

University at Albany, State University of New York

POS 101 American Politics – Prof. José E. Cruz – Spring 2011

Class Number 5987 MWF – 9:20 – 10:15 am Lecture Center 7

Description

Introduction to the study of politics, focusing on American national government. Our review will cover a wide range of subjects, from the politics of the American founding, the struggle for equal rights, political institutions, civic and political organizations, to U.S. foreign policy.

Objectives

The goals of the course are to enable students to understand how the American political system works, to evaluate the workings of the system, and to explore the practical expressions of the concepts of citizenship and power. As a social science and U.S. history course in the General Education program, it has the following learning objectives: to enable the understanding that human conduct and behavior are subject to scientific inquiry; to enable the understanding of the difference between rigorous and systematic thinking and uncritical thinking about social phenomena; to enable an understanding of the kinds of questions social scientists ask and the ways they go about answering these questions; to enable knowledge of the major concepts, models, and issues in political science; to enable students in the acquisition of knowledge of substance and methods for comprehending the historical narratives or themes presented throughout the semester; and to enable students in the acquisition of knowledge of common institutions in American society and how they have affected different groups.

Required Text

Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright, *Keeping the Republic, Power and Citizenship in American Politics*, 4th ed. Includes Gregory Giroux's *Midterm Mayhem, What's Next for Obama and the Republicans*.

Grades

Grades for the course are on an A-E basis, but the course can be taken on an S-U basis. Grades will be based on: 1. attendance and participation in the discussion sections; 2. eleven quizzes; 3. a short essay on a selected topic due by the mid-term point; 4. a final exam.

Attendance and Participation

In your discussion section, there will three group debates and you will write two short essays (2-3 pages, typed, double-space) that will **recount and comment** on the major arguments in these debates. Your discussion section instructors will choose the debate topics and readings. These readings will be in addition to the textbook. Specific instructions will be provided by the section instructors.

Quizzes

Each quiz will be worth 10 points. The quizzes will evaluate your understanding of boldface terms in the text as well as of key points made during lectures. Use the "Flashcards" button for each chapter available at <http://republic.cqpress.com> to review the book's key terms. You can also take the online quizzes as part of your preparation. Questions will be written as a combination of multiple choice, short-answer, fill-in-the-blank, and true or false.

Close attention, good note-taking, and systematic review of your notes will increase the likelihood of a good performance on your part.

Your quizzes grade will be calculated on the basis of a 100 point score, which means that the lowest grade will be dropped, using the following scale: 100-95 A; 94-90 A-; 89-85 B+; 84-80 B; 79-75 B-; 74-71 C+; 70-65 C; 64-61 C-; 60-55 D+; 54-51 D; 50-45 D-; 44-0 E.

Short Essay

You will write the short mid-term essay, between 3-5 pages, typed, double space, on one of the following topics: presidential power; divided government; the filibuster; role of Tea Party in 2010 Mid-term elections; bipartisanship in Congress; congressional oversight; tax, foreign, energy, transportation, education, or trade policy; federal budget; and 2010 election patterns. You will use the textbook supplement by Gregory Giroux, Midterm Mayhem as your organizing text for this essay. Each of these topics is referenced in Giroux's essay. You will identify three additional academic journal articles on the topic of your selection and essentially provide your own analysis of the chosen topic. This means that you must identify a point made by Giroux on the chosen topic, summarize the argument that he presents, and offer a commentary that reflects your own point of view based on the additional sources you identify. You can use the section "Consider the Source" on pp. 24-25 in the textbook as your how-to-guide to writing the essay. A rubric for the evaluation of the essay, which will also help you write it, will be provided on Blackboard.

Final Exam

The final exam will consist of a selection of questions based on the lectures from the second half of the semester and from the practice quizzes at the end of the chapters covered during the second half of the semester. Taking the online quizzes will also help you prepare for the final exam. The questions in the final exam will also be written as a combination of multiple choice, short-answer, fill-in-the-blank, and true or false. The exam will also be graded on the basis of a 100 point

score using the scale noted above.

In addition to reading carefully and knowing the answers to the questions in the textbook, you will need to pay attention during lectures and take good notes in order to do well in the final exam.

Through emphasis and repetition I will help you sort out what is particularly important and therefore may be included in the final.

There will be no plenary review session prior to the final but there will be a powerpoint study guide on Blackboard and review sessions will be held in discussion sections.

Grades

You will receive four grades during the semester. One of these will be a composite of separate grades for your debate reports (50%), participation in section discussions and debates (30%), and attendance to discussion sections (20%) That composite grade will be worth 30% of your course grade. The remaining three course grades and their weight will be: Quizzes (20%); Short Essay (10%); Final Exam (40%). Remember: **You cannot pass the course unless you attend your discussion section! All assignments must be completed before you can receive a grade for the course.**

Academic Integrity

Students are reminded that all work handed in must be their own. **Cheating on the exam or plagiarism will result in course failure. Please note that ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not a valid excuse for this academic violation.**

Office Hours

Mondays and Wednesdays from 10:30 am – 11:30 am in the political science contact office, located in Humanities B16. If this schedule does not work for you, I am also available at a mutually convenient day and time by appointment.

Your teaching assistant's office hours will be announced in your discussion section.

My e-mail is conga@albany.edu. I will use Blackboard mail to communicate with the class as a whole but to reply to my messages or to reach me by e-mail you should use webmail or the application of your choice. If you e-mail me or reply using Blackboard mail I cannot guarantee a timely response.

Course Outline

January

19-21 - Introduction

24-26 - Politics: Who Gets What and How?

27-31 - American Citizens and Political Culture

February

2-4 - Classes cancelled due to snow and illness

7- Politics of the American Founding

9 - Federalism and the U.S. Constitution

11-14 - Fundamental American Liberties

16-18 - The Struggle for Equal Rights

28 - Congress

March

2 - Congress, cont.

4-7 - The Presidency

9-11 - The Bureaucracy **Short essay due March 9.** (Mid-term point)

14-16 - The American Legal System and the Courts

18-21 - Public Opinion

23-25 - Political Parties

28-30 - Interest Groups

April

1 -4 - Voting, Campaigns, and Elections

6-8 - The Media

11-13 - State and Local Politics in a Federal System

15 - Social and Environmental Policy

27-29 - Economic Policy

May

2 - Foreign Policy

12 - Final exam, LC 7, 10:30 am -12:30 pm.

NOTE: This syllabus is a blueprint, not a legal contract. While its content is binding, I reserve the right to modify its terms as needed during the course of the semester. Any changes will be effective immediately after due notification in class and on Blackboard.