

Government 101
Introduction to American Government

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Office Hours:
Tu & Th, 2-4 PM
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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 life-changing message from me, you may receive one from Match.com (it is not a dating site; it is a relationship site).

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 “if it don’t scroll, I don’t roll” people, read the NYTs on-line, but you will by doing so fail to learn to fold pages properly (Good luck with your wedding invitations). 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/

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) Two 5-7 page papers on topics assigned by me due on **Thursday, March 3** and **Thursday, April 21** (30%)

3) An in-class midterm examination on **Thursday, March 31** (30%)

(4) An in-class final examination scheduled by the Tarantino zealots in the Registrar's Office for **Tuesday, May 10 at 1:30 PM**(30%)

Attendance

You are allowed to miss five (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, Justin Bieber 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 the Spike T.V. programming staff is not this generous, and it put into production *Auction Hunters*. **I will treat tardies as absences.** I do often say significant things at the outset of class about readings, assignments, life coaching opportunities, new Six Flags' promotions, etc. It is hence important that you be at least physically present at 11:00 AM. Your mind belongs to you (though I do yearn to see your thoughts about *The Wizarding World of Harry Potter* attraction at Universal Studios), 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 what Facebook has done to those I love. All of them are now lost to me (well, the truth is that they never liked me much). 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 3)**

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

I recognize that these devices (which always prompt from me the exclamation, "Ohhh, shiny") are as much a part of you as snark is to Ricky Gervais. I shall thus not cause you any feelings of separation or anxiety by having Big Coco confiscate them at the door. But I would be grateful if you turned them off during class. Loud, unexpected noises can cause me to think about scenes from *The Green Hornet*. Please do not make me endure that ordeal.

Books

The following books can be purchased from The Skidmore Shop for less than it cost Associate Justice Stephen Breyer to purchase his robe from "Robes, Rouching, and Beyond":

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 17th edition of *The Hodges Harbrace Handbook*. Copies of the HHH can be found on the bottom shelf of the "Government" section at The Skidmore Shop. **If you do not yet own a copy, then you must purchase one for this course.** If you already own a copy, then you are still dangerous, but you can be my wingman any time.

Weekly Topics and Reading Assignments

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

Week 1 (January 25-27): The Founding

Readings: * Gordon Wood, *The American Revolution*, Chapter 1
Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. A3-A6, "The Declaration of Independence"

Week 2 (February 1-3): The Critical Period

Readings: * "The Articles of Confederation"
* Letter from Alexander Hamilton to James Duane, September 3, 1780

Week 3 (February 8-10): From Confederation to Constitution

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 2
Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. A7- A27, "The Constitution of the United States and Amendments"

Week 4 (February 15-17): Separation of Powers and Federalism

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 3
The Federalist Papers, #10 and #51

**CONSTITUTION TEST
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 17**

Week 5 (February 22-24): Political Parties

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 11
Fiorina, *Culture War?* Chapters 1-4

Week 6 (March 1-3): Campaigns and Elections

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 10
Fiorina, *Culture War?* Chapter 7
Michael Tomasky, "How Historic a Victory?" *The New York Review of Books* (December 18, 2008)

**FIRST PAPER DUE
THURSDAY, MARCH 3**

Week 7 (March 8-10): The Supreme Court and Judicial Review

Readings: Toobin, Prologue, Chapters 1-4 and Chapters 11-13
* *Marbury v. Madison*

SPRING BREAK

Week 8 (March 22-24): Civil Liberties

Reading: Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. 72-90

**Roe v. Wade*

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

Week 9 (March 29-31): Civil Rights

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. 90-112

**Plessy v. Ferguson*

**Brown v. Board of Education*

**MIDTERM EXAMINATION
THURSDAY, MARCH 31**

Week 10 (April 5-7): Congress: The House of Representatives

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 5

Week 11 (April 12-14): Congress: The Senate

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

Week 12 (April 19-21): The Presidency

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 6

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

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**SECOND PAPER DUE
THURSDAY, APRIL 21**

Week 13 (April 26-28) The Presidency: What Next?

Readings: *David Kennedy, "What Would Wilson Do?" *The Atlantic* (January/February 2010)

Week 14: (May 3): Review for the Final Examination

Readings: No Reading

**FINAL EXAMINATION
TUESDAY, MAY 10, 1:30 PM, Ladd 307**