

American Government

POL: 790:104:H6
Summer 2014

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Monday (6:00 pm – 9:40 pm) Frelinghuysen Hall – A2
Wednesdays – Online Exams
Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Description: This course provides an overview of American Government and will be divided into three main themes: (1) Constitution in Theory and Practice, (2) The Role of Citizens in our Democracy, and (3) American Public Policy. Constitution in Theory and Practice will focus on the basic principles of our government along with how it was created and evolved through our history. This will include a focus on the actual functioning of the American system, as well as its influences and applications that are not clearly spelled out within its founding documents. Role of Citizens will focus on how people learn what they want, how people are able to influence government, and how government learns what its people want. Public Policy will expose you to some of the most important policy debates that our nation has and continues to face. It will become clear that they are all interrelated – Economic, Social, and Foreign policy all affect one another in quite interesting ways.

Required Text: None – They will be provided for you via Sakai under “Resources”

Sakai: To access the class Sakai website, (1) sign on to sakai.rutgers.edu, (2) sign in using your RU screen name, and (3) click on the class tab at the top of the page.

The Sakai site contains a discussion forum and chat room. Please use these areas to post materials you may find to be helpful to others as well as any questions you may have about the course. If you have a question, chances are that other people will as well, so please post them in the chat room so everyone can benefit from them. I check the chat room periodically and will answer any questions then. Please also scan through the chat room to see if others have already asked your question. We will also be using Sakai to post blog entries and reaction papers (see sections below).

Course Requirements: This is a Hybrid-course, meaning that half of the sessions are conducted online. By necessity, summer courses are very compressed – we will cover a whole semester’s worth of material in only four weeks. It is imperative that students attend all the lectures, complete all the readings, and participate meaningfully in the online sessions. Our classes will consist of lectures that emphasize the assignment readings (to be read before class), supplemental material, and relevant current events. Both the lectures and the readings will present novel information about American Government that you will need to be successful in this course.

Online Lectures: Our Wednesday class days are Online. You will either have to review a set of lectures (Resources tab on Sakai) or take an online exam (Tests and Quizzes tab on Sakai). The lectures are provided in Power Point and PDF format – both contain the same information, but the power points also have my lecture notes. Both also contain “Video” links on several slides that will direct you to a youtube channel I have created where I spend a few minutes in front of a white board discussing the material. You are responsible for all of the material presented in these lectures, videos, and in the text book. You are obviously free to review them whenever you wish. Please use the Discussion Forum to post any questions you may have about the material from the textbook, lecture, or video in the Forum tab on Sakai.

Exams: Given the truncated schedule, I have decided to make our exams “Online Take-Homes”. This means that every other Wednesday you must finish the exam in the “Tests and Quizzes” tab on Sakai by 12 am Wednesday evening. (No late exams will be accepted!) Exams will be available to take starting at 10am Wednesday morning. These exams are timed – You will have 2 hours to complete the exam. Because these exams are essentially open-note, the questions will be more challenging and my expectations for quality answers will be raised. In other words, these exams have been created such that you will not have sufficient time to look up answers during the exams. Furthermore, plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated. The essay part of the exams will be automatically submitted to Turnitin.com to verify that there is no plagiarism. Exams will consist of both Multiple Choice and Essay Questions.

Grading:

Participation (10%)
Blog Entries (15%)
Reaction Papers (15%)
2 Exams (60%)

Rutgers Grading System:

A = 90-99
B+ = 86-89 B = 80-85
C+ = 76-79 C = 70-75
D = 60-69

Participation: Based on attendance and performance in the classroom and online. Students are expected to show up to class having not only read the assigned material, but thought about it as well. Although the format of the class is primarily lecture-based, questions, comments, and discussion are not only encouraged, but necessary. (*Trust me – this class will be much more interesting for all of us if there is active participation). Online participation is judged by both the frequency and quality of a student’s comments to other students’ blog entries along with participation during our online class meetings.

Blog Entries: You will be required to blog about a news story that relates to the topics under discussion for the next online class meeting. Find a newspaper article from a reputable source (i.e. Washington Post, NY Times, Wall St. Journal, etc.) and write a 400-500 (1 page double-spaced) essay relating that news to what you’ve read about in the text book. Your blog must include a link to the news story. This news story cannot be an editorial or outside blog (I want you to comment of the facts of a news story – not someone else’s interpretation of that news). Your blog should not summarize the news – we can all read the article. Your blog should focus on relating that news to the topics under discussion. Blog entries are due Tuesday (by noon) so that we all have time to read

everyone's blog post and comment on them before our online class meets on Wednesday. You will receive a 5 point deduction for missing the noon deadline and a 10 point deduction for every day late after that.

