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Introduction to American Government Government 101 Fall 2008

This course is an introduction to the foundations and workings of the American political system. The main focus of the course is on the institutions and activities of the national government. The assignments and lectures in this course are designed to enhance your ability to think critically about politics, political choices, political institutions, and public policies. The course covers four main topics: the foundation of American politics, citizen participation in the political process, political institutions, and public policy.

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this class, students should understand:

1. the theoretical and practical considerations that inspired the founding of the American political system and how they help and hinder democratic government;
2. the causes and consequences of different forms of political participation;
3. the structures and activities of Congress, the Presidency, and the Judiciary;
4. the extent and causes of economic inequality in the United States;
5. how individuals and groups can influence American politics;
6. how political scientists make empirical and normative arguments.

Requirements

The grades for the course will be based on first midterm (15%), second midterm (25%), a short research paper (30%), and a final exam (30%). Class participation will be taken into account for borderline grades. As befitting your status at one of the “New Ivies” (US News and World Report 2006), I have high expectations of student performance.

Course Absences

A well functioning class that promotes learning requires good attendance. Students should inform me prior to class if they must miss class on a specific day. You are allowed two personal days (absences), after that I will deduct 2.5% from your final grade. For example, you receive a 90% as your final grade, but have missed four classes; your final grade is an 85%.

Books and Readings

1. Morris Fiorina and Paul Peterson *The New American Democracy*
2. Bruce Miroff, *Debating Democracy: A Reader in American Politics*.
3. Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*
4. ** indicates readings are in class reader
5. Subscribe to ABC News The Note; go to <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/>, click on Sign Up for The Note and enter the relevant information. It provides a daily

update with links to all the important politics news stories from around the web.
Read the New York Times every day.

You should complete the assigned reading before the topic is discussed in lecture. Class discussions will use current events, the readings, and web assignments as a point of departure.

September 3 Introduction—“Is there a new American Democracy”

Fiorina, Chapter 1

Miroff, Introduction p. 1-13

SECTION I. THE FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN DEMOCRACY

September 5 Creating the Constitution

Fiorina, Chapter 2 The U.S. Constitution

Web Assignment #1, Constitutional Scavenger Hunt

Sep 8 Federalists vs. the Anti-Federalists: Debating the Constitution

Mock Constitutional Debate: Federalists vs. the Anti-federalists

James Madison, The Federalist, Nos. 51. Fiorina -Appendix A

Miroff, Chapter 1, The Founding

James Madison, Federalist No. 10

Brutus, Anti-Federalist Papers, 18 October 1787

Sep 10 Interpreting the Constitution

**Charles Beard, An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution, p. 68-70

**John Roche, A Reform Caucus in Action, p. 70-74

**Martin Diamond, A Reconsideration of the Framers Intent, p 74-78

Sep 12 Federalism in Theory

Fiorina, Chapter 3

Sep 15 Federalism in Practice: Laboratories of Democracy or a Race to the Bottom?

Miroff Chapter 3 The New Federalism

Eggers and O’Leary, Beyond the Beltway

Donahue, The Devil in Devolution

Sep 17 What is the role of the market in a democracy?

Miroff Chapter 5, How Democratic is the Free Market Economy?

Friedman, Capitalism and Friedman

Bowles and Edwards, The Market Erodes Democratic Government

Sep 19 What is the role of a citizen in a democracy?

Miroff Chapter 2 Democracy: Overrated or Undervalued

Mueller, Democracy’s Romantic Myths

Loeb, The Active Citizen

Sep 22 American Political Culture

Fiorina Chapter 4

Sep 24 Immigration and American Political Culture

Miroff, Chapter 4 Immigration: Good or Bad for American Democracy?

Ben Wattenberg, Immigration Is Good

Newt Gingrich, Patriotic Immigration

Web Assignment #2 What Makes Us American?

Sept 26 FIRST MIDTERM

Section II. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Sep 29 Public Opinion

Fiorina, Chapter 5

Oct 1 Does the Public Have Opinions Worth Listening To?

