UFSP 100:
Current Controversies in American Politics
Fall 2012
Professor S. Friedman

Credit: 1 credit, A-E graded

Office: Milne #221 (downtown campus) and office hours at Political Science Contact Office (HU016, basement Humanities building)
Phone: 442-5278
Email: sfriedman2@albany.edu

Peer Mentor- Carlos Valle cfvalle@albany.edu

Professor Friedman’s Office Hours- Contact Office (Humanities #016, uptown campus), Thursday, 10:30-11:30; 1:15-2:15; downtown campus (Milne #221) Wednesday 2:30-3:30; by appointment.

*Thanks to Profs Hildreth and Asal and Brian White (former peer mentor) for their advice and input for course preparation.

What’s the first thing you think of when you think about politics? For many of us, the answer to that question has to do with current and controversial issues—energy, immigration, health care. In this course, we will find “fun” ways to deepen your understanding of some of these controversies through activities including class discussion, class simulation/group activities and the writing of short reaction papers. We will take a look behind the rhetoric and examine the political and policy factors that come into play to produce a more thorough understanding of these controversies. Thus, the first goal of the class is to provide a forum for you to deepen your understanding of some important current issues.

But what does it mean to deepen your understanding of issues? For purposes of this course, we will go deeper in a number of diverse ways including considering the factors most important to an understanding of the policy process and the history/events that brought us to the current status quo with respect to particular policies. In addition, through simulations and several short papers, you will be asked to go deeper by playing the roles of specific players in the policy process and by arguing on behalf of your own views.

As advertised, a second and equally important set of objectives of the course center around helping to acclimate you to life at the University of Albany. What are things like in a college environment? What do professors expect of you? How do you find the resources and assistance available to you, and how do you go about learning the skills for success? In short, how do you not only make yourself comfortable but, more, even thrive at the University at Albany?

Thus, the learning objectives for this class are as follows

a. To identify and discuss the major debates underlying some of the most current and controversial issues facing the country.
b. To go deeper into those debates by simulating the roles of particular players/stakeholders in the policy process.
c. To go deeper into the debates by locating yourself on a continuum: where do you stand on these important current controversies and why?
d. To introduce you, as new students, to the many aspects of the college experience at the State University of New York at Albany.
e. To provide you the opportunity to discuss college success strategies with a small group of your peers and an instructor.

**Note:** You do not have to see yourself as knowledgeable about politics or particularly informed about current events to take this class. You need only to be interested and want to learn more. Nor do you need to feel like you have the skills of an “expert” student; it is one of the goals of the class to help you develop the skills you will need to be successful here at SUNY/Albany. Mostly, the course is here to encourage you to engage in discussion, to hear the views of other students and to think a little more deeply about some important policy issues.

**Elaboration on the Purpose of the Freshman Seminar**

The Freshman Seminar is designed to introduce first-year students to the University at Albany community and to engage you in a topic that interests you while clarifying the academic expectations, intellectual challenges, and personal opportunities available to you as learners. As such, some of the issues that will come up for discussion include:

1. academic expectations of the University,
2. academic behaviors and learning strategies essential to success,
3. personal, academic and career goals and a preliminary plan to achieve those goals,
4. resources of the University (e.g., Academic Support Services, University Libraries, Counseling Center).
5. University community activities and learning opportunities beyond the classroom,
6. making more personal connections with other first-year students and an instructor in a small-class setting, and
7. additional concerns that, in the course of the semester, you perceive as important.

In short, the course is here to support you as you make the transition from high school to college and as you particularly familiarize yourself with SUNY/Albany.

**Required Readings**

There is no required text for this class. A collection of readings taken from issues of the *CQ Researcher* are/will be (once we pick the issues) available through Blackboard, and you are expected to come to each class having read the designated reading(s) for each date. For some classes, you are also expected to additionally complete a short writing assignment (related to the issue under discussion) or activity prior to coming to class. There will also be a short college related assignment each week. You will be expected to complete all readings and assignments.

**Course Policies**
Attendance: Attendance is expected in every class. In the event of an emergency, students should contact me via email BEFORE the class explaining the absence. Students are expected to complete the assignments whether they attend class or not.

