

**Government 391 (1 credit)**

Spring 2019

Office Hours:

2/21, 4-6pm

3/13, 3-5pm

or by appointment

**Professor Jaime Settle**

Tyler 361

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**American Politics Institute Pre-Course****Spring 2019****Polarization: Parties, Interest Groups, Media and the Electorate**

A polarized electorate changes the incentives and thus the behavior and interactions of various actors in the political system: elected officials, bureaucrats, political parties, interest groups, the media, and voters. We will explore the origins and extent of political polarization in America—considering how it manifests in electoral politics, policy debates, media coverage, and interpersonal interactions—to discuss the longer-term effects on our political system and culture.

What sets this institute apart from similar coursework you could take on campus is that you will hear directly from the policymakers and opinion leaders about their experiences with polarization and its influence on the American political system. There is significant dispute over the level of polarization and its effects on various aspects of the political system. By bringing in a range of individuals and exposing you to relevant articles, you will be encouraged to come to your own conclusions about the phenomenon. Furthermore, your internship will allow you to observe some of these effects up close and on a consistent basis as you interact firsthand with influential people at think tanks, nongovernmental organizations, political agencies, and media organizations.

**Teaching Philosophy and Course Goals**

The subject matter of a course serves as a tool to help you develop skills to become a better thinker and communicator. The goals for this course are for you to:

***Ask good questions.*** Learning necessitates curiosity.

***Assess and synthesize information.*** Use the course material to arrive at informed opinions.

***Engage in analytical reasoning.*** Respectfully discuss and deliberate ideas.

***Communicate effectively.*** Continue to improve the skills necessary to write or present a clearly argued and well-developed discourse.

**My Expectations**

I aim to make class worth your time, and I ask for the same in return. This course serves as the required preparation of the reading before the official first day of the DC Summer Institutes class on May 13<sup>th</sup>. The more prepared you are before the institute begins, the more you will get out of the overall experience.

**Course Materials**

A list of suggested readings will be posted on Blackboard. They will be posted on Blackboard or can be found online. You should also purchase a copy of *Solutions to Political Polarization in America*, edited by Nate Persily. Please contact me if you have concerns about your access to the course materials.

## Assignments

There are no tests for this course, but there will be a significant amount of writing required. You cannot pass this course without completing all assignments. Each of the assignments below is described in a separate handout or on Blackboard. All assignments should be submitted in class or through Blackboard.

Key Terms and Concepts Handout	5%
250-word summary of resource from Pew Research Center	5%
Seminar Memo	25%
Seminar Presentation	25%
Solutions Exercise	20%
Class Participation	10%
Online Participation	10%

## Calendar

<b>February 19<sup>th</sup></b>	First class meeting (Key Terms and Concepts Handout due)
<b>February 21<sup>st</sup></b>	Second class meeting (Pew Research Center assignment due)
<b>February 21<sup>st</sup></b>	Prof. Settle holds office hours (4-6pm)
<b>March 13<sup>th</sup></b>	Prof. Settle holds office hours (3-5pm)
<b>March 14<sup>th</sup></b>	Seminar memo due; feedback returned by March 18 <sup>th</sup>
<b>March 18<sup>th</sup>- March 22<sup>nd</sup></b>	TA holds office hours by appointment
<b>March 24<sup>th</sup></b>	Final draft of seminar memo due
<b>March 26<sup>th</sup></b>	Third class meeting (presentations)
<b>March 28<sup>th</sup></b>	Fourth class meeting (presentations)
<b>April 4<sup>th</sup></b>	Solutions exercise due
<b>April 11<sup>th</sup></b>	Fifth class meeting
<b>May 8<sup>th</sup></b>	Online engagement deadline

## American Politics Background Knowledge

There is no prerequisite for this course. Consequently, I don't assume that you have any background knowledge about American politics or polarization. If you feel as though you would like additional information or a refresher, I recommend the following resources.

