POSC 020 - American Politics

Fall 2008

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417 Physics
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Office Hours: MW 4-5, T 10-noon, F 1-3

Course Objectives:

The course will both describe and analyze the American political system, with primary emphasis at the federal level. A particular concern will be the extent to which, and the ways in which, public opinion is translated into policy. That is to say, is the system actually “democratic” and if so how? Are there systematic distortions in the processes that translate public preferences into policy?

Texts:

Student Handbook for Wilson and DiIulio (optional)

Students should check Sweeney’s College Books for the best prices on textbooks.

Requirements:

Attendance is optional, although it will be extremely difficult to achieve a good grade without regular attendance. All readings are required. All are available on library reserve. Most will be made available in a xeroxed packet.

There will also be two videos on the issue of “global warming” shown in the evening. Attendance will be required, but an alternative will be available for students whose schedule does not allow them to show up at the required time.

Grading:

There will be eleven short objective quizzes during the term, which will test both assigned readings and class material. They will be announced in advance. There will be a mid-term exam, a second exam near the end of the semester and a final exam, all of which will include objective and essay portions. The grade will consist of the final (30%), exams (20% each) and the quizzes (30%).

Course Outline:
I. Introduction – Theories of American Politics

Wilson, Chap. 1

II. The Philosophy of the Founders

Wilson, Chap. 2

*Federalist* numbers 10 and 51 in Wilson, p. A21

The U.S. Constitution in Wilson, p. A4

Declaration of Independence, Wilson, p. A1

III. Public Opinion

Wilson, Chap. 7


IV. The Media

Wilson, Chap. 12

Peters, Chap. 1

William Nesbitt, “How Three Newspapers Handled a Story,” Chapter 4 of *Interpreting the Newspaper in the Classroom*.


“Roe Warriors: The Media’s Pro-Abortion Bias,” Media Research Center Special Report.


Howard Fineman, “The ‘Media Party’ is Over,”

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6813945/

“A Load of Hot Air” The BBC,

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/4923504.stm

V. Elections and Voter Behavior

Wilson, Chap. 10

VI. Interest Groups

Wilson, Chap. 11, 17
Peters, Chap. 2

VII. The Parties

Wilson, Chap. 9
Mike Royko, The Boss, in Peter Woll (ed.) *Behind the Scenes in American Government*

VIII. The Congress

Wilson, Chap. 13
Peters, Chap. 7

IX. Social Welfare Policy

Wilson, Chap. 19

X. The Presidency

Wilson, Chap. 14
Peters, Chap. 8

XI. Bureaucracy

Wilson, Chap. 15
Peters, Chap. 3, 5, 6.
Dave Barry, “America’s Toilets -- they stink” (on reserve)

XII. Courts

Wilson, Chap. 16

XIII. Conclusion

Wilson, Chap. 22
Peters, Chap. 9