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Political Science 1602H, Spring 2016
Introduction to American Politics
MWF 11:15-12:05, Oak 201
URL: <http://lms.uconn.edu>

Course Description

This course is designed to serve two primary purposes. First, it will focus on the "nuts and bolts" issues of American government. We will deal with, among other topics, the legislative, executive, judicial, and electoral processes, both as they were designed, and as they work today in the real world. Second, the course should enhance your understanding of the principles underlying the modern system of governance in the United States. You will be asked to step away from the details of contemporary political debates and come to grips with the more fundamental political questions they address—questions that have dominated American political discourse since the founding.

Readings: The following text is required and is available at the Co-op. Readings designated with **(HuskyCT)** in the course outline are available on the HuskyCT website.

- Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore J. Lowi, and Margaret Weir, and Caroline J. Tolbert. 2014/15. *We The People: An Introduction to American Politics* (10th/Core ed.). W.W. Norton & Company. (ISBN13: 978-0-393-93704-6).

Grading and Examinations: (1) writing, quizzes, and class participation 20%; (2) "basics" of American government exams 10%; (3) midterm examination 20%; (4) short essays 20%, (5) final examination 30%.

Outside Talks (2 required): The Department of Political Science will host several talks by visiting scholars this semester (schedule tba). Students are required to attend and write short reactions to at least one of these talks. Students are also required to attend and write short reactions to at least one additional outside talk/event. The second talk can be something that's hosted by the Political Science Department or something on a related topic that's hosted by another unit on campus (e.g., the Human Rights Institute, the History Department, etc.).

Book Club: In addition to the textbook, students will read two additional books they'll choose in consultation with me. Then, on dates to be determined, we'll organize our class meeting as a "book club" at which students will lead the discussion of the book we read for that month.

Accommodations: I will be happy to provide testing accommodations for students with proper documentation from the Center for Students with Disabilities (<http://www.csd.uconn.edu>).

Writing Requirement: All students will complete several short (3-4 page) analytical essays during the semester. Two of these will deal with our "book club" selections. Details on these assignments will be made available later in the semester. Some will be completed in class; others will be submitted via HuskyCT.

Final Examination: All students are required to take the final exam at its scheduled time (the exam schedule will be posted on the registrar's website early in the semester). No exceptions will be made without written approval, in advance, from the Office of Student Services and Advocacy (OSSA). I have no discretion in this matter.

Course Outline

I. Introduction

A. Political Science and the Fundamental Questions of Politics (W1/20, F1/22)

- Review course syllabus.
- Homework Assignments: Visit the course HuskyCT site and complete the student biography assignment before midnight on Sunday, 1/24.
- Readings:
 - *WTP*, pp. 3-17
 - Lincoln, "On the Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions" (**HuskyCT**)
 - King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion and Review Questions: What obligation do citizens have to "obey" the government? "Who governs and to what ends?" Why study American government? What is political science?

II. The Creation and Development of the American Constitutional System

A. The Design of the Constitutional System, Part I: The Founding (M1/25, W1/27, F1/29)

- Readings:
 - **WTP**, ch. 2
 - Declaration of Independence (**WTP**, pps. A1-A3)
 - Federalist #10 (**WTP**, A20-A22)
 - Federalist #51 (**WTP**, A22-A24)
 - Brutus, Antifederalist Essay from October 18, 1787 (**WTP**, A25-A29)
 - Storing, "What the Antifederalists Were For" (**HuskyCT**)
 - "The Address and Reasons of Dissent..." (**HuskyCT**) (*recommended, not required*)
- Discussion Questions: Is the view of human nature espoused in *The Federalist* (and by Madison in particular) an accurate one? How committed were the Founders to the idea of democracy? Summarize the major assertions of the Antifederalists and outline Madison's response(s) to each.

B. The Design of the Constitutional System, Part II: The Judicial Branch & Judicial Review (M2/1, W2/3, F2/5)

- Readings:
 - **WTP**, ch. 15
 - Federalist #78 (**HuskyCT**)
 - *Marbury v. Madison* (**HuskyCT**)
 - Stevens and Thomas, "Should the Constitution . . ." (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: What is judicial review? Contrast Stevens' and Thomas' competing views of constitutional interpretation. What is judicial activism? Judicial restraint?. Does the Supreme Court make public policy? Should it?

C. Constitutional Development Part I: Civil Liberties & the Bill of Rights (M2/8, W2/10, F2/12)

- Readings:
 - **WTP**, pps. 114-134, 144-150
 - Posner, "Security vs. Civil Liberties" (**HuskyCT**)
 - Panos and Schneider, "Church and State in Bloomfield" (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: Identify the various components of the First Amendment. Define incorporation and explain why it is important. Describe the types of expression that are not protected by the First Amendment. Should speech that is considered offensive by some groups be banned? How has the scope of the Bill of Rights been altered since 9/11/01?

Monday, 2/15: "Basics of American Government" Quiz #1 (first 15 minutes of class)

D. Constitutional Development, Part II: Federalism (M2/15, W2/17, F2/19)

- Readings:
 - **WTP**, ch. 3
 - *McCulloch v. Maryland* (**HuskyCT**)
 - Sparer, "Federalism and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act" (**HuskyCT**)
 - Doovere, "President Obama vs. Texas" (**HuskyCT**)
 - Federalist #46 (**HuskyCT**) (*recommended, but not required*)
- Discussion Questions: How has the relationship between the states and the federal government changed from that envisioned by the Founders? What are some of the costs/benefits of current attempts by Congress to return more autonomy to state and local governments? How would the Founders respond to this trend?

