

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
AND  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**POSC 150**

**THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM  
INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS**

**Winter, 2003**

**H. T. Reynolds**

**WHY SHOULD I GIVE YOU A BREAK?!**

Let me paraphrase a story Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* told his readers a couple of years ago. Murray, a very religious individual, regularly appeared at his place of worship to ask his creator for helping winning the lottery. Week after week, month after month, Murray beseeched his lord, "Please. As a devoted believer, I faithfully obey your teachings. Why won't you help me win the lottery?" Years passed until one day, after he had again asked for divine assistance, Murray's god spoke:

"You want to know something, Murray?"

"Yes," he quickly replied.

"If you want me to help you, you have to buy a ticket."

This tale summarizes my attitude toward helping you succeed in the course. If you want my assistance or understanding, you have to "buy a ticket." You can start by reading this course guide very carefully. Then make sure you come to class **every** day. And read the attendance and writing policies. Ask if you have questions.

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## POLITICAL SCIENCE 150 AT A GLANCE

### IMPORTANT NUMBERS

Class voice mail for weather and other  
announcements: 80433

Class internet site:

<http://www.udel.edu/htr/American/>

Instructor e-mail: [htr@udel.edu](mailto:htr@udel.edu)

Department phone: 831-2235

Instructor phone: 831- 1940

**Goals:** Since politics and the American political system are badly misunderstood by most citizens, I want to offer interpretations and analyses that may clarify some important events and practices. Note, however, that this is not a civics course. If it's not one of the best courses you've taken, I'll be disappointed.

**Questions:** The course raises several issues, including among others:

- How *desirable* and *necessary* are governments;
- *What is meaningful* democracy;
- The true relationship between business- and government;
- How to understand the *language* of politics;
- The role of the media in shaping opinions and determining the *political agenda*;
- Why the presidency can be considered a "sideshow" in the political system;
- The truth behind taxes and government spending;
- The future of social security;
- The death penalty.

**Requirements:**

**Attendance:** Attendance is **always** required. Since you can't pass the course without attending each time, don't take it if you can't meet this obligation.

**Reading:** Two very interesting paperbacks; articles in the Cyber Reserve Room, and a text for background information.

**Tests:** two (2) tests counting 40 percent each.

**Assignments:** three short assignments worth in total 20 percent.

**Electronic (E- )mail:** No credit but required. Each person is expected to use electronic mail daily.

**COURSE PROCEDURE:**

Unlike many college courses this one will not be a "survey" of or an introduction to the topic. Instead, it offers an opportunity to explore in depth and systematically some rather sophisticated arguments, interpretations and controversies. **Hence, do not think of this as a traditional survey or introductory course. It's intended audience is college students.**

Each day I will present a lecture and lead a discussion that deals with a specific aspect of American government and politics. It is important to realize right now that the lectures and discussions will not summarize the readings nor describe the nuts and bolts of governmental bodies such as the Supreme Court or the presidency. You can and should obtain that information on your own (see below). Instead we will critically interpret and evaluate significant parts of the political system. In the process I will try to debunk numerous deeply held but very misleading beliefs people have about how politics works in this country. Some of my remarks may seem unsettling if not outrageous. Still, my mission as an educator is to challenge your basic beliefs, arouse your intellectual curiosity, and encourage you to think for yourselves.

**READINGS:**

Unless otherwise noted books are available in the University Bookstore and in downtown Newark shops.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

- Elizabeth Drew, *The Corruption of American Politics*, Chapters 1 through 9 for the first test (see below) and Chapters 10 through 15 for the second exam. You should become familiar with the main "characters," many of whom are still active in Congress and politics today. Use the Index as a guide to who is significant: the more citations, the more important.
- Robert Heilbroner and Lester Thurow, *Economics Explained*, Newly revised and updated edition (1998). Chapters 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18 for the second test (see below).
- Papers on the course "Cyber Reserve" web site:  
<http://www.udel.edu/htr/American/Texts/reserve.html>

**REQUIRED INDEPENDENT READING:**

- John C. Tucker, *May God Have Mercy*. Read on your own but keep in mind that the second test will include questions on this book..
- *The New York Times*: A daily subscription (Monday through Friday) to the

*Times*. Subscriptions (at a discounted price) are available at the Newark Newsstand located on Main Street, near Rainbow Records. Each test will include a few current events questions. I will offer help, but reading the *Times* regularly is an indispensable preparation.

### **OPTIONAL TEXTBOOK**

- Robert Squire and others, *The Dynamics of Democracy*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition. Buy and use as needed to understand the nuts and bolts of government and political science. The tests will *not* cover the specifics of this book.

You will be told in daily notes what you should be reading.

Keep in mind that the Bookstore returns unsold books to the publisher a few days after the start of the semester. You should not delay purchasing any work you might need later.

### **REQUIREMENTS:**

**E-mail:** Each person is required to have a University of Delaware e-mail account and read it daily. If you, use an other e-mail service (e.g., AOL) be sure to have your University e-mail forwarded to that server.

