

# **RPOS 101: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS**

Monday & Wednesday: 2:45-4:05 p.m. (ES 241)

Spring 2008 • University at Albany

---

Instructor: Cecilia Ferradino  
E-mail: [cferradino@hotmail.com](mailto:cferradino@hotmail.com)  
Class website: <http://www.ceciliaf.com>  
Office hours: Mondays & Wednesdays: 1:30-2:30 p.m. (HU 16) and by appointment  
POS Contact Office: Humanities 16; Phone (518) 442-3112; Hours: M-Th: 9:00-3:00; F: 9:00-1:00

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Whether we are renewing a driver's license, reading the newspaper, watching television, or pulling a lever in the voting booth, we are surrounded by politics. Therefore, as citizens, it is important that we understand not only how the American political process operates, but also why. This course will introduce students to basic concepts of American politics, such as the founding, the Constitution, institutions, the electoral process, civil liberties/rights, and civil society. In addition, students will also explore the nuances of government and its impact on society by examining policy, public opinion, political commentary and satire, the role of the media, and grassroots politics. The overarching goal of the course is to demonstrate the continuous interplay between the American people and the governmental institutions and practices that have evolved since the founding.

RPOS 101 fulfills the University's General Education requirements for History and Social Science and is a required course for Political Science majors and minors. As such, students will be also exposed to basic social science concepts throughout the semester in an effort to understand and apply various methods of inquiry used by political scientists.

## **REQUIRED BOOKS**

The following textbooks are available at the UA bookstore and at Mary Jane Bookstore; you could also find used copies online:

Miroff, Bruce, Seidelman, Raymond and Swanstrom Todd. 2007. *The Democratic Debate: An Introduction to American Politics*. Houghton Mifflin. [**"TDD" in the syllabus**]

Miroff, Bruce, Seidelman, Raymond and Swanstrom Todd, Eds. 2005. *Debating Democracy: A Reader in American Politics*. Houghton Mifflin. [**"DEB" in the syllabus**]

## **EXAMS & ASSIGNMENTS**

Your final grade for this course will be based on three exams, pop quizzes and three papers. Please note that you must **COMPLETE ALL EXAMS AND PAPERS** in order to receive credit for the course. Otherwise, you will be given an incomplete and will have to finish up the class next semester; this holds true whether you are taking the class for a grade (A-E) or pass/fail (S/U). It is *your responsibility* to make arrangements with me in order to make up exams and/or submit late papers.

Exams. There will be three (3) exams throughout the semester. Material for the exams will be taken from the readings, lectures, videos, and class discussion/group work. The tests will be comprised of short answers and essays and you will be given the entire class time. If you are unable to attend class on an exam day, I will give make-up exams only if you have obtained proper documentation from the Dean of Undergraduate Studies or other official source (e.g., doctor, health center, etc.).

Papers. Students will be expected to write three (3) papers throughout the semester. Paper assignments will be discussed at length during class and will be due on the date noted on the syllabus. Written assignments are designed to give you the chance to be creative and comment on political issues that have been raised in class. I

am always happy to review drafts, outlines, or even random thoughts. Papers are expected to be typed and conform to the specifications given. Late papers will be penalized and e-mail submissions will not be accepted.

Anything you take out of the textbooks—directly quoted or paraphrased—and other sources must be cited. The easiest format to use is MLA (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/01/>), although any format is acceptable. If you have any questions about what should be cited or how to cite, ask me. Or, if it's 3 a.m. the night before the paper is due and you don't know whether or not to cite, err on the side of caution: *when in doubt, cite or footnote.*

Quizzes. Random pop quizzes will be given throughout the semester. These cannot be made up, so half the battle is being there. Quizzes could be drawn from the reading, lecture, current event, or other sources that we have covered. I will only count your top five (5) quizzes; this allows for sick days, absences, etc.

### Grade Breakdown

- Exam 1: 20%
- Exam 2: 20%
- Final exam: 30%
- Papers: 20%
- Quizzes: 10%

Cheating on exams or quizzes and/or plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students found to be cheating will receive an "E" for the course. All of the University policies regarding academic integrity may be found at: [http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate\\_bulletin/regulations.html](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html).

## **CLASS INFORMATION**

### Questions

Any and all questions are encouraged. If you are unclear about any of the material we are covering in class that day, or have already covered, please do not hesitate to stop me and ask. Similarly, if you are having trouble with a topic or just want to discuss politics, the political science program, classic TV, or whatever, feel free to stop by during my office hours or make an appointment and we will meet at a mutually convenient time. I am also available via e-mail and generally return e-mails quickly. Late-night e-mails (especially the day before a paper or exam) are fine...we've all been there. I'd rather have you ask than lose points on an exam or paper, especially when your confusion could have been easily cleared up with a quick e-mail.

