WELCOME TO U.S. FED GOV & POL!

This is an interesting and important time to study American politics. Recent decades have seen remarkable change in the configuration of US governmental institutions, not least the major reforms carried out in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 and, more recently, the introduction of the Affordable Healthcare Act (and now, with Trump, the undermining of significant elements of that Act!). How do we make sense of these changes, their pace, and their scope? What forces are driving them? And what implications might they have for democracy and justice in the United States? In this class, we seek to appraise these questions not from the perspective most typical to their discussion in contemporary American society (TV pundits will often gladly reduce their complexity to the cut and thrust of inter-party rivalry). Rather, in this course we will seek to elaborate a different perspective; one that puts ordinary, everyday people at the center of political action. In this sense, the goal of this course is to present students of US government and politics with an opportunity to equip themselves with a vocabulary and set of concepts that they can use not only to make better sense of these transformations but also to help gauge their own appropriate responses to them as citizens.

This course is an introduction to the processes and institutions of American politics and government. However, it does not take these processes or institutions for granted. Rather, this course aims to animate for students the contested nature of much of American political life, and the basic importance of the stories we tell ourselves about it for producing and reproducing many of the viscerally divisive issues that dominate the American political landscape to-
day. In this sense, for example, we cannot ignore that our course is taking place in lingering of the financial crisis of 2008, which clearly put issues of distributive equality are back on the agenda. Equally, as attested by the #BlackLivesMatter protests, and the recent violence of so-called ‘Alt-Right’ white nationalists in Charlottesville, VA, the question of racial justice is once again in the headlines. As we proceed, we shall be attentive to enjoying developments and the evidence they provide for the role of people in political life.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR CORE CURRICULUM REQUIREMENTS**

This course fulfills a core area requirement in Government/Political Science:

(i) Courses in this category focus on consideration of the Constitution of the United States and the constitutions of the states, with special emphasis on that of Texas.

(ii) Courses in this area involve the analysis of governmental institutions, political behavior, civic engagement, and their political and philosophical foundations.

(iii) The following four core objectives must be addressed in each course approved to fulfill this category requirement: Critical Thinking Skills, Communication Skills, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility.

The core objectives are defined as:

**Critical Thinking**

Students will demonstrate comprehension of a variety of written texts and other information sources by analyzing and evaluating the logic, validity, and relevance of the information in them to solve challenging problems, to arrive at well-reasoned conclusions, and to develop and explore new questions.

**Communication Skills**

Students will demonstrate the ability to adapt their communications to a particular context, audience, and purpose using language, genre conventions, and sources appropriate to a specific discipline and/or communication task.

**Personal Responsibility**

Students will demonstrate an awareness of the range of human values and beliefs that they draw upon to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making.

**Social Responsibility**

Students will recognize and describe cultural diversity, the role of civic engagement in society, and the link be-
tween ethics and behavior.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Through lectures, class discussions, and assignments students should by the end of this course be able to:

- Distinguish between “elite democratic” and “popular democratic” models of American government
- Understand the key tensions that animated the debate between Federalists and Anti-Federalists over the framing of the US constitution
- Assess the relevance and dilemmas of corporate power and accountability for US political life
- Explain important aspects of mass-movement politics in the United States, including recent ‘horizontal’ movements like Occupy Wall St.
- Identify the major political institutions in the United States.
- Understand the main issues concerning civil rights and civil liberties.
- Understand the role of the media in American politics.
- Understand the processes of campaigns and elections.
- Know the role of political parties in the United States.
- Understand how public policy is formulated in various fields (e.g., welfare, foreign policy).
- Most importantly, develop their own critical capacities and awareness as citizens in their nation’s democratic processes

READINGS:

Required Texts

Online resources

• A number of further readings and resources will be provided for you, on the course Blackboard site

COURSE ORGANIZATION:

The course will meet twice a week. Our first session will generally be carried out in the style of a lecture. Our second session will be devoted to discussion of the week’s readings, with some discussion from events dominating the news. As discussed below, students should bring with them to the second class of the week a copy of a journal entry. The second class of every week will start with a student-led discussion. These discussions might be thought of as informal presentations; there is no set schedule for them, but each student should be seeking to ensure that they present at 2-3 journals, over the course of the semester. Students may volunteer to present their journals. If no volunteers emerge, students may be called on to present. All students should come to class ready to participate in discussion after the presentation/s.

