Course Syllabus

Political Science 301
American Government and Politics
Winter 2011

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Course Description | Readings | Course Requirements | Research Paper
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Instructor:

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Course Description:

This course is designed as an introduction to the institutions of American government and the political environment in which they function. These lawmaking institutions are bound and shaped by a complex of democratic ideals and procedures. Among our objectives will be to analyze how effectively the government operates in light of its democratic goals. To accomplish this we will first examine the constitutional and philosophical bases upon which our government and legal system are built and then explore the processes by which citizens translate their aspirations into government action through political parties and elections. We will then focus our attention on legislative, executive, and judicial institutions and their impact on policy.

Special Note About On-line Courses:

Because on-line courses do not have regularly scheduled class meetings and students can work at home, some students presume that classes are "easier" when
taken on-line. In fact, the opposite is true. It takes a very disciplined student to be successful through this format. Because students do not have in-class lectures, it is even more imperative that they carefully read all of the assigned material, visit relevant web material and stay active in Blackboard discussions. The course moves quickly and students must show independent initiative.

Readings will be drawn from the following texts:

Richard Gelm, HOW AMERICAN POLITICS WORKS: PHILOSOPHY, PRAGMATISM, PERSONALITY AND PROFIT (2008)


Course Requirements:

Lecture outlines (to be provided) and assigned readings will serve as the primary basis for discussions, weekly questions responses and examinations. Since there will be no lectures in this course, it is extremely important that students complete readings in a timely fashion. The professor's book serves in lieu of lectures.

All students are expected to participate in class discussions which will be conducted through e-mail and Blackboard. Since we will not meet as a class, it is imperative that students regularly communicate with each other and the instructor through e-mail and Blackboard.

Twenty percent of a student's course grade will be based upon weekly response papers and discussion participation. Each week students will submit a 1-2 page paper to the Blackboard, in which they identify a controversy related to the week's readings and propose a resolution to the problem. This includes offering a response to one of the questions posed in the outline or developing one's own question.

To facilitate comprehension and discussion of material, readings are to be completed by the dates listed in the syllabus. Students are also expected to keep up with current political events by reading a daily newspaper and consulting relevant political websites. Postings on Blackboard should make reference to current news items whenever possible.

We will have a midterm and a final exam. Exams will be taken at ULV centers near the student. Makeup exams are given only under extraordinary circumstances. Students must request permission to take a makeup exam IN ADVANCE of the scheduled exam day.
Students will also write a term paper (approximately 10-12 pages) on a contemporary political reform proposal of some aspect of the American political system. All papers (hard copy only) are to be delivered to the Department of Political Science, Founders Hall Rm 114 no later than Monday, February 28. Late papers will be penalized. Students will also send the instructor an electronic version of the paper to be submitted to Safeassign.com.

Students should regularly visit the Resource and Book links on Blackboard for additional references to supplement course material, and as resources for conducting research for term papers.

The following weights will be assigned to each of the course requirements in completing the course grade:

Midterm exam 25%
Final exam 35%
Paper 20%
Weekly response papers and class participation 20%

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COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

Dates
Topic
Readings

Jan. 3-7

CONSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS

Gelm, chs. 1-3
Edwards, chs. 1-2, U.S. Constitution

Jan. 10-14

FEDERALISM

Gelm, ch. 4
Edwards, ch. 3

Jan. 17-21

CIVIL LIBERTIES

Gelm, ch. 5
Edwards, chs. 4, 5
Jan. 24 -- TERM PAPER OUTLINE DUE

Jan. 24-28

PUBLIC OPINION

Gelm. ch. 6
Edwards, chs. 6, 7

Jan. 31 - Feb. 4

POLITICAL PARTIES

Gelm, ch. 7
Edwards, ch. 8

Feb. 7 -- MIDTERM EXAM

Feb. 7-11

VOTING/CAMPAIGNING AND ELECTIONS

Gelm, ch. 8
Edwards, chs. 9, 10

Feb. 14-18

THE LEGISLATURE (CONGRESS)

Gelm. ch. 9
Edwards, ch. 12

Feb. 21-25

THE EXECUTIVE (PRESIDENCY)

Gelm, ch. 10
Edwards, chs. 13, 15

Feb. 28 - TERM PAPERS DUE

Feb. 28 - Mar. 4

THE JUDICIARY

Gelm, ch. 11
Edwards, ch. 16
RESEARCH PAPER ASSIGNMENT:

Your paper should involve an analysis and critical examination of a contemporary political reform proposal of some aspect of the American political system. The following is a partial list of suitable topics.

- Line item veto
- Campaign finance reform
- Balanced budget amendment
- Federalism reforms
- Welfare reform
- Health care reform
- Term limits
- Flat tax
- Immigration policy
- Public funding for public broadcasting
- Public funding for the arts

This is an incomplete list. There may be other topics of interest to you that are suitable for the assignment, but they must be cleared by the instructor.

ORGANIZATION

Your paper should be organized into distinct sections which roughly correspond to the following breakdown:

1. A brief INTRODUCTION in which you identify your subject and its components, indicate its importance and specify how you will proceed in your evaluation.
2. A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND section in which you describe how your issue has been addressed by Congress, Presidents, the Supreme Court, States, etc.
3. An ISSUE ANALYSIS section in which you describe the specific policy issues associated with your topic and the pro and con arguments for each side.
4. An EVALUATION section in which you critically evaluate ways of resolving the problems you identify.
5. A DOCUMENTATION section identifying sources used in your paper. Endnotes or footnotes are acceptable. (For information on how to use endnotes or footnotes...
see Kate Turabian, A MANUAL FOR WRITERS or Joseph Gilbaldi and Walter Achtert, THE MLA HANDBOOK, or Diana Hacker, A POCKET STYLE MANUAL.) FORMAT

All papers must be typewritten, double-spaced, on one side of 8 1/2 x 11 paper. Paper length should generally be between 10-12 pages. Students must carefully proofread their papers. Spelling and grammatical errors will be taken into consideration in the grading.

DUE DATES

By Monday, Jan. 24 students are to submit (via e-mail) an outline of their paper. This should include a clear description of the topic and an explanation on how you will argue your position. AND each section of the paper should be outlined with main points identified. In addition, this outline should include a list of at least three sources (books, articles, etc.) that will be used in your research.

All papers (hard copy only) must be received by the instructor (hand delivered or by U.S. mail) no later than Monday, Feb. 28. Late papers will be penalized one-half of a letter grade for each day late.

WARNING

It is expected that this assignment will be completed in its entirety by each student. Submission of papers written for other classes is not permissible. Plagiarism is not acceptable. Any student who turns in work which is not his or her own will receive a failing grade for the course and will be referred to the Dean for further academic discipline.