Louisiana State University
Political Science 2051:
Introduction to American Government
Fall 2012

Instructor: Jonathan LeBlanc
Class location: 218 Coates Hall
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Office hours: MWF – 10:30-11:30 am, or by appointment

This semester, we will be undertaking a scientific–philosophical examination of the basic features of American government. Because the American regime was founded upon philosophical grounds, we'll begin the semester by briefly looking at some of those foundational documents, so that we may begin to see how those ideas have shaped the American regime and way of life. Once we have restored to our sight the view from our nation's founding, we will proceed to examine our government's structure and institutions. And we will definitely be looking into the many and varied relationships between the American (national/Federal) government on the one hand, and both lower (state and local) governments and foreign governments on the other. By the end of the semester, you will have gained a more sophisticated, political-scientific perspective on American politics than you had going into this semester, and should be able to confront and analyze difficult problems, such as those raised in upper-level political science classes, or in any of the arts and sciences disciplines.

Prescribed Reading

Wilson, American Government (Brief Version)
Lasser, Perspectives on American Government
Reading selections posted on Moodle (marked with *)

General Education Requirement

This course is applicable to the University’s General Education Requirement for the social sciences, and as such, it embraces the fundamental aims of a classical liberal education. Such an education seeks to free our minds from the tyranny of unexamined opinion, and enable us to make intelligent, free choices about the ends and means of both private and public life. This course will not only illuminate some of the permanent questions of human existence in community (through the study of certain factual elements of American Government), but will have great relevance to contemporary problems as well.
Grades

Scale: 100-90 = A  
  89-80 = B  
  79-70 = C  
  69-60 = D  
  59-   = F

Rubric: quizzes – 20% (four quizzes; 5 points each; 20 points total)  
  short paper – 20% (one paper, 20 points)  
  midterm – 20% (20 points)  
  final – 40% (40 points)

Course Requirements:

Participation: The study of American politics cannot be done in isolation. Only by entering into the conversation among learners (some more experienced than others) can a genuine understanding of the essential problems of American political life be achieved. Therefore you must attend class every day, having read the assigned text carefully, and be prepared to respond to the comments of your teacher and fellows. A few additional points: 1) please bring the book that we will be discussing with you to class every day; 2) laptops will not be allowed in class except for official note-takers; and 3) please turn off cell phones. If you have a documented disability, you may contact the Office of Disability Services at disability@lsu.edu, and they will assist you in bringing it to my attention. I will make every effort to accommodate you.

Quizzes/Short Papers: There will be four quizzes (5 questions each) and one short paper. The quizzes will be multiple choice, and the papers will be due in class; no e-mail submissions or papers left in my mailbox will be accepted. You'll have plenty of advance notice before quizzes are given and papers are due. I will give you some guidance on writing papers for this course before the first one is due, as well as a topic for each of the two assignments. The papers are intended simply to give you some practice in focusing your interpretation of the texts and writing just a few paragraphs on your interpretation.

Midterm and Final Exams: The midterm and final exams will be in essay format, which will be explained to you in class. The final will be cumulative, but the major emphasis will be on material covered after the midterm.

Academic Integrity

I take academic integrity very seriously. Plagiarism is a serious breach of trust; it undermines the entire academic enterprise, and is akin to theft of intellectual property. Section 8.1 of the LSU Code of Student Conduct governs our scholarly practice. http://www.lsu.edu/judicialaffairs/code.htm
Tentative Schedule: (* - selections will be posted on Moodle)

Introduction to the Course: Our course of study

Monday, August 20th – Introduction to the course (syllabus and course policies)

The Foundational Documents of the American Regime

Wednesday, August 22nd – The Declaration of Independence*, The U.S. Constitution*

The Debate over the Constitution, its Power, and Democracy.