Students in this class are expected to keep on top of current events that relate to the course’s themes and objectives. To prepare for this, students should avail themselves of a subscription to a major newspaper, such as the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*.

It is also highly recommended that students make a regular practice of listening to NPR or the *BBC World Service* news, which gives regular attention to political affairs. Students with smartphones or other compatible devices may download shows (for free!) from the BBC or NPR, as podcasts. I recommend using a podcasting app, such as iTunes or Stitcher, just to name two. My three podcast recommendations for this class are:

• Democracy Now! (high quality non-corporate news show)
• BBC Radio 4’s ‘Today Show’ (generally non-partisan, funded by British taxpayers, managed by an independent commission)
• KCRW’s ‘To the Point’, with Warren Olney (from America’s NPR, so while non-corporate and funded by listener donations, it also accepts large amounts of corporate money)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & ASSESSMENT:

Students must complete all reading assignments prior to the second class of the week. Students are responsible for their assigned work, and are required to submit all assigned projects, homework, and research papers on time. If a student has obligations that might keep he/she from completing the assignments in accordance with the schedule, she/he ought to reconsider taking this course.

There are FOUR major assignment groupings for this course, each with grades weighted according to the relative effort required:
I. Examinations: $2 \times 20 = 40\%$

The most significant assessment of your learning in this course will be through the medium of TWO multiple choice exams. Topics and specifics for these exams will be announced one week before they are to be taken. Questions will be multiple choice. The exam will be administered via Blackboard.

II. Book Review: 20\%

In this class you will be asked to write a two-page review of Angela Nagle’s recent book, *Kill All Normies*. Details on what is expected from you for this book review will be distributed 2-3 weeks before the assignment is due.

III. Weekly Quiz: 20\%

Every week, you will be asked to take a quiz, on Blackboard. There will be one quiz per week. These quizzes will be worth approximately 1.5%, each. That might not seem like much, but they add up to a lot! Students who take these quizzes seriously will be very well-prepared for the midterm and final exams. Quizzes must be taken by Friday, at midnight.

IV. Journal & Discussion: 20\%

You are expected to keep a Journal of your readings from the class READER (i.e., *Debating Democracy*, by Miroff, Seidelman, and Swanstrom) for each module we cover. At the start of every week, there will be a checklist posted on Blackboard, which will give you specific topics and questions you should be addressing in your journal. If you like, you can also give some comments comparing the author’s arguments with those made by other scholars we have looked at in the course so far. The journal is intended to help you writing and engaged with the material. In this way, it also serves as your preparation for engaging with the other students in classroom discussion. Finally, you should find them a helpful preparation for the exams.

Journal entries must be typed up on a computer, printed, and brought to class every Thursday. They should be two double-spaced pages (assuming standard 1-inch margins, a 12-point font size, using the *Times New Roman* font). Do not write more than two pages. Do not include a cover page. Do not include a bibliography. Please do staple your pages, but do not submit in any kind of plastic or card binder. I want to see only paper pages, only.

Journals should have a header. The header for your journal should take up no more than two lines. On the first line, I need only your name, and the class number (i.e., ‘Your Name, POLS 1010’). On the second line, please write simply the week of the journal (i.e., ‘Week 1,’ ‘Week 2,’ ‘Week 3,’ etc). You do not need a title.

Note that citations are required for journals. Citations help us to avoid plagiarism, and allow the reader to check the original location of any cited or paraphrased material. We put cita-
tions in parentheses, e.g., (p. 32), at the end of a sentence where we might have quoted or paraphrased original material. Again, however, bibliographies are NOT required.