Requirements:

- Attendance/participation 25%
- Quizzes, 10%
- Weekly short assignments (1 per week), 30%, on the college experience; graded minus, check, plus; (0,1,2), 30%. These assignments will generally ask you to engage in a short activity and, in a couple of paragraphs, reflect on some aspect of your college experience. Since the most important goal of the assignments is the reflection in which you engage, the content will count more than the quality of the writing. These assignments are meant to get you to think; they are not intended to be busy work or torture. More details to come, but a preliminary list of these assignments will appear both on the reading schedule and at the end of this document.
  - Three Short Reaction Papers, 5% each, 15% total; 1-to-1.5 pages, graded minus, check or plus.
  - Two 3-page papers 10% each, 20% total; (one as further research on the issue you care about most; one as a final essay, and directions to all assignments will be handed out in class).

*Please note you need to provide a hard copy of each paper as well as sending me a copy via email (sfriedman2@albany.edu)

The Papers

As noted above, you are being asked to write two kinds of papers for this class. Three of these will be 1 to 1.5 page reaction papers. The first, on No Child Left Behind, which everyone is asked to write about, is due 9/5. Thereafter you need to write on two of the four additional issues we will be discussing.

In these reaction papers, your job is to lay out, with specifics, one or two points of disagreement on the issue and to end by arguing, with specifics, for your own stand. You are also being asked to write two longer (approximately 3 page) papers. The first of these will ask you to go deeper into the issue you are most interested in both by collecting additional information and by arguing on behalf of a political actor with a stake in that issue due on 12/5. The second paper will be a final essay handed out the last day of class and due on 12/12.

Papers should be proofread and grammatically in good shape. You might want to think about giving each paper a title to reflect the main idea you want to get across.

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. Plagiarism violations will result in disciplinary action. (http://www.albany.edu/eas/104/penalty.htm)
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.

Course Dates and Readings

What follows is a rough guide and may be subject to changes contingent on student interest and progress; since several of our activities are interactive and will develop organically, we may need to adjust the schedule accordingly.

Note: All readings are or will be posted on Blackboard. Assignments are due a week after the date they are listed (See schedule of due dates at the end of the syllabus).

Part I: Getting Started

8/29: Introduction.

9/5: “Revising No child Left Behind: How Are Schools Doing?” (CQ Researcher)
  * Come to class with at least one point you want to make in the discussion.
  * Read syllabus and come to class with one question, comment, something you really liked or something else you would have liked to have seen there.
  * Reaction paper due: Write a one to 1.5 page paper (typed) reacting in any way you want to the reading. What are the most important controversies? What do you agree or disagree with? (Don't worry. The goal of the assignment is simply to get you thinking and reacting. Don't worry about getting everything "right". Just do it! Graded minus, check or plus.
  * scavenger hunt (directions provided at end of syllabus) (due 9/12).

9/12: “Legalizing Marijuana” (CQ Researcher)
  * reaction paper
  * calendar and planner assignment (handed out)
  * setting your goal for improvement (handed out)

9/19: Comparison of Issues/overview of Factors Impacting the Policy Process
  * learning styles and strategies assignment

9/26 No class; Jewish holidays.

Part II: The Simulations (chosen to illustrate some of the factors we laid out in class on 9/19). Reaction papers due the week after we discuss the issue.

10/3: Simulation I: hydrofracking
  * time log for class

10/10: Continue hydrofracking
  * reaction paper due
  * study skills assignment
10/17: Degree Audits and Scheduling (advising office)
  • Diversity of views
  • progress with your goal

10/24: Simulation 2: Congress, formulating a Bill (Issue of the Class’s Choice; Reading on Blackboard Posted about the Issue)

  • Prior to class, you will be assigned a member of Congress. Go to the website of the member; come to class with brief information about the district the member represents and the member's views on our issue (more details to be given out).

10/31: Continued, The Vote

  • Note: you are a member of Congress representing the district you have been assigned. How are you going to decide how to vote? What additional information do you need?
  • Reaction paper
  • If you haven't already done so, come to my office hours.
  • Information about your assigned member of Congress

11/7: Presentation on an aspect of University Life
  • Assignment: 3 sources for your paper.

  • Bring in 3 sources you will be using for your final paper.
  • activity of your choice to enhance your college experience and a paragraph reflection

11/21: Thanksgiving Break (Happy Holiday; No Class)

11/28: Election Simulation
  • Some of you will be asked to volunteer to stand as candidates.
  • The election should also provide a way for us to review the issues/controversies we have discussed throughout the semester.
  • assignment about college majors

12/5: Looking Back and Looking Forward
  • Handing out of final assignment
  • longer issue paper due (12/05)

12/12: Final Paper Due.

