

Introduction to American Government
POL K111
Fall 2010

David Ferreira
dferreira@trcc.commnet.edu
Phone 860-383-5229
Office Hours: By appointment

Required Text:

Stephenson Jr., D. Grier, et al. *Introduction to American Government*, 5th edition.
Redding, CA: BVT Publishing, 2009.

ISBN: 978-1-60229-392-2

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. Topics such as election campaigns, political parties, presidential power, and individual liberties are explored.

Learning Outcomes:

At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

- Recognize and articulate the theoretical underpinnings of this government, the operation of American institutions and politics, and the role citizens play in American governmental processes.
- Explain the policy making process in the United States through case study.
- Assess the strengths and weaknesses of our constitution through the comparison and contrast of other constitutions.
- Formulate views of organizational change or support for American Government systems.

Expectations of you:

- a. You should attend and participate in every class. Missing class will certainly affect your ability to learn and it will almost certainly affect your grade in a negative way. By contrast, attending and participating in all classes will enhance your learning experience and almost certainly improve your grade.
- b. You are responsible for reading the entire assignment before class. For example you are assigned the introduction for the first class, please have the entire section read before that class.

c. This class will consist of lectures, small group work, and class discussion. Let me assure you that this course is designed for you. Therefore, if you have any questions about the material please feel free to ask me immediately.

Expectations of me:

a. While I expect you to prepare on a daily basis, let me assure you that I will be there to help you. Please feel free to come and see me in my office. Even if you are not having any difficulty with the material, please come and see me. My door is always open.

b. American government is such an interesting subject. I will make sure that you enjoy this learning experience as long as you read the material before class, attend class, participate, and work hard.

Learning Outcomes Assessment:

Participation – 15%

Students are expected to come to class prepared and actively participate in discussions and group work each week.

Chapter Questions – 10%

Each class you are required to turn in a list of three questions about the readings. This means you must complete the readings and submit the questions before we cover them in class. The questions must be about the topic. Ask questions to clear up any confusion you may have about the reading assignments or to expand on something you are especially interested in. The questions will be consolidated and used as the basis for in-class discussion during the class. The first questions are due Week 2.

Constitution Paper – 10%

Find a copy of the constitution of a country other than the United States. Write a 3-4 page double-spaced paper comparing that constitution to the American Constitution. Answer the following questions in essay form:

- a. How is the government organized and what are the major branches of government?
- b. How is power divided between the branches of government?
- c. What is the process for elections?
- d. Is there a bill of rights? What is the extent of these rights and what limitations are placed on them?
- e. Is judicial review mentioned? If so, what is the procedure for judicial review?
- f. What is the process to amend the constitution? Is it easy or hard to amend the constitution?

Group Project – 15% (7.5% individual, 7.5% group)

Choose one of the following topics: Energy, Social Security, Environment, Health Care, Trade.

As a group (4-5 people), give a 30 minute presentation to the class on one of the above topics. If a group also wanted to get together to examine another topic or issue in American Government (e.g. Abortion, Legalization of Marijuana, Stem Cell Research, etc.) please let me know and I would be happy to substitute one of the topics above for a topic of the group's choosing. Include in your presentation a brief legislative history of the policy, current/future problems, current initiatives, what are other countries doing about the issue, current stakeholders, and a references slide. Half of your grade will be based on the group presentation; the other half will be based on a one page peer evaluation. The peer evaluation will cover the roles/responsibilities of each member of the group and your thoughts as to how the group worked together.

Mid Term – 15%

Take home exam in essay form. Answer 2 of 5 questions (minimum 500 words per question double spaced).

Perception of American Politics – 20%

In the final paper you will discuss your overall impressions of American Politics. You are to discuss three of the scheduled topics in detail and how your views changed over the course. Discuss your preconceptions at the start of the semester and how they were changed. Which ideas were reinforced by your studies and which ones were modified or reversed. Most importantly, explain why your ideas changed. Give evidence supporting your change of views. You must properly cite any material you quote. You are use at least three outside sources to support your arguments. Your paper should be 5-7 pages double spaced excluding the references page.

Final Exam – 15%

Take home exam in essay form. Answer 2 of 5 questions (minimum 500 words per question double spaced).

TOTAL – 100%

Grade	Equivalent	Quality Points
A	94-100	4
A-	90-93	3.7
B+	87-89	3.3
B	83-86	3
B-	80-82	2.7
C+	77-79	2.3
C	73-76	2
C-	70-72	1.7
D+	67-69	1.3
D	63-66	1
D-	60-62	0.7
F	0-59	0

Academic Integrity:

Student Discipline Policy, section 2:10, Board of Trustees of Connecticut Community Colleges) Academic Dishonesty shall in general mean conduct which has as its intent or effect the false representation of a student's academic performance, including but not limited to (a) cheating on an examination, (b) collaborating with others in work to be presented, contrary to the stated rules of the course, (c) plagiarizing, including the submission of others' ideas or papers (whether purchased, borrowed, or otherwise obtained) as one's own, (d) stealing or having unauthorized access to examination or course materials, (e) falsifying records of laboratory or other data, (f) submitting, if contrary to the rules of a course, work previously presented in another course, and (g) knowingly and intentionally assisting another student in any of the above, including assistance in an arrangement whereby any work, classroom performance, examination or other activity is submitted or performed by a person other than the student under whose name the work is submitted or performed.

Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities who wish to receive accommodations in this class should contact Chris Scