

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Posc 150**

TRENDS IN AMERICAN POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

- I. CONTENTS:
- A. Overview of course administration
 - B. Issues in American government and politics
- II. THE COURSE:
- A. What you absolutely must do.
 - 1. Read the syllabus carefully.
 - 2. Attend class regularly
 - 3. Subscribe to the New York *Times* (or at least keep up with current events).
 - 4. Meet deadlines
 - B. Class periods are devoted interpretations of American government and politics.
 - 1. It is **not** a systematic review of the parts of American government.
 - C. Readings:
 - 1. Main “texts”:
 - i. Elizabeth Drew, *The Corruption of American Politics*
 - ii. Robert Heilbroner and Lester Thurow, *Economics Explained*
 - iii. Web readings in the “Cyber Reserve Room”
 - 2. Independent reading:
 - i. Robert Tucker, *May God Have Mercy*
 - ii. The New York Times
 - 3. Optional text: Squire and others, *Dynamics of Democracy*, 4th edition.
 - 4. You’ll always be told where to be in the reading.
 - D. Current Events
 - 1. Please! Purchase a subscription to the New York Times from the Newsstand on Main Street. (Near Rainbow Records.)
 - E. Web site and e-mail.
 - 1. If you don’t pick up something, lose it, or just want a copy get it at www.udel.edu/htr/American
 - 2. Review questions are not included. You have to come to class for those.
- III. ISSUES IN AMERICAN POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT
- A. ✱ The role of government in society.
 - 1. How much government is necessary and desirable.
 - 2. September 11th and recent elections
 - B. ✱ Building and maintaining democracy.
 - 1. ○ Democracy means government “by” the people.
 - i. People in general, not just some of them, must be able to make

collective decisions and hold state managers accountable.

- 2. ○ Democracy is in decline
 - i. Note: this an interpretation that not all political scientists accept.
 - ii. Some indicators.
 - 1) ○ Unsatisfactory citizenship.
 - a) ✓ Turnout in elections has decreased more or less steadily over the last 100 years.
 - 2) ○ Elected and administrative officials are increasingly “corrupted” by money.
 - a) ✓ The cost of running for even “minor” offices has skyrocketed.
 - b) ✓ Growth in special interest groups.
 - 3) ○ Low levels of *democratically useful political discourse* and *enlightened understanding*.
 - a) ✓ Impoverished political debate.
 - b) ✓ Americans lack functional understanding of government and politics.
 - c) ✓ Quick poll: how many here know what “switch hitter” and “sacrifice bunt” mean in baseball? Now, how many know what a “progressive” politician stands for?
 - 4) ○ The absence of news in the media.

C. *Confusion about state power and who’s “for and against it.”

- 1. ○ Layers of decision making and types of policies.

D. *Disappointment on the American way of life.

- 1. ○ Growth of the have nots and the disappearance of the middle class.
 - i. ✓ Despite growth in government wealthy as wealthy as ever.
 - ii. ✓ Stagnating wages and family incomes.
 - iii. ✓ Persistent poverty.
- 2. ○ Ethnic diversity.
 - i. ✓ Hispanics rapidly becoming the largest minority.
- 3. ○ Globalization
 - i. The shifting balance between production of information versus material goods creates imbalances and especially anxieties in labor markets.
 - ii. Disruptions in labor markets.

IV. NEXT TIME:

A. Why government is desirable as well as inevitable.

B. Reading:

- 1. Required:
 - i. Start Drew, *The Corruption of American Politics*, say Chapters 1 and 2.



2. Course web site: Cyber Reserve Room, “An Argument for Government.”
(www.udel.edu/American/Texts/needfor.html.)