**Two (2) examinations:** About 60 to 65 percent of the questions will be based on the lectures, films, class handouts, material on the web and e-mail notes. The remainder will cover *American Government, current events*, and the two paper backs. The examination schedule is:

- Test 1: January 17. This exam covers the assigned “text” and “Reserve Room” readings, class discussion, lectures, and notes, videos, and any other relevant material.
- Test 2: February 7. This exam covers the assigned “text” and “Reserve Room” readings, class discussion, lectures, and notes, videos, and any other relevant material. It will also have questions about the book, *May God Have Mercy*.

The class notes and web pages will always tell you specifically what these tests will cover.

### **EXTRA CREDIT:**

**I MAY OR MAY NOT MAKE EXTRA CREDIT ASSIGNMENTS AVAILABLE.**

If you think you might want to explore some of the topics in more detail or feel a need to bolster your grade, read the next paragraph carefully.

I sometimes provide opportunities for extra credit. Some of the assignments can be quite short and count for relatively little. Some, however, involve major research and can raise a grade one or two letters. Note: just because you complete an extra credit project on time you can receive less than the maximum bonus points or none at all. Extra credit is an opportunity, not a guarantee. No matter how long and hard you've worked or how much you "got out" of it I assign points strictly on the basis of what's actually turned in. Also read the instructions carefully. If I ask for even a one- or two-sentence analysis, it must be written in standard English with complete sentences and flawless punctuation. Read the last page's admonish on written work.

### THE VIRTUAL CLASSROOM:

**Electronic Mail:** (No credit but **required**) Each person in the class must read electronic (computer) mail daily. It is an important part of the course. If I send you messages, their content is part of the course requirements, and you are responsible for them on tests.

**Web Page:** I have created a "web page" that contains a great deal of information relevant to the course. You need to "visit" it regularly with **Netscape**, **Internet Explorer**, or an equivalent "browser."

**Internet: <http://www.udel.edu/htr/American/>**

### GRADING:

The plus-minus system is in effect in this course. See the web page for more details.

### VOICE MAIL:

I have established a voice mail system for the course. You call from anywhere to listen to important announcements such as whether or not class will be canceled due to inclement weather. The voice mail box number is **80433**. To reach it dial (302) 831-4000 and, depending on where you are calling from, follow the instructions to leave a message in mail box 80433.

### INFORMATION ABOUT AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS:

Very good sources of information about American government are opinion magazines such as *The National Review* (conservative) and *The Nation* (liberal). These and dozens of others are available in the Newark Newsstand on Main Street. I strongly encourage everyone to look at them from time to time. In addition, you should know that the Newsstand is one of the finest on the East coast and contains a wealth of material on American politics and culture. Anyone who really wants to understand what's going on in the world should spend time looking through this store's magazine racks. We are lucky to have such an establishment in our area; not many communities do.

I also encourage everyone to listen to National Public Radio (NPR), watch the Public Broadcast System (PBS), especially the “New Hour” with Jim Lehrer (6:00 pm week nights) , and Sunday morning news programs. CSPAN, the cable networks-sponsored news channel, is also a great source, especially if you know what to look for.

You will soon discover that America’s main mass media sources do not do a very good job of informing citizens about their government and the world. Forget about CNN and MSNBC.

Additional sources of information are also available on the class internet page. Go to [www.udel.edu/American/Texts/information.html](http://www.udel.edu/American/Texts/information.html)

**You should have a good dictionary. Use it if you don't understand any terms.**

#### **OFFICE:**

My office is in 434 Smith Hall. I will there briefly for an hour or so after class except on Friday. If these times are not convenient, I am more than willing to meet at other hours of mutual convenience.

Use e-mail or voice mail to schedule an appointment. The address is [htr@udel.edu](mailto:htr@udel.edu).

#### **ATTENDANCE:**

**PLEASE READ THESE PARAGRAPHS CAREFULLY.**

**My attendance policy is very simple. Attendance is always required.**

**There are no make-up tests or reissuing of handouts except for those reasons specifically designated in the student handbook as “excused absences.”<sup>1</sup> Excused absences include**

- **religious holidays;**
- **participation in athletic or “other extracurricular activities in which students are official representatives of the University”;**
- **“serious illness or death within a student's family”;**
- **“serious illness of the student (e.g., hospitalization, surgery, or protracted medical illness or convalescence)”;**
- **“military duty in the National Guard or active reserve.”**

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<sup>1</sup>*Academic Regulations for undergraduates .*  
( [www.udel.edu/catalog/current/ugacadregs.html#basicpols](http://www.udel.edu/catalog/current/ugacadregs.html#basicpols) )

