

## SYLLABUS

American Government  
(10940 POL K111 T-02)

Three Rivers Community College

Norwich CT

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SPRING 2007

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** Through open discussion of political issues and controversies, this course examines the framework of our democracy. The broad study focuses on the strengths and weaknesses of American national government. We will also explore such topics as election campaigns, political parties, presidential power, and individual liberties.

**REQUIRED TEXT:** Barbour, Christine and Gerald Wright. 2006. Keeping the Republic. CQ Press Brief Edition  
Clued in to Politics 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2006  
Election 2006 - CQ Weekly special edition  
(all above publications sold as a set - ISBN 0872895203)

**OBJECTIVES:** Besides the obvious acquisition of an appreciation and understanding of American politics, this course is specifically tailored to do as Hercule Poirot so often states - "to exercise the little gray cells". I will present varying models of analysis of American government with which you are to conduct your own analyses and assessments of the policymaking process. Most importantly, this course seeks to allow you to develop your own evaluation of what the founding fathers called an "antileadership system of government."

In addition to discussing issues facing America, we will take an intense look at the concept of citizenship. In a democracy, citizenship is more than nationality, more than being a subject. Citizenship is an office, and like other offices, carries with it certain powers and responsibilities. Some critics claim that those powers and responsibilities seem to be lost today. Citizenship must therefore be redefined, away from consent and passivity, toward intelligent criticism. This course and your contributions will allow us to criticize intelligently and become the "vigilant citizenry" of Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton (one of the few points they agreed upon).

The course is essentially divided into five sections, all focusing on "approaching democracy." The first reviews the foundations of American politics where we learn the origins, makeup, and construct of the American political system. In this first section, we will also establish the structure of government. The second part of the course lays out the institutions of national government. The third section presents the process of government, warts and all. Here we will look at how to resolve the problem of precluding absolute power while developing techniques for sharing that power. Also of importance in this section is the problem of resolving the liberty/control dilemma. In the fourth, and arguably the most important, we will discuss how to fix what can be fixed and enhance what is in place. This section places you the citizen squarely into the political process. You, as citizen, remain the bedrock on which the "temple of democracy" is built. We will look at the issue of civil rights/civil liberties and how you the individual engage the political process. Throughout, the role of the citizen remains paramount and we must concern ourselves with how to keep Madison's goal in mind - "you must first enable the government to control the governed and in the next place, oblige it to control itself." The final section addresses the specific policies emerging from the last four sections.

**METHOD OF EVALUATION:**

- Student participation/ Journal of political significance
- Four response papers (1-3 pages each)
- Midterm and final exams
- Quizzes at my discretion (generally T/F, MC)

**GRADING CRITERIA:** I compute your final grade as follows:

- Quizzes 10% (if no quiz this is a freebie!)
- Participation/Journal 20% (10% each)
- Response papers 40% (10% each)
- Examinations 30% (15% each)

A	93-100	C	73-77
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	88-89	D+	68-70
B	83-87	D	63-67
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	78-79	F	Unsatisfactory

You should note that even though individual exams might be graded as a D-, school policy is that there is no D- as a final grade.

**READINGS:** I assign the readings for each session in the syllabus. To properly prepare for class sessions, I expect you to complete the readings, prepare questions on areas you do not understand, and engage in discussion with your classmates.

In addition to the assigned readings, I expect each of you to read a major newspaper (NY Times) and to monitor the news with an eye to keeping up with national events as they happen. I do not expect you to know every detail of every event, but I do expect you to be acquainted with the major events and what is going on in our government.

**DISABILITIES STATEMENT:** If you have a hidden or visible disability requiring classroom or test-taking modifications, please see me as soon as possible.

**MAKE-UP EXAMS:** Are **not** given. This also holds true for written assignments. Be responsible, work with me to provide you the best education possible. I also do not accept late work. You know the scheduled due dates, plan accordingly.

**PERFORMANCE:** How well you perform is a combination of three factors:

- How well I present the material.
- Your personal motivation to learn. (Notice that I did not mention your capability. You are capable by the mere fact that you are sitting here.)
- Your personal discipline to prepare.

**THE MOST IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THIS CLASS IS TO ENJOY IT.**

Three Rivers Community College  
 American Government  
 Office: In class

GARY DONATO  
 F 6-8:45 pm  
 Classroom: TV 102

**Part I: Foundations of American Democracy**

Meeting Date	Discussion Topic	Keeping the Republic	Additional Readings
Fri Jan 19	Approaching Democracy	Xviii; Ch 1	Focus on 10,13,14,27,29
Fri Jan 26	The Founding and the Constitution	Ch 2	Declaration App 1 Articles of Conf. App 2 Constitution App 3
Fri Feb 2	The Founding and the Constitution (con't) <b>First paper due in class - flow diagram of FP 10</b>	Ch 1 19-30	The Federalist, No. 10 App 4
Fri Feb 9	Federalism	Ch 3; CQ Weekly 3039-3041	Federalist No. 39 (online) Constitution (Preamble) The Federalist, No. 51 (App 5) Q: What type of government does the United States practice?

