

American Politics

Professor J. Azari

Political Science 2201

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“Every two years the American politics industry fills the airwaves with the most virulent, scurrilous, wall-to-wall character assassination of nearly every political practitioner in the country - and then declares itself puzzled that America has lost trust in its politicians. “ - Charles Krauthammer

“Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it whether it exists or not, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedy.” - Ernest Benn

“Politics is the art of the possible.” - Otto von Bismarck

“We are not afraid to entrust the American people with unpleasant facts, foreign ideas, alien philosophies, and competitive values. For a nation that is afraid to let its people judge the truth and falsehood in an open market is a nation that is afraid of its people.” - John F. Kennedy

Course Description: The purpose of this course is to develop an understanding of the basic ideas, institutions, and issues in American politics. We will cover a variety of material ranging from political thought to political behavior. The first objective of this course is to impart information about the fundamental aspects of American politics, including (but not limited to): how American political institutions work; what trends have emerged in voting behavior; and what ideas were behind the formation of the federal system. The course is organized into five units: the Founding and Constitutional Structure; Governing Institutions; Culture and Ideas; Political Behavior; and Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.

The second objective of the course is to improve your critical reading, writing and thinking skills. You will be expected to demonstrate your knowledge of American politics concepts and ideas, as well as to link concrete events to abstract ideas. Finally, you will be expected to engage critically with the analysis presented in the readings.

Political Science 2201 falls under the “Individual and Social Behavior” section of Marquette’s Course of Common Studies. As such, included among the aims of this course is to enhance your ability to understand concepts, theories, and methods used to explain individual and social behavior in the context of American politics and to use this theoretical knowledge to analyze examples of individual and social behavior.

Grading Breakdown:

Attendance and Participation: 15%

Midterm: 20%

Quizzes: 25% (~ 5% each)

Written assignment: 10%

Amendment assignment: 10%

Final Exam: 20%

Assignments and Expectations

While this is a large introductory course, your participation is still integral to your success in the course. You are expected to show up in class, on time and prepared to discuss the assigned readings, as well as to participate in class activities, which may require you to collaborate with your colleagues from time to time. Classroom debates and discussions require that you use technology appropriately and behave courteously toward classmates and the professor. Improper use of cell phones or the internet or otherwise behaving disruptively in class will result in a lower participation grade.

There will be one written assignment for this course. Due dates are listed below. Assignment details will be distributed in class. Late assignments will lose 5 points per day, and will not be accepted after 5 days.

Your capstone project for the semester will be the Constitutional Amendment assignment. This assignment will take place mostly in class, in groups, at the end of the semester.

The most important and fundamental expectation is that all work will be your own. Academic dishonesty dishonors the learning process, your classmates, yourself, and your university. It also makes your professor mad. I will assign a failing grade on the assignment, if not the entire course, in the event of academic dishonesty. Avoiding cheating is pretty easy, really. Make sure you attribute all ideas that are not your own. When in doubt, include a citation.

Textbooks

Two textbooks will be available for purchase at the Book Marq.

Lowi, Theodore, Benjamin Ginsberg, and Kenneth A. Shepsle, *American Government: Power and Purpose*. Brief 10th edition.

Rourke, John T. *You Decide! Current Debates in American Politics*, 2009 Edition.

All other readings will be available on D2L or online.

Summary of Important Dates:

Midterm: October 29

Writing assignment due: November 17

Graded in-class activities: October 15; December 8; December 10

Semester Schedule

September 1: Introductory meeting

September 3 - writing assessment

Unit One: The American Founding and the Structure of the Constitution

September 8 - The Study of American Politics

Reading: *American Government*, Chapter One

September 10 - The American Founding and the Constitution

Reading: *American Government*, Chapter Two

September 15 - Assessing the Constitution

Reading: The United States Constitution, AG A13-A34; "A Citizen Reads the Constitution," E.L. Doctorow (D2L)

September 1 - Federalism

Reading: *AG*, Chapter 3

September 22 - Federalism Discussion

Reading: Rourke, Debate 2, pp.16-31

Unit Two: Governing Institutions

September 24 - Quiz #1 (Constitution and Federalism)

Congress: Procedures

Reading: *AG*, Chapter 5

October 1 - Congress: Representation

Reading: Rourke, Debate 11, pp. 148-159

October 6- Presidency: Presidential Power

Reading: *AG*, Chapter 6

Rourke, Debate 12 pp. 160-176

October 8 - Presidential Selection

Reading: Rourke, Debate 10, pp. 136-145

October 13 - Judiciary

Reading: *AG*, Chapter 8

Rourke, Debate 14 pp. 190-199

October 15 - In-class activity: Supreme Court simulation

Unit Three: Culture and Ideas

October 20 - Quiz #2 (American Political Institutions: Congress; Presidency; Judiciary)

What is American Political Culture?

Readings: Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (D2L)

Skoble, "Lisa and American Anti-Intellectualism," *The Simpsons and Philosophy* (D2L)

October 22 - FALL BREAK

October 27 - - Equality and Social Policy

Readings: Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, selections

Brooks, "The American Way of Equality," *New York Times* (link provided)

Midterm review

October 29 - MIDTERM

November 3 - Culture war

Readings: Keynote Address of the 1992 Republican National Convention, Patrick Buchanan (D2L)

Additional reading TBA (D2L)

November 5 - writing assignment distributed

Culture, language, and immigration

Readings: Huntington, "The Hispanic Challenge" (D2L)

Fukuyama, "Identity Crisis" *Slate Magazine* (link provided)

Unit Four: Political Behavior and the Political Process

November 10 - Quiz #3

History and Importance of American Political Parties

Reading: *AG*, Chapter 11

Excerpt from 2008 Party platforms

November 12 - Elections, lecture

Reading: *AG*, Chapter 10

November 17 - Elections, discussion

Reading: Lowi, "Let's Take 'No' For an Answer" (D2L)

Rourke, Debate 9 pp. 120-135

Writing assignment due

November 19 - Public Opinion

Reading: AG, Chapter 9

November 24 - Quiz #4

Media, part 1

Reading: AG, Chapter 13

Last, "The Not-So-Swift Mainstream Media," (D2L)

Unit Five: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

December 1 - Civil Rights

Reading: AG, Chapter 3; Rourke Debate 4, Debate 17

December 3 - Civil Liberties

Reading: Debate 32, Debate 18

December 8 - Quiz #5 Amendment assignment

December 10 - Amendment assignment and final exam review

December 16- Final Exam, 8AM-10AM