Note also that there is a ‘Writing and Presentations Guide’ uploaded to same section of Blackboard where you found this syllabus. This document goes into further detail on what your goals should be when writing for one of my classes.

Every Wednesday, you will bring with you a printed copy of your journal entry for the week at hand. These entries will be taken up at three random and unannounced occasions through the course of the semester. Grades for journals will be returned to you on an ‘A-B-C’ basis (meaning your possible grades are A, B, C, or F). The following constitutes an approximate Rubric which you can use to anticipate your journal performance:

- A 2-page (or 600-words, approx) journal, written in a manner befitting academic writing; it is proofread and free of typos, poor grammar, and overly general or vague statements. The journal is formatted according to all the requirements stipulated above (33 points)

- The journal answers the questions assigned in the weekly checklist, thoughtfully engaging with the assigned readings in support of its response (33 points)

- The journal demonstrates effective summary and comprehension through quoting and/or paraphrasing key arguments and concepts from the assigned readings. Note: journals are not required to have a bibliography page, or bibliography (33 points)

V. A Note on Attendance & Participation

There is no grade for attendance in this class. Through your weekly quizzes and journals, you are already giving evidence to your attendance. However, I would like to stress the importance of participation in a course like this. Participation does not simply mean ‘talking a lot’ in class - I tend to give the highest grades to students that offer engaging and critical perspectives on the course readings. Writing a good journal entry and submitting it on time will ensure your recognition as an active course participant. Students are invited to discuss in class not just the readings but also any ongoing related issues they have been following in the media.

GRADING POLICIES:

Please note that UTRGV does not have a plus/minus (+/-) grading system, which means there is no such thing as an A- or B+. The grading scale for this course is as follows:

- A = 90 to 100
- B = 80 to 89
- C = 70 to 79
- D = 60 to 69
Incomplete grades will not be given. Also, as a matter of policy, there will be no extra credit given in this class. However, where an absolute emergency (see Attendance) requires it, students may be allowed to submit additional work. The nature of this work will be determined with the instructor on a case-by-case basis.

Please note that any extra credit work receiving a grade below a B will be considered an F. As such, extra credit assignments should not be sought unless the student is prepared and able to do reasonably good work.

**COMPUTER ACCESS, BLACKBOARD AND EMAIL PROTOCOL:**

This course will make extensive use of online resources. As such, it is up to you to ensure:

- That you are enrolled in Blackboard
- That you have access to a functional email account
- That you are checking your email on a daily basis.

Please note that there is a specific email protocol in this class which you must observe in all communication with me. Your “subject line” must start with the class code, then your name, followed by a one or two word indication of the subject. So, for example:

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“POLS 1010, Your Name: exam schedule”
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**NOTE:** I have filters set up on my computer to help me manage your email. This means that, if your email does not meet the above requirement, there is a good chance it will get lost, or end up in my spam folder. It is your responsibility to use the correct subject line!

Any special requests for absence, exam makeups or whatever, must be sent by email. This is to ensure I have a written record of your request.

**Policy Statements**

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:**

If you have a documented disability (physical, psychological, learning, or other disability which affects your academic performance) and would like to receive academic accommodations, please inform your instructor and contact Student Accessibility Services to schedule an appointment to initiate services. It is recommended that you schedule an appointment with Student Accessibility Services before classes start. However, accommodations can be
provided at any time. Brownsville Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in Cortez Hall Room 129 and can be contacted by phone at (956) 882-7374 (Voice) or via email at accessibility@utrgv.edu. Edinburg Campus: Student Accessibility Services is located in 108 University Center and can be contacted by phone at (956) 665-7005 (Voice), (956) 665-3840 (Fax), or via email at accessibility@utrgv.edu.

MANDATORY COURSE EVALUATION PERIOD:

Students are required to complete an ONLINE evaluation of this course, accessed through your UTRGV account (http://my.utrgv.edu); you will be contacted through email with further instructions. Online evaluations will be available Nov. 18 – Dec. 9, 2015. Students who complete their evaluations will have priority access to their grades.