**Nothing else counts as an excused absence. How do you get an excuse?**

**“To validate such absences, the student should present evidence to the Dean's Office of his or her college...Supportive evidence will [also] be provided on the student's request by Student Health Services directly to the respective Dean.”<sup>2</sup> Participation in religious holidays, athletic, or extracurricular activities “shall be recognized as excused absences when the student informs the instructor in writing during the first two weeks of the semester of these planned absences for the semester. Absences due to similar events that could not have been anticipated earlier in the semester will be recognized as excused absences upon advanced notification of the instructor by an appropriate faculty advisor or athletic coach. The Dean's Office will then provide a letter of verification to all of the student's instructors for the term.”<sup>3</sup>**

**Hence, you need to see your dean. Please do not come to me directly. Bringing me a note saying simply that you visited the infirmary is not sufficient. Similarly, verbal or e-mail explanations are not acceptable.**

**Please have the documentation with you *before* talking to me about missed work. I appreciate being notified ahead of time via e-mail or in person, but you still need official documentation for makeups. Note also that I should have this information as soon as possible and certainly no later than 24 hours after you return. Do not wait longer.**

**In short, the policy is very simple: don't miss class. Think of it this way: if what you missed is important enough to ask for a make up, then you need to see your dean.**

#### **OTHER COURSE GUIDELINES:**

See the last page for rules pertaining to the course. These guidelines are important and you should make sure that you understand them. In particular, any behavior that disrupts the class--coming in late or leaving early or talking when some one is asking a question--will not be tolerated. Please cooperate in making this class an enjoyable learning experience for everyone. If you don't feel that you can live with these requirements and constraints, you should not enroll.

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<sup>2</sup>*Academic Regulations for undergraduates .*  
( [www.udel.edu/catalog/current/ugacadregs.html#basicpols](http://www.udel.edu/catalog/current/ugacadregs.html#basicpols))

<sup>3</sup>*Academic Regulations for undergraduates .*  
( [www.udel.edu/catalog/current/ugacadregs.html#basicpols](http://www.udel.edu/catalog/current/ugacadregs.html#basicpols))

**LIST OF TOPICS**

**You will always be told where you should be in the reading.**

**At any time I may pause to discuss important current events or policy controversies.  
(The topics will not necessarily be discussed in this order, and some may be omitted entirely while others are added.)**

**PART I**

**INTRODUCTION TO THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM**

Topic 1: Current Issues in American Politics

Topic 2: A Case for (Large) Government

**PART II**

**Who Governs the United States?**

Topic 3: Democracy as Accountability

Topic 4: Minority Rights in the Age of Global Terrorism

Topic 5: State Theory: The relationship Between Capitalism and Government

**PART III**

**The Constitutional and Philosophical Context**

Topic 6: The Public Philosophy: General-Welfare Liberalism

Topic 7: The Constitution: A Shattered Sword

Topic 8: The Real Structure of Government

**PART IV**

**The Opinion and Electoral Context**

Topic 9: The Mass Media in American Politics

Topic 10: Campaigns, Elections, Participation, and Accountability

Topic 11: The American Political Party System

**PART V****Formal and Informal Institutions**

- Topic 12: Money and Politics
- Topic 13: Why Congress Is the Most Powerful Branch
- Topic 14: The Presidency: Overrated Power?

**PART VI****Public Policies: Who Benefits, Who Makes Them**

- Topic 15: The Federal Budget
- Topic 16: Social Insurance
- Topic 17: The Death Penalty

**POSC 150 COURSE GUIDELINES:**

In the interests of making the course as beneficial as possible for everyone concerned, I ask that these guidelines and rules be followed. If you have any questions whatsoever please ask.

**ATTENDANCE:** I cannot stress strongly enough the importance of class attendance. Do everyone a favor, especially yourself. Do Not Cut Class! Note that you probably can't get a very good grade unless you take most (at least 90%) of the quizzes.

**HONESTY:** The presence of your name on a test (or any other assignment) is, in effect, a statement that the work is yours and yours alone. It is a serious breach of academic honesty to represent someone else's thoughts or efforts as your own. Make sure that you work completely alone.

The point is that a university community ultimately depends on truth and honesty. It is your responsibility to live up to that principle. Failure to adhere to it is, in my opinion, a major wrongdoing and will not be tolerated.

If you have any questions or problems in this regard, please direct them to me. You should also be familiar with the University's publication Academic Honesty and Dishonesty

**BEHAVIOR:** In the interest of fairness and respect to all, please do not engage in any

activity that disturbs the classroom learning experience. This includes among other things: bringing pets or children to class; reading newspapers or magazines; listening to portable radios however small and unobtrusive; talking when someone is asking a question; or operating a cell phone.

It is especially important that you do not arrive late or leave early. Doing so is extremely distracting to me and others. I consider it a classroom disruption.

**WRITING:**

Since this is a large class, since I grade most of the written work myself, since I expect college-level writing even for small assignments, and since I'm busy like everyone else, I follow this rule when grading assignments: **I read a paper until I come across the fifth egregious typo or grammatical and then I quit and assign little or no credit.**