### Participation

While the class size is large, participation is still expected, particularly when we are viewing videos and/or reading articles. We will also engage in group work from time to time and active participation will be very important. Sometimes, the best insights and questions are raised during discussions; those usually are also the ones that stick with you well after the semester has ended. As Katherine Hepburn has said, "Everyone is entitled to my opinion." Please take that to heart. I am looking forward to hearing what you have to say. ***One important caveat:*** Because politics in general can be contentious, it is imperative that **everyone respect each other's opinions.** Disagreements are good—just take a look at how the country was founded—disrespect is not.

### Weather Cancellations

If class is cancelled due to inclement weather, we will simply pick up where we left off as opposed to moving ahead on the syllabus. I will adjust the schedule as needed and will inform the class of any changes via e-mail and/or in class. If you commute and are unsure as to whether or not UA will be open or closed, you can go online <http://www.albany.edu/emergency/snow.shtml>, or call the University's Snow Information hotline at (518) 442-SNOW (7669).



## COURSE SYLLABUS (Subject to change)



“*Detours.*” As you know, American politics do not conform to the academic calendar. So, if a politically newsworthy event occurs—for example, the presidential primaries—we may take time in class discussing it; these are what I call “detours.” **Detours are fair game for exams.** When possible, I will place this cute detour icon on the lecture slides and/or make explicit that we’re taking a detour.





Videos and Handouts. Whereas a great deal of material will be taken from the textbooks, we will also be viewing videos, reading newspaper articles, and using sources other than the book. When possible, I will use the camera icon on the syllabus to denote a video for that day. Similar to the “detours,” **videos and all supplementary materials are fair game for the exam.** Please be aware that there may be videos and that are NOT noted on the syllabus. Therefore, if you are absent, it is your responsibility to get the information.

### Part I: Nuts and Bolts of American Democracy: The Founding and Institutions



W	1/23	Introduction	
M	1/28	The American Founding I <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ TDD: Chapters 1 and 2</li></ul>	
W	1/30	The American Founding II <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ DEB: Chapter 1</li></ul>	
M	2/04	Federalism <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ TDD: Chapter 15</li></ul>	
W	2/06	Congress I <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ TDD: Chapter 11</li></ul>	
M	2/11	Congress II <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ DEB: Chapter 13</li></ul>	
W	2/13	Judiciary <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ TDD: Chapter 14; Skim DEB Chapter 15 for class and paper #1</li></ul>	
M	2/18	<i>Classes suspended</i>	
W	2/20	Presidency + <b>PAPER #1 DUE IN CLASS</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ TDD: Chapter 12</li><li>▪ DEB: Chapter 14</li></ul>	
M	2/25	American Foreign Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ TDD: Chapter 18</li></ul>	
W	2/27	Review/Catch-up	
M	3/03	<b>EXAM #1: Will cover everything from 1/23-2/27</b>	

### Part II: Linking People and Politics: Parties, Campaigns, and the Electoral Process

W	3/05	Political Parties <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ TDD: Chapter 7</li></ul>	
---	------	--	--

- M 3/10 Campaigns & Elections 
  - TDD: Chapter 8
- W 3/12 Election 2008
  - Scan the news and bring in an election-related article and two discussion questions
- M 3/17 Media and Politics
  - TDD: Chapter 6
  - DEB: Chapter 9
- W 3/19 Public Opinion
  - TDD: Chapter 4
- M/W 3/24-3/26 *Classes suspended: Spring Break!*
- M 3/31 Political Satire and Commentary (Material to be distributed in class) 
- W 4/02 Review/Catch-up + **PAPER #2 DUE IN CLASS**
- M **4/07 EXAM #2: *Will cover everything from 3/5-4/2***

<b>Part III: Getting Involved: People, Policy, Participation, and Civil Society</b>
---

- W 4/09 Political Economy 
  - TDD: Chapter 3
- M 4/14 Bureaucracy/Policymaking: State and Local Connection between Government and its Citizens
  - TDD: Chapter 13 (Bureaucracy chapter is heavily Federal-oriented, but try to apply concepts to state and local level as best you can; we'll discuss in class)
  - State and local policymaking (materials to be distributed class)
- W 4/16 Civil Society
  - TDD: Chapter 5
  - DEB: Chapter 4 (Putnam article only)
- M 4/21 Interest Groups
  - TDD: Chapter 9
- W 4/23 Mass Movements 
  - TDD: Chapter 10
- M 4/28 Civil Rights/Liberties I
  - TDD: Chapter 16
- W 4/30 Civil Rights/Liberties II + **PAPER #3 DUE IN CLASS**
  - DEB: Chapter 6
  - Court cases to be discussed in class; **some cases NOT in the book!**
- M 5/05 Review/Catch-up
- Friday 5/09 FINAL EXAM—3:30-5:30 p.m. (ES 241): *Will cover everything from 4/9-5/5 AND include one cumulative essay (2 essays total)***