E. Constitutional Development, Part III: Democratization (M2/22, W2/24)

- Readings:
 - **WTP**, ch. 8, and pps. 17-24
 - Dahl, "Is the Constitution Democratic?" (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: Trace the growth (and decline) in political participation in the United States. Describe several ways in which the American political system has become more democratic over time.

Friday, 2/26: Midterm Examination (in class)

F. Constitutional Development, Part IV: Civil Rights (M2/29, W3/2, F3/4, M3/7)

- Readings:
 - **WTP**, ch. 5
 - *Brown v. Board of Education* (**HuskyCT**)
 - Coates, "The Case for Reparations" (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: To what extent has federalism aided or impeded the achievement of racial equality in the United States? Describe how (1) constitutional amendments, (2) actions by interest groups, (3) actions by the courts, (4) actions by Congress, and (5) actions by the executive branch furthered the cause of racial equality in the United States over the past 150 years.

III. The People

A. American Political Culture (W3/9, F3/11)

- Readings:
 - **WTP**, pps. 24-32
 - Tocqueville, "Political Association in the United States" (**HuskyCT**)
 - Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" (**HuskyCT**)
 - Huntington, "The Hispanic Challenge" (**HuskyCT**)
 - Citrin, et al., "Testing Huntington" (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: Define political culture. Describe the elements of American political culture observed by Tocqueville in the 1830s. What are the differences between the American political culture observed by Tocqueville and that of today? What elements have changed? Which have remained stable?

March 14-18: Spring Break. No Class Meeting.

B. Ideology and Public Opinion (M3/21, W3/23, F3/25)

- Readings:
 - **WTP**, ch. 6
 - Zaller, "The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion," pp. 6-39 (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: Where do our political attitudes come from? Define ideology. What issues divide the American public? Are UConn students "liberal" or "conservative"?

Monday, 3/28: Basics of American Government Quiz #2 (first 15 minutes of class)

Monday, 3/28: Last day to drop with "W"

IV. Linking the People to Government

A. Parties (M3/28, W3/30, F4/1)

- Readings:
 - **WTP**, ch. 9
 - Fiorina, “America’s Missing Moderates” (**HuskyCT**)
 - Abramowitz, “Polarized or Sorted?—a response to Fiorina (and Fiorina’s rejoinder)” (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: How strong are political parties in the United States? Should they be stronger? What is polarization? Is the electorate becoming more polarized?

B. Campaigns and Elections (M4/4, W4/6, F4/8)

- Readings:
 - **WTP**, ch. 10
 - Jacobson, “How the Economy and Partisanship Shaped the 2012 . . . Election” (**HuskyCT**)
 - Issenberg, “How Obama’s Team Used Big Data to Rally Individual Voters” (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: Why is voter turnout so low and what are the prospects for increased turnout in the future? How do the public opinion “gaps” we identified in the previous section play out on election day? What explains the Democrats’ success in the 2012 elections? Why did their fortunes change in 2014?

C. The Media (M4/11, W4/13)

- Readings for Class:
 - **WTP**, ch. 7
 - Meyrowitz, “Lowering the Political Hero to Our Level” (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: What is the effect of television/radio on American politics? Is it possible to measure this effect scientifically? Is the traditional news media (network evening news, major newspapers, etc.) biased? If so, in what way(s)?

D. Interest Groups (F4/15, M4/18)

- Readings:
 - **WTP**, ch. 11
 - Bartels, “Economic Inequality and Political Representation” (**HuskyCT**)
 - Review *Federalist* #10 (**WTP**, A20-A22)
- Discussion Questions: What are the major types of interest groups and whom do they represent? What explains the explosion of interest groups in recent decades? How do interest groups try to influence the policy making process?

V. The Institutions of Government and the Policy Making Process

A. Congress: Lawmaking, Representation, and Dysfunction (W4/20, F4/22)

- Readings:
 - **WTP**, ch. 12
 - Mann and Ornstein, "Let's Just Say It" (**HuskyCT**)
 - Hetherington, "Why Polarized Trust Matters" (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: To what extent does Congress represent the public interest as opposed to special, or particular interests? What is representation?

B. The Presidency and the Executive Branch (M4/25, W4/27)

- Readings:
 - **WTP**, ch. 13-14
 - Neustadt, "Presidential Power" (**HuskyCT**)
 - Miller, "Have We Reached Peak President?" (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: What are the sources of presidential power? Is the American president "powerful"? Are citizens' expectations about the nature of presidential leadership consistent with the institutional powers of the presidency?

VI. Conclusion: Bringing it all Together

A. Evaluating the American Political System (F4/29)

- Readings:
 - **WTP**, pp. 3-13 (review)
 - Review Meyrowitz, "Lowering the Political Hero to Our Level" (**HuskyCT**)
- Discussion Questions: Is the American political system "broken"? What types of reforms would be likely to produce better governance in the United States?

Final Examination: Visit the Registrar's website at <http://www.registrar.uconn.edu/exams.htm> to access the official final examination schedule. Early exams or makeup exams must be approved by the Office of Student Services and Advocacy. I do not have discretion in this matter.
