Introduction to American Government  
POLI 2051  
Fall 2009 Louisiana State University  
Instructor: Miss Angela Miceli  
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218 Coates Hall T Th 12:10-1:30 PM  
Office Hours: 10:30-11:30 and 1:30 – 2:30 216 Stubbs Hall

The defects and weaknesses of a democratic government may readily be discovered; they can be proved by obvious facts, whereas their healthy influence becomes evident in ways which are not obvious and are, so to speak, hidden. A glance suffices to detect its faults, but its good qualities can be discerned only by long observation. The laws of the American democracy are frequently defective or incomplete; they sometimes attack vested rights, or sanction others which are dangerous to the community; and even if they were good, their frequency would still be a great evil. How comes it, then, that the American republics prosper and continue?

Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, Book I, Chapter 14

I. Course Description and Objective:

This course is designed to give students an introduction to the fundamentals of American politics. The course will focus on the history, theoretical and philosophical ideas, institutions, the cultural traditions, and the societal conditions that function within the American political system. We will focus on the theme of democracy and critically examine the democratic nature of American politics.

II. Required Texts:


These text books are available at all of the university book stores. If you buy a used copy, please make certain that it is the most recent edition since the readings are different in older editions.

III. Course Guidelines and Expectations:

Assignments

Written Homework: Each student will be required to write 2 critical analysis papers of 1 to 2 pages each. These reaction papers will be based upon readings from our Lasser text that we cover in class.* Students must follow the guidelines that will be handed out in class for their papers, and they must sign up on the schedule for two topics. During the week we are discussing the issue, each student will briefly present his or her topic to the
class. Once the schedule is completed, it will be posted on Moodle. These assignments will make up 25% of your grade.

In Class Assignments: Class attendance and participation is mandatory for each class. We will do in-class work, quizzes, and exercises that will make up about 15% of your grade, so it is highly recommended that you to attend each class.

Exams

We will have one midterm (25% of your grade) and one final exam (35% of your grade). The format of these exams will include objective questions and essays.

Grades

Grades will be distributed based on reaction papers, in-class assignments, midterm, and final exam. Grade Scale as follows:

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

Make-Ups/Absences

Make-up exams are given only to students who can produce a valid and documented excuse explaining why they had to miss an exam. You must tell me in advance if you will miss an exam. For problems that arise unexpectedly, get in contact with me as soon as possible. Do not wait to get in touch with me. Students who do not meet these requirements will receive a 0 on the exam.

IV. University Regulations and General Education Requirement

University Regulations on Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct apply to this course. You can view these regulations here:


If a student is found guilty of such misconduct, an F may be given for the assignment or for the course, and expulsion from the course could result.

POLI 2051 fulfills the University required General Education Requirement for the Social Sciences. See additional handout for more information.
V. Assignment Schedule

25 August  Intro to Course, Syllabus

27 August

Part I: Foundations

Wilson Chapters 1 and 2 pp. 1-31
   The Declaration of Independence (Found in Wilson text, Appendix)

1 September

Wilson Chapter 5 pp. 71-79 and chart on p. 80
The Constitution (Found in Wilson text, Appendix)
From Lasser Chapter 1:
   Federalist Paper 10

3 September

From Lasser Chapter 1:
   Federalist 51
From Lasser Chapter 2:
   The Address and Reasons of Dissent of the Minority of the Convention
   Storing, What the Anti-Federalists Were For
   Dinan and Krane, The State of American Federalism

8 September

Wilson Chapter 3 Civil Liberties

10 September

From Lasser Chapter 3:
   John Stuart Mill, On Liberty
   Rosen, The Day After Roe
   Glennon, Terrorism and the Limits of Law

15 September

Wilson Chapter 4 Civil Rights and Chapter 5 pp. 79-89

17 September
From Lasser Chapter 4:
   Plessy v. Ferguson
   Brown v. Board of Education
   Schuck, Affirmative Action
   Miller, We Do

22 September

Wilson Chapter 6 Public Opinion and Media

Part II: Political Behavior

24 September

From Lasser Chapter 5:
   Toqueville, Democracy in America
   David Brooks, One Nations, Slightly Divisible
   Waldman and Green, Twelve Tribes of American Politics

29 September

Wilson Chapter 7 Political Parties and Interest Groups

Fall Holiday

6 October

From Lasser Chapter 6:
   Scattasneider ,The Scope and Bias of the Pressure System
From Lasser Chapter 7:
   New York Times Co v. United States
   Mayer and Cornfield, The New Media
   Goldberg, Bias

8 October

Wilson Chapter 8 Campaigns and Elections

13 October

From Lasser Chapter 8:
   Aldrich, Why Parties?
   Judis, How the Democrats Won
   Stoner, In Defense of the Electoral College

15 October Midterm Exam
Part III: Federal Institutions

20 October
Wilson Chapter 9 The Congress

22 October
From Lasser Chapter 9:
  Federalist Paper 55
  Federalist Paper 57
  Quirk and Binder, Congress and American Democracy: Assessing Performance

27 October
Wilson Chapter 10 The Presidency

29 October
From Lasser Chapter 10:
  Federalist Paper 70
  Richard Neustadt, Presidential Powers
  David Frum, September 11, 2001

3 November
Wilson Chapter 12 The Judiciary

5 November
From Lasser Chapter 12:
  Federalist 78
  Marbury v. Madison
  Denniston, From Rehnquist to Roberts

Part IV: Policy Making

10 November
Wilson Chapter 13 Making Domestic Policy

12 November
From Lasser Chapter 13:
Davidson and Oleszek Domestic Policy Making
Henderson Why Spending Has got to Give

Select Articles on current public policy issues (i.e. health care reform)

17 November

Wilson Chapter 14 Making Foreign and Military Policy

19 November

From Lasser Chapter 13:
Ruebenfeld, The Two World Orders

Select Articles on current foreign policy issues

24 November

Wilson Chapter 15 How American Government Has Changed

Thanksgiving Holiday

1 December

Reading Selection TBA

3 December: Review Session

Final Exam TBA