ATTENDANCE & MEDICAL EMERGENCY POLICY:

Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes and may be dropped from the course for excessive absences. UTRGV’s attendance policy excuses students from attending class if they are participating in officially sponsored university activities, such as athletics; for observance of religious holy days; or for military service. Students should contact the instructor in advance of the excused absence and arrange to make up missed work or examinations.

Attend class regularly if you want to get a good grade. Late submissions of any graded material for this course will only be allowed if an actual medical emergency pertaining to the student arose. ‘Emergency’ shall be strictly defined as an immediate medical emergency or death of immediate family member that absolutely prevents the student from submitting on time. Notice in advance is critical in order that the professor can give permission for the student to submit late; without it, the student forfeits the grade.

SCHOLASTIC INTEGRITY:

As members of a community dedicated to Honesty, Integrity and Respect, students are reminded that those who engage in scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and expulsion from the University. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to: cheating, plagiarism, and collusion; submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person; taking an examination for another person; any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student; or the attempt to commit such acts. Since scholastic dishonesty harms the individual, all students and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced (Board of Regents Rules and Regulations and UTRGV Academic Integrity Guidelines). All scholastic dishonesty incidents will be reported to the Dean of Students. Institutional Equity Statement
SEXUAL HARASSMENT, DISCRIMINATION, AND VIOLENCE:

In accordance with UT System regulations, your instructor is a “responsible employee” for reporting purposes under Title IX regulations and so must report any instance, occurring during a student’s time in college, of sexual assault, stalking, dating violence, domestic violence, or sexual harassment about which she/he becomes aware during this course through writing, discussion, or personal disclosure. More information can be found at www.utrgv.edu/equity, including confidential resources available on campus. The faculty and staff of UTRGV actively strive to provide a learning, working, and living environment that promotes personal integrity, civility, and mutual respect in an environment free from sexual misconduct and discrimination.

COURSE DROPS:

According to UTRGV policy, students may drop any class without penalty earning a grade of DR until the official drop date. Following that date, students must be assigned a letter grade and can no longer drop the class. Students considering dropping the class should be aware of the “3-peat rule” and the “6-drop” rule so they can recognize how dropped classes may affect their academic success. The 6-drop rule refers to Texas law that dictates that undergraduate students may not drop more than six courses during their undergraduate career. Courses dropped at other Texas public higher education institutions will count toward the six-course drop limit. The 3-peat rule refers to additional fees charged to students who take the same class for the third time.

INTELLECTUAL COPYRIGHT POLICY:

The lectures, classroom activities, and all materials associated with this class and developed by the instructor are copyrighted in the name of Nicholas J. Kiersey, August 26, 2018.

STATEMENT REGARDING CLASSROOM PRIVACY:

Observation and evaluation of any classroom (including those on-line) by any observer or evaluator requires the prior notification and mutual agreement of the class instructor and the observer or evaluator. Furthermore, recording of classroom activities by any electronic means, by students, other faculty, university administrators, or others, requires permission of the instructor. All students in a class must be informed if permission has been given for a class to be recorded. Classroom lectures and associated course materials may be copyrighted by an instructor. Under no circumstances may verbatim recording of copyrighted classroom lectures and materials by electronic or any other means (including note taking) be conducted for 1) sale, whether or not it is for educational benefit, or 2) for the educational benefit of those not enrolled in the class. This does not apply to non-verbatim notes taken by students.
FINAL COMMENTS:

There are several things that you should keep in mind to avoid unpleasant surprises through the course of this quarter: I expect students to critically ponder the material assigned and to make an effort to understand the various arguments presented therein with the goal of developing a rigorous and informed critique. Therefore, it is important that you have your thoughts together when you work your way through these texts. In other words, the readings for this class are not meant for “bus” or “bed time” reading. As a piece of advice, I encourage you to do the readings when you are awake and in an environment conducive to study, otherwise it will be difficult for you to keep up with the class. Also, keep a dictionary near you at all times - you can expect to see some dense and complex terms.

