

Government 101  
Introduction to American Government

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Office Hours:  
Tu&Th, 12:30-2:30  
Spring 2012

**Course Description**

This course provides an overview of contemporary American government and politics. It is designed to: (1) provide you with the essential information and concepts you will need to take upper division courses in American government; (2) introduce you to how political scientists think about the American political system; and (3) help you to analyze some of the key political issues and controversies animating American politics today.

Most of the course will focus on contemporary American politics and government. I will often draw on recent political events and issues to illustrate points in the lectures, and many of the authors you will read will describe current policy debates and political personalities. I will occasionally distribute short newspaper or magazine articles via email to help amplify or clarify points made in the lectures or the course readings. **Please check your email at least once a day.** If you do not receive a “grandiose” message from me, then you may receive one from Newt Gingrich’s command center in the volcano.

**I strongly encourage you to read** *The New York Times*, both because it is a quality publication and because it is a **free** quality publication. You can, of course, if you are one of those Neo-lithic Matrix snobs, read the NYT’s on-line. You can access the online version of *The Times* at the following link:

<http://www.nytimes.com/>

You can also acquire a considerable amount of useful information about and analysis of American politics by perusing the following web sites:

Realclearpolitics.com

CNN’s *Inside Politics* at [cnn.com/POLITICS/](http://cnn.com/POLITICS/)

ABC’s “The Note” at <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/TheNote>

**Course Requirements**

Your final grade will be based on your performance on the following exercises:

(1) A multiple-choice test on the United States Constitution and its first 10 amendments (aka, "The Bill of Rights") (10%) on **Thursday, February 17**

**This test will be graded pass/fail. You will need to answer 80% of the questions correctly to earn a "pass." Should you fail the test the first time, you may take it once more on a date and at a time of your choosing.**

(2) A 1-2 page paper on the relationship between religious beliefs and political attitudes due on **Thursday, March 1** (10%)

(3) A 5-7 page paper that builds on the first paper on the role that religion is playing in the current Republican nomination contest due on **Thursday, April 19** (20%)

3) An in-class midterm examination on **Thursday, March 29** (30%)

(4) An in-class final examination scheduled by the freedom haters in the Registrar's Office for **Monday, May 7 at 1:30 PM**( 30%)

## **Attendance**

**You are allowed to miss four (4) classes. There are no excused absences.** I do not grant excused absences for two reasons: (1) I just do not possess the cranial power to be able to discriminate between those illnesses, events, life changes, Rebecca Black break-out performances, etc. that are serious and those that are trivial; and (2) Four absences allow you to miss 2 weeks of class sessions without incurring any penalty. Even Angelina Jolie is not that generous, and recall that she puts up with Maddox. **I will treat tardies as absences.** I do often say significant things at the outset of class about readings, assignments, life coaching opportunities, *The Courtship of Eddie's Father* artifacts available on eBay, etc. It is hence important that you be at least physically present at 11:10 AM. Your mind belongs to you (though I do yearn to see your thoughts about the forthcoming Russell Brand book), but I do need at least to feel your presence if I am to summon the strength to love myself.

**I will deduct 2% from your final grade for each absence over the 4 absence limit (e.g., a student who earns a cumulative score of "90" (A-) on the course assignments who compiles 5 absences will receive an "88" (B+) for the course).**

**If you reach four absences,** I will send you an email alerting you that your next absence will cause me to deduct 2% from your course grade.

You should also keep in mind that according to *The Academic Information Guide*, "any students who miss more than a third of the (class) sessions may expect to be barred from (the) final examination. In such cases, the course grade will be recorded as F."

## Laptops

**Laptops are not allowed in class.** I have seen that Facebook has done, to paraphrase Dewey Finn, to "your head, your brain, and your mind." I am not judging, though you are killing independent George. You may continue to kill George outside of class. Students who have a disability that precludes them from taking notes with any instrument other than a laptop must provide me with documentation testifying to their "laptop needs" **by the end of the second week of classes (i.e., Thursday, February 2)**

## Cell Phones, Blackberries, PDAs, and Other Gadgets for Touching Lives and Spreading Your Love

I recognize that these devices are as much a part of you as snark is to Ricky Gervais. I shall thus not cause you any feelings of separation of anxiety by placing them just out of your reach (I have seen what this does to kittens). But I would be grateful if you turned them off during class. Loud, unexpected noises can cause me to snap like Russell Crowe at a Smartphone Convention.

