American Government

POLS 1030

Why are we here?

(in this class. not existentially. #thatsadifferentclass)

Put simply, we want you to leave this class understanding:

1 Why government is relevant to you & your life

2 How (and why) to engage with your elected representatives

3 How to have civil conversations about politics-- even with those with whom you disagree

In This Syllabus...

Everything grades

This semester, I'm experimenting with a different approach to grading sometimes called **specification grading**. The idea is simple: You are given a set of *specifications* on what kinds of efforts will lead to a particular grade. You choose how much effort you wish to expend to earn that grade. At the end of the semester, the determination of your grade will be a rather uncomplicated look at which specification category you fall into based on your work. You'll report what you did each week in a check-in that looks sort of like a quiz.

You are expected to keep up with the course readings, according to the schedule on page 6. Everyone should also complete the Semester Project and an Impact Statement.

We have a WIDE VARIETY of things to explore; you get to choose where you focus your curiosity and attention. Each will give you more information about the Big Three Goals listed on page 1 of this syllabus.

Here's how the grades will shake out:

eLearn is going to make you slightly panicky with its alerts. eLearn is addicted to alerts.

Please channel your inner zen master and instead ignore them for this class. Entirely.

In short: Don't panic.

To earn this grade,	you must satisfactorily complete...
A	At least 2 learning activities per week (min. 28)
B	At least 1-2 learning activities per week (min. 21)
C	At least 1 learning activity per week (min. 14)
D	At least 1 learning activity every 1-2 weeks (min. 11)

that's me!

you noticed the manic bug-eyed excitement, right?

(My political-junkie friend, Amanda, who is less extra about her nerd-dom.)

Dr. Liz Norell

political junkie, bibliophile, yogi, stepmom, dog lover

I spend a lot of my intellectual energy puzzling over where extreme political attitudes come from, how attitudes could (or fail to) change, and how our identification with different groups affects our political attitudes. I'm borderline obsessed with all things Supreme Court and (pre-COVID, *used to*) plan my vacations around their oral argument calendar. True story.

One thing that often drives my students crazy is my unwillingness to share with you my own political attitudes. I strongly believe that my opinions aren't consequential in your ability to learn from me. I will spend the semester trying to throw you off the scent.

I live in Monteagle with my family -- Doug, two kids (currently 21 and 13), and our dogs Lexie and Ginger. When I'm not teaching in the age of #covid, I'm probably reading, watching a Hallmark movie, doing the grocery shopping for our family ... or daydreaming about teaching.

I'm here to be your eager learning coach and all-around government enthusiast. Reach out anytime. I mean that.

Useful 411

Call me:
Dr. Liz, Dr. Norell, Professor Norell, or Ms. Norell -- any of these are appropriate and accurate.

Office:
CAT 67

Email:
elizabeth.norell@chattanoogastate.edu
why yes, that DOES need more letters!

Office phone:
(423) 697-2512

Cell phone:
(972) 965-9293
when you text the first time, please identify yourself

Dog* photos:
@liznorell
*mostly

The most important work you will ever do is ahead of you. It is never behind you.
-- Stephen R. Covey

The Work

Choose your own adventure

You really do get to choose (most of) what and how you demonstrate learning in this course. I will provide multiple ways to engage with the material of the course -- podcasts, books, online textbook chapters, etc. -- and you will choose the ones that spark your own curiosities.

After completing each learning activity, you will write OR record a short reflection sharing what you took away from that activity. This will be shared with the class in our Discord channel.

At the end of the semester, everyone should have:

- Completed 14 weekly check-ins, by Sunday at 11:59 pm each week, reporting on what you did that week.

- Submitted an Impact Statement, sharing what the most important things you learned this semester were (and why).

