

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

POSC 105

THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

HELPING THOSE WHO HELP THEMSELVES

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 asking once more 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 and coming to class every day.

POLITICAL SCIENCE 105 AT A GLANCE

IMPORTANT NUMBERS

Class voice mail for special weather
announcements: 80433

Class internet site:

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

Instructor e-mail: htr@udel.edu

Department phone: 831-2235

Instructor phone: 831- 1940

Goals: I want this course to be an exiting and challenging interpretation of the American political system. If it's not one of the best courses you've taken, I'll be disappointed.

Themes: The courses asks everyone to think critically about the role of government in American society. Many people, perhaps a majority, feel that in the second half of the 20th century government has grown too big, too impersonal, too remote from its citizens to be compatible with individual liberty and economic freedom. Indeed, nearly everyone political leaders and institutions and clamor for changes in both. Yet the political system, one can argue, must be strong and adaptable enough to meet the challenges of the 21st century. What sorts of reforms, then, are needed? Understanding how the American system works will help us find answers.

Requirements:

Reading: Two very interesting paperbacks in addition to modest reading in a text.

Tests: Two (2) tests counting 35 percent each.

Quizzes: Any where from one to ten short, in-class quizzes that cover material discussed in class the day of the quiz. (10 percent of total grade)

Learning activities:

- ✓Clipping file of *New York Times* articles (20 percent).
- ✓Does your representative represent you? (5 percent)
- ✓Political action committees and soft money. (5 percent)

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

Attendance: Attendance is **always** required. See the below.

Extra Credit: Opportunity to earn up to 20 points of extra credit.

THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

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 study systematically some rather sophisticated concepts and controversies.

Each day I will 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. Instead we will critically interpret and evaluate a significant facets 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.

The readings merely supply sufficient information to make these lectures informative and interesting. The tests and quizzes, which cover every aspect of the course including readings, lectures, class discussions, handouts, films, and current events, are intended to clarify the major ideas and arguments made during the semester.

READINGS:

Books are available in the University Bookstore unless otherwise noted.

Required Class Reading:

- Thomas Patterson, *We the People: A Concise Introduction to American Politics* 2nd Edition.
- *The New York Times*: A daily subscription (Monday through Friday) to the *Times*. Subscriptions (at a discounted price of about \$15) are available at the Newark Newsstand, also located on Main Street, near Rainbow Records.

Required Independent Reading:

- Alex Kotlowitz, *There Are No Children Here*. The first test includes questions about this book.
- Robert Heilbroner and Peter Bernstein, *The Debt and The Deficit*. The second test covers the entire book.

Optional Independent Reading:

- John C. Tucker, *May God Have Mercy*. An optional exam will be on this book will be included on the second test. (You can earn up to 10 additional points or percent on this test.)

We'll devote some extra or out of class time to the Heilbroner and Bernstein work. The others you can read on your own. The text serves mainly as a reference.

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

REQUIREMENTS:

Your understanding of the material is assessed in several ways:

Two (2) examinations: Each test counts 35 percent. They cover the independent and text readings, lectures, class handouts and notes, films, current events, information on the class web page; and any other matter that comes up in class. The examination schedule is:

- Test 1: January 15: Coverage: Kotlowitz, *There Are No Children Here* (Entire book); relevant chapters of Patterson, *We the People*; films; lectures; information on the class web page; and related material.
- Test 2: February 5: Coverage: Heilbroner and Bernstein, *The Debt and Deficit* (Entire book); relevant chapters of Patterson, *We the People*; films; lectures; information on the class web page; and related material. Also an extra credit test on *May God Have Mercy*.

Note: you will be told in more detail (including page numbers) what each test covers in case we get ahead or behind schedule.

- **Class Quizzes:** (10 percent) There will be 1 to 10 short-answer quizzes given randomly during the term. They will cover only material discussed during class. Their purpose is to make certain that you understand important ideas and concepts and that I have explained them clearly.
- **“Active” learning:**
 - ✓ **Current Events Clipping file:** (20 percent) Although the lectures do not cover current events per se, a knowledge of contemporary political affairs is essential to understanding many of the points that I will be making during the semester. Therefore, you are required to read a major national newspaper, *The New York Times*. Subscriptions are available from the

