

POLS 101, Introduction to Politics: Representation and Voting Systems, Fall 2007

Section 1: MWF 8:00–8:50 a.m., 101 Norman Mayer Building
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Office: 309 Norman Mayer Building
Hours: MWF 10:00–11:00 a.m., or by appointment
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This course is designed to introduce you to some of the central debates in contemporary political science relating to representation and democracy. Specifically, we will examine two related questions in depth: first, what is the best way to design a representative democracy, and second, to what extent should the will of the majority prevail in a democratic system? You might even think of these two questions as reflections of a single, broader question about the viability of democracy as a system of governance.

A secondary goal of this course is to familiarize you with the expectations of professors for collegiate-level writing in political science. Over the course of the semester, you will be assigned a number of writing projects in the hopes of further developing your writing skills; we will meet on an individual basis several times over the course of the semester.

This course is a *seminar*. While I, as the instructor, will normally lead the discussion in the course, your participation and reading is key to the success of the course. You are expected to complete the readings prior to class and to be prepared to discuss their content with your fellow students.

Texts: Readings will be taken from the following books:

Caplan, Bryan. 2007. *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP. ISBN 0-691-12942-8.

Farrell, David M. 2001. *Electoral Systems: A Comparative Introduction*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN 0-333-80162-8.

Norris, Pippa. 2004. *Electoral Engineering: Voting Rules and Political Behavior*. New York: Cambridge UP. ISBN 0-521-53671-5.

Additional readings, as noted on the syllabus by (R), will be made available online via BlackBoard or on reserve at the library.

Assignments and Grading: Your grade in this course will be based on the following elements, weighted as indicated:

Position Paper	20%
Research Paper: Topic Statement	5%
Research Paper: Bibliography	10%
Research Paper: Draft	10%
Research Paper: Final	20%
Final Exam	20%
Participation	15%

Position Paper: After reading Caplan's *The Myth of the Rational Voter*, you will write a 6–10-page position paper that reviews Caplan's arguments and makes an argument about their viability. Your paper should implicitly answer some or all of the following questions—you

shouldn't set your paper up as a series of direct responses to these questions, but the reader should, when reading the complete paper, know what your answers to these questions would have been.

- ★ What does Caplan argue in his book?
- ★ In what ways would America be better off in Caplan's ideal system? In what ways would America be worse off?
- ★ Are there other ways to accomplish the goals that Caplan sets out?
- ★ Are there any historical parallels with the type of solution Caplan is discussing? If so, how can our experience with those situations inform us about how Caplan's preferred system would work?
- ★ Do you agree with Caplan's goals and means for accomplishing those goals?

Your paper should develop arguments and anticipate critical responses—you should not just answer these questions, but explain *why* you care you taking the positions you take. hose the answers you did.

Most importantly, there **is no correct answer** to the questions above. We will all have different interpretations of Caplan's arguments—some of us might agree with him wholeheartedly, some might disagree vehemently. You will not be graded on whether or not you agree with my position, or your classmates' positions, but rather on how well you make your arguments and how well your paper is written.

This paper will be due **Friday, October 26** at the beginning of class.

Research Paper: The second, more involved, paper in this course is a *research paper* on voting systems and election reform. In this paper, you should do the following:

1. Choose a democratic country or subnational entity of interest to you. For example, you could choose a country, city, state, province, county, or something else.
2. Describe its existing electoral system for its legislative body or legislative bodies. (If the entity has no legislative body, you will need to choose another entity.) This might be called a legislature, but often—particularly in the case of cities and counties—will go by another name, such as a city council, board of aldermen, regional assembly, or something else entirely.¹ Most countries and some subnational entities will have more than one legislative chamber, but it is rare to see a city or county with more than one.
3. Find out if the electoral system has been changed in the last 50 years; if it has, describe the changes and the reasons why the changes were made.
4. How well does this system represent the interests of various groups in the population? Are women and minorities underrepresented? Is the system biased against, or in favor of, particular political parties?
5. If the electoral system includes districts, how are those district boundaries determined? Is there a history of *gerrymandering* in the jurisdiction? If so, what have the effects of gerrymandering been?
6. Finally, you should make some recommendations for electoral reform. How can the existing system be made fairer or reformed to better represent the popular will? What sort of electoral system would you use? Would you change the size of the legislative body or bodies? These choices are up to you.

This paper will be developed over the course of the semester in stages:

¹Some parishes in Louisiana are governed by a "police jury"; counties in Texas are often governed by "court" of commissioners or "judges."