- Finalized a Semester Project in your ePortfolio (see page 5), touching on the three Big Goals (see page 1).
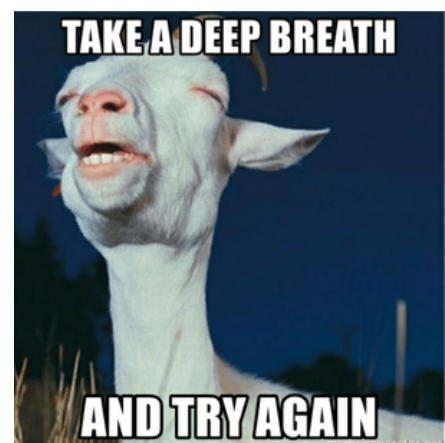
Semester Project

Goals

The genesis of this project came from reflecting on the goals indicated on the first page of the syllabus -- namely, the hope that you'll leave this course better understanding why and how government is relevant to your life, how to be an engaged citizen, and able to have civil political conversations. To achieve those goals, some self-inquiry is necessary, and that's what this project prompts you to do.

Steps

1) What are your beliefs? In this step, you'll explore your own political beliefs by looking at a number of tests and measures of political ideology. You'll also complete the Social Identity Wheel exercise independently, and think about how your different social identities show up in your day-to-day life with others. Once you've completed the independent activities, you'll complete the first step of this project by reflecting what you learned and where you fit within American politics today.

2) Who represents you? Next, you'll identify who represents you in legislative (policy-making) bodies at local, state, and national levels of government.

3) Move closer: For this phase, you'll seek out someone you *do not* agree with politically, on an issue you care about, and you'll interview them about their beliefs *without sharing your own*. The goal of this phase is to acquire deep understanding of someone else's perspective. Then, you'll reflect on this experience.

4) Engage: You'll choose some part of government + some issue that matters to you, and find a way to share your perspective with one of the people you identified in step #2. Exactly what that looks like will be up to you.

Submission

Regardless of how you choose to reflect at each phase of this project, including your final reflection, you should share your project in the ePortfolio. Again, this can be in writing or with a video.

Schedule

Week dates	Topics *common readings/explorations*	Project targets
Week 1 Jan. 19-24	**Setting the tone for the semester** Brene Brown's "People Are Hard to Hate Close Up." (PDF) + Eli Finkel podcast episode	Complete a get-to-know-you questionnaire & a starting civic engagement survey
Week 2 Jan. 25-31	**Foundations of government** *Textbook* chs. 1-2; *Fault Lines* chs. 1, 7, 20	
Week 3 Feb. 1-7	**The Constitution, Bill of Rights, & federalism** *Textbook* ch. 3; article on convict leasing (PDF)	Semester project step #1 target
Week 4 Feb. 8-14	**Civil rights & civil liberties** *Textbook* chs. 4-5; choose from options in eLearn	
Week 5 Feb. 15-21	**Criminal justice system** *Just Mercy* chapters 1-7	Semester project step #2 target
Week 6 Feb. 22-28	**Congress** *Textbook* ch. 11; *Fault Lines* chs. 2, 4, 9	
Week 7 Mar. 1-7	**Presidency** *Textbook* ch. 12; *Fault Lines* chs. 3, 10-11, 13-17	
Week 8 Mar. 15-21	**Courts** *Textbook* ch. 13; *Fault Lines* chs. 18-19	
Week 9 Mar. 22-28	**Criminal justice system (cont'd)** *Just Mercy* chapters 8-16	Semester project step #3 target
Week 10 Mar. 29-Apr. 4	**Public opinion & media** *Textbook* chs. 6, 8; *Ghosting the News* (PDF)	
Week 11 Apr. 5-11	**Voting & elections** *Textbook* ch. 7; *Fault Lines* chs. 5-6, 8, 12; videos in eLearn	
Week 12 Apr. 12-18	**Political parties** *Textbook* ch. 9; videos in eLearn	
Week 13 Apr. 19-25	**Interest groups** *Textbook* ch. 10; Innocence Project case study (eLearn)	Semester project step #4 target
Week 14 Apr. 26-30	**TBD** *Fault Lines* chs. 20-22	Final semester project reflection, impact statement, and all other work due **by 11:59 pm on Friday, April 30**
Final Exam Week	**1-on-1 conferences**	

Unit 1 — Weeks 1-3
Unit 2 — Weeks 4-5
Unit 3 — Weeks 6-9
Unit 4 — Weeks 10-14

Sooo.... what do I do?

Weekly course rhythms

Each week, you should be engaging with the common readings listed in the course calendar (see page 6).

You'll then **choose learning activities** that match your **curiosities**.

