

POLS3493 X1 American Government – Fall 2008

Prof. Andrew Biro

Class meetings: Mondays & Wednesdays 1:00-2:30; BAC132

Office hours: Mondays & Wednesdays 2:30-4:30 or by appointment; BAC 216

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This course will provide students with an overview of politics and government in the United States. The course will focus on developing two different ways of understanding American government. The first examines the formal institutions of governance in the United States. The second uses a more historical approach to explore the interrelations of the US economy and “politics” (in a broader sense). Both of these approaches will be used throughout the course, to develop contrasting interpretations of similar political phenomena.

The course is divided into three parts:

- I. The architecture of American governance – the “foundations” of American politics - including federalism and the Constitution, the ideological underpinnings of American political life, and a brief survey of the historical development of the American polity and economy.
- II. The institutions and processes of modern American government: the three branches of government, the welfare state, and the role of political parties, the media, and elections in shaping political life.
- III. Contemporary issues in American politics. A key focus in this section will be how economic restructuring and “securitization” are articulated in American politics at both domestic and global levels.

Readings:

There is a reading list for each week, in the course schedule below and on the Acorn page. All readings are **required** unless otherwise indicated. Readings should be completed by the beginning of the week.

- Textbook: Theodore Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, and Kenneth Shepsle, *American Government: Power and Purpose* (10th Brief edition) – available at the Campus Bookstore.
- All other **required** readings are available via the course Acorn page (either a weblink or a document posted directly on the Acorn page). Some links are via the library’s site – to access these you may have to be on the Acadia network.
- Additionally, we will discuss current events in class, including, but not limited to, the elections in November. The New York Times (nytimes.com) and the Washington Post (washingtonpost.com) are the two "newspapers of record" for American politics. Reading at least one of these regularly is a good starting point for keeping up with current events.

Assignments and grade breakdown:

Short reading responses (5x2=10%): Five short written responses to **individual articles** (any required course readings EXCEPT chapters from the Lowi, Ginsberg & Shepsle text). Responses should briefly summarize the article *and* provide some thoughtful reaction to or critique of it. These should be 250-300 words and must be submitted before the Monday class during the week in which the reading will be discussed. Each student can submit a maximum of one reading response (short or long) per week, and late reading responses cannot be accepted under any circumstances, so please plan carefully.

Long reading response (10%): One reading response that discusses **all of the required readings** for one week (including textbook chapters). In addition to summary and response of individual readings, in

this assignment you should make connections between the readings, assessing them comparatively and/or relating them to a common theme. Long reading responses should be about 750-1000 words, and must be submitted before the Monday class during the week in which those readings will be discussed. Each student can submit a maximum of one reading response (short or long) per week, and late reading responses cannot be accepted under any circumstances, so please plan carefully.

Essay (25%): A 10 page (2500 word) essay. Topics will be announced shortly. The essay will be due on Wednesday November 19.

Exam (30%): A final exam, during the exam period, covering material from the entire course. The exam schedule will be announced in late September.

Election Simulation and Simulation Reports (15%): Assignments related to the election simulation will count for 15% of the total mark. More details about the election simulation will be provided shortly.

Class Participation (10%): Participation in general class discussions.

Bonus (1%): Given to the student(s) who correctly predicts the outcome of the Presidential election in the most states (predictions must be submitted no later than Monday, Nov. 3rd).

Detailed course schedule:

Sept. 3 Introduction to the course

Part I. Foundations of American Politics

Sept. 8 & 10 The Founding and the Constitution

Lowi, Ginsberg & Shepsle, ch.2-3 and Appendix

Howard Zinn, "Columbus, the Indians, and Human Progress"

Sept. 15 & 17 Individualism, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights

Lowi, Ginsberg & Shepsle, ch.4

Mike Davis "Los Angeles: Civil Liberties Between the Hammer and the Rock"

Ian Speirs, "Humiliated, Angry, Ashamed, Brown"

Sept. 22 & 24 The Civil War, Modernization, and the Development of Capitalism

Barrington Moore, "The American Civil War: The Last Capitalist Revolution"

Part II. Institutions and Processes of American Politics

Sept. 29 & Oct. 1 Three Branches of Government

Lowi, Ginsberg & Shepsle, ch. 5,6,8

Oct. 6 & 8 The Welfare State

Lowi, Ginsberg & Shepsle, ch.13

Jacob Hacker, "Bringing the Welfare State Back In"

(Oct. 13 – Thanksgiving – no classes) Oct. 15 Political Parties

Lowi, Ginsberg & Shepsle, ch.11

Marty Cohen et al, "Political Parties in Rough Weather"

Mike Davis, "What's Wrong with America?"