**Part II: Institutions of American Democracy**

Fri Feb 16	Congress - generally & House of Representatives	Ch 6 (focus on House) CQ Weekly 2984/5; 2981; 2988	The Constitution of the United States of America (Article I) Q: What do the Federalists claim as differences between House and Senate?
Fri Feb 23	Congress generally & Senate	Ch 6 (focus on Senate) CQ Weekly 3010-3013	Federalist 52-58, 62-66 Intimate Sympathy v National Character
Fri Mar 2	Congress Committees & Lawmaking Process	Chapter 6 (182-192) CQ Weekly 2971-2974; 2979; 2989-3008 (skim) 3013; 3015-3017; 3019-3037 (skim)	Q: What is the "proper" relationship between the branches? What is the proper relationship between the houses of congress?
Fri Mar 9	The President	Ch 7 CQ Weekly 2958, 3082	Constitution (Article II) & FP 67-70 Q: What are the constitutional and extra-constitutional roles of the president?
Fri Mar 16	The Presidency	Ch 8 CQ Weekly (Committees)	Q: How does the Constitution reconcile executive energy and republican liberty?
Mon Mar 18 - Sun Mar 25	<b>NO CLASSES -</b>	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	<b>RETURN SAFELY!!!!</b>

Fri Mar 30	The Judiciary	Ch 9	Constitution (Article III) FP 78 Q: What did Hamilton mean when he said that the Supreme Court is the "least dangerous" branch? Q: What are judicial review, judicial restraint, and judicial activism?
	<b>RP #2: Topic: Inter-branch relationship. Due in class</b>		

**Part III: Processes of American Democracy  
(Extra-Constitutional Actors)**

Fri Apr 6	Political Parties & Interest Groups	Ch 11 Relook at concept of partisanship in CQ Weekly	PIG-PIE-PO Concepts: realignment, dealignment, and ideological platforms Minor Parties - What is their role in a democracy? Q: How do the functions of Interest Groups compare to those of Parties? Concepts: pluralism, interest group liberalism, demoscclerosis, teledemocracy.
Fri Apr 6	Participation, Voting, and Elections	Ch 12 CQ Weekly 3017; 3039	Q: What is the connection between parties and participation? Concepts: Electoral College, soft v hard money, "dirty politics polling
Fri Apr 13	The Media & Public Opinion	Ch 10 & 13	Q: What constitutes media? What are the differences between types of media? Q: How can the media be both controlled and controlling? The media, political parties, and interest groups play a major role in the American Government
	<b>RP #3 -. Discuss the role of extra-constitutional actors. Which has the greatest impact on the process? Why/How?</b>		

### Part IV: Liberties and Rights in American Democracy

Fri Apr 20	Civil Liberties	Ch 4	Constitution (Amendments - 1-8, 11,13, 14, 15, 19, 23, 24, 26)
Fri Apr 27	Civil Rights and Political Equality	Ch 5	Constitution (Amendments 13-15, 19, 26) Concepts: equal opportunity, equal outcomes, and affirmative action  Q: How does one reconcile liberty/equality and freedom/security?

### Part V: Policy Making in American Democracy

Fri May 4	Domestic and Economic Policy	Ch 14 (411-437)	Q: How can the Madisonian system of slow, deliberative, and frustrating processes inviting contentious division, debate, and political conflict result in legislation benefiting the public good?
Fri May 11	Foreign Policy  <b>Response Paper #4 Due Topic: policymaking</b>	Ch 14 (417-420; 437-445)  NY Times or major newspaper  Exam review	Concepts: War Powers Resolution, executive agreements, treaty making Q: Who makes foreign policy, the President or Congress?
Date TBD	<b>Final Exam</b>		

## Thought statements:

- The Constitution is a complex document, reflecting the conflicts and compromises of American history.
- The “national power structure” -- that is the prevailing beliefs and values and the conditions that are based upon them -- has been inalterably modified since the collapse of the New Deal coalition.
- Only with a renewal of electoral mobilization and a rebuilding of America’s electoral institution can governmental power again be harnessed to democratic accountability.
- Freedom of the press is so important to a functioning democracy that the power of the media must be left unchecked, even though this allows for the possibility of abuse of that power.
- The role of interest groups presents a dilemma for the organization of American politics.
- How did the Madisonian model protect against mass democracy and limit governmental power?
- What constitutes abuse of power?
- What threats exist to American democracy in the contemporary world?
- Is American democracy exportable?
- Have we maintained the chief characteristics of the Constitution, namely limited government, rule of law, separation of powers, and checks and balance?
- The concept of citizenship is no longer valid.

## **RANGE OF VIEWPOINTS IN AMERICA**

**LIBERALS** would like to see a country in which there are no great disparities of income, wealth, power, and status. They would also like to see stalemate and inertia removed from our constitutional system. In foreign policy, they favor discouraging the obsession of ideology.

**RADICAL LEFTISTS** desire a socialist society. Property, except for a few personal possessions, should be communally owned, and cooperation replaces competition in the economic realm. Inequalities should be eliminated and corporate wealth broken up. In foreign policy, the radical left wants a reconstruction of America's aims and an elimination of corporate businesses' undue influence in shaping that policy.

