

Political Science 210
American Politics and
Government
Spring Qtr., 2005

Instructor: Dr. Todd Schaefer
Office: 454 Psych Bldg
ph.: 963-3675
Hrs: 11am-12pm Daily

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course surveys the current American political system. It uses the organizational framework of 3 levels of analysis (namely structural contexts, political influences and processes, and governmental institutions), to examine (and hopefully, explain) the workings of politics and government in the United States. The overarching theme of the course is assessing how democratic the U.S. system is both in theory and practice. In addition, we will also analyze and de-bate competing views of controversial contemporary political issues.

Teaching Methods

The instructor will offer introductory comments and thoughts on the weekly subject matter to provide material and raise issues not fully covered in the assigned readings. Students are expected to do the readings for each class and to be prepared to engage in a discussion of both the materials and their implications. Students will also participate in 1 or 2 formal debates (see below). We will also watch some videos.

Methods of Evaluation

Your grade in this course will be determined according to the following criteria:

Exam #1:	10%
Exam #2:	15%
Debate:	20%
Paper:	25%
Exam #3/Final:	20%
Participation:	10%

More information on the assignments will be provided.

Required Readings

Greenberg and Page, The Struggle for Democracy 7th Ed. (2005)
Levine, ed. Point-Counterpoint: Readings in American Government
7th Ed. (2004)

I also expect that you will subscribe to and read a major daily newspaper (e.g., *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Seattle P-I* or *Times*) to keep abreast of current political events and issues. Occasionally, we will discuss various news items in class, and an article will form part of your paper assignment.

ADDENDUM: Course Requirements

Midterm Exams

There will be two in-class midterm examinations. The first is on **Mon., April 11**, and the second on **Mon., May 2**. More details will be provided. Unexcused absences from an exam will result in a failing grade for that assignment; 'make-ups' will only be given where deemed appropriate and approved by the instructor.

Class Debates on Controversial Issues

Following the format of our supplementary work, Point-Counterpoint, on several of the class meetings we will formally debate the merits of these various “controversial” political issues. There-fore, each student is expected to participate in a team debate at least once (and possibly twice) during the term. They will be observed, participated and evaluated by your peers as well as the instructor (yes, you grade each other). The debates will be in three person teams, though arguments/presentations will be made by individual team members (more on the rules, format, etc. of them will follow).

Paper

The paper in this course is meant to be an exercise where you can apply ideas, concepts and theories from the course to “real world” political events of the day which interest you. The paper should be an analytical critique of a newspaper article or editorial on some political topic published since the first day of the class/quarter. As you follow the daily news, keep an eye out for potential articles that interest you or would be a good choice for the assignment; don't wait until the week before the paper is due to scramble around to find a suitable article! How you present the information and your argument in the paper will be of as much importance as how well you have thought and applied relevant concepts to the subject at hand.

The paper should be no longer than 6 double-spaced pages, or 1500 words. It is due in class Wednesday, May 25 by the start of class. You should include a copy of the article in its entirety with the final version you hand in. Like the debates, I will give you more detailed information on the exact nature of the paper assignment.

Final Exam

The final examination in this course is an in-class essay and short-answer exam during the final examination session. It will be comprehensive, covering the whole course (though concentration will be on material since the last midterm). Students absent from the final examination will receive a grade of 'No Credit' for the course, unless the absence has been approved by the instructor (in which case a grade of 'incomplete' will be given).

Class Meetings

All readings **must** be read carefully in advance of class discussions of them, as assigned. Students are expected to **participate rigorously** in class discussions and debates. Class attendance is

absolutely essential. Thoughtful participation is absolutely expected. Attendance per se is not required, though it will usually be taken every class. If you are unable to attend your own scheduled section, you may 'make up' the class by attending the other section for that day. Please note that numerous absences will have a negative effect on your participation grade. Also, show common courtesy to the instructor and especially other members of the class - avoid distracting behaviors such as entering/leaving class in the middle, interrupting or insulting people, talking while others are, snoring or belching loudly, etc.. *A special word to cell phone enthusiasts: turn off – better yet, don't bring – your phone.* Not only are these devices disruptive and inconsiderate to others, they imply your personal needs and concerns come before the rest of us, and besides 50 minutes isn't that long. I reserve the right to remove anyone from this class if they are in my opinion interfering with its operation.

Graded Assignments

The CWU Student Judicial Code applies to all work and every aspect of this course. Also, any alterations or exceptions to the assignment schedule as stated in the syllabus must be cleared by the instructor well in advance of the due date. Failure to do so will result in late penalty. Exams, papers, etc. submitted MORE THAN 15 MIN. past deadline will be considered late and penalized one full letter grade for each day (24 hrs.) and after two days, you will fail that assignment. Punctuality and meeting your obligations is an unfortunate fact of life you should learn early; and extra time is neither fair to me nor your academic colleagues. Any assignments which are to be handed in late should either be turned in directly to the instructor or, if the latter is impossible, to the departmental secretary who will notarize the material, indicating dates and time of day.

In addition, you are expected to keep a copy, either on disk, paper, or preferably both, of all written work you submit for a grade and have it readily available to surrender to the instructor upon request. Failure to do so will result in the assignment being considered late. This protects both of us from unforeseen mishaps.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

This course complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Students who believe they require accommodation should consult relevant sections of the catalog and more importantly contact Disability Support Services in Bouillon 205.

Disagreements with the Professor:

Political attitudes and opinions tend to reflect one's background and self-interest, and since we have different backgrounds and interests there is no reason why we should be expected to agree. A student does not have to agree with the professor to get a particular grade in this class. It is both legitimate and desirable for you to disagree with me and independently and critically analyze the material. I will exercise my academic freedom and say what I think is accurate about politics; you have the same right. Please challenge me if you think I'm wrong. Former Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn had two pieces of advice for new members: "Learn to disagree without being disagreeable" and "Don't turn political differences into personal differences."

