

Government 101
Introduction to American Government

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Office Hours:
M & W, 2:00-4:00 PM
Spring 2009

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 a Nigerian millionaire.

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 (so long as you are not Monty Burns and hence have the strength to pull a copy from one of the racks in Case Center). If you prefer cyber to paper, then 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 5

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 day and time of your choosing.

(2) Two 5-7 page papers on topics assigned by me due on Thursday, February 19 and Thursday, April 2 (30%)

3) An in-class midterm examination on Thursday, March 5 (30%)

(4) An in-class final examination, date and time to be determined by the mobile and hostile schedulers in the Registrar's Office (30%)

Attendance

I will allow you two excused absences. You must file your request for an excused absence **before or on the day of the class you absolutely must miss.** If you know ahead of time that you will need to miss a class (e.g., your falconry class is scheduled to take a trip to 17th century Spain, Rod Blagojevich wants your counsel on what it "feels like dying from mining for gold," the new *American Idol* judge wants some tips on how to conceal her overbite, etc.), then inform me of this as early in the semester as possible. If you wake up one morning and realize that a debilitating disease (turf toe does not count) will prevent you from attending class that afternoon, **then you must make your request to me for an excused absence prior to the beginning of class on that day.** You may make your request for an excused absence by phone, via e-mail, or in person. **Any unexcused absence, any absence after you have exhausted your two excused absences, or any lateness to class (i.e., I will treat tardies as unexcused absences) will cause me to deduct 2% from your final grade (e.g., a student who earns a cumulative score of "90" (A-) on the course assignments will receive an "88" (B+) for the course).**

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 know how irresistible TMZ is... believe me, I know). Students who have a disability that precludes them from taking notes with any instrument other than a laptop may petition me for a waiver from this prohibition. I will, however, be asking Chloe to monitor these students' screens.

Books

The following books can be purchased from The Skidmore Shop for less than the cost of Caroline Kennedy's extreme elocution makeover:

Morris Fiorina, *Culture War?*

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

Jeffrey Toobin, *The Nine*

Weekly Topics and Reading Assignments

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

Week 1 (January 20-22): The Founding

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

Week 2 (January 27-29): The Critical Period

Readings: *"The Articles of Confederation"
*Letter from Alexander Hamilton to James Duane, September 3, 1780
*James Madison, "Vices of the Political System of the United States"

Week 3 (February 3-5): From Confederation to Constitution

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 2
"The Gettysburg Address"
Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, Chapter 1
Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. A7- A27, "The Constitution of the United States and Amendments"

CONSTITUTION TEST FEBRUARY 5

Week 4 (February 10-12): Separation of Powers and Federalism

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 3

Garret Epps, "The Founders' Great Mistake," *The Atlantic*
(January/February 2009)

The Federalist Papers, #10 and #51

Week 5 (February 17-19): Political Parties

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 11

Fiorina, *Culture War?* Chapters 1-4

**FIRST PAPER DUE
FEBRUARY 19**

Week 6 (February 24-26): 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)

Week 7 (March 3-5): Congress: The House of Representatives

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 5

*Edward Epstein, "Her Key to the House," *Congressional Quarterly
Weekly* (October 29, 2007)

*Eve Fairbanks, "Children of the Revolution," *The New Republic*
(December 31, 2008)

**MIDTERM EXAMINATION
MARCH 5**

SPRING BREAK

Week 8 (March 17-19): Congress: The Senate

Readings: *Joshua Green, "Take Two," *The Atlantic* (November 2006)

*Jacqueline Calmes, "'Trivialized Filibuster is Still a Potent Tool,'" *Congressional Quarterly* (September 5, 1987)

*Alan Ota, "The Price of the Fight," *Congressional Quarterly* (February
18, 2008)

Week 9 (March 24-26): The Presidency

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 6

*Joshua Green, "The Rove Presidency," *The Atlantic* (September 2007)

*Elizabeth Drew, "The Truth about the Election," *The New York Review of Books* (December 18, 2008)

Week 10 (March 30-April 2): Managing the Bureaucracy

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 7

Jeffrey Rosen, "Man-Made Disaster," *The New Republic* (December 24, 200)

**SECOND PAPER DUE
APRIL 2**

Week 11 (April 7-9): The Supreme Court and Judicial Review

Readings: Toobin, Chapters 1-10

**Marbury v. Madison*

\Week 12 (April 14-16): Civil Liberties

Reading: **Roe v. Wade*

Fiorina, Chapter 5

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

Week 13 (April 21-23): Civil Rights

Readings: Toobin, Chapters 14, 16, and 17

Fiorina, Chapter 6

**Plessy v. Ferguson*

**Brown v. Board of Education*

Week 14 (April 28): Review for the Final Examination

Readings: No Reading

**FINAL EXAMINATION
TBA**