After completing each learning activity, you'll share a reflection -- written or in a video -- in either our class's **Discord channel** or in your personal ePortfolio. These should focus on what you found most interesting, surprising, important, unbelievable, etc., about what you learned. They should *NOT* be summaries.

Then, you'll finish off the week by submitting a weekly check-in. This is just a way to stay accountable and create a record of what you completed that week. This also allows us to check in with one another informally as the course progresses.

The weekly check-in will ask you a series of questions; they aren't "graded," as such, but they do show up as completed in the gradebook. However, these check-ins are merely creating a record of your work this semester.

The weekly check-in ends by asking you to share what you're curious to learn more about the next week. The goal here is simple: As you reflect on what you've learned, sharing what questions/curiosities have arisen will help you choose materials from the resource library that take you deeper.

Learning activities

Over the years, I have collected a large library of podcasts, videos, and readings that have contributed to my understanding of how our government works ... and why we should care. Those are available in eLearn's Course Content area, under the "content library"; they are grouped by topic and indicate whether you're reading, researching, listening, or watching the item in the library.

You are also welcome to explore resources not included in this library, but I hope you'll clear them with me first. These resources should be as **nonpartisan** or **bipartisan** as possible, from trustworthy sources. If you're not sure what those are, stick to sources that have a reliability score above 36.5 and a bias score between -16.5 and +16.5 from MediaBiasChart.com (basically, extend the green box down to the next horizontal line).

Engagement

As we explore materials in the resource library, we will go to our **Discord channel** (or to your personal ePortfolio) to share reflections. When you're engaging with the class, keep in mind that your focus should be on your thoughts on the topic/material. You *might* talk about things like: What surprised you? How did this affect your understanding of political science/government? What questions still linger for you? How can you connect this to other things you've learned, in this class or elsewhere? What decisions would you have made in this situation? And so forth.

In all responses, you do not need to provide citations for materials you were asked to read/watch/listen to in the prompt. However, if you search and find/use sources outside of what's provided in the resource library, you should share enough information for others to find those sources.

Impact statement

General guidelines

The Impact Statement assignment is designed to help you reflect on the semester in this course and discern what things had a lasting impact on you. There are very few restrictions on how you might express your reflection, except that you must provide a video and it must be between 4-6 minutes long. Otherwise, the possibilities are limited only by your imagination: write a poem? sing a song? perform a skit? puppet show? poster? It's up to you.

Ultimately, anyone watching your video should be able to see what you got out of this class and what it meant to you.

THIS IS NOT A SUMMARY OF WHAT WE DID! I WAS THERE! I REMEMBER!

Instead, like your other responses, make this a discussion of what your most valuable lessons are from this class.

Outstanding creative examples from previous semesters are linked in eLearn.

Joining Discord

**First, an acknowledgement:**

I know students are frustrated when professors use technology and tools outside of eLearn. Each new web site or technology creates more things you have to remember, use, and juggle. I don't like having a lot of that, either, so I understand the frustration.

I thought long and hard about how to have more meaningful and user-friendly discussions in this class. The eLearn discussion board is neither user-friendly nor especially engaging. The benefits of having it with the rest of the class material are not as strong (in my opinion) as the negatives -- it's not as easy to use on mobile devices, it threads conversations in bulky ways, and it's really not very engaging.

With that in mind, I decided to experiment with **Discord** this semester. Why Discord?

(1) The ChattState Math Lab uses Discord for tutoring, so many of our students are already familiar with the platform.
(2) It's a favorite platform for gamers, so many of our students are familiar with it from that hobby.
(3) It's fast, easy, and free.
(4) It has mobile apps that make using this discussion format more accessible for those using phones or tablets.
(5) You can use emoji, gifs, and attach files easily.

