

Introduction to American Government and Politics

Political Science 101

Fall 2007

(T R: 9:30-10:45am at 1115-2 BSB)

Instructor: Dukhong Kim

Office Hours: T R: 1:30-2:30 or by appointment

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Course Description

The goals of this course are to gain a clear idea of how the American political system - as a democratic government - was created and reformed, to understand how it works, and to evaluate whether it lives up to the standards of a democracy. To achieve these goals, we will explore the theories of democracy and government which provided a basis for the construction of the American political system; examine how the system originated and has been maintained through the interaction between major actors in the political arena; and study the role and function of the major political institutions, both formal (i.e., Congress, the Presidency, the Courts) and informal (e.g., public opinion, the mass media, and interest groups).

In surveying the American political system, we focus on theoretical concepts and frameworks which provide criteria for the evaluation of the system. We will analyze *why* and *how* political actors (both elites and the public) create and change political institutions and rules over the years. Specifically, we want to address the following questions: Why was the Constitution created as it was? How has it changed? How are individuals' rights protected and expanded? How do local, state, and national governments interact under federalism? How does public opinion influence decision making? Are American citizens capable of making reasonable choices in elections and informed opinions on policies? How do interest groups and the mass media mediate citizens' choices and opinions? How do political parties attempt to mobilize and organize citizens to gain political power? How do the President, Congress, and the Supreme Court make policies and interact with each other? And how do international politics affect the American political system?

Teaching format: The class will be a combination of lecture and discussion. I will lecture based on the text book, covering the main points of the chapters and providing illustrations from the readings or current news sources. To encourage discussion, I will regularly ask questions of the class. Students are strongly encouraged to bring their own questions, comments, and ideas to participate in the discussion.

Evaluation: Students can choose one of two options for their evaluation. Grades will be determined as follows.

1. Midterm exam (20%)
2. Final exam (35%)
3. Essays (25%)
4. Participation/presentation (20%)

Exams: There will be two exams - midterm and final. Both exams will include short identification and multiple choice questions. The final will be cumulative, but will be weighted toward the topics covered after the midterm. The questions will be drawn from the text book and the readings.

Essays: Each student must write three short essays on the questions that are listed below after they read the relevant texts. The length of the essays should be 4-5 pages double spaced with 12 font size and one-inch margins (maximum length is 5 pages). The essays need to address the questions directly with coherent arguments and evidence to support your main thesis. The due dates of the essays are Sept. 13, Oct. 16, and Nov. 1. Students should submit a hard copy of the essay to the instructor by the end of the class on the due date. Students are encouraged to use the essay materials for discussions and presentations.

Discussion and Presentation: I believe in the exchange of ideas, discussions, and debates as important tools for learning about American politics. Thus, it is important to engage in constructive debates in the class as well as to make good comments on the subjects and issues. It is necessary to read the text and the other books in advance to prepare and participate in the discussions. Each student (or a group of students) will have at least one chance to present topics that they choose for themselves. The format of the presentations is informal.

Group presentation and debate: There will be three times of presenting the materials on the 3 books. The format of presentation will be discussed more later. Students should turn off their cell phones before class, and should refrain from surfing the internet or responding to email or IM during class.

Outside speaker on Voting and National Student Issues Convention: These two events are scheduled to occur at noon on September 24 (Monday) and at 9 am on November 9 (Friday). The outside speaker will talk about voting choices in the coming elections. Major party workers or candidates will talk in the convention, which will give you chances to hear directly from the party activists. Since two events are going to be held outside of our scheduled times, those students who participate in those events will get extra credit. To encourage you to participate in these events, the classes on September 25 and November 8 will be canceled. We will discuss the assigned topics in the classes after the events.

Newspapers: I strongly recommend that you to read newspapers to keep up with current domestic and international affairs. Compare the coverage of ten political, economic, or social events given by *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*. Use events from ten separate days and include copies of the articles. This assignment will be graded and included in the participation category¹.

