POLITICAL SCIENCE 2051
AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
Fall 2008

Professor Betina Cutaia Wilkinson
POLI 2051, Section 3
MWF 2:40-3:30pm
113 Lockett Hall

Office Hours:
Mon. & Thurs. 12-2pm/ by appointment
318 Stubbs Hall
Email: bcutaia1@lsu.edu

Course Description:

This course is designed to introduce students to the fundamentals of American government and politics. The first part of the course examines the ideological, historical, socioeconomic, and constitutional contexts of politics in the United States. The second part explores public opinion and the mass media and components of the political process including interest groups, political parties, and elections. The third part focuses on the institutions of government (executive, legislative, and judicial branches) that create and implement public policies. The majority of our time will be spent on national-level politics, but aspects of state and local governments will be incorporated throughout the semester.

As a General Education Course, POLI 2051 classes are designed to address the following General Education outcomes:

- A familiarity with the nature and function of the social sciences
- An appreciation of the methods of critical inquiry
- An understanding of diversity of cultures across time and space

Required Texts

Two texts are available for purchase in the bookstore:


I highly recommend that you read a daily newspaper. Many newspapers can be accessed on-line for free. For the purpose of this class, I recommend that you read a national newspaper (The New York Times or The Washington Post). Papers can be found at www.nytimes.com or www.washingtonpost.com. Also, if interested, you can sign up to receive these newspapers daily for free by email.
**Student Evaluation and Policies:**

Grades for the course are based on a student’s class participation and on performance on quizzes, reaction papers, two in-term exams, and a final exam. Letter grades are determined on the following scale:

- A  90% - 100%
- B  80% - 89%
- C  70% - 79%
- D  60% - 69%
- F  0% - 59%

**Grade Distribution**

- 20%  Exam1
- 25%  Exam2
- 25%  Exam 3
- 20%  Reaction Papers (2 @ 10% each)
- 10%  Quizzes (10 @ 1% each)

100%

**Exams**

There will be three exams given in this course. The exams may be objective, essay, or a combination of both. The final exam will be cumulative but will emphasize the last third of the course. The exams will cover material from class lectures, textbook chapters, supplemental readings, and video presentations. Since material provided in class is not always found in the texts, students are strongly encouraged to attend class regularly. Note that not all of the readings from *You Decide!* are covered in class. Students will only be quizzed and tested on the material covered in the *You Decide!* chapters that are listed on the syllabus.

Makeup exams are only provided for students who can produce a valid excuse (serious illness, family crisis, and legitimate extracurricular activity). For problems that can be anticipated, students must let me know well in advance of the problem AND must provide documented proof as to why they had to miss an exam. For problems that crop up at the last minute, students should contact me as soon as possible AND must provide documented proof as to why they had to miss an exam. **Students who do not meet these conditions will earn a 0 on the exam.** Makeup exams are scheduled for the Friday following the date of the missed exam and are written essay tests.

For students who have special needs or who require accommodations through Disability Services, please advise me of your situation. For accommodations involving the exams, please contact me about the necessary arrangements well in advance of the testing date.

**Quizzes**

Twelve quizzes will be given unannounced throughout the session. The two lowest quiz grades will be dropped. Makeup quizzes will not be given.
Reaction Papers
Students will be required to complete two 2-3 page reaction papers. These papers will be in response to an article that I will provide a week before the due date of the paper or in response to a chapter in the You Decide! book. These papers should focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments presented. The guidelines for submitting a paper are the same as those for taking an exam.

Extra Credit
Voter Registration
Students may earn two (2) points added to their final, raw score. Proof of registration is due November 1st. Register to vote and submit a copy of your voter registration card. (This copy will be returned to protect your privacy). Students who are already registered to vote need only submit a current copy of their registration card.

Essay
If students do not wish to take advantage of the voter registration extra credit opportunity, they may earn two (2) points to their final, raw score by writing a five page essay in response (addressing strengths and weaknesses) to an article provided by the instructor. This essay will be due on November 1st. More information regarding this essay will follow.

Class Debate
On the first day of class, students will choose one topic from a list of controversial topics to debate. The class will be divided into two random groups and the students on the winning team (team with the most points) will receive one extra point added to their final, raw score.

Course Expectations

- **Students are expected to attend all classes.**
  - LSU's policy on class attendance states that "Class attendance is the responsibility of the student. The student is expected to attend all classes. A student who finds it necessary to miss class assumes responsibility for making up examinations, obtaining lecture notes, and otherwise compensating for what they may have missed." Students who do not attend class will find it very difficult to succeed in the course.

- **Students are expected to be on time and seated prior to the beginning of class each day and leave early only for emergencies.** Keep in mind that class will begin promptly at 2:40pm. Picking up books towards the end of the class period but before the professor has finished lecturing is disrespectful and disruptive and will not be tolerated.

- **Students are expected to be respectful and attentive to the instructor and to each other.** Reading the newspaper, doing crossword puzzles, browsing the web, napping, text messaging and other discourteous behavior will NOT be tolerated and can result in dismissal from class. Laptop use is permitted, but only for taking notes. Cell phone use is not permitted during class, and students are expected to keep cell phones on vibrate or turn them off before class begins.