Oct. 20 & 22 – Public Opinion and the Media

Lowi, Ginsberg & Shepsle, ch.9
Gene Weingarten, “Cruel and Usual Punishment”
Douglas Kellner, “The media and the crisis of democracy in the age of Bush 2”
Luc Sante, “Tourists and Torturers”

Oct. 27 & 29 Elections

Lowi, Ginsberg & Shepsle, ch.10
Joel Rivlin, “On the Air: Advertising in 2004 as a Window on the 2008 Presidential Election”
Johsua Green, “The Amazing Money Machine”
And one or both of:
William Chaloupka, “What’s the Matter With Us: The Meaning of Post- 11/2 Politics”
Mark Danner, “How Bush Really Won”

Part III. American Politics in the 21st Century

Nov. 3 & 5 “Domestic” Politics I – Economic Restructuring

Gerard Dumenil & Dominique Levy, “The economics of US imperialism at the turn of the 21st century”
Neil Fligstein & Taekjin Shin, “Shareholder Value and the Transformation of the American Economy, 1984-2001”
Mike Davis, “Who is Killing New Orleans”
Theda Skocpol, “The Missing Middle”
Steven Greenhouse, “Wal-Mart, A Nation Unto Itself”
Robert Kuttner. “Fannies and Shorts: A Brief History”

*Note: Election predictions
due Nov. 3;
Election Day is Nov. 4*

Nov. 10 & 12 “Domestic” Politics II – Security

Adam Liptak, “Inmate Count in US Dwarfs Other Nations”
Glenn Lowry, “America Incarcerated”
Daniel Lazare, “Stars and Bars”
David Schlosberg & Sara Rinfret, “Ecological Modernisation, American Style”
Matthew Rothschild, “The FBI Deputizes Business”
Casey Miner, “The Real-Life Matrix”

Nov. 17 & 19 “Foreign” Policy I – Economic Restructuring

Lowi, Ginsberg & Shepsle, ch. 14
Barbara Epstein, “Not Your Parents Protest”
Leo Panitch & Sam Gindin, “Finance and American Empire”
Barack Obama, “Renewing American Leadership”
John McCain, “An Enduring Peace Built on Freedom”

Note: Essay due Nov. 19

Nov. 24 & 26 “Foreign” Policy II – Security

Samantha Power, “Bystanders to Genocide”
Ralph Peters, “Constant Conflict”
Niall Ferguson, “An Empire in Denial”
Joshua Kurlantzick, “The Decline of American Soft Power”
Michael Cox, “Still the American Empire”

Dec. 1 – Review & Conclusions

Course Policies and Procedures

Plagiarism: The primary function of a university is to produce and disseminate knowledge. Plagiarism – taking someone else’s intellectual work and presenting it as your own – is thus an extremely serious offense and will not be tolerated. Penalties can range from a mark of zero on the assignment in question, to a mark of zero in the course. All violations of academic integrity (plagiarism, cheating) are reported to the Registrar, who maintains a list of students who have been penalized for plagiarism. If you are at all unsure about what constitutes plagiarism, please consult with me, or use the library’s “You Quote It, You Note It” tutorial, available online at <http://library.acadiau.ca/help/tutorials.html>.

Students with Disabilities: If you are a student with a documented disability who anticipates needing accommodations in this course, please inform me after you meet with Jill or Suzanne in Disability/ Access Services, in the Student Resource Centre, lower floor of the old SUB. jill.davies@acadiau.ca 585-1127 or suzanne.robicheau@acadiau.ca 585-1913.

Class Discussions: Learning in this course will occur by having information conveyed to you (via lectures or readings), and through discussion and reaching conclusions (individually and collectively) through dialogue. A fair amount of our class time will be spent in open discussion. In order for these discussions to be successful, a few ground rules need to be observed:

- Discussion must at all times be respectful. Learning cannot happen if we are not prepared to treat everyone in the discussion as deserving of respect, regardless of their background or beliefs.
- Remember that the point of discussion here is not to “win” arguments or debates, but to learn. Sometimes this requires trying to convince people that something they think is wrong, but it always requires listening to understand what others think and why.
- During this course you may be exposed to ideas that you not only disagree with, but that you find unsettling, perhaps deeply so. This is what “education” means: it is an opportunity, not a crisis.
- Opinions expressed should be backed up by reasons. “That’s just my opinion” is not a reason.

Powerpoints: I will post powerpoints after class (usually the same day) to the Acorn page. Please note that downloading and even carefully looking over the slides is NOT a substitute for attending class, listening attentively, and taking notes.

Laptops: can be used in class for note-taking and similar *course-related* activities. Email, messaging, gaming, random net surfing, writing papers for other courses, etc. should NOT be done during class time. Attempting to multitask seriously impairs your ability to process new information and to engage in meaningful dialogue (i.e. to learn and do well in this course). And it is rude.

Contacting me: I strongly encourage you to talk to me about any course-related issue, whether you want to talk further about something we discussed in class or in the readings, you anticipate having problems meeting a deadline, or you found something interesting (article, video, website, etc.) that relates somehow to the course. The best way to do this is to see me during my office hours or make an appointment to see me outside of office hours. You can also contact me by phone or email, although you should generally use email only for points of information or for things like scheduling an appointment. For things that will require detailed responses or that will require a back-and-forth conversation, face-to-face conversation is a much more efficient and more effective form of communication. *You should not ask for extensions on assignments via email* unless it is absolutely essential (e.g. you have a highly contagious illness and can’t leave your room). I will generally try to respond to emails within 24 hours (not including weekends), and except for Thursdays, which I am keeping email-free.