

AMERICAN POLITICS

Pol. Sci.200
Mon. 8:30-9:40

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to the philosophy, institutions and process of American national government. Because it is an introductory course, we will quickly cover many different topics instead of spending focused time on only a few topics. My hope is that through this course, you will develop a framework for understanding American politics. Then, as you develop as a student of political science, or as a citizen of American democracy, you will be able to build on this framework.

I also hope the course will motivate you to become more interested in and engaged with politics. A primary goal of the course is to help students realize and articulate the role of politics in their own lives, and develop an understanding of and appreciation for current events in American politics.

Finally, the course is designed to help students learn how to view politics from the standpoint of social science. While politicians and pundits are singularly focused on achieving certain policy outcomes through political institutions, political scientists try to understand why certain political outcomes emerge and others do not, and strive to do so as neutral observers of behavior.

CLASS FORMAT

This class will meet twice a week; the class meetings will consist of a combination of lectures, discussions and student presentations. It is expected that you will have read the reading material prior to each class meeting so that you can actively participate in discussions.

Keeping up with current events is an important component of the course. You are expected to read the newspaper every single day. I will also occasionally post current news articles on the course conference to enrich your understanding of the course topics. It is your responsibility to check the conference and keep up with these postings.

You are expected to attend class everyday; class participation is an important component of your final grade in the course. If you miss class, you are responsible for obtaining information on material covered in class from one of your classmates.

CONTACTING THE PROFESSOR

I encourage students to attend my office hours to discuss not only issues arising in this class, but more generally for those interested in law school, questions about law school and the practice of law. I am happy to share insights about my own law school experience as well as my experience as a litigator in a big NY City law firm. You should also feel free to e-mail me with questions and concerns. If you cannot make my office hours, please e-mail me to set up an appointment. I am more than happy to meet students outside of office hours. I do want to warn students that I check my e-mail and my voice mail very irregularly in the evenings or on weekends so please do not be offended if I do not respond during my off-

hours.

POLICY ON EXTENSIONS

If a religious observance will limit you from sticking to the class schedule, you **MUST** see me at the beginning of the semester. If you want other extensions, please do not ask me if you can have an extension. Instead, follow the policy below.

Excused extensions

There are only two contingencies which are acceptable for the excused postponement of a test or final paper: personal illness or family crisis. If either of these contingencies prevents you from taking an exam or turning in the final paper, you are entitled to an excused extension. The following steps must be taken:

1. **PRIOR** to the class period in which the work is due or the exam is to be given, you must notify me that you will not be present at the exam or that you cannot submit the assignment. This notification must be made before the actual class begins.
2. You **MUST** contact me by 5 pm of the following day to arrange when the work will be completed.
3. You **MUST** submit to me at the time of your make-up exam, or at the time your final paper is submitted, a signed, written statement indicating that you are acting in accord with Wellesley's Honor Code. The signed statement may be brief and needs only to indicate; (1) that you are requesting an excused extension; (2) that the reason for the extension is consistent with the criteria described above; and (3) that you are acting in accord with Wellesley's honor code.

Unexcused Extensions

I will assume that any work submitted without a written statement is an unexcused extension, and will be subject to the following penalties:

1. Missed exams must be made up within one week of the date of the exam. The exam will be reduced by a third of a letter grade for each late day (A to A- the first day, A- to B+ the second day, etc). After one week, the student will receive a zero.
2. If you turn the final paper in late, your overall grade on the paper will be docked a third of a letter grade for each day late.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who are taking this course and who need disability-related accommodations are encouraged to work with Jim Wice, the Director of Disability Services to arrange these accommodations. His office is located in the Pforzheimer Learning & Teaching center in Clapp Library.

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

I am, of course, glad to accommodate any student's need to miss a class because of a religious observance. You must see me at the beginning of the semester so that we can make any necessary arrangements for missed work.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

This course has an unusual feature: you get to choose what work you will do in the class and how you will be graded. You have two options:

Track I is the "exam" option. It requires you to take three timed closed-book exams--two midterms (25% each) and a final (35%). Class participation also counts for 15% of your grade.

Track II is the "paper and presentation" option for those students who don't love exams and would rather write papers and do presentations. You will take the first midterm along with Track I students (25%), but instead of taking two more exams, you will write one 7 page research paper and one 12 page research paper, each based on course themes. The first paper will count 20% and the second 30%. You will also do one in-class Powerpoint presentation on the topic of your final paper (10%). Class participation also counts for 15% of your grade.

Track II probably involves more work than the exam option, but some students appreciate the opportunity to conduct research, write papers, and make presentations rather than simply answering exam questions.

Students will be asked to pick between the Track I and Track II options after completion of the first midterm.

Participation in Discussions about Current Events

A primary goal of this course is to encourage students to pay attention to current events and politics. To this end, we will devote the first part of each class discussing current news stories. These are informal discussions, but all students are expected to participate in them throughout the semester.

Students are expected to prepare by reading the *New York Times*, which is a daily newspaper with extensive coverage of national political events. It is available in hard copy or on-line: www.nytimes.com. You'll want to focus on articles dealing specifically with national politics. The reason I chose the New York Times (as opposed to other great newspapers like the *Washington Post*) is to ensure that we're all reading the same thing since there will be questions on every exam about current events. Of course, students are free to read both newspapers if they want to get different angles on the same issue.