Our classroom discussions are open, frank, and casual. Please respect the perspectives and inquiries of your peers and instructor. Do not interrupt someone who is speaking and refrain from deliberately demeaning language or intimidating behavior. Do not read newspapers or other unrelated materials during class. Students found doing so will be dismissed.

CALENDAR OF ACTIVITIES:

The instructor reserves the right to make alterations in the course. Discretionary schedule changes will be announced in advance on Blackboard, by email and, where possible, in class. It is the student’s responsibility for keeping abreast of any changes as may develop in the class schedule. In the below, you will see that most lectures also have links to YouTube versions. Note that these are a bit dated, and they are not intended to serve as replacement for coming to class; I am including them only insofar as they might be helpful for purposes of exam preparation and revision.

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<th>week</th>
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| 1    | Aug 27 | Introduction to course: Government & the Democratic Debate | - Readings for week  
- Main text: Chapter 1  
- First class: Introductory meeting; roll taken; syllabus handed out; suggestions for how to approach the readings for the course. Note that no journal entry is due for this module. |
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sep 3</td>
<td>Debating the Constitution</td>
<td>• Readings for week:</td>
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<td>• Main text: Chapter 2</td>
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<td>• Reader: Chapter 1 (Madison &amp; Brutus)</td>
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<td>• YouTube - Part 1: <a href="http://youtu.be/1m65jBx7TCc">http://youtu.be/1m65jBx7TCc</a></td>
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<td>• YouTube - Part 2: <a href="http://youtu.be/Z9nAEm63u8o">http://youtu.be/Z9nAEm63u8o</a></td>
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<td>Day 1 - Labor Day Holiday - NO CLASS. Regular lecture will be on Wednesday</td>
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<td>class, instead. Accordingly, no journal will be due this week. In its</td>
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<td>place, we will have a slightly extended weekly quiz. Details will be</td>
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<td>posted in the checklist for the week.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Sep 10</td>
<td>Globalization &amp; America’s Political</td>
<td>• Readings for week:</td>
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<td>Economy</td>
<td>• Main text: Chapter 4</td>
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<td>• Reader: Chapter 5 (Friedman &amp; Bowles et al.)</td>
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|      |       |                                            | • YouTube - Part 1: [http://youtu.be/va1huIbBoMk](http://youtu.be/va1huIbBoMk)
<p>|      |       |                                            | • YouTube - Part 2: <a href="http://youtu.be/R62pQgyIdYg">http://youtu.be/R62pQgyIdYg</a> |
|      |       |                                            | • This week you have extra homework. Please watch this documentary, ‘The   |
|      |       |                                            | Inside Job’ - <a href="http://documentary-movie.com/inside-job/">http://documentary-movie.com/inside-job/</a> (we may watch a clip or two in class, too) |</p>
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| 4    | Sep 17   | Public Opinion & Political Culture - Can the People Be Fooled? | Readings for week:  
  • Main text: Chapter 5  
  • Reader: Chapter 2 (Mueller & Rogat Loeb)  
  • YouTube - Part 1: [http://youtu.be/evY7EqMX7GE](http://youtu.be/evY7EqMX7GE)  
  • YouTube - Part 2: [http://youtu.be/ua9k6yeMHRI](http://youtu.be/ua9k6yeMHRI)  
  • This week you have extra homework: please watch the documentary, ‘Boogie Man: The Lee Atwater Story’ - [http://tubitv.com/video/15602/boogie_man_the_lee_atwater_story#freefull](http://tubitv.com/video/15602/boogie_man_the_lee_atwater_story#freefull) (you may have to watch some ads first - we may also watch a clip or two in class, but make time to watch the full documentary at home) |
| 5    | Sep 24   | Voting & Engagement                   | • Readings for week:  
  • Main text: Chapter 6  
  • Reader: Chapter 11 (Ansolabehere & Iyengar, Geer)  
  • YouTube (one-part only): [http://youtu.be/LuGhChAJEF4](http://youtu.be/LuGhChAJEF4) |
| 6    | Oct 1    | The Media                            | • Reading for week:  
  • Main text: Chapter 9  
  • Reader: Chapter 9 (Sunstein & Bennett)  
  • YouTube (one-part only): [http://youtu.be/dUQ5yu5ZmFg](http://youtu.be/dUQ5yu5ZmFg)  
  • This week you have extra homework. Please also watch this clip of Jon Stewart’s appearance on CNN’s ‘Crossfire’ - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFQFB5ypDZE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFQFB5ypDZE) |
### Lobbying & Elites

