State University of New York, University at Albany

Introduction to American Politics                                    Jason Di Gianni
POS 101M (7803)                                               Spring '09
HU 39                       Monday 5:45-8:35

Course Description

This course will provide students with the opportunity of studying American politics critically, while providing a foundation for further study of American politics and political science. Through readings and discussion, we will examine not only institutions and policies but also the larger themes and theories behind American politics. This course is intended to help prepare students to participate, critically and thoughtfully, in all aspects of our political world.

This course satisfies the General Education requirements for both United States Historical Perspectives and Social Science. As such this course will present an account of American political and constitutional development since the period of the American Founding and will explore issues social scientists face, including, but not limited to subjecting human conduct and behavior to scientific inquiry, understanding major concepts in social science, exploring hypothesis development, and data collection and analysis.

Required Texts

There are two required texts for this course. The texts are only available at Mary Jane’s Books located at the corner of Western Avenue and Quail Street. Additionally, I have set one copy of each on reserve at the University Library.

The Democratic Debate: An Introduction to American Politics Fourth Edition Miroff, Seidelman, & Swanstrom

Debating Democracy: A Reader in American Politics Sixth Edition Miroff, Seidelman, & Swanstrom

Exams & Papers

There will be three exams during the semester. The dates, though subject to change, are 3/9/09, 4/6/09 and 5/4/09. Each exam will consist of multiple-choice questions, short answer/identification, and a written essay. You will have an hour and a half to complete the exam. Each exam counts for 25% of your final grade.

Most nights we will hold a class debate based on a chapter from the reader. On each scheduled debate night, we will discuss the two articles from the chapter and have a large open discussion. Students are required to write three 3-4 page debate papers. These papers should recount the classroom debate while also evaluating the success of each side’s arguments. A winning side should be declared with evidence – based on the discussion – supporting that claim. Students are free to write about any three debates they choose. The papers are due at the start of the class following the debate, without exception. Therefore, at the end of the semester you cannot write about a debate that took place in February. You may not like the debates at the end, so be sure to write papers early on if you find a topic that interests you. The average of the three papers will count for 25% of your final grade.

Cheating, plagiarism, and all forms of academic dishonesty will be grounds for failure of the course—and possibly worse. Refer to the Undergraduate Bulletin for the University's guidelines. Furthermore, I will only accept late assignments if they are accompanied by a letter from the Dean of Undergraduates students.
Students with disabilities who require special accommodations should identify themselves to the instructor, and express their needs during the first few weeks of class.

Attendance

There is no attendance policy for this class. While I expect you all to attend regularly, I will not be taking roll. However, you will lose credit for debates and exams if you are not present the day an exam is scheduled or the day your debate team is scheduled to present. Only absences excused by the Dean of Undergraduate Studies will be accepted for make-up. In addition, students will not adequately complete debate papers if they are not present for the debates. In general, students will find it difficult to get through the course without regular attendance and participation through discussion and debates. Furthermore, those students attending regularly will be given the benefit of the doubt as grades are determined.

Expectations

I expect students to complete all readings and to be prepared to discuss them in class. Completion of the readings in a timely matter is critical to the success of this class. Without a proper foundation, we cannot have meaningful lectures and discussions. If you do not expect to keep up with the readings, do not take this class.

Participation in class through debates, discussions and questions during lecture is a crucial element to a successful course. I expect everyone to participate regularly. I will frequently interrupt class so that we may respond to something from lecture, a reading, something in the news or a student question. Therefore, I encourage you all to bring up comments, criticisms, or questions as they arise.

Finally, I expect all students to be informed of what is going on in the political world. Everyone should read some sort of news daily in order to keep up to date. Our daily media discussions will fall flat if students are not informed. In addition, students should bring in news stories to add to the discussion. However, if there is not an adequate media discussion on a regular basis it may become a required, graded element of the course.

BLS, Contact Information, & Office Hours

This course has a BLS site. Students enrolled in the course will have access to the site. This site allows me to communicate with all of you, you to communicate with me, and for you to communicate with each other. Students should regularly check this website to see if there are any added or changed assignments or announcements. I will post reading assignments, debate teams, exams dates and a copy of this syllabus there.

All contact that I make with you will be through BLS. Any changes to assignments, cancellation of class, or announcements will be posted BLS. Therefore, it is your responsibility to regularly check the site for any news. If you miss any announcement or message sent to you through the site, you are accountable.

My direct e-mail address is jd6256@albany.edu. It is the best way to contact me.

I am available for office hours by appointment.