Call it the reverence for our American political tradition or call it political indoctrination. Whatever you think of it, we have all been taught about the concepts—equality, liberty, justice, and the like—which are seen as hallmarks of the liberal tradition and the American creed. From an early age, we are taught about the importance of founding symbols and documents, and how national rituals such as the singing of our national anthem before sporting events serve as reminders of our national heritage. We hear the words so many times we often don’t really hear them at all. Alternatively, we hear what we want to hear. We simplify our understanding and don’t consider that some of these key concepts in actuality mean different things to different people and indeed have multiple meanings.

Thus, this course takes a look at some “values” that have played a key role as part of American culture, examining alternative conceptualizations, current day debates and above all, the ways these concepts are relevant for each of us as 21st century American citizens.

After overviewing the terrain we will be covering, we will begin with a brief look at where in the first place our values and beliefs come from (political socialization), spend the majority of the class examining some of the values that have been central to the shaping of American political culture and conclude with the role these ideas may play as we head further into the 21st century. Throughout we will be debating the application of these values to some of the most controversial issues facing our current society.

In addition, this is a capstone course for political science majors. It will meet this requirement in two ways. The course will ratchet up your understanding of some often
misunderstood ideas which have nonetheless been central to the workings of American politics. Further, since this is a writing intensive course, a second (and perhaps fairly intimidating) purpose of this course is to focus on your writing. You will be asked to produce 4 short (approximately 3 page) papers and one longer (approximately 12 page) paper. In recognition of the fact that many students find writing not such a happy experience, we will engage in a variety of activities designed to facilitate learning and make everyone more comfortable with the job at hand, e.g. affording opportunities for practice and engaging in discussions about specific strategies to make writing easier.

Course Objectives

- To think through alternative meanings and conceptualizations about some values deemed to be central to Americans since the time of the Founding.
- To compare and contrast alternative understandings of these conceptualizations.
- To apply these conceptualizations to current political debates
- To locate yourself on continua: What do you believe about these ideas and where do you stand in contrast to others?
- To improve your research and writing skills to produce a high quality set of capstone papers.

*Particular thanks to Professor Peter Breiner for thoughtful input and good suggestions.

Course Reading and Requirements

There is no single text for this class. All material can be accessed on Blackboard, and as befits a 400 level class, you will find one or two required readings for each class.

Requirements

1. **Short Papers, 30%:**
   There will be 4 short (approx. 3-page) papers on various topics due throughout the semester. These papers will ask you either to reflect and react to material we have discussed in class or ask for original research building on and deepening your understanding of class material.

2. **Research Paper, 30%:**
   Approximately 12 pages long, this final research paper will be on a topic of your choice. In order to complete this assignment you will also be required to submit writing along the way: statement of topic, outline/preliminary draft (introduction section), and a more complete draft.

3. **Attendance, class participation, quizzes, 40%**
   There will be two kinds of quizzes: every three weeks on Fridays, there will be a 20-30 minute quiz on the readings from the last three weeks. Toward the end of the semester these quizzes will additionally include material from earlier parts of the class. There will also be approximately five pop quizzes throughout the semester. (Grading: reading quizzes, 20%; consistent participation, attendance, and pop quizzes 20%). (Expect more quizzes if you don’t read!)
Course Policies

Attendance: It matters. You are allowed one unexcused absence. Any other absence must be excused by the instructor before the absence or excused afterwards based on a medical note.

Plagiarism: The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Plagiarism is the use of someone else's work, words, or ideas as if they were your own without giving the original author credit by citing him or her. If you have any questions about plagiarism, please contact me before submitting assignments for grading and/or reference the undergraduate bulletin at: http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/regulations.html

It is required by the University that I report any violations; should this be your first violation, the report simply sits in a file. A record of several violations will result in disciplinary actions. In terms of class, violations of academic integrity will minimally result in failing the specific assignment.

Students with Disabilities: If you need any class accommodations due to a disability, please utilize University resources as needed, and please let the professor know well in advance of any assignments requiring accommodation(s). It is a function of the University to provide such accommodations as needed.

Topics and Readings
*(dates subject to change contingent on progress and interest)*
* All readings available on Blackboard.

**Part I: Defining the Terrain and Political Socialization**
8/29: Introduction

**Political Socialization and the Agents that Shape It**
9/12: Overview and Family Influences. Dawson, Prewitt and Dawson (1977), Political Socialization, Ch. 7 (The Family and Political Socialization)
9/14: The Role of Schools. Reading TBD. In addition, bring in an article that you think will help us directly or indirectly understand the role of modern day schools in your socialization process. Be prepared to discuss in class and have two questions ready to ask the class based on the article.
9/16. First quiz
9/21: The Larger Culture and Its Influence. Spend a couple hours watching some popular TV programs that interest you along with the commercials. How does any of what you’re seeing relate to things we have talked about? What do you learn from this experience about American culture?
9/23: Putting it all together. CQ Researcher, Community College (2015)

**9/30: first Paper Due**

**Part II: Equality**

For 9/28 - Feulner and Tracy, Ch. 17, Capitalism
9/30-10/7: Equality: Modern Day Issues
9/30-10/5: Increasing Income Inequality (Objective vs. Subjective Equality); CQ Researcher, Wealth and Inequality
10/3: No class; Rosh Hashanah
10/7: QUIZ
What Kind of Equality? : The Case of Gender. Eric Bolling: Wake Up America (2016), Ch. 3 (Manliness)

10/12: No class; Yom Kipur
10/14: Equality Wrap Up; bring in article of your choice that adds to our understanding of equality.

**Part III: Liberty**

10/17: Introduction and Modern Day Issues (class will choose issues of interest relating to liberty)
10/19 T.B.D. :
10/21: reading T.B.d.; equality Paper Due
10/24: Stone, Ch. 5 on liberty/harm (first part of chapter, definitions)
10/26: Stone, liberty, 2nd part of chapter and bring in an article about an issue you think captures interesting ideas about liberty
10/28: QUIZ
Open ended discussion about writing, paper topics etc. Tarshis Ch. 1-4,

**Part IV: American Values and American Elections**

10/31 – Debating the Presidency; Nelson, ch. 1
11/2 – David Greenbergs Republic of Spin, Introduction + 1 president from Parts 1-3
11/4 – David Greenbergs Republic of Spin, 1 president from Part 5
Part IV: Rights
11/7: Rights. T.H. Marshall Excerpts
11/9: issue of class choice
11/11: liberty Paper Due
11/14: issue of class choice; Final paper Topic statement (about a page) Due
11/16: Rights wrap up
11/18: QUIZ

Part VI: American Values: Moving Forward into the 21st century
11/21: NO CLASS; Rights Paper Due
11/23-11/25: Thanksgiving Break
11/28: Bring in article of your choice on something you think is interesting and suggests something about the future of American values.
11/30: Millennials (CQ Researcher)
Outline of final paper (3 pages of several solid paragraphs and the introduction) Due
12/2: Bilingual Education (CQ Researcher)
12/5: Bilingual Education Continued
12/7: Course Wrap Up
12/9: QUIZ
12/12: Draft of entire Final Paper Due
12/16: FINAL PAPER DUE

Important Dates Going Forward:
*Quizzes: 9/16; 10/7; 10/28; 11/18; 12/9
*Papers: 9/30 (introduction); 10/21 (equality) 11/11 (liberty) 11/21 (rights); 
*final paper prep
10/28; initial discussion of paper topics
11/14; topic statement due
11/30; outline of final paper and approx the first 3 page due
12/12; draft entire paper due
12/16; final paper due