

Required text: Either Ford et al., or Bardes & Gerston American Government & Politics Today or American Government Today, with California Politics & Government
Supplementary materials on library reserve
Access to daily newspaper or weekly newsmagazine

Learning objectives:

- To understand the forces shaping the origins of the United States
- To study the political process as it transforms private opinion into public policy
- To examine the compromises between what the voter "demands" public policy accomplish and what the Constitution "allows," " between what politicians promise and deliver, between what citizens vote for and what they are willing to be taxed for, between what is private responsibility and public power, between democratic political and capitalistic economic choices, and between what is efficient or necessary and what is just or right
- To relate the course materials to current events
- To impart a comprehension of citizenship as consensus and commitment
- To serve as an intellectual basis for ensuing political and social science courses
- To start the training of the next generation of political leaders

Course Outline:

1. The origin and functions of government
 - What historical factors and persons shaped our governmental system?
 - How did the Founding Fathers balance such conflicting urges as "freedom vs. control," "personal autonomy vs. collective security," "local vs. national," "power vs. rights," "privilege vs. equality?"
 - Why was war necessary to create a government that would make war unnecessary?
2. The constituting of a government
 - Incorporation of a cultural heritage
 - Erecting a federal system
3. The process of government
 - Do the media report or shape public opinion?
 - Are lobbies and interest groups replacing political parties?
 - Nominations, campaigns, and elections: Are they participation, manipulation, or window-dressing?
4. The policies of government
 - Individual gain and personal rights, i.e., economic vs. constitutional rights
 - Collective good and public policy - what is the commonweal?
 - A specific focus on current domestic and foreign policy issues

Evaluation and grading policy:

Course evaluation is based on exams, participation, and presentation, with a term paper. Grade computation is as follows: Three midterm exams (20% each), participation (20%), and presentation/paper (20%). Participation assumes attendance (including arrival on time, plus remaining until the end of class), completion of readings by the assigned date, plus current events contributions. The presentation examines a civil liberties or civil rights issue of your choosing. Consult chapters 4 and 5 for topics. A typed, double-spaced term paper will be a fuller explication of the presentation. Most will be in the 6 to 10 page range, and all are due in class on the date prior to the final exam. Midterm exams will cover the course in thirds, i.e., the "final" is not comprehensive. Exams are approximately half essay and half short answer. Essay questions must be in pen. Exams are closed book and notes, with a 10 point bonus for following exams instructions completely. However, a single sheet of notes will be permitted. You are expected to supply a green/blue book, Scantron slip (50 on a side), pencil, and pen. Exams are curved, and a numeric grade is recorded, with an A-B-C-D-F distribution announced once the class average has been determined.

Should either first or second exam be missed, several additional essay questions will be administered upon conclusion of the taking of the third (final) exam. These questions can cover anything from any part of the course. This procedure is in lieu of a make-up exam.

Procedures:

Classes are lectures and discussion. Read assignments by the date on the assignment calendar below. Lectures are not summations of the text, but build from it as a common point of reference and departure. The course uses the chapter headings as a study guide. Consult with the instructor if you need suggestions on how to take and use notes from lecture, since these and the text are the sources of exam questions.

Students with verified disabilities may be entitled to appropriate academic accommodations. Please confer with the instructor at the beginning of the term. All students are encouraged to meet, as I shall make as much additional time available for office hours as you may need.

Withdrawal from the course must be by the drop date, and is the sole responsibility of the student. It is the instructor's discretion to withdraw a student after the add/drop deadline, due to excessive absences. Students remaining enrolled beyond the published withdrawal deadline, as stated in the class schedule, will receive an evaluative letter grade in the class. Remember, the final grade will be affected by active participation, including attendance, as noted above.

A student found violating standards of honest academic conduct will fail the assignment(s), and be referred for further disciplinary action.

Upon successful completion of the course the student will be able to:

1. Identify the origins and development of the US political system from its colonial beginnings to the writing of the US Constitution in Philadelphia.
2. Analyze the agenda and the compromises made at the Constitutional Convention.
3. Examine the institution of slavery and the failure to confront this moral issue at the Convention and during the early years of the Republic
4. Describe the balance of power between the national government and state governments as detailed in the Constitution and as it has evolved through two centuries.
5. Recognize the ways in which individual rights are protected by the Bill of Rights and how they are often threatened or challenged.
6. Identify the major perspectives used to interpret the Constitution and how Supreme Court decisions shape contemporary applications of constitutional principles.
7. Trace the development and path of the civil rights revolution with emphasis on the centrality of the 14th amendment in this process.
8. Analyze components of public opinion such as political socialization, current political ideologies, the US political culture, and the measurement techniques of polling.
9. Examine voting patterns in terms of history and demographics.
10. Explain the US presidential election process with its reliance on the Electoral College as prescribed in the Constitution.
11. Compare and contrast the Madisonian view of political parties and interest groups to contemporary theories.
12. Trace the development of US political parties and analyze the current coalitions that exist within each of the two major parties today.
13. Understand the political roles of reporters of mediated news and how their views affect public perceptions of government and its policy decisions.

Reading assignments:

- Feb. 1 Introduction, overview, concepts, terms Ch. 1 (Bardes)
8 Pluralist democracy & radical critique "Greenberg" (on
15 Colonial status & revolutionary response Ch. 2 reserve)
22 Constitutional solutions "Brutus" (on reserve)
- Mar. 1 Federalism Ch. 3; Appendix C
8 Civil liberties Ch. 4 EXAM #1 (Chs. 1-3; App. C; reserve
15 Civil rights Ch. 5 items)
29 Presentations
- Apr. 5 Presentations
12 Presentations
19 Public opinion Ch. 6 EXAM #2 (Chs. 4-6; presentations)
26 Lobbying Ch. 7
- May 3 Parties Ch. 8
10 Campaigns & elections Ch. 9
17* Politics & economics "Politics & economics" (on reserve)
24 EXAM #3 (Chs. 6-9; reserve item)

Dates: Last drop, 12 Feb.; last drop with 'W' 24 Mar.

Office hours: M and Th. 4:30-6 p.m. in MD377

* Papers due in class