health counselors. Please familiarize yourself with the services offered by the counseling center by stopping by or visiting: bellevuecollege.edu/counseling/

Typical Module At A Glance (one module per week)

Complete these tasks anytime throughout the week:

- Read the “key concepts and questions” page, and listen to the short audio clips on major concepts not covered in the readings. (NOTE: It’s best to complete this before doing the module readings, but there isn’t a specific due date each week for this task.)
- Look over my answers to student questions on previous “asking for a friend” discussions. These are discussion boards for content-related questions. Reviewing my answers to students’ comprehension questions can help all students understand the material.

Complete these tasks by Monday at midnight:

- Turn in your reflection paper (on the previous week’s material) by midnight.
- If you are facilitating the weekly small-group conversation, you initiate the discussion with a post by midnight. (NOTE: we won’t start this until a couple weeks into the quarter.)

Complete these tasks by Wednesday at midnight:

- Complete the reading (~20-25 pages).
- Complete the open book, untimed reading assessment (also referred to as “quizzes”).
- Post a question and "like" 2-3 other questions on the “asking for a friend” discussion board. (Students are required to complete these 10 times—out of 20 discussions—during the quarter, so there will be some weeks when you consider it optional.)
- Respond to the discussion post from your group’s facilitator by midnight. (NOTE: we won’t start this until a couple weeks into the quarter.)

Complete these tasks by Sunday at midnight:

- Complete the reading (~20-25 pages).
- Complete the open book, untimed reading assessment (also referred to as “quizzes”).
- Post a question and "like" 2-3 other questions on the “asking for a friend” discussion board. (Students are required to complete these 10 times—out of 20 discussions—during the quarter, so there will be some weeks when you consider it optional.)
- In your small group discussion, respond to one of your peers by midnight. (NOTE: we won’t start this until a couple weeks into the quarter.)
- Share/participate in the checking-in challenges. (NOTE: these will end after the first couple weeks and are designed for community building.)

Module Calendar at a Glance (see Canvas for up-to-date schedule)

Week 0: Jan. 4 Getting Started (class logistics and opening introductions)
Week 1: Jan. 4 – 10 Introduction – Who Are We? We Have Never Been Exceptional

Section One – The U.S. Constitution

Week 2: Jan. 11 – 17 The Framers' Coup – Federalism & the U.S. Constitution/Bill of Rights
Week 3: Jan. 18 – 24 Looking East at the Constitution – Colonial Government
Week 4: Jan. 25 – 31 The Second Founding & Black Reconstruction

Section Two – Elections and Institutions

Week 5: Feb. 1 – 7 Elections and Voting Rights
Week 6: Feb. 8 – 14 Institutions Part I – The Presidency and Executive Branch
Week 7: Feb. 15 – 21 Institutions Part II - Congress
Week 8: Feb. 22 – 28 Institutions Part III – The Courts

Section Three – Contemporary Issues in U.S. Policy

Week 9: Mar. 1 – 7 Post-1960s Civil Rights
Week 10: Mar. 8 – 14 Citizenship and Immigration Policy
Week 11: Mar. 15 – 21 Climate Justice