Friday, August 24th – Federalist #’s 1, 10, 47, 48, and 51*

Monday, August 27th – Anti-Federalist, “Brutus No.1”* 

Wednesday, August 29th – Wilson, American Government, Chapters 1 and 2

Friday, August 31st – Wilson, American Government, Chapter 3

Monday, September 3rd – Labor Day, NO CLASS

Wednesday, September 5th – Lasser, Perspectives, Chapter 2:
  Herbert Storing, “What the Anti-Federalists Were For”
  Federalist # 45
  Berkland and Waterman, “Is Federalism the Reason for Policy Failure…”
  Barron, “Reclaiming Federalism”

Politics and the Institutions of the American Regime

Friday, September 7th – Wilson, American Government, Chapter 4

Monday, September 10th – Lasser, Perspectives, Chapter 5:
  Alexis De Tocqueville, “Democracy in America”
  David Brooks, “One Nation, Slightly Divisible”

Wednesday, September 12th – Wilson, American Government, Chapter 5

Friday, September 14th – Lasser, Perspectives, Chapter 6:
  Schattsneider, “The Scope and Bias of the Pressure System”
  Hoersting, “Corporate Campaign Speech is Free Speech”

Monday, September 17th – Wilson, American Government, Chapter 6
Wednesday, September 19th – Lasser, Perspectives, Chapter 7:
Justice Hugo Black, New York Times Co. v. United States
The Media Research Council, “The Liberal Media Exposed”
Eric Alterman, “What Liberal Media?”
Tommy Christopher, “Inside the White House Press Corps”
White House Press Briefing, January 20th, 2010

Friday, September 21st – Wilson, American Government, Chapter 7

Monday, September 24th – Lasser, Perspectives, Chapter 8:
John Aldrich, “Why Parties?”
Gelman and Sides, “The Story Behind Obama’s Victory”
James R. Stoner Jr., “In Defense of the Electoral College”

Wednesday, September 26th – Wilson, American Government, Chapter 8

The Congress

Friday, September 28th – Wilson, American Government, Chapter 9

Monday, October 1st – Lasser, Perspectives, Chapter 9:
Federalist #’s 55 and 57
Binder and Mann, “Slaying the Dinosaur…”
Frentzel, “Defending the Dinosaur…”

The President

Wednesday, October 3rd – Wilson, American Government, Chapter 10

Friday, October 5th – Lasser, Perspectives, Chapter 10:
Federalist # 70
Neustadt, “Presidential Power”
Tulis, “The Two Constitutional Presidencies”

Monday, October 8th – Lasser, Perspectives, Chapter 10 cont:
Hardin, “The Crisis and its Cure”
Schlesinger, “Leave the Constitution Alone”

The Judiciary

Wednesday, October 10th – Wilson, American Government, Chapter 12

Friday, October 12th – No Class, professor out of town

Sunday, October 14th – Midterms due by midnight

Monday, October 15th – Lasser, Perspectives, Chapter 12:
Federalist # 78
Chief Justice Marshall, Marbury v. Madison
Wednesday, October 17th – Crawford, Chapter 7
Denniston, “From Rehnquist to Roberts”
Bazelon, “O’Connor vs. Kennedy…”

Friday, October 19th – No Class, Fall Break

Monday, October 22nd – Crawford, “Concluding Remarks”
Kelo v. City of New London, Justices Stevens and Thomas

Ethics and the Practice of Law

Wednesday, October, 24th –

Friday, October 26th –

Monday, October 29 –

Wednesday, October 31st –

Friday, November 2nd –

Monday, November 5th –

Wednesday, November 7th –

Ethics and Health

Friday, November 9th –

Monday, November 12th –

Wednesday, November 14th –

Friday, November 16th –

Monday, November 19th –

Wednesday, November 21st through Sunday, November 25th, No Class – Thanksgiving Holiday

Monday, November 26th –

Final Thoughts and Final Exams

Wednesday, November 28th –

Friday, November 30th – Review for final exam

Saturday, December 8th – Final Exam, 12:30 PM-2:30 PM

Have a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

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