COURSE OUTLINE AND ASSIGNMENTS:

WEEK ONE: INTRODUCTION - Analyzing American Politics; STRUCTURAL LEVEL - Social, Economic and International System (3/29-4/1)

Readings: Greenberg & Page (hereafter G&P), Chs. 1 & 4.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT THIS WEEK:

What is 'Democracy'? How can we tell if U.S. is democratic? What is standard/s for classification? How do we analyze American politics? How can we make SENSE of it all??

How do "systemic" elements set parameters for American politics and government ???

How do they influence/constrain government? AFFECT OUR POLITICS??

WEEK 2: STRUCTURAL LEVEL - Constitution & Federalism (4/4-8)

Readings: G&P, Chs. 2&3, Appendix (Declaration, Constitution, *Federalist* Nos. 10, 51).

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT THIS WEEK:

Why do/did we need the Constitution? Why and how did we get it? How democratic was/is the Constitution? How does the Constitution affect us TODAY?

What effects does a federal system have on our politics? Does Federalism promote or inhibit American Democracy? Does it make sense that diff. states have diff. laws? What SHOULD distinction be between diff. levels of government: where do we draw the line?

M 4/11: **MIDTERM EXAM #1**

WEEK 3: POLITICAL LEVEL - Interest Groups (4/12-15)

F 4/15: Practice DEBATE?: Corporate Power

Readings: G&P, Chs. 7 & 9; *Point-Counterpoint* (hereafter P-CP), Ch. 9.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT THIS WEEK:

How do IGs function in US politics? How do they work as intermediaries? What techniques of influence do they use?? Are IGs too powerful? Why or why not? Do IGs subvert the 'public in-terest,' or help promote it???

What role do political parties play in American political system? How are they similar/different than IGs? How has this role changed/stayed the same? Why do we have 2 major political parties, and not more/less? What type of party systems have we had in US?

WEEK 4: POLITICAL LEVEL - Public Opinion & Mass Media (4/18-22)

F 2/3 : DEBATE?: Media Bias

Readings: G&P, Chs. 5 & 6; P-CP, Ch. 13.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT THIS WEEK:

What is 'Public Opinion'? Is it real? Where does it come from? How do we measure it? What is the Quality of Public Opinion: are the voters fools, or capable of governing themselves?

What effect do the mass media have on Politics? What role do they play in the US political system? What is the quality of information conveyed by the media? Are the media 'biased'? How do/would we know?

WEEK 4: POLITICAL LEVEL – Political Parties, Voting and Elections (4/25-29)

F 4/29: DEBATE?: Abolition of Electoral College

Readings: G&P, Ch. 10; P-CP, Ch. 12.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT THIS WEEK:

What function do elections serve? Who participates, and why? What are citizens' motivations for voting, etc.? Is nonvoting a 'problem'? Why or why not? How do we explain the nature, content, and outcomes of elections in the United States?

M 5/2: **MIDTERM EXAM #2**

WEEK 6: GOVERNMENTAL LEVEL - Congress (5/3-6)

F 5/6: DEBATE?: Adopting a Parliamentary System

Readings: G&P, Ch. 11; P-CP, Ch. 14.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT THIS WEEK:

How does Congresspersons' constant obsession w/reelection affect the operation of the Legislative Branch? Why do incumbents usually win? How effective is Congress as a Representative body? As a lawmaking body? How does Congress work in practice? How WELL does it work?

WEEK 7: GOVERNMENTAL LEVEL - The Presidency (5/9-13)

F 5/13: DEBATE?: Presidential War Powers

Readings: G&P, Ch. 12; P-CP, Ch. 15.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT THIS WEEK:

How is the office of the President different from our conception of the President (current occupant)? How much do individual factors (personality, behavior, background) influence presidential policymaking action VS. structural ones (economy, international system, etc.)? What about the Presidential advisory system: who are these 'pals' who 'help' the president, and how much power do/should they have?

WEEK 8: GOVERNMENTAL LEVEL - The Bureaucracy (5/16-20)

F 5/20: DEBATE?: Big Government & Freedom

Readings: G&P, Ch.13; P-CP, Ch. 16

QUESTIONS FOR THIS WEEK:

What is "bureaucracy", and how does it operate? Do bureaucrats simply implement policy, or do they make it? How does the executive branch affect public policy and politics? Are criticisms of the bureaucracy valid?

WEEK 9: GOVERNMENTAL LEVEL - The Courts (5/23-27)

W 5/25: **PAPERS DUE! [at start of class]**

F 5/27: DEBATE?: The Death Penalty

Readings: G&P, Ch. 14; P-CP, Ch. 6.

QUESTIONS FOR THIS WEEK:

What role do the Courts play in the American Political System? Why do we give so much power to 9 unelected, unremovable old people who wear funny robes? How does the Court operate/arrive at its decisions? How democratic are the Courts?

WEEK 10: GOVERNMENT ACTION - Civil Liberties and Civil Rights; Conclusion (5/31-6/4)

W 6/1: DEBATE?: The "War on Terrorism" and Civil Liberties

Th 6/2: DEBATE?: Affirmative Action in Higher Education

Readings: G&P, Chs. 15 & 16; P-CP, Chs. 3 & 8.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT THIS WEEK:

What are civil liberties and civil rights, how are they similar and different, and why are they important to American democracy? How have the Courts affected the rights and freedoms of the American People??

Now the course is over: What do YOU think about American politics and government? What do you like/dislike about our system? What would you change, and why and how would you change it?

****FINAL EXAM:**

Tuesday, June 7, 8-18am PDLT