

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT SYLLABUS

Instructor: Michael Dubin
Office: Rm. 241 Downtown

Course Description:

This is a survey course that will address American National Government. It emphasizes the relationships between structure and behavior. Teaching methods will employ political theory along with various political science methodologies. Students are encouraged to improve analytical and communication skills. Topics of study include the U. S. Constitution, elections, interest groups, parties, mass media, congress, judiciary, the presidency and bureaucracy.

Required Reading:

Lowi, Theodore H., Ginsberg, Benjamin and Weir, Margaret, We The People, 4th Edition (shorter version), Norton 2004

Grading:

Midterm essay exams	20% each of Grade
Final exam	30% of Grade
Short paper and class presentation	20% of Grade
Attendance and participation (including short one page analysis essays)	10% of Grade

Class attendance will be taken. The course is based upon student interaction and democratic principles. Your presence and participation is fundamental to your success in each aspect of the course!

Any assignments submitted after designated due date will be marked down by one half grade per day for each day over due, unless prior approval is granted by the instructor. NO EXCEPTIONS WILL BE MADE!

For paper:

Pick a book that you find interesting and readable. As long as the book primarily focuses on American Politics it is acceptable. Turn in the topic as early as possible so that there will be a meeting of the minds with the instructor. Meet with the instructor at least once to discuss topic and related research materials. The paper should be 3-5 pages long. The first part of the paper should summarize the main thesis of the book. Here you will need to discern the message of the author. In the second part of the paper (at least one page) you will need to analyze and evaluate this message as it relates to course themes as well as outside research agreed upon with the instructor. The end product should reflect your ability to think critically by analyzing, evaluating and synthesizing related themes as they shed light on American Politics.

Topics and Reading Assignments:

The course is divided into four units:

1. American Political Culture
2. Constitutionalism
3. Political Processes
4. Political Institutions

American Political Culture

In this unit we will examine the basic values that are intrinsic to American Political Culture, as well as, how they have evolved during the course of American history. This part of the course

will cover issues and themes that have shaped our political system such as the lack of a feudal past, de-colonization from British Rule, Puritan and other religious influences in American culture, America's "loose bounded culture", multiculturalism, communitarianism, as well as, modern and post-modern themes.

Readings include chapters 1-2 of the text. Louis Hartz, The Liberal Tradition In America (short potted readings class handout), Alexis De Tocqueville, Democracy in America (short potted readings class handout), Samuel Huntington, American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony (short potted readings class handout), Michael Walzer, "Puritanism as a Revolutionary Ideology" (short potted readings class handout), Judith Shklar, American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion, (short potted readings class handout), Rogers Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Hartz and Myrdal" (short potted readings class handout), Richard Merelman, Making Something of Ourselves (short potted readings class handout), Robert Bellah, Habits of the Heart (short potted readings class handout). Robert Booth Fowler, Enduring Liberalism (short potted readings class handout).

Constitutionalism

This unit will explore the mechanics and theories underpinning the constitution by which we live. We will study the founding in historical and comparative perspective. We will also explore some applications of constitutionalism in the areas of civil liberties and civil rights.

Readings include: The Declaration of Independence and the U. S. Constitution, chapters 3-6 in the textbook. John Locke, The Second Treatise on Government (short potted readings class handout), Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws (short potted readings class handout), Thomas Jefferson, "Notes on the State of Virginia" (short potted readings class handout). Louis Hartz, The Founding of New Societies (short potted readings class handout), Gordon Wood, The Creation of the American Republic (short potted readings class handout). On the obligation to obey the law: Plato, The Crito, Henry David Thoreau, "On Civil Disobedience", Abraham Lincoln, "The Perpetuation of our Political Institutions" and Martin Luther King Jr., "A Letter From the Birmingham Jail", (all are short potted readings and class handouts.)

Political Processes

This unit addresses the political processes that impact America's democratic political system. We will study public opinion, political parties, interest groups, the media, political participation and voting and campaigns and elections. We will inquire into whether America's democratic system is adequate in the face of the narrow range of political discourse and the lack of alternative ideas presented in this system. We will ask why diversity i.e. race, gender and ethnicity is protected in the legal system yet not adequately represented in public discourse.