**CONSERVATIVES** believe that America should be a land in which individuals are encouraged to improve themselves by hard work, initiative, and creativity. Power should reside at the state and local levels. America must remain a leader among nations. They denounce the drab conformity of the welfare state and denounce liberal programs that engage in "social engineering."

**RADICAL RIGHTISTS** have two differing strands of thought. One embraces the elitist position typified by the John Birch society, which advocates competitive individualism and unrestricted business activities. On the other side, populist rightists seek a much broader base for their ideal system that denounces the poor, the minority, and the counter-culturalists. They are highly aggressive in foreign policy.

**CENTRISTS** hope to create a land of moderation, reasonableness, and goodwill based on diversity and multiple interests. They believe in equality of opportunity, but allow substantial variations in income and property. Their foreign policy, they believe, has been a judicious mixture of firmness and restraint.

The continuum would look something like this:

**RADICAL LEFT --- LIBERALS --- CENTRISTS --- CONSERVATIVES --- RADICAL RIGHT**



## Papers and Examination Information

I will constantly evaluate your writing skills as the course develops.

**EXAMS** Examinations will be of the "mixed type" combining true/false, multiple choice, short answer (less than a paragraph), longer answer (paragraph), and essay (page to page and a half). Responses other than multiple choice require supporting evidence in the form of citation/quotation using either MLA/APA/Chicago Manual of Style format.

**NOTE: Grading on examinations consist of 50% for the correct answer and 50% for germane supporting evidence.**

**PAPERS** All written material must be typed double-spaced and with 1 ½" left margin, 1" margins top/bottom/right. The writing must comply with MLA standards. I most strongly recommend you acquire a writing guide/handbook. I evaluate the papers for content, grammar, and historical accuracy. The best way to ensure you have a presentable paper is to conduct both spell and grammar check and have at least one peer read your paper, preferably aloud so you can hear your errors. The quality of your papers falls into and between three categories: Superior, Excellent, and Good.

**Superior:** (A/A-) Paper is historically accurate with main ideas supported by facts. The paper has a clear thesis, original/thoughtful interpretation and demonstrates significant knowledge of the topic. This paper also exhibits creative use of wide ranging sources that advance the thesis and analysis. Finally, this paper exhibits a balance between interpretations.

**Excellent:** (B+/B/B-) The main ideas have factual support but can be improved with more evidence. The thesis is present, but not clearly stated. This paper presents more description than analysis. The author uses a variety of sources to support the thesis but provides little analysis of the supporting material. Finally, this paper inordinately selects one position over another with little convincing evidence or analysis.

**Good:** (C+/C/C-) Little evidentiary material to support thesis. The paper has a focus but no clear thesis. The work is essentially non-specific in that there is little analysis and factual material to support a position. Source material is not diverse, too much emphasis on one type of resource. The paper only presents one point of view when it is obvious that others exist.

**POOR:** (D/F) There are no cogent or pertinent ideas present. No evidence or analysis, source material not present. The paper was obviously written in haste. (you generally have to "work" to achieve a grade this low!)

## JOURNAL GUIDELINES

In this course, I require you to maintain a journal divided into three sections.

**Readings (40%)**: For each class session, you will have concepts to evaluate, questions to answer or problems to solve. Prepare responses for each as a means of readying yourself for active class participation.

**Evaluation:** I will evaluate this section against four criteria:

- a. Excellent: Clear, neat, organized note taking where entries make specific references to readings
- b. Good: Entries provide "answers" but with no supporting material
- c. Fair: You obviously read the material, but ramble in your responses, note-taking sloppy
- d. Poor: You have not read the material and are just going through the motions of putting something on paper to appease the instructor.

**Current Events (45%)**: Beginning with the second class-week, I require you to select one major feature before each class session from a major national paper or news weekly (NO INTERNET SOURCES).

**CORRELATE YOUR ARTICLE TO THE SUBJECT WE ARE STUDYING THAT WEEK!!!**

You must then include a synopsis of the article to include:

- a. A brief summary of the key points to serve as a basis of discussion (15%). Overall theme: Is government working?
- b. An analysis of how some aspect of the article relates to either a specific "pillar of democracy" or the question at hand (20%).
- c. Your reaction to the article. Here answer the "so what" question. Also add questions you may have about the article. (10%)

**Evaluation:** I look for specific connections to the three criteria above.

- a. Excellent: Your entries make clear and explicit connections to readings or classroom material.
- b. Good: Your entries present the summary, but there is minimal analysis and your reaction doesn't answer the basic question.
- c. Fair: You present the summary in a cursory fashion with no analysis or reaction.
- d. Poor: You obviously didn't read the article, collected the article at the last minute (before turn-in), or included the article as a ruse.

**Dictionary (15%)**: Any presentation provides the listener/reader with the opportunity to increase their vocabulary. This section of your journal should include words unfamiliar to you. For each word, provide the following:

- a. Identification of the source from which you retrieved the word (5%)
- b. Definitions of the word taking into account the context (5%).
- c. An original sentence where you properly use the word (5%).

**Evaluation:** I evaluate the entries in the dictionary section against the criteria of completeness.