Participation in Other Class Discussions

Students will also be expected to participate in lectures and other class discussions concerning the readings. This includes asking questions when you are perplexed, and participating in debate and discussion of readings. Students are encouraged to engage with me, the readings and each other in discussion. However, an important part of class discussion is also being a good listener – being attentive to, respectful of, and sensitive to the thoughts of your peers. Obviously, participating in class means you must regularly attend class and be prepared by doing the readings.

Midterm Exams and Final Exam

Each midterm will be composed of five short identifications, in which you will be asked to define and explain the significance of terms introduced in the readings and lectures; one essay question; and several questions on current events. The final will be comprehensive and will feature short essays; a long essay question encompassing course themes; and questions on current events (but no identifications). Current events questions which will count for about 10-20% of your grade on each exam.

The exams aren't easy! However, for each exam a list of identifications will be handed out in advance. As you will see, the list is very comprehensive, covering just about everything in the course. All identification questions will be drawn from this list.

Short Research Papers

Students choosing the Track II option will do two research papers, one 7 pages and one 12 pages. The first will be due on the same day that Track I students take their second in-class exam. The second paper will be due on the last day of finals. Each paper will cover one of the main topics we cover in class. The professor will hand out a detailed paper assignments for the first paper, and students will choose their own topics (which must be approved by the professor) for the final paper. Students will also be expected to attend office hours to go over research techniques and resources that you will need for the papers.

Power Point Presentations

Students choosing the Track II option will do an in-class power point presentation during the last week of classes. The topic of the presentation will be on the topic chosen for your final paper. This means that, while the final paper is due the last day of finals, by the last week of classes you must have completed a good deal of the research for inclusion in the Powerpoint presentation.

Tutors will be available to help Track II students with their oral presentations.

Presentations will be approximately 15 minutes in length.

REQUIRED BOOKS AND READINGS

The following books are available for purchase from the college book store or from Amazon.com:

Dahl, Robert A. *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* 2nd ed. Yale University Press. 2003 (herinafter, "Dahl").

Mayhew, David R. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. Yale University Press. 1974 (herinafter, "Mayhew").

Serow, Ann G. And Everett C. Ladd. *The Lanahan Readings inthe American Polity*, 4th ed. Lanahan Publishers. 2007 (herinafter, "Serow").

Many of the readings in this class are articles or excerpts of books. These will all be available through e-reserves for our course conference.

CLASS SESSIONS

Class 1 (Jan. 28): Introduction to course

I. Ideas: American Democracy and Values

A. The Constitution

Class 2 (Jan. 31):

Review the basic structure of the Constitution (copy available on e-reserve)

Serow, pp. 49-55, 97-100

Class 3 (Feb. 4):

Dahl, pp. 1-89

Class 4 (Feb. 7):

Discussion of results on Super Tuesday

Class 5 (Feb. 11):

Dahl, pp. 121-139

Serow, pp. 62-71

Marshall, "A Bicentennial View from the Supreme Court,"(available on e-reserve)

B. Federalism

Class 6 (Feb. 14):

Serow, pp. 117-120

McCullough v. Maryland (available on e-reserve)

U.S. v. Lopez (available on e-reserve)

C. American Democracy and Culture

Class 7 (Feb. 21):

Serow, pp. 43-48, 71-94

Class 8 (Feb. 25):

Hochschild, *Facing Up to the American Dream*, pp. 15-38 (available on e-reserve)

Review for Exam

Class 9 (Feb. 28):

Midterm Exam # 1

II. Interests: Links between Government and Citizen

A. Public Opinion

Class 10 (Mar. 3):

Rivlin, "Do You Trust Polls or Not" (available on e-reserve)

Serow, pp. 383-392, 401-407

B. Voting

Class 11 (Mar. 6):

Serow, pp. 457-463, 480-487, 487-494, 500-507

C. The Media

Class 12 (Mar. 10):

Iyengar and Kinder, "News That Matters," pp. 63-72, 90-111 (available on e-reserve)

Class 13 (Mar. 13):

Serow, pp. 598-603

Auletta, "Backstory" (available on e-reserve)

D. Interest Groups

Class 14 (Mar. 17):

Wright, "Interests Groups and Congress (available on e-reserve)

Mitchell, "A New Form of Lobbying Puts Public Face on Private Interest," (available on e-reserve)

Scherer, "Scoring Points," (available on e-reserve)

E. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Class 15 (Mar. 20):

Serow, pp. 317-331

Class 16 (Mar. 31):

Taylor, "Rights, Liberties and Security: Recalibrating the Balance after September 11," (available on e-reserve)

Ogletree, "All Deliberate Speed," Serow, pp. 350-358.

NO CLASS APRIL 3RD

Class 17 (Apr. 7):

MID-TERM EXAM # 2 or 1st RESEARCH PAPER DUE

III. Institutions

A. Political Parties

Class 18 (April 10):

Aldrich, "Why Parties," (available on e-reserve)

Class 19 (Apr. 14):

Serow, pp. 511-516

Carmines and Stimson, "Issue Evolution," (available on e-reserve)

B. The Presidency

Class 20 (Apr. 17):

Neustadt, "Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents," (available on e-reserve)

C. Congress

Class 21 (Apr. 22):(Patriot's Day class on Tuesday)

Mayhew, pp. 1-77

Serow, pp. 150-156

D. The Judiciary

Class 22 (Apr. 24):

Serow, pp. 283-291

Rosenberg, "The Real World of Constitutional Rights: The Supreme Court and the Implementation of the Abortion Decisions," (available on e-reserve).

Class 22 (Apr. 28):

Dionne, "Why Americans Hate Politics," (available on e-reserve)

Class 23 (May. 1):

Presentations

Class 24 (May 5):

Presentations