Blog entries can be posted by going to the "Forums" tab on Sakai. You will see several topics listed. Select the appropriate topic and then hit the "Start a New Conversation" button. Blog entries can be commented on by hitting the "Reply" button next to each blog listed.

Reaction Papers: You will be required to write 3 reaction papers (due each Monday before class – uploaded to the assignments tab in Sakai and submitted to turnitin.com) in which I provide you with a question or theme. These should be about 3 pages double-spaced and will receive a 5 point deduction for missing the deadline and 10 point deduction for every day after that.

Class Conduct: Students are strongly encouraged to engage in discussion and ask questions. Students should at all times remain respectful of other's opinions and perspectives – this does not mean you cannot disagree with other students or the instructor – but that you must do so respectfully. This is especially true in your online interactions!

Behaviors that interfere with effective teaching and learning, such as late arrival, leaving for the bathroom, early departures without instructor permission, talking to each other during the lectures, sleeping, playing with cell-phones, etc. will not be tolerated. I reserve the right to deduct points from a student's final grade for violations of this policy.

Academic Integrity: If you have not done so already, please familiarize yourself with Rutgers' academic integrity policy at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>. Cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism are serious offenses and will be dealt with according to the policy. I have zero tolerance! If you have any questions about the policy or what constitutes a violation, do not hesitate to ask me.

Absences: Students are expected to attend all classes and participate meaningfully in class discussions. If you will miss a class, you must use the University Absence Reporting Website at <http://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. This system generates an automatic email notifying me of your absence. Should you encounter an emergency or situation that will hamper your ability to attend classes and complete the course requirements, speak to the Dean of students as soon as possible – DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE END OF THE SEMESTER!

Syllabus - Draft

This syllabus and schedule are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances. *If you are absent from class, it's your responsibility to check on announcements made while you were absent.*

Monday (6/25) – Introductions/Founding/Constitution

We the People – Chapter 2 (Founding)
Dahl – Chapter 2 and 3 (selections)
Shalom – Selections

Wednesday (6/27) Online – Civil Liberties/Civil Rights/Judiciary

Assignment – Blog Entry 1 due Tuesday (6/26) @ Noon

We the People – Chapter 4 (Civil Liberties)
We the People – Chapter 5 (Civil Rights)
We the People – Chapter 15 (Judiciary)

Monday (7/2) – Congress/Presidency/Parties

We the People – Chapter 12 (Congress)
We the People – Chapter 13 (Presidency)
We the People – Chapter 9 (Political Parties)
Assignment – Reaction Paper 1 due before class

Reaction Question: *This week's readings on Congress inform us that the House of Representatives and Senate were structured to ensure compromise, thoughtful debate, and prudent decision-making. However, the result has often been a Congress that moves slowly to pass bills, approve presidential appointments, and engages in questionable ethical behavior (i.e. logrolling, gerrymandering, pandering, permanent campaigning, etc.) Given what you have learned about our legislative branch and its interactions with the executive branch and political parties - do the costs outweigh the benefits? Why or Why not?*

Wednesday (7/4) – NO CLASS

Monday (7/9) – Ideology

Assignment – Reaction Paper 2 due before class.
Shalom – Chapter 2 (Ideology)
Shalom – Chapter 3 (Conservatism)
Shalom – Chapter 4 (Liberalism)
Shalom – Chapter 5 (Democratic Socialism)

Reaction Question: *Ideology and partisan identification are often simply inherited from our parents with little more than a superficial understanding of what these beliefs and values entail. Most never engage in the sort of critical reflection required to determine if they truly buy into the underlying logic of these worldviews. Given what you've learned from the chapters – Reflect upon your own ideology (past and present). Did you learn things that strengthen or weaken your existing beliefs? Did you learn things that about other ideologies which put them in a more understandable light? Or...are you more confused than ever?*

****Note – You will not be graded upon your political views (past or present) – you will be graded upon your capacity to demonstrate that you have critically engaged the material and put some thought into this essay.***

Wednesday (7/11) Online – Public Opinion/Media

Assignment – Blog Entry 2 due Tuesday (7/10) @ Noon
We the People – Chapter 6 (Public Opinion)
We the People – Chapter 7 (Media)
Hershey – Chapter 6 (Party Identification)

Monday (7/16) – Political Participation/Interest Groups

Assignment – Reaction Paper 3 due before class.
We the People – Chapter 11 (Interest Groups)
Hershey – Chapter 5 (Party Activists)
Maisel and Brewer – Chapter 4 (Interest Groups)

Wednesday (7/18) Online – Economic Policy

Assignment – Blog Entry 3 due Tuesday (7/17) @ Noon
Shalom – Chapter 11 (Economic)
We the People – Chapter 16 (Economic)
Shalom – Chapter 13 (Tax)

Friday (7/20) Take-Home Final Exam (12pm – 3pm)