POLS 198: Honors American Government: Important Debates in American Politics
Professor Travis Ridout

This course provides an opportunity for students to learn about—and participate in—important debates in American politics, both historical and contemporary. Some of the questions we will debate are:

- What is the proper trade-off between security and civil rights?
- Should affirmative action be used in university admissions?
- How much of a role should religion play in politics?
- Are Americans informed enough to make good voting decisions?
- Does the president have too much power?

In preparation for these debates, we will read several classics in American politics, including the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence and some of the Federalist papers. We will also read several pieces addressing contemporary debates and issues. And in order to get a feel of what it is like to be a politician, we will read two political biographies.

The course will be run as a seminar. I will not lecture much; instead, I will guide discussion. During several class periods, students will be responsible for leading debate on the topic of the week. I will try to arrange for some guest speakers. And for those of you who are fantasy football fans, get ready to draft your legislators for our weekly fantasy Congress contests.

Course grades will depend on students’ participation, their performance on several written assignments and a final course project.

Reading List