Readings include: Chapters 7-12 in the textbook, Judith Shklar, Legalism (short potted readings class handout), Theodore Lowi, The End of Liberalism (short potted readings class handout), Robert Dahl, Polyarchy (short potted readings class handout), Seymour Martin Lipset, "Why No Socialism in America"? (short potted readings class handout), Leon Epstein, Political Parties in the American Mold

Political Institutions

This unit will explore the issue of the proper institutional structure that will most adequately fulfill America's core values of liberty, democracy and equality. We will explore how separate institutions share power. This will illuminate the tension in American politics between limiting governmental power while seeking to maintain adequate authority to govern and make policy. Topics include the presidency, congress, the judiciary and the bureaucracy.

Readings include: Chapters 13-16 in the textbook. Judith Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear" (short potted readings class handout), Louis Fisher, Constitutional Power (short potted readings class handout), Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract (short potted readings class handout). Gerald Rosenberg, The Hollow Hope, Richard Neustadt, Presidential Power, Theda Skocpol, "Bringing the State Back In"

NOTE:

"Short potted readings" will be no longer than 1-5 pages each.

Weekly Schedule:

Week 1

Lecture 1: Introduction to political science approaches and analyses.

Lecture 2: Requirements of citizenship-alternative views.

Lecture 3: American political values: liberty, equality, democracy.

Week 2

Lecture 1: American political culture: conflict or consensus?

Lecture 2: The Founding: The American Revolution, The Declaration of Independence, The Federalist Papers

Lecture 3: The Constitution: separate institutions sharing power, checks and balances, federalism

Week 3

Lecture 1: The nationalization of the bill of rights

Lecture 2: Civil liberties

Lecture 3: Civil rights, historical background

Week 4

Lecture 1: Obligation to obey the law; civil disobedience

Lecture 2: Plessy v. Ferguson, Brown v. Board of Education

Lecture 3: Affirmative action

Week 5

Lecture 1: Public opinion in the U. S.- a "loose bounded culture"?.

Lecture 2: Political Socialization

Lecture 3: Approaches to measuring public opinion

Week 6

Lecture 1: Politics and media

Lecture 2: Political advertising, the proliferation of bias in news coverage

Exam

Week 7

Lecture 1: Political parties-the two party system

Lecture 2: Weak Parties?

Lecture 3: Why no viable third party?

Week 8

Lecture 1: Political parties in the context of Western Democracies

Lecture 2: Groups and interests

Lecture 3: The rise of public interest groups

Week 9

Lecture 1: Federalism- Was Madison right about faction?

Lecture 2: Polyarchy and pluralism or power elite?

Lecture 3: Campaigns and elections

Week 10

Lecture 1: Campaign finance

Lecture 2: Levels of participation in the political process-who votes and why

Lecture 3: Evaluating the political process

Week 11

Lecture 1: Political Institutions: separate institutions sharing power

Lecture 2: The executive branch

Lecture 3: The president as head of government and head of state

Week 12

Lecture 1: Evaluating the growth of presidential power-Is there an imperial presidency?

Lecture 2: The Legislative Branch

Exam

Week 13

Lecture 1: Congress: Bicameralism

Lecture 2: Sociological and agency representation

Lecture 3: Evaluating representation in light of democratic norms

Week 14

Lecture 1: The Federal Court System

Lecture 2: The Power of the Supreme Court: Marbury v. Madison and judicial review

Lecture 3: Judicial activism, judicial restraint and the judicial appointment process

Week 15

Lecture 1: Judicial legislation and the legitimacy of the court

Lecture 2: The structure of the bureaucracy

Lecture 3: The growth of the "State"

Week 16

Lecture 1: Is the "State" autonomous from the democratic process?

Lecture 2: Confronting the size of the bureaucracy-contemporary strategies

Lecture 3: Evaluating the adequacy of separate institutions sharing power in regard to the norms of constitutional democracy

Final Exam