## Books

The following books can be purchased from The Skidmore Shop for less than it cost Chris Matthews for that dye job:

Morris Fiorina, *Culture War?*

Theodore Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, and Kenneth Shepsle, *American Government*

Jeffrey Toobin, *The Nine*

## Important Note Pertaining to The Hodges Harbrace Handbook

All Government majors are now required to **own** a copy of the 17<sup>th</sup> edition of *The Hodges Harbrace Handbook*. **If you do not yet own a copy, then you must purchase one for this course.** If you already own a copy, then you may sleep the sleep of the just.

## Weekly Topics and Reading Assignments

**An asterisk (\*) denotes a reading that will be distributed in class**

Week 1 (January 24-26): The Founding

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. A3-A6, "The Declaration of Independence"

\*Roger Pilon, "The Purpose and Limits of Government," *Cato's Letter* #13 (1999)

Week 2 (January 31-February 2): From Confederation to Constitution

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 2

Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. A7- A27, "The Constitution of the United States and Amendments"

James Madison, "Federalist #10" (Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. A28-A33)

Week 3 (February 7-9): Federalism

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 3

Daniel Elazar, *American Federalism : A View from the States*, pp. 79-104

Bill Bishop, "The Politics of Migration," Chapter 2 in *The Big Sort*

Week 4 (February 14-16): Political Parties

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 11

Fiorina, *Culture War?* Chapters 1-4

**CONSTITUTION TEST  
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17**

Week 5 (February 21-23): Campaigns and Elections

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 10

Fiorina, *Culture War?* Chapter 7

Matt Bai, "You're Nuts: The GOP Tries to Takes Its Party Back," *The New York Times Magazine* (October 16, 2011)

Week 6 (February 28-March 1): The Supreme Court and Judicial Review

Readings: Eric J, Segall, "The Court: A Talk with Judge Richard Posner," *The New York Review of Books* (September 29, 2011)

\**Marbury v. Madison*

**FIRST PAPER DUE  
THURSDAY, MARCH 1**

Week 7 (March 6-8): The Rehnquist and Roberts Courts

Readings: Toobin, Prologue, Chapters 1-4 and Chapters 11-13

\*Jeffrey Rosen, "Robert's Rules," *The Atlantic* (January/February 2007)

## SPRING BREAK

### Week 8 (March 20-22): Civil Liberties

Reading: Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. 76-93

\**Roe v. Wade*

\*Jeffrey Rosen, "The Day After Roe," *The Atlantic* (June 2006)

### Week 9 (March 27-29): Civil Rights

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. 94-117

\**Plessy v. Ferguson*

\**Brown v. Board of Education*

## MIDTERM EXAMINATION THURSDAY, MARCH 29

### Week 10 (April 3-5): Congress: The House of Representatives

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 5

### Week 11 (April 10-12): Congress: The Senate

Readings: \*\*George Packer, "The Empty Chamber," *The New Yorker* (August 9, 2010)

### Week 12 (April 17-19): The Domesticated Presidency

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 6

Matt Bai, "Democrat in Chief?" *The New York Times Magazine* (June 8, 2010)

## SECOND PAPER DUE THURSDAY, APRIL 19

### Week 13 (April 24-26) The Presidency: A View from the Shore

Readings: \*John Yoo, "The President's Constitutional Authority to Conduct Military Operations Against Terrorists and Nations Supporting Them," Memorandum Opinion for the Deputy Counsel to the President, September 25, 2001

Peter Baker, "Obama's War Over Terror," *The New York Times Magazine* (January 17, 2010)

Week 14: (May 1): Review for the Final Examination  
Readings: No Reading

**FINAL EXAMINATION**  
**MONDAY, MAY 7, 1:30 PM, LADD 307**