Grading standard: Letter grades will be assigned according to the following scoring scheme.

A range: 90-100%

B range: 80-89%

C range: 70-79%

D range: 60-69%

F range: below 60%

Note: If an emergency arises during the semester that makes fulfillment of class requirements difficult, please discuss the situation with me as early as possible, so we can discuss how to resolve the problem and maintain your good standing. Also if you need special assistance, you need to inform me on the first day of class.

Academic honesty: Students should follow the University regulations regarding academic integrity which are laid out in the *Student Handbook*. Students are strongly advised to read and familiarize themselves with these regulations. If students violate standards of academic honesty -i.e., by cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, or academic interference- they will get a failing grade for the class and may face expulsion from the University.

Required Texts:

1. Janda, Kenneth, Jeffrey M. Berry, and Jerry Goldman. 2007. *The Challenge of Democracy* 9th edition. New York: Houghton Mifflin. ²
2. Ellis, Joseph J. 2000. *Founding Brothers*. New York: Vintage Books.
3. Price, David E. 2004. *The Congressional Experience*. 3rd edition. New York: Westview Press ³
4. Wattenberg, Martin P. 2007. *Is Voting for Young People?*. New York: Pearson Longman.

¹I borrowed this idea from Professor Bruhl's syllabus.

²You may use earlier edition.

³These 2 books and the related essay questions are borrowed from professor John Geer, who is Professor in the Department of Political Science at Vanderbilt University. His syllabus is available at <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/home/htdocs/psci/geer/docs/psci100f06.pdf>.

COD below refers to *The Challenge of Democracy* and BB to Blackboard.

Reading schedule⁴

Week 1 (Aug. 28): Introduction and Theory of Democracy

Reading assignment: COD chapter 1

Week 2 (Sept. 4): Theory of Democracy (cont'd) and the Constitution

Reading assignment: COD chapters 2 and 3, Articles of Confederation and the U.S. Constitution

Week 3 (Sept. 11): Federalism, Ellis' book

Reading assignment: COD ch. 4

Ellis' *Founding Brothers* pp 3-205. Essay question (Due on Sept 13): Were the founding fathers men of character and not driven by personal political ambition?

Week 4 (Sept. 18): Public opinion and the mass media

Reading assignment: COD ch. 5 and ch. 6

Week 5 (Sept 25): Parties and lecture by an outside speaker

Reading assignment : COD ch. 7

Week 6 (Oct 2): Midterm review, Mid-term

Week 7 (Oct 9): Voting, and Campaigning

Reading assignment: COD ch. 8, and 9

Week 8 (Oct 16): Youth voting and Interest groups.

Wattenberg's *Is Voting for Young People?*

Bartel's article, which is available on Blackboard.

Essay question (Due Oct. 16): Do we have hope for the American youth to be able to fulfill their duty as citizens in a democratic society?

Week 9 (Oct 23): The Presidency, and Bureaucracy

Reading assignment: COD ch. 12 and 13.

⁴This schedule is subject to change according to the progress of the class.

Week 10 (Oct 30): Congress, and Price's book

Reading assignment: COD ch. 11 and Price's entire book.

Price's *The Congressional Experience* Essay question: Does Congress function as a democratic institution?

Week 11 (Nov 6): The Courts, National Student Issues Convention (Nov 9)

Reading assignment: COD ch 14,

Week 12 (Nov 13): The Courts (cont'd) and Civil liberties

Reading assignment: COD ch 14 and COD ch 15.

Week 13 (Nov 20): Civil Rights, Video

Reading assignment: COD ch. 16.

Week 14 (Nov 27): Economic Policy, Domestic Policy

Reading assignment: COD ch. 17, 18, and 19.

Week 15 (Dec 4): Foreign Policy, final review

Reading assignment: COD ch. 20.

Dec 11: Final exam