

PSC 32-114: American Politics

Tuesday/Thursday 8:30-9:15 am

Tuesday/Thursday 1:00-2:15 pm

Cullen 330

Dr. Emily Sydnor

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Wed. 1-4 pm,

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Community Engaged Learning Teaching Assistant (CELTA)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

A 2013 poll by Public Policy Polling found that Americans rate Congress lower than root canals, cockroaches, and traffic jams. (Respondents also had a higher opinion of Donald Trump than Congress, so maybe we should have seen the 2016 election coming.) Yet, in 2014, approximately 96 percent of incumbent members of Congress were re-elected. Why do we see this contradiction?

This course will help you understand the incentives and motivations of actors throughout the American political system so that you can interpret what you read and hear about American politics in a more analytical manner. The course serves simultaneously as a “civics” course that helps you become a more confident participant in American politics and as an introduction to the theories and methods used in the study of American politics.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. *List* the major institutions in American government and *explain* their functions.
2. *Assess* the strengths and weaknesses of the American political system.
3. *Interpret* statistical and graphical political data.
4. *Apply* theories of political science to contemporary political events.
5. *Connect* government institutions and responsibilities to everyday life and your learning in other Southwestern classes.
6. *Communicate* your ideas through writing and oral presentation.
7. *Identify what you need to know* to be an engaged American citizen.
8. *Recognize the value* of your own political engagement.

MATERIALS

Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore J. Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline J. Tolbert and Robert J. Spitzer. (2017). *We The People: An Introduction to American Politics*. 11th Essentials Edition. New York: W. W. Norton.

Canon, David T., John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer. (2017). *The Enduring Debate: Classical and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*. New York: W. W. Norton.

HOW TO SUCCEED IN THIS COURSE

This course emphasizes active learning, using a range of interactive assignments to investigate American politics. Here are a few tips that will help you be successful in this course.

1. **Plan ahead.** Keep due dates for both the weekly assignments and the larger projects in mind and plan your work accordingly. Part of surviving college and the professional world beyond is knowing how to budget your time, and I will not be forgiving of late assignments that are the result of poor planning.
2. **Use your resources.** I am your most valuable resource, and I want to help you! If something isn't clear after our class discussion or an assignment, don't hesitate to visit my office hours, talk to me after class, or send me an email. I aim to be responsive and timely in my feedback and email replies. That being said, see number 1 above—don't email me at midnight the night before an assignment is due and expect a response. Instead, think about your schedule and come see me in advance if you think there will be any problems.

I recognize that it can feel daunting to get involved in politics and that it is sometimes hard to know where to start. To help overcome this feeling of inertia, our class has a Community Engaged Learning Teaching Assistant (CELTA) who will be sending you information about ways to get involved on campus and in the Georgetown and Austin communities. Don't hesitate to reach out to Natalie if you are having trouble fulfilling your community-engaged learning requirement or if you have questions about ways to get involved in politics.

Beyond campus, there are dozens of great resources for learning more about American Politics. [The Monkey Cage](#) and [Mischiefs of Faction](#) are two blogs written by political scientists on a range of topics. [FiveThirtyEight](#) offers data-driven analysis of myriad topics and is one of the most well known forecasters of American elections. The Pew Research Center's [U.S. Politics and Policy](#) wing and the [National Election Studies](#) offer a wealth of polling and survey data on a range of issues. And if there's another type of information you're looking for, just ask me or one of Southwestern's librarians—we'll help you track it down.

ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

1. **Paper 1: What makes an American citizen? (15%)**

One of the biggest political debates we are currently facing is about who should be entitled to the rights and privileges afforded by the U.S. Constitution and what qualifications people should have to become American citizens. For this assignment, create a new set of requirements for becoming a citizen of the United States. What does an individual have to do or know to be accepted as a U.S. citizen? Should new citizens have different rights? How are your decisions shaped by American culture and ideologies? To answer these questions, you will write a 2-4 page paper outlining your ideas and expectations. Each element of your proposal should be supported by course readings or class discussion.

2. Mock Press Conference (15%)

The political press conference highlights the dynamic nature of political communication, bringing together a range of concepts we will discuss in class. This assignment is designed for you to experience these concepts in action and encourages you to hone your skills in public communication, writing and critical thinking. Each person will be assigned a role in the press conference itself, and that role will come with written “deliverables.”