### **For a very brief overview of political parties in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century:**

New Books in Political Science Podcast, Sam Rosenfeld, "The Polarizers: Postwar Architects of Our Partisan Era." Available at <https://player.fm/series/new-books-in-political-science-2421446/sam-rosenfeld-the-polarizers-postwar-architects-of-our-partisan-era-u-chicago-press-2018>

New Books in Political Science Podcast, James Campbell, "Polarized: Making Sense of a

Divided America.” Available at <https://player.fm/series/new-books-in-political-science-2421446/james-e-campbell-polarized-making-sense-of-a-divided-america-princeton-up-2016>

**To understand what happened in the 1990s and early 2000s:**

Mann, Thomas and Norm Ornstein. *It's Even Worse Than It Was*. Chapter 2. (Posted on Blackboard)

**To understand the Obama Era:**

There are two, two-hour specials from PBS Frontline that are excellent for hitting the highlights of the key political developments during the Obama presidency.

<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/divided-states-of-america/>

### **Themes and Topics**

During the third and fourth class session, we’ll dive deeply into the causes of polarization. Each student will be assigned to write a memo on a particular topic. These topics cluster into one of six themes.

#### **Electoral Explanations**

1. Electoral Rules and Primaries
2. Gerrymandering
3. Campaign Finance and Interest Groups

#### **Congress**

4. Institutional Rules (within Congress)
5. Parties, Party Factions and Divided Government
6. Congressional Norms and Practices

#### **Other institutional Explanations**

7. Sunshine Laws
8. Executive and Judicial Branches
9. Federalism and State-level Polarization

#### **Social Psychology**

10. Authoritarianism and Personality
11. Social Identity Theory and Social Cognition
12. Social Sorting and Geographic Clustering

#### **Economic and Social Divides**

13. Racial Divisions and Attitudes
14. Culture War and Religion
15. Economic Inequality

#### **Media and Interpersonal Interactions**

16. Media
17. Social Media
18. Interpersonal Discussions

### **Policies**

#### **Late Policies**

Because your peers are relying on you for your seminar memo and presentation, there is no

option to submit those assignments late. If you do not submit them on time, you will receive a “0.” For all other written assignments, you should submit your assignment via Blackboard by the time specified on the assignment sheet. Assignments turned in after the deadline are subject to a 10% penalty. After that first day, assignments will be penalized an additional half-letter grade (5%) for each day (or fraction thereof) they are late until the maximum grade possible is a 60. Weekend days count. So, if you turn in an assignment after class but before midnight on the day the assignment is due, the maximum grade possible is a 90. An assignment turned in the day after the due date will receive a maximum score of 85; two days late will receive a maximum of 80; three days late, 75, etc. If you are submitting your paper late, you must email it to me for time-stamping purposes.

**I will not accept assignments after the Friday of the last week of regularly scheduled classes.**

### **Extra Credit**

Extra credit will rarely, if ever, be available. Consequently, it is imperative that you do your best on each and every assignment.

### **Grade Appeals**

If you are dissatisfied with your grade on an assignment, you can choose between two options. If you want to talk about your work and discuss ways you can improve on *future* assignments, I am happy to meet with you in office hours or by appointment. You cannot appeal your grade after we have this conversation. Therefore, if you are positive that you want to appeal your grade, you need to write a one-page double-spaced explanation of why you think your work merits a higher grade. After reading your appeal, I will re-grade your assignment. Your grade can go up, stay the same, or go down. We will *then* schedule a meeting to talk about your work.

### **Plagiarism**

I assume that students take the Honor Code and plagiarism as seriously as I do and that academic misconduct will not become an issue in this class. For any questions about policies regarding cheating, plagiarism, or other types of academic dishonesty, please see the William and Mary Honor Council’s web site and the discussion of the Honor Code and plagiarism in the Student Handbook. I will initiate an Honor Council proceeding for any student whom I judge to have plagiarized any part of their work or to have cheated in any way, and at a bare minimum, I will recommend that the student receive an F for the course.

### **Misc. Policies**

Turn off your cell phones before coming to class. If you are expecting an important call, tell me before class, keep your phone on vibrate, and leave quietly when you receive the call.

I prefer that you do not use your laptop in class. We will discuss this in more detail on the first day of class, but if you feel that you must use your laptop, please be especially conscious of the signals you are sending to me and to your peers with your body language and eye contact.

Anyone requiring accommodations due to a disability should contact the Dean of Students Office as soon as possible so that arrangements can be made.