**List of Course Assignments on College Experience**

**College Experience Assignments (Plus Some Short Extras)**

Question/comment about syllabus due 9/5
Scavenger hunt due 9/12
Calendar and planner due 9/19
Learning styles due 10/3
Time log due 10/10
Study skills due 10/17
Diversity of views/progress with your goal due 10/24
Information about your assigned member of Congress due 10/31
See me in office hours by 11/7
3 sources for your paper by 11/14
Activity of your choice enhancing college experience due 11/28
Assignment about college majors by 12/5

Scavenger Hunt for UFSP 100 Fall 2012

UAlbany 20 Questions: A glance at UAlbany and the people, places and resources of our community

Scavenger Hunt

Directions: Answer one question from each group as follows:

If your last name begins with A-F, answer question 1 in each category.
If your last name begins with G-L, answer question 2 in each category.
If your last name begins with M-Q, answer question 3 in each category.
If your last name begins with R-Z, answer question 4 in each category.

To learn the answers to these questions, you can either visit the office in person, talk to a friend or research on the internet. A combination of all three strategies would be great because we usually obtain information in a variety of ways. Hand in brief responses (a couple of sentences or clear notes on each question) and a note showing how you got your information. As a last piece, write a couple of sentences highlighting the most interesting thing you learned from this assignment. (If nothing particularly interested you, poke around the university website or talk to a friend to find something engaging).
Note: Don’t make this a big deal. The purpose of the assignment is to expand your knowledge about campus activities, thus increasing your options for success and fun. Also, be sure to use more than one source when collecting your information.

Resource Category A: Academics

1. Where are the academic advisors for freshmen located? Who is your academic advisor?
2. What does the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education do? How do students get placed on the Dean’s List?
3. What office monitors your academic success (i.e., your GPA)? What constitutes academic probation?
4. What is the Office for Academic Support Services? What is the Center for Achievement, Retention, and Student Success?

Resource Category B: Student Activities

1. What is the Student Association? Where do you go to find out about clubs and organizations on this campus?
2. What is the name of the student newspaper? Where is the UAlbany TV studio and what programming do they produce?
3. In which NCAA division does UAlbany compete and what does that mean?
4. What do the following stand for: R.A., R.D., Q.C.? Why does this matter?

Resource Category C: Student Services

1. Where is the University Health Center, what services does it offer students and do you pay for these services?
2. What is the purpose behind the Office of Conflict Resolution & Civic Responsibility? Where is it located?
3. What is the University Counseling Center? Are there student run organizations offered by this office?
4. Where is the Office of Career Services? What does a student need to do to be interviewed on campus by a prospective employer?

Resource Category D: Arts and Culture

1. Where is the University at Albany Theater Department? What is one play being performed during the current semester?
2. Where is the University at Albany Art Museum and what are the hours?
3. What types of musical groups (both instrumental and vocal) does the University have? Where is the University at Albany Music Department located?
4. What is Study Abroad and what office runs it?

Resource Category E: Miscellaneous
1. What does the Department of Public Safety do?
2. What is the New York State Writers Institute?
3. What and when is Fountain Day?
4. What is the Purple Growl?

Resource Category F, Miscellaneous Cont.

1. What is The Clash of the Quads?
2. What bus takes you downtown and where do you get it?
3. What is Crossgates Mall?
4. What are two events that happen during Homecoming Weekend?
Introductory Questions

General Questions

• What three issues, ranked in order, would you most like us to discuss this semester?
• What, ranked in order are the three most important issues facing the nation? (Be specific; try not to say something as broad as “foreign policy.”)
• What two things about being on a college campus are you most looking forward to?
• What two things are you a little nervous about?

Issues

• Where do you stand (pro or con) on the following issues or do you have no opinion?
• Standardized tests for elementary and secondary school students should be promoted.
• People should be arrested if they burn the American flag as a symbol of protest.
• The proposed plan to build a mosque near the site where the World Trade Center once stood was a good idea.
• Requiring everyone to have health insurance is a good idea.
• Companies should be encouraged to build nuclear power plants.
• The Arizona law where drivers can be stopped at any time and asked for identification is a good idea.
• Oil Drilling close to the shores of the United States should be promoted.
• Hydrofracking in pursuit of oil should be promoted.
• The U.S. should increase the budget for the Department of Defense.
• All gun control laws should be repealed.
• The public is ready to elect a female president in the U.S.