- **Students are expected to respect each others' opinions.** No view is forbidden, but equally important, no view is protected from critical challenges. However, this does not mean personal attacks, humiliations or any other type of discourteous behavior are allowed.

- **Students are expected not to talk during class.** Please be considerate of those around you who are trying to listen and take notes. Disruptive students will be asked to leave immediately.
• Students are expected to keep up with the assigned readings according to the schedule below. This means dedicating substantial time to careful reading and thoughtful reflection before coming to class.

Instructor’s Pledge

• I will be more than happy to help you throughout the semester with any questions. If you do not understand something in class, please raise your hand and ask. If you would rather talk to me personally, please visit me during my office hours or make an appointment. However, do not wait until right before the exams to ask me questions.
• I will consistently maintain office hours and check my email on a regular basis. If at anytime I have to cancel office hours or class, I will notify you by email as soon as possible.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the copying of another’s work without proper citation. This act can result in failure of a class and expulsion from the university. Most plagiarism is the result of carelessness and laziness. Please do not copy directly from the internet or any other reference. Provide references for all of your sources of information and never reprint published material without adequate citation. For more information on plagiarism, or on proper citation form, see the LSU library webpage on plagiarism: http://www.lib.lsu.edu/instruction/plagiarism2.html.

Course Schedule

*Readings are subject to change. I will inform you in class of any changes in the syllabus.*

Class 1 (August 25): Introduction
• Overview of the course and review of syllabus

Class 2 (August 27): Introducing Government in America
• Edwards et. al Ch. 1

Class 3 (August 29): The Constitution
• Edwards et. al Ch. 2

*** September 1: LABOR DAY HOLIDAY ***

*** September 2nd: Final date for dropping courses without receiving a grade of “W” ***

Class 4 (September 3): The Constitution ctd.
• Edwards et. al Ch. 2
• Debate 1 in You Decide!

Class 5 (September 5): The Constitution ctd.
• Edwards et. al Ch. 2
• Debate 1 in You Decide!

Class 6 (September 8): Federalism
• Edwards et. al Ch. 3
Class 7 (September 10): Federalism ctd.
- Edwards et. al Ch. 3
- Debate 2 in You Decide!

Class 8 (September 12): Federalism ctd.
- Edwards et. al Ch. 3
- Debate 2 in You Decide!

Class 9 (September 15): Civil Liberties
- Edwards et. al Ch. 4

Class 10 (September 17): Civil Liberties ctd. and Civil Rights
- Edwards et. al Ch. 4 and 5
- Debate 6 in You Decide!

Class 11 (September 19): Civil Rights ctd.
- Edwards et. al Ch. 5

Class 12 (September 22): Review for Exam 1

Class 13 (September 24): ***EXAM 1***

Class 14 (September 26): American People/Political Culture
- Debate 5 in You Decide!

Class 15 (September 29): Public Opinion and Political Action
- Edwards et. al Ch. 6

Class 16 (October 1): Public Opinion and Political Action ctd.
- Edwards et. al Ch. 6
- Additional Readings

Class 17 (October 3): Public Opinion ctd. and the Mass Media
- Edwards et. al Ch. 6
- Edwards et. al Ch. 7

***FIRST REACTION PAPER DUE***

Class 18 (October 6): Public Opinion ctd. and The Mass Media ctd.
- Edwards et. al Ch. 7
- Additional readings

Class 19 (October 8): Political Parties
- Edwards et. al Ch. 8

***October 10: Fall Break***

Class 20 (October 13): Campaigns and Voting Behavior
- Edwards et. al Ch. 9
- Debate 10 in You Decide!
Class 21 (October 15): Campaigns and Voting Behavior
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 9

Class 22 (October 17): Campaigns and Voting Behavior
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 9

Class 23 (October 20): Interest Groups
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 10

Class 24 (October 22): Review for Exam 2

Class 25 (October 24): Review for Exam 2

Class 26 (October 27): ***EXAM***

Class 27 (October 29): The Presidency
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 12

Class 28 (October 31): The Presidency
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 12
  • Debate 12 in You Decide!

Class 29 (November 3): The Presidency
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 12
  • Debate 12 in You Decide!

Class 30 (November 5): Congress
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 11

Class 31 (November 7): Congress
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 11
  • Debate 11 in You Decide!

Class 32 (November 10): Congress
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 11
  • Debate 11 in You Decide!

Class 33 (November 12): The Federal Bureaucracy
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 13

***SECOND REACTION PAPER DUE***

Class 34 (November 14): The Federal Bureaucracy
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 13

Class 35 (November 17): The Federal Courts
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 14

Class 36 (November 19): The Federal Courts
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 14
Class 37 (November 21): The Federal Courts
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 14

Class 38 (November 24): The Politics of Taxing and Spending
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 15

Class 39 (November 26): Social Welfare Policymaking
  • Edwards et. al Ch. 16

November 28 *** Thanksgiving Holiday ***

Class 40 (December 1): DEBATE

December 3-7 *** Concentrated Study Period ***