

# American Political Thought 46.307.201

**Instructor:** Susan E. Gallagher [Susan\\_Gallagher@uml.edu](mailto:Susan_Gallagher@uml.edu)  
**Course page:** <http://faculty.uml.edu/sgallagher> (Click on [American Political Thought](#))  
**Time:** Tuesday, Thursday, 11:00-12:15  
**Office:** Coburn 106  
**Office Hours:** On campus: Thurs, 1:00–2:00 (or by appointment)  
Online: Friday, 7:00-10:00pm

**Note:** The assignment schedule and other details are included on the [course web page](#).

This course utilizes documentary resources to survey major milestones in American political thought from the Founding Era to the present. During the first half of the term, we will study selections from leading contributors to social, economic, and political discourse over the past two hundred years. During the second half, students will use what they have learned to explore how eighteenth and nineteenth-century approaches to politics and government shaped social and political developments in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Topics covered in the readings during the first half of the semester include the crafting of the U.S. Constitution, the rise of abolitionism, the struggle for woman suffrage, the response to industrialization, and the political and legal consequences of the spread of mass communications. Drawing from these materials, students will make presentations on the ways in which earlier conceptions of democracy, equality, freedom, justice, and the rule of law influenced more recent debates about civil rights, gender equality, free speech, environmental problems, the scope of government, and other political issues.

All required readings and supporting materials will be drawn from public domain collections that are freely available on the Internet. Throughout the course, students will be encouraged to conduct research for papers and presentations by locating relevant images, texts, and other documents on trustworthy sites such as [Digital Commonwealth](#), the [Library of Congress](#), and [Google Books](#).

## Requirements

You must have regular access to the Internet in order to take this course. You are not required to purchase any books. All course materials, including required readings and assignments, are available at <http://faculty.uml.edu/sgallagher>. Click on [American Political Thought](#) in order to access the course page.

When you contact me via e-mail, you must include the initials APT in the subject heading of your message. If you do not include “APT,” your e-mail could be misdirected or rejected as spam.

If you need to miss a session, please e-mail a valid excuse beforehand if you can or as soon as possible after that session. If you miss more than three sessions without providing a valid excuse, you will receive an “F” for the course.

You must not plagiarize. If you copy from any outside source without providing proper attribution in any of your assignments, you will receive an “F” for that assignment. If you copy

from any outside source without providing proper attribution on either the midterm or the final exam, you will automatically fail the entire course.

### **Assignments**

The first half of the course is divided into 7 Units. We will generally spend a week covering each Unit, but some sections will run a bit longer. Before the start of each Unit, a few students will be chosen to provide background information on the readings to the rest of the class. While students are encouraged to conduct their own research, links to reliable sources are provided on the course web page.

To complete each Unit, you must provide brief typewritten answers to questions on the required readings. In some cases, you will be required to submit your answers via e-mail; in others, you will be required to print out your answers and bring them with you to class. Please follow the instructions included with each set of reading questions and always arrive in class prepared to show that you have completed your work.

In all of your assignments, you must demonstrate your ability to write college-level prose. Consequently, all of your assignments must be thoughtfully composed and free of grammatical errors. If you have severe writing problems, or if your work is carelessly written, or if you neglect to proofread your assignments, you should not expect to receive passing grades.

During the second half of the course, you will work with other students to prepare and give presentations on specific issues related to American political thought. On the date of each presentation, each of the students involved will be required to submit a written summary of the main points made. We will work out a schedule of presentations midway through the term.

Throughout the course, you will be expected to advance the class discussion, not only by answering questions about the readings, but also by responding (politely!) to points raised by other students in discussions and presentations.

### **Exams**

For your midterm exam, you will be required to write two two-page essays on specific aspects of the required readings. In order to help you complete this task, I will supply a list of thesis statements that you may use as the opening paragraph for each of your essays.

Your essays will be graded according to your ability to write college-level prose. Consequently, like your answers to the reading questions, your midterm must be carefully written and proofread. If your essays do not conform to the rules of college-level composition, you should not expect to receive a passing grade.

For your final exam, you must choose one of the following options:

1. You may write a five-page paper on a topic chosen from a list that I will supply well in advance.

2. If you already possess the required technical skills, you may create a web page on a specific aspect of one of the major issues covered in class. Students who would like to choose this option must obtain formal permission.
3. If you would like to conduct further research on a topic related to issues raised in class, you may make an in-class presentation of your findings near the end of the term. Note: Please choose this topic only if you are prepared to carry out significant extra research. Also, you must obtain formal permission well in advance.

No matter which of these options you choose, you must submit a thesis statement on your topic approximately two weeks before the work is due. In order to help you complete this work, we will discuss possible thesis statements in class long before the deadline.

### **Grade Formula**

Class participation, presentations, and reading assignments = 25%

Midterm exam = 35%

Final paper/presentation/web page = 40%