We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, --That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.” - Declaration of Independence IN CONGRESS, July 4, 1776.

Course Description

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 overviewsing 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 skill 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**

**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.

**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, set of sources, preliminary draft (introduction section), and a more complete draft.

**Attendance, class participation, quizzes, 40%**
There will be two kinds of quizzes: every three weeks 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, 30%; consistent participation, attendance, and pop quizzes 15%). (Expect more quizzes if you don’t read!)

Course Policies

Attendance. This course has a great deal of in class and collaborative work. You have to come to class. Each person is allowed one unexcused absence. Any other absence must be excused by the instructor before the absence or excused afterwards based on a medical note. Any unexcused absences after that will count against you.

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
Plagiarism violations will result in disciplinary action.

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.*

1/20-1/29 Part I: Defining the Terrain and Political Socialization
1/22: What is the American Creed? James Morone. The Struggle for American Culture.
PS: Political Science and Politics, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Sep., 1996), pp. 424-430

1/25-1/29: Overview of Founding concepts
1/25-1/27: The Declaration

1/29: Multiple Traditions?

2/1-2/12: Political Socialization and the Agents that Shape It
2/1: Overview and Family Influences. Dawson, Prewitt and Dawson (1977), Political Socialization, Ch. 3 (The Political Self), Ch. 7 (The Family and Political Socialization)

2/3-2/5: The Role of Schools & Communities
*Quiz on 2/5*

2/8: The Larger Culture and Its Influence—Watch at least part of the Super bowl—you don’t need to be a sports fan—come in ready to discuss the commercials and what they tell us about modern day American culture.

2/10-2/12: Putting it all together, CQ Researcher: Assessing the New Health Care Law

2/15-2/29: Part II A Closer Look at Some Specific Values
2/15: No class: President’s Day!

2/17-2/19: Defining the Concept
For 2/17 - Stuart White, Equality (Polity Press)
For 2/19 - Feulner and Tracy, Ch. 17, Capitalism
*Paper due on the 19th*

2/22 -2/24 Political Equality: Increasing Income Inequality (Objective vs. Subjective Equality)
CQ Researcher, Wealth and Inequality

2/26 Women in Sports. CQ Researcher: Women and Sports (a role for culture)
*Quiz on the 26th*

2/29 A final look with a new twist
Deborah Stone. Policy Paradox (1997), Ch. 2, Equity

3/2 – 3/9 Part III Liberty
3/4 *Paper Due*
3/7
3/9
3/11 No Class.

*More to come including discussion of rights, tolerance, and the future*

Important Dates Going Forward
3/28 Paper Due
4/1 Quiz
4/18 Paper
4/22 Quiz
5/9 Draft of entire final paper due
5/12 Final draft of final paper (the day of the university final)