**Robert Nisbet, Public Opinion Versus Popular Opinion

**Benjamin Page and Robert Shapiro, Public Opinion Is a Wise Judge

October 3 Media

Fiorina, Chapter 5

October 6 Can the Internet Reduce Media Bias?

Miroff, Chapter 9 The New Media: Corporate Wasteland or Democratic Frontier?

Cass Sunstein, The Daily We

Robert McChesney, The Power of Producers

Peruse political blogs- http://www.skidmore.edu/~bturner/my_favorites.htm

October 8 Citizen Participation

Fiorina, Chapter 6

Oct 10 A Crisis in Civic Engagement?

Miroff Chapter 4: Civil Society: Does America Face a Crisis in Civic Engagement

Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone

Galston and Levine, America's Civic Condition

Oct 13 Interest Groups

Fiorina, Chapter 8

Oct 15 Are Special Interests in Washington a Problem?

Review Madison, Federalist #10

**John Moore, "The Grapes of Wrath"

**Cigler and Loomis, From Big Bird to Bill Gates, Organized Interests and the Emergence of Hyperpolitics

October 17 Political Parties

Fiorina, Chapter 8

October 20 and 22 Political Parties: Party Realignment

Judis and Teixeira, The Emerging Democratic Majority

***Ch 1, The Rise and Fall of the Conservative Republican Majority, 11-37

***Ch 4, The Politics of the Emerging Democratic Majority, 117-143

October 24 Study Day

October 27 and 29 Is There A Culture War in America?

Fiorina, Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America
Take Slate's Red vs. Blue Quiz-

http://slate.msn.com/Features/040712_RedBlueQuiz/quiz.html#

October 31, SECOND MIDTERM Trick or Treat

SECTION III POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Congress: The First Branch of Government

November 3 Getting Elected

**Reader Article on congressional elections

November 4 Election Day- VOTE – Undecided?

Try <http://abcnews.go.com/politics/MatchoMatic/fullpage?id=5542139>

November 5 Congress as a Representative Institution

** David Mayhew, Congress The Electoral Connection, p. 272-281

Web Assignment #3 Congress as a Representative Institution due

November 7 Congress as a Lawmaking Institution

Miroff Chapter 13 Congress: Can It Serve the Public Good?

Mayer and Canon, Congressional Individualism and the Collective
Dilemma

Barbara Sinclair, Political Parties in the House Today

** Barbara Sinclair, Party Leaders and the New Legislative Process

The President: From Chief Clerk to Chief Executive

November 10-12 Choosing the President

** Reader articles

**Susan Page, "Bush policies follow politics of states needed in 2004," USA

TODAY

**Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "Not the People's Choice", The American Prospect, Mar
25, 2002.

November 14 Presidency, Powers and Practice

Fiorina, Chapter 10

Web Assignment #4

Nov 17 Presidency, Powers and Practice

Miroff: Chapter 14 The Presidency

Fred I. Greenstein, Lessons from the Modern Presidency

Stephen Skowronek, The Changing Political Structures of Presidential
Leadership

The Courts, The Least Dangerous Branch?

November 19 The Supreme Court

Fiorina, Chapter 12

** Alexander Hamilton, The Federalist, No. 78

November 21 The Judiciary: What Should Its Role Be in a Democracy?

Miroff, Ch 15 The Judiciary: How Should It Interpret Our Constitution?

Antonin Scalia, Textualism and the Constitution

Stephen Breyer, Active Liberty and the Constitution

November 24 The Judiciary

** Rosenberg, The Supreme Court and the Implementation of the Abortion
Decisions

SECTION IV ECONOMIC INEQUALITY AND PUBLIC POLICY IN AMERICA

Dec 3 Economic Inequality: A Threat to Democracy?

Mirotff, Ch 16

W. Michael Cox and Richard Alm, Myths of Rich and Poor

Paul Krugman, The Disappearing Middle

December 5, Economic Inequality and Public Policy

**Larry Bartels, Homer Gets a Tax Cut, Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind

December 8, Economic Inequality and Public Policy

**Hacker and Pierson, Abandoning the Middle, The Bush Tax Cuts and the Limits of Democratic Control

December 10 Conclusion

December 16 Final Exam 6-9pm, Ladd 307