At about week 4 or 5 of this course, I'll ask you for feedback on how Discord is going. If everyone hates it, we'll go back to using eLearn discussions. Your input matters to me. So give it a few weeks to try out, and then we'll reevaluate.
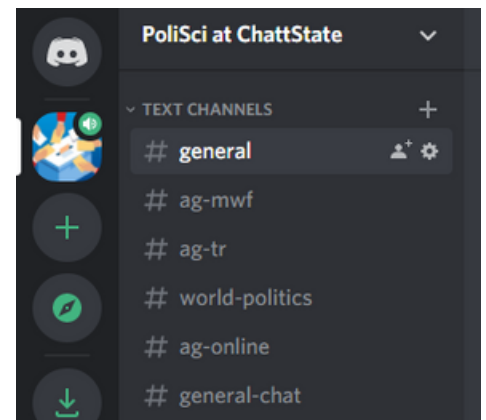
Join the ChattState PoliSci Discord channel here: https://discord.gg/ AjAUCEZn3f

Important policies

College Policy Statement

This class is governed by the policies and procedures stated in the current Chattanooga State Student Handbook. College Policies, available at https://library.chattanoogastate.edu/mastersyllabi/collegepolicystatements

Technology Requirements

Students are required to use some technology to succeed in this course. You should be able to:

- Draft, save, and submit written work using Microsoft Office (or a comparable program). All students can download Office 365 and authenticate it with your student @my.chattanoogastate.edu email account free of charge while enrolled at ChattState.
- Conduct internet searches, using a search engine (like Google) and library databases.
- Send and receive emails, including attaching files.
- Use eLearn's dropbox, discussion board, and browsing capabilities.
- Connect to virtual classes using a camera + microphone, in a relatively quiet space.

Regarding eLearn

You will be accessing and submitting assignments, reading and studying course material, and completing assessments via eLearn. Assignments MUST be submitted as a .doc, .docx, or .pdf format. Documents submitted in .wps or .pages formats cannot be read. I also can't consistently access Google Doc URLs.

Late Work

If there is a reason you cannot complete your work by the deadline, please let me know as soon as you're able. You do not need to provide doctor's notes, photos from the ER, or paperwork from a court of law; I will believe you. Just keep me posted when something happens to keep you from submitting work in a timely fashion.

Having said that, **ALL work must be submitted by the last day of class – Friday, April 30** – in order to ensure I have time to review it before our 1-on-1 conferences the following week. If extreme/extenuating circumstances make that final deadline impossible, you should let me know as soon as possible so we can discuss next steps.

Resources

You have pre-paid resources available.
Don't think about tutoring in the math lab or writing center as something extra--it's a pre-paid part of your ChattState experience, and you should take advantage of those resources ... early and often.

Chattanooga State invests in what we call a **Culture of Caring** -- namely, we want our students to know that we care about you and your well-being. In the Student Support Center, you'll find a range of services, including:

- Helping Hands fund requests (for emergency financial assistance)
- Tiger Cupboard (food pantry)
- Counseling services
- Veterans services
- Study tips & workshops
- Tech support
- Connections to community resources

Get in touch by visiting IMC 124, emailing studentsupport@chattanoogastate.edu, or calling (423) 697-4483).

the bottom line

If something is going to prevent you from attending class or completing your course work, we can help. We'd rather help you succeed than lose touch with you.

Course Information

Catalog Course Description: Basics of democratic government; constitutional principles, functions, operations, and processes of governmental change; attention given to the role of political institutions and parties, public opinion, interest groups and the media.

Prerequisites/Co-requisites: None

Entry-Level Standards: Ability to read and write at a college level.

Program Student Learning Outcomes (PSLO):
The goals of the Social and Behavioral Sciences requirement are (a) to develop in the student an understanding of self and world by examining the content and processes used by social and behavioral sciences to discover, describe, explain, and predict human behavior and social systems; (b) to enhance knowledge of social and cultural institutions and the values of this society and other societies and cultures in the world; and (c) to understand the interdependent nature of the individual, family, and society in shaping human behavior and determining quality of life.

Course Student Learning Outcomes (CSLOs)
1) Students will be able to describe key events and ideas in the foundations of American democracy and constitutionalism, such as the Declaration of Independence, the Articles of Confederation, the drafting and debate over ratification of the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.
2) Students will be able to define, recognize, and understand the significance of key structural elements within the United States government, including: federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances, and the relationship of the individual to the state through the protections of civil rights and liberties.
3) Students will be familiar with the key institutions of government and social science research surrounding the Congress, presidency, and federal judiciary.
4) Students will be exposed to political science scholarship analyzing key elements of political behavior and processes, including: public opinion and polling; elections and campaigns, including the Electoral College; political parties and interest groups; political culture and socialization; and the contemporary impact of media and technology on politics.