Newark Newsstand on Main Street. Discounted subscriptions cost about \$15.00

To meet this requirement you should maintain a "clipping file" of one or two major domestic (not international or state or local) issues. President Clinton's trial, taxes, health care, the economy, campaign finances, the federal budget, congressional and presidential politics, "Election 2000," and the like would make suitable topics. The file should contain at least **four to eight** separate articles **per week** from the *Times*. (**Important: do not use the News Journal or the Wall Street Journal.**). Moreover, I want the articles in your file to be cut from the original papers or from the New York *Times* web site and then neatly pasted or taped on 8 ½ X 11 inch plain paper. **DO NOT PHOTO COPY THE ARTICLES.** Your collection should be bound in a three ring binder. Please do not hand in a sloppy folder of miscellaneous articles gathered together at the last minute. **Clearly note the date the article was published, not written..**

Getting used to reading a major national newspaper is an important part of a college education, and everyone should take this opportunity seriously.

The clipping file is due January 29, 1999 in class at the latest.

- ✓ Use the internet to see how closely your senator or representative stands to your opinions on several key issues. You can use the class web site to find make the comparison. (5 percent) **Due January 27 in class.**
- ✓ Do interest groups "buy" votes in Congress? Although you won't be able to answer definitively, you can at least explore the issue by PAC examining contributions to various senators and representative. The class web site will have a page devoted to this analysis. (5 percent) **Due in class February 3.**

THE INTERNET:

Electronic Mail: (No credit but required) Each person in the class must know how to use electronic (computer) mail. It is an important part of the course. (In fact, I may ask you to submit some quizzes via e-mail.) Electronic mail provides a convenient way to ask questions, express opinions, and so forth.

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

NOTE:

IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT EACH PERSON GO TO SMITH HALL OR ANOTHER "SITE" AND MAKE SURE HIS OR HER E-MAIL ACCOUNT IS ACTIVATED. DO THIS TODAY! ASK CONSULTANTS FOR HELP DOING THIS.

I believe that you will get more out of the class and your college experience if you think of this part of the course not as a requirement but as an opportunity.

GRADING:

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

E-MAIL ADDRESS AND WEB (INTERNET) PAGE:

E-mail: *htr@udel.edu*

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

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.

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.

Additional sources of information are also available on the class internet page. Go to 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 be there briefly for about half an hour after class on Monday, Wednesday, and 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 set up an appointment.

ATTENDANCE:

PLEASE READ THESE PARAGRAPHS CAREFULLY

Attendance is always required. There are no make-up tests or reissuing of handouts except for specifically documented medical or other reasons. If you are sick, seek medical care and do not return to class until you feel well enough. Similarly, if you have a family emergency or face some other personal crisis, attend to it. When you feel better or the problem is under control, see me about making up missed work.

Note, however, that if you miss an assignment or a test and want an extension or makeup, you will need to go to your dean to obtain a written excuse explaining exactly why you could not be in class on the specific days and times you were absent. Please do not come to me directly. University policy indicates that you must have your dean's approval (in writing) in order to make up work. This message must state the *specific* dates that you missed. A note saying simply that you visited the infirmary is not sufficient. Similarly, verbal or e-mail explanations are not acceptable. Please have this 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.

Keep in mind that I cannot always keep extra class handouts so if you miss a class for some non-excused reason, you will have to rely on your own resources to obtain copies.

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.

LIST OF TOPICS

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

PART I INTRODUCTORY TOPICS

- Topic 1 The Political System and a Case For Government
- Topic 2: Democracy, and Political Capacity
- Topic 3: Majority Rule and Minority Rights

PART II CULTURAL, PHILOSOPHICAL, AND CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT OF GOVERNMENT

- Topic 4: American Political Culture: General-welfare liberalism
- Topic 5: The Constitutional Context

PART III CITIZENS AND POLITICS

- Topic 6: The Role of the Mass Media in American Politics
- Topic 7: Voting and Elections
- Topic 8: The American Political Party System

**PART IV
INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS**

- Topic 9: Interest Groups and PACs
- Topic 10: Congress
- Topic 11: The President and Bureaucracy

**PART V
POLICY AND CURRENT EVENTS**

- Topic 12: The Federal Budget: Myths and Realities
- Topic 13: The Death Penalty
- Topic 14: Social Security
- Topic 15: Welfare Reform

POSC 105 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.

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 tape recorder.

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.

ATTENDANCE: I cannot stress strongly enough the importance of class attendance. Do everyone a favor, especially yourself. Do Not Cut Class!

Go to American Political System page

Go to H. T. Reynolds page.