Political Science 2052
Honors Introduction to American Government
Fall 2008

Professor: Kevin V. Mulcahy
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Course Objectives and Requirements

This course is designed to introduce various theories on the American system of government. Three major areas relating to America's political system will be highlighted in this course: the Constitution, Political Behavior, and Governmental Institutions. The primary intellectual goals are twofold: (1) The development of a knowledge base concerning a basic understanding of the theoretical foundations and modern realities of government (2) The use of that knowledge base to inform critical thinking as manifested through written assignments and essay examinations.

Course Books

Feingold, Stanley Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Political Issues
Frank, Thomas What's the Matter with Kansas?
Lewis, Anthony Gideon's Trumpet
Patterson, Thomas We the People: A Concise Introduction to American Government
Winkler, Allan Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Making of Modern America

Attendance

The class begins at 6:10pm and ends at 9:00pm. Students should be responsible about arriving on time and staying for the duration of the class. If there are unavoidable circumstances which will require a student to leave early, he or she should notify the instructor beforehand. Since class participation is essential and class attendance is the sine qua non of discussion, more than two absences will result in a reduction of one letter grade per each additional absence.

Grading

The following grading scale will apply to the course:

A: 800 - 716 B: 715 - 636 C: 635 - 556 D: 555 - 476 F: 475 - 0

Assignments

1) There will be one exam at the conclusion of each section for a total of three exams. These exams will cover lecture material, assigned chapters from the textbook and general topical information from other materials read. The final is a last exam rather than a cumulative exam. The dates of the exams are on the syllabus.
(100 points each; 300 points total)

2) Students will complete three papers that “critically analyze” the books assigned. Although these papers should not be book reports, students should provide enough background and detail of the books in order to demonstrate that they read and analyzed the books.

Papers are to be at least 1,500 words in length. Papers are due at the beginning of class.

If students have printer difficulties, they may e-mail their paper to kmulcah@lsu.edu. A letter grade will be deducted for late turn-ins.
(100 points each; 300 points total)

3) There will be a quiz at the beginning of each class session for which chapters from We The People and topics from Taking Sides are assigned. Each quiz will be composed of two portions: a 10-question multiple choice review of the WTP chapter and a 10-point, two-paragraph essay summarizing and examining the main points of the Taking Sides topic, along with the student’s own opinions and analysis.
(20 points each; 200 points total)
Course Outline

Aug. 26
WTP Ch. 1
Introduction / Syllabus
Basic Vocabulary / Concepts of Political Science

Part One: The Constitution and the Judiciary

Sept. 02
WTP Ch. 2
The Principle of Limited Government
The Constitution’s Structural Arrangements I
TS: “Should the Courts Seek the Original Meaning of the
Constitution?”

Sept. 09
WTP Ch. 3
Constitution’s Structural Arrangements II
Federalism
TS: “Should the Government Provide National Health
Insurance?”

Sept. 16
“Gideon’s Trumpet” Papers Due
Video: “The Cold War at Home”

Sept. 23
WTP Ch. 4
Supreme Court
Civil Liberties and Civil Rights
TS: “Is Homosexual Conduct Constitutionally Protected?”

Sept. 30
Exam I
Video: “The Weather Underground”

Part Two: Political Behavior and Socialization

Oct. 07
WTP Ch. 6
Political Socialization and Participation
TS: “Does the Patriot Act Abridge Essential Freedom?”

Oct. 14
WTP Ch. 8
Political Parties, Interest Groups
TS: “Is America Becoming More Unequal?”

Oct. 21
WTP Ch. 7
Voting, Elections, Electoral College
TS: “Should America Adopt Public Financing?”

Oct. 28
“What’s the Matter with Kansas?” Papers Due
Video: “The War Room”

Nov. 04
Exam II
Video: “Scopes and the Monkey Trial”

Part Three: Governmental Institutions and Public Policy

Nov. 11
WTP Ch. 11
Congress
TS: “Is Congress a Broken Branch?”

Nov. 18
WTP Ch. 12
Presidency
TS: “Does the President Have Unilateral War Powers?”

Nov. 25
WTP Ch. 17
Foreign Policy
TS: “Must America Exercise World Leadership?”

Dec. 02
Franklin D. Roosevelt Biography Paper Due
Video: “The Fog of War”

Dec. 09
Final Exam (08:00pm-10:00pm)