3. Paper 2: Integrating Experience and Research (20%)

Throughout the course of the semester, you are required to find at least one way to get involved in politics and to spend **four hours** volunteering in some way.

Community Engagement Proposal (5%): At the beginning of the semester, you will need to submit a proposal for how you will complete your 4 hours of community engagement. As part of this proposal, you must tell me what organization you plan to work with and what you expect to do while volunteering with that organization. You must also outline your own objectives for this activity—what do you hope to get out of your volunteer experience? What skills do you want to learn, or what contribution do you want to make? This proposal should be no more than one page.

Final paper (20%): For your final paper, I want you to reflect on your community engagement experience—What challenged or surprised you? What did it teach you about the organizations and institutions that structure American politics? How did it connect to your daily life, or to other classes you are taking? What tools do you now have to be an engaged and informed citizen? I will provide you with a list of suggested ways to volunteer in Williamson County and at Southwestern and more specific instructions about what to include as you’re writing. This reflective paper will be 3-4 pages long.

4. Class Preparation Activities (15%)

In the schedule below, you’ll see an assignment listed with each day’s reading. These assignments are designed to get you thinking about the class topics before you come to class and will help us get the discussion started each week. **You should post your responses to these assignments on Moodle;** an assignment tab will be created for each day’s prompt. Most assignments will require a minimum of 1-3 paragraphs. Each week I will randomly choose student assignments to assess, evaluating a total of 10 course preparation assignments for each student over the course of the semester. These assignments will be graded on a 5-point scale:

Score of 5: Meets or exceeds required length; strongly engaged, high-quality exploration of the question or topic at hand.

Score of 4: Meets or exceeds required length; meets my expectations for engagement with material.

Score of 3: High-quality exploration but too short, or meets required length but is too superficial

Score of 2: Too short and too superficial

Score of 1: Missing or unacceptable assignment.

5. Attendance & Participation (15%)

Part of being a good colleague and good democratic citizen is engaging in thoughtful and civil discussion and actively listening to your peers. I expect you to participate in class activities and discussions, thereby improving your verbal communication skills and practicing how to analyze, critique, and respond respectfully in discussion.

In order to participate, you must be present! Much of the work we do in class will reinforce the assignments you complete for a grade; therefore it is to your benefit to be in class every day. You are allowed **two unexcused absences** throughout the course of the semester. Each unexcused absence exceeding two will result in a five-point deduction from your final participation grade. In other words, if you earn an 80% on participation but are absent 4 times, you will receive a 70%. Doctor's notes do not exempt absences from this policy (but please let me know in the event of any prolonged, severe illnesses or other extenuating circumstances).

6. Final Exam (15%)

The final will be cumulative and will include a combination of multiple choice, short answer and essay questions that focus on material from both class discussion and your readings.

7. Extra Credit (5%)

This semester, I am offering extra credit to students who would like to help with my research by participating in an on-campus study of people's reactions to political discourse. I am seeking students who are able and willing to participate in an experiment that will last approximately one and a half hours. Participants will watch a short political video and discuss it. We will be collecting saliva samples from each participant throughout the experiment. To determine if you are eligible, you will need to complete a short screening test available at the link below. Once we have determined your eligibility, you will be contacted to schedule a time to complete the full experiment.

Screening questionnaire:

https://survey.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/sv_ct4ijmo1a187hip

Please be aware that the video used in the experiment may contain objectionable content. Further, the screening survey asks questions about medication and general health/medical history because these factors can affect cortisol levels. All of this information will remain strictly confidential.

Those who do not wish to or are ineligible to participate in the experiment can complete a summary of an article on political science research to receive extra credit in this course. You must select an article from the folder on Moodle called "Extra Credit Research Articles." Then, complete the "components of research design" worksheet with answers based on the article that you have read. **You must submit your Research Design worksheet to me by December 8 in order to receive extra credit for the assignment.**

Please come talk to me if you have questions about the experiment or about the research design assignment. Remember, both assignments are optional!

IMPORTANT DEADLINES

Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due at the beginning of class.