1. You will turn in a “topic statement” early in the semester. This will be very brief—a paragraph or two will suffice—and will identify the country or subnational entity you are interested in looking at. You should also briefly describe the legislative body or bodies of the entity—how many are there (i.e. is it unicameral or bicameral), how large they are, and how the members are elected or selected. This statement will be due on **Friday, October 12** at the beginning of class.
2. You will then turn in a bibliography, based on the sources you believe will be helpful in writing the paper. In addition to the Farrell and Norris books, you should find other scholarly books or articles either on electoral systems broadly or on the electoral system of the entity you are looking at. Generally speaking, you should only rely on scholarly sources, mass-circulation magazines and newspapers, and official government documents; you might find an encyclopedia or articles in Wikipedia helpful for identifying helpful sources, but you should not rely on these sources for the substance of your research. The bibliography will be due on **Friday, November 9** at the beginning of class.
3. Next you will turn in a paper draft, which should be a substantially complete paper including a list of works cited. You do not need to have completed your recommendations at this stage, but otherwise the paper should be close to complete. The draft paper will be due **Monday, November 21** at the beginning of class.
4. Finally, you will turn in a finished product—the complete paper, incorporating your feedback from the paper draft. The complete paper will be due **Friday, December 7** at the beginning of class.

The week after you turn in the work in stages 1–3 (i.e. after all but the final paper), we will have individual meetings for me to give you feedback on your work so far and to discuss the next stage of your paper.

Requirements For All Papers: All papers written for this course must be word-processed or electronically typeset. The body of your paper should be double-spaced and written using a proportional typeface (either 11 point or 12 point).² Your paper must be an individual effort; you may consult with me, the Writing Studio, other faculty members, or other students, but the writing and research must be substantially your own work.

The paper must consistently utilize an “author-year” citation style, such as that of the [American Political Science Association](#) (or, if you prefer, one of the Modern Language Association or American Psychological Association styles), include appropriate figures and tables and a full bibliography listing the works cited in your paper, and be written using coherent prose and acceptable grammar. You should also include a title page with the date, title, and appropriate identifying information.

General Policies: Attendance at class is required. Please discuss any planned absences with me at least two weeks in advance. Absences, repeated tardiness, cell phone disruptions, and abuse of Internet technologies (e.g., web browsing/IMing during class) will adversely affect your grade in the course.

Please arrive at class *on time* and mute (or switch off) all pagers, cell phones, and alarms during class.

Please note that appointments are *not required* for my regular office hours listed above. If those times are not convenient for you, I am happy to make arrangements to meet at alternative times; you can make appointments via email or by seeing me immediately before or after class.

²Proportional typefaces include Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, Garamond, etc. “Typewriter” (constant-width) typefaces such as Courier New are not acceptable.

Late assignments will lose 5 percentage points per calendar day they are late.

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact me to discuss their individual needs for accommodations.

This syllabus is subject to revision by the professor.

Grade Appeals: If you wish to dispute a grade for any reason other than an obvious arithmetic error on my part, you will need to type a one-page explanation of your position and turn it in, along with the original graded assignment, at least one week after the assignment is returned to you. I will then consider your appeal and make a determination. Appeals must be submitted in hard copy format; no appeals submitted via email will be considered.

Academic Integrity and Honesty: All students in this course are expected to comply with the Code of Academic Integrity of the Newcomb-Tulane College, which can be found online at <http://college.tulane.edu/code.htm>. An excerpt from the honor code appears below:

The integrity of the Newcomb-Tulane College is based on the absolute honesty of the entire community in all academic endeavors. As part of the Tulane University community, students have certain responsibilities regarding work that forms the basis for the evaluation of their academic achievement. Students are expected to be familiar with these responsibilities at all times. No member of the university community should tolerate any form of academic dishonesty because the scholarly community of the university depends on the willingness of both instructors and students to uphold the Code of Academic Conduct. When a violation of the Code of Academic Conduct is observed it is the duty of every member of the academic community who has evidence of the violation to take action. Students should take steps to uphold the code by reporting any suspected offense to the instructor or the associate dean of the college. Students should under no circumstances tolerate any form of academic dishonesty.

In all work submitted for academic credit, students are expected to represent themselves honestly. The presence of a student's name on any work submitted in completion of an academic assignment is considered to be an assurance that the work and ideas are the result of the student's own intellectual effort, stated in his or her own words, and produced independently, unless clear and explicit acknowledgment of the sources for the work and ideas is included (with the use of quotation marks when quoting someone else's words). This principle applies to papers, tests, homework assignments, artistic productions, laboratory reports, computer programs, and other assignments.