**Reading for week:**
- Main text: Chapter 10

**Reader:** no reader chapters this week. Your journal should address instead these videos:
- Bill Moyers special on lobbying and corruption, 'Capitol Crimes' - [https://vimeo.com/channels/820365/33621406](https://vimeo.com/channels/820365/33621406)
- "A Classic State Capitalist": How Donald Trump Profited from Public Subsidies & Political Favors” – [https://www.democracynow.org/2016/6/30/a_classic_state_capitalist_how_donald](https://www.democracynow.org/2016/6/30/a_classic_state_capitalist_how_donald)
- “Did Companies & Countries Buy State Dept. Access by Donating to Clinton Foundation?” - [https://youtu.be/rGg3Z7GpIIE](https://youtu.be/rGg3Z7GpIIE)

**Midterm Exam Prep**
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Oct 15</td>
<td>Mass Movement</td>
<td>• Readings for week:</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>• Main text: Chapter 11</td>
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<td>Note: no reader chapter this week — instead, please read the following article, and watch the video mentioned below:</td>
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<td>• <a href="http://www.thenation.com/article/169759/can-debt-spark-revolution">http://www.thenation.com/article/169759/can-debt-spark-revolution</a> (this piece is an extract from a book by David Graeber, who was one of the organizers of the Occupy Wall Street movement).</td>
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<td>• Please also watch the documentary: '99%: The Occupy Wall Street Collaborative Film' - <a href="http://watch32.is/movie/EdBa17Gj-99-the-occupy-wall-street-collaborative-film.html">http://watch32.is/movie/EdBa17Gj-99-the-occupy-wall-street-collaborative-film.html</a></td>
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<td>Midterm Exam to be taken this week</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Oct 22</td>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>• Readings for this week:</td>
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<td>• Main text: Chapter 12</td>
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<td>• Reader: 13 (Mann, Ornstein, &amp; Mayhew)</td>
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<td>• YouTube: <a href="http://youtu.be/rJBYWSjEAXA">http://youtu.be/rJBYWSjEAXA</a></td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Oct 29</td>
<td>The Presidency</td>
<td>• Readings for this week:</td>
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<td>• Main text: Chapter 13</td>
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<td>• Reader: 14 (Greenstein &amp; Skowronek)</td>
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<td>• YouTube (one-part only): <a href="http://youtu.be/LQH1vqNA6v4">http://youtu.be/LQH1vqNA6v4</a></td>
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| 11   | Nov 5| Judiciary              | **Readings for this week:**  
* Main text: Chapter 15  
* Reader: 15 (Scalia & Breyer)  
* YouTube (one-part only): [http://youtu.be/gp-CxR2VKt0](http://youtu.be/gp-CxR2VKt0) |
| 12   | Nov 12| Civil Liberties & Civil Rights | **Readings for this week:**  
* Main text: Chapter 16  
* YouTube: TBA  
Note: no reader chapter this week — instead, please read the following articles:  
| 13   | Nov 19| Book Review Special session | **Readings for this week:** By the time of this week, you should be 70%-80% done with your reading of the Nagle text.  
THANKSGIVING BREAK - Nov. 22 – Nov. 24 (Thurs. – Sat.) |
| 14   | Nov 26| Economic & Social Policy | **Readings for this week:**  
* Main text: Chapter 17  
* YouTube: TBA |
**Foreign Policy**

- Readings for this week:
  - Main text: Chapter 18
  - Reader: 17 (Bacevich & Mandelbaum)

Dec. 6 (Thurs.) — Study Day. No classes.