Course Preparation Activities	Weekly
Community Engagement Proposal	Tuesday, Sept. 12
Paper 1 (Citizenship)	Tuesday, Oct. 3
Mock Press Conference Deliverables	Thursday, Oct. 26
Mock Press Conference Participation	Tuesday, Oct. 31
Paper 2 (Community Engagement)	Tuesday, Dec. 7
Final Exam	1 pm section: Wed. Dec. 13 @ 1:30 pm 2:30 pm section: Fri. Dec. 15 @ 1:30 pm

COURSE POLICIES

Pre-requisites: There are no prerequisites for this course.

Late assignments: You may turn in an assignment late for a 1/3-letter grade deduction per day (so an A paper receives an A- if it is turned in within the first 24 hours after the deadline, B+ when two days late, etc.). I will not remind you to turn in late assignments.

Citations: The political science department has decided that students in every course will use the same method of citation in all their writing assignments: the Chicago Style. For the sake of uniformity, we ask you all to consult the same text, Kate Turabian's guide to the Chicago style, titled *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, for information on how to employ this method of citation in your writing. Therefore, I will not accept work that is not cited properly according to Turabian.

Academic Integrity: Please read the honor pledge and learn what constitutes an honor code violation, especially as regards cheating and plagiarism. People usually are aware of what constitutes cheating, but many might be unsure of what exactly plagiarism is all about. The academic honor code can help clarify. Plagiarism is intellectual theft and you must know what constitutes it to avoid it. Using the words and ideas of others without acknowledgement is the essence of plagiarism. **You can unintentionally plagiarize by failing to cite sources or incorrectly citing your sources.** To avoid honor code violations, read the section below and cite your sources properly. In addition, on all your written work for this class, you must affirm the Honor Code by writing the pledge and signing your name beneath it: "I have acted with honesty and integrity in producing this work and am unaware of anyone who has not." Questions about the Honor Code may be directed to: Jaime Woody, Dean of Students (woodyj@southwestern.edu). Phone 863-1624.

Grading: Your grades will be calculated on the following scale:

A+	97-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69
A	93-97	B	84-86	C	74-76	D	64-66
A-	90-92	B-	80-83	C-	70-73	D-	60-63

The University Honor Code applies to all graded assignments. The work should be yours alone and no one else's.

Accommodating Disabilities: Southwestern University will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Students should contact the Center for Academic Success to determine their eligibility to receive accommodations. To arrange accommodations, students should contact Maria Pena, the Access and Academic Resource Coordinator, (penam@southwestern.edu) within the Center for Academic Success (in the Prothro Center): call 512-863-1286 or email success@southwestern.edu. Students seeking accommodations should notify the Access and Academic Resource coordinator at least two weeks before services are needed. It is the student's responsibility to discuss any necessary accommodations with the appropriate faculty member.

More information can also be found here:

<http://www.southwestern.edu/offices/success/forstudents/services.php>.

Technology: You are welcome to use your laptop or tablet to take notes for class, and at times we may use multiple laptops to look up information and watch or listen to course material. However, I expect these items to only be used for class-related purposes and not for your amusement or distraction. On the first day of class, we will come to an agreement as a class as to the penalty for inappropriate use of technology.

SCHEDULE

Who is a citizen? Who is a “good” citizen? What is the relationship between the government and citizens in the United States?

Aug. 29 Introductions, no reading.

NO CLASSES AUGUST 31 DUE TO AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION ANNUAL MEETING

Sept. 5 **To read:**
“Lycurgus” by Plutarch, selections

Democracy in America, by Alexis de Tocqueville, selections.

“Harrison Bergeron,” by Kurt Vonnegut

Class Preparation Assignment:

Consider the types of regimes described in each reading. Which would you most like to live in, and why?

Sept. 7 **To read:**
We the People, ch. 2

Declaration of Independence (*We the People*, A1)

Constitution of the United States (*We the People*, A11)

Class Preparation Assignment:

On Tuesday, we discussed three questions asked about every regime: who governs? To what ends? What is life like? Answer each question in the context of the Articles of Confederation. What changes with the Constitution?

What principles undergird American institutions? How effectively are they applied?

Sept. 12 **To read:**
We the People ch. 3

Enduring Debate, ch.3 (readings 12, 15-17)

Class Preparation Assignment:

How does an organization you’re working for (or thinking of working for) as part of your civic engagement project fit into the federal system? At what level of government are they trying to affect change? How does the fact that we have a federal system influence their strategies or organization?

Community Engagement Proposal Due

Sept. 14

To read:

Ceaser, James. (2002). "Progressivism and the New Deal" *American Government: Origins, Institutions and Public Policy*, 7th ed. New York: Kendall/Hunt Publishing.

Roosevelt, Theodore (1910). *New Nationalism*. Dedication of the John Brown Memorial Park in Osawatomie, Kansas.

Wilson, Woodrow. (1912). *What is Progress?* (Campaign speech)

Roosevelt, Franklin Delano. (1944). *State of the Union Message to Congress*. Washington, D.C. (Also known as the "Second Bill of Rights")

Class Preparation Assignment:

Write brief responses the following questions:

- (a) What did Progressives mean by the idea of "progress"?
- (b) What was the Progressives' critique of the Constitution? Of the doctrine of natural rights?
- (c) Is our actual governing scheme today more influenced by the Progressives or the Founders?
- (d) What elements of the speeches of Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, and Franklin Roosevelt helped to establish the foundation for liberalism in the last generation?

Sept. 19

To read:

Ceaser, James (2010). "Four Heads and One Heart: The American Conservative Movement."

Kirk, Russell (1993). "Ten Conservative Principles" from *The Politics of Prudence*, New York: ISI Books.

2016 Democratic Party Platform, Preamble.

2016 Republican Party Platform, Preamble.

Class Preparation Assignment:

Think about the functions of ideology that we discussed in the context of progressivism. What answers does a conservative ideology have to the same questions? How do the answers vary within the conservative movement?

Sept. 21 **To read:**
Enduring Debate ch. 1 (readings 1-5)

Class Preparation Assignment:
How would you describe American political culture to an alien from outer space? What are the central tenets? How do they vary?

Sept. 26 **To read:**
We the People ch. 4

Enduring Debate ch. 4, (reading 19)

American Civil Liberties Union. (2017). [Speech on Campus](https://www.aclu.org/speach-on-campus), aclu.org.

McElwee, Sean. (2013). "[The Case for Censoring Hate Speech](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-case-for-censoring-hate-speech)" *Huffington Post*, July 24.

NPR (2011). "[Comparing Hate Speech Laws in the U.S. and Abroad](https://www.npr.org/2011/03/03/134444444-comparing-hate-speech-laws-in-the-u-s-and-abroad)" *NPR.org*, March 3.

Class Preparation Assignment:
In class, we will hold a structured debate on the question of whether hate speech should be protected under the First Amendment. I will assign you positions; however, I want you to use this assignment to stake out your own position on the issue. Summarize the main points for and against restrictions on hate speech and offer your own conclusions on why America should or should not protect this sort of language. Make sure you defend your position with clear logic and strong evidence from either the readings or your own research.

What are the primary institutions in American government? How do American institutions function?

Sept. 28 **To read:**
We the People, ch. 9

Fenno, Richard (1973). *Congressmen in Committees*. New York: Little, Brown and Company. Introduction, chapter 1.

Hamilton, Lee. "[Ten Things I Wish Political Scientists Would Teach About Congress](https://www.pisigma.org/lectures/ten-things-i-wish-political-scientists-would-teach-about-congress)." *Pi Sigma Alpha lecture to the American Political Science Association*, Aug. 31, 2000.

Class Preparation Assignment:
Write a draft of an email you could write to your Congressperson (whether here at SU or at home) about an issue they might consider as part of their committee responsibilities.

Oct. 3 To read:
Enduring Debate, ch. 5 (readings 22-24)

Schulz, Kathryn (2017). "What Calling Congress Achieves" *The New Yorker* (March 6).

Class Preparation Assignment:

Throughout your civic engagement activities, have you seen elected officials respond to citizens? If so, how? Are there ways the system could have been more responsive? Do you think increased responsiveness is a positive outcome for our political system?

Citizenship Paper due

Oct. 5

To read:

We the People, ch. 10

Enduring Debate ch. 6 (reading 27)

Class Preparation Assignment:

Make a list of the five best and worst presidents. What makes some of these presidents great? How often do we really have a great president? Why were others poor presidents? What criteria should we use to judge presidents—policy accomplishments? The ability to inspire? Character?

Oct. 12

To read:

Enduring Debate, ch. 6 (readings 29-31)

Class Preparation Assignment:

Imagine you are a Congressional staffer whose boss is contemplating proposing a Constitutional amendment to dismantle the Electoral College. Make a list of arguments for *and* against the continued use of the Electoral College as a means of deciding the presidency. Then offer a recommendation to the Congressperson. Should we have an Electoral College? Justify your recommendation with evidence from contemporary politics and your readings.

Oct. 17

To read:

We the People, ch. 11

Enduring Debates, ch. 7 (readings 34 & 35)

Class Preparation Assignment:

Make a list of bureaucratic agencies (federal, state, or local) that influence an organization you are volunteering with as part of your civic engagement project. What are the pros and cons of having to work with these agencies?

Oct. 19

To read:

We the People, ch. 12

Enduring Debate, ch. 8 (readings 37 & 38)

Class Preparation Assignment:

How important is it that Americans respect the Supreme Court of the United States? How responsive is the Supreme Court to public opinion and political considerations? Is this appropriate? Why or why not?

Oct. 24

To read:

Enduring Debate, ch. 8 (readings 39 & 40)

Class Preparation Assignment:

Identify the logic behind the “originalist” and “living constitution” positions. If you could choose one interpretation strategy to impose on all justices, what would it be? Would it be different from either of the two theories described in the readings?

How do political organizations and groups interact with government institutions?

Oct. 26

To read:

We the People ch. 6

Klar, Samara, Joshua Robison and James N. Druckman (2013) “Political Dynamics of Framing” *New Directions in Media and Politics*.

Class Preparation Assignment:

Find two news stories that cover the same topic. How is each framed? How do the frames used in the articles potentially change the way you view the issue? Include links to the two stories you discuss.

Oct. 31

Enduring Debate, ch. 9 (readings 44-46)

Ladd, Jonathan M. (2013) “The Era of Media Distrust and Its Consequences for Perceptions of Political Reality” *New Directions in Media and Politics*.

Course Preparation Assignment:

Play a full game of “[Factitious](#),” a game that asks you to distinguish between real and fake news. How’d you do? What criteria did you use to make your decision? What made certain articles harder or easier to label as fake?

Nov. 2

Mock Press Conference

Course Preparation Assignment:

Submit the deliverables for your role in the press conference (see assignment sheet for specifics) in advance of class.

Nov. 7

Guest speaker: Dr. Emily Northrop, SU Economics dept. and a member of the Citizens' Climate Lobby

To read:

We the People, ch. 8

Gilens, Martin (2014). "Affluence and Influence: Economic Inequality and Political Power in America" in *Readings in American Politics: Analysis and Perspectives*, 3rd ed. Ed. Ken Kollman. New York: W.W. Norton.

Kollman, Ken (2014). "Outside Lobbying: Public Opinion and Interest Group Strategies" in *Readings in American Politics: Analysis and Perspectives*, 3rd ed. Ed. Ken Kollman. New York: W.W. Norton.

Class Preparation Assignment:

Visit the Citizens' Climate Lobby website (www.citizensclimatelobby.org). As you look at the website, think about the path they're taking to influence government and how they measure success. Come to class with at least 3 questions for Dr. Northrop about the organization, her involvement, or the group's policy goals.

Press Conference Reflection Papers Due

Nov. 9

To read:

We the People, pgs 203-218

Enduring Debate, pgs. 393-414 (readings 55 & 56)

Class Preparation Assignment:

What role have political parties played in your civic engagement experience? How would that role change (or not) if we had a multiparty system?

How do we choose our leaders? How can we get involved in campaigns and elections?

Nov. 14

To read:

Brownstein, Ronald (2016). From "The Second Civil War", *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity*. 6th ed. Ann G. Serow & Evertett C. Ladd, eds. Baltimore: Lanahan Publishers (pgs. 551-557).

Bishop, Bill (2016). From "The Big Sort", *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity*. 6th ed. Ann G. Serow & Evertett C. Ladd, eds. Baltimore: Lanahan Publishers (pgs. 558-565).

Class Preparation Assignment:

Do you think Americans are polarized? Draw on the readings or data from scholarly sources to offer 3 specific pieces of evidence in support of your answer.

Nov. 16

To read:

We the People, pgs 218-241

Scala, Dante. "From *Stormy Weather*" *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity*. 6th ed. Ann G. Serow & Evertett C. Ladd, eds. Baltimore: Lanahan Publishers.

Boatright, Robert. "From *Getting Primaried*" *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity*. 6th ed. Ann G. Serow & Evertett C. Ladd, eds. Baltimore: Lanahan Publishers.

Class Preparation Assignment:

Are there local representatives who are "getting primaried"? How have the 2018 primaries affected your civic engagement activities?

Nov. 21

Ingraham, Christopher. (2016). "[This Is Actually What America Would Look Like Without Gerrymandering](#)" *Washington Post*, January 13.

Jarvie, Jenny. (2017). "[Why Texas is Texas: A gerrymandering case cuts to the core of the state's transformation](#)" *LA Times*, July 11.

Course Preparation Assignment:

Play a mission as part of [the Redistricting Game](#). How easy was it to come to a solution? How can different groups introduce biases into the allocation of districts? How do these additional parameters change the way you play the game? Take a screenshot of your final districts and include it in your Moodle post.

Nov. 28

To read:

We the People, ch. 5

Enduring Debate, ch. 9 (readings 42 & 43).

Class Preparation Assignment:

George Gallup originally designed polls to help make the democratic system more responsive to the people. Did he succeed? If someone from the Gallup poll called to ask you how you voted in the 2016 election, would you tell the truth? What if Katie Couric stopped you outside the polling place and asked you how you had voted?

NO CLASS NOV. 23 FOR THANKSGIVING

Nov 30

Hershey, Marion Randon (2009). "What We Know about Voter-ID Laws, Registration, and Turnout" *PS: Political Science & Politics* 42(1): 87-91.

Barreto, Matt A., Stephen A. Nuno and Gabriel R. Sanchez (2009). "The Disproportionate Impact of Voter-ID Requirements on the Electorate—New Evidence from Indiana" *PS: Political Science & Politics* 42(1): 111-116.

Mycoff, Jason D., Michael W. Wagner, and David C. Wilson (2009). "The Empirical Effects of Voter-ID Laws: Present or Absent?" *PS: Political Science & Politics* 42(1): 121-126.

Ansolahehere, Stephen (2009). "Effects of Identification Requirements on Voting: Evidence from the Experiences of Voters on Election Day" *PS: Political Science & Politics* 42(1): 127-130.

Course Preparation Assignment:

One of the major questions surrounding voter ID laws is "what are the effects of voter ID laws on participation?" Before you start your reading on voter ID laws, generate 2 hypotheses that answer this question, using the form "If voter ID laws are passed, then..." To what extent does the data in the readings support your hypotheses?

Dec. 5

To read:

Hertzberg, Hendrik. (2002). "Framed Up: What the Constitution Gets Wrong" *The New Yorker*, July 29.

Enduring Debates, ch. 2 (readings 6-11)

Course Preparation Assignment:

Levinson argues that the practices of our government fail to live up to the goals set forth in the Preamble to the Constitution. Go back and look at the preamble. Where do we fail to meet the nation's goals? Do we need a constitutional convention to realign our goals and practices? Why or why not?

Dec. 7

No reading, exam review day

Course Preparation Assignment:

Submit three multiple choice questions and a short answer question that you think would make good, challenging exam questions.

Civic engagement papers due

THE DATE OF YOUR FINAL EXAM DEPENDS ON WHAT SECTION OF AMERICAN POLITICS YOU ARE IN.

1 pm section: Exam is on Wednesday, Dec. 13 at 1:30 pm.

2:30 pm section: Exam is on Friday, Dec. 15 at 1:30 pm.

Final exams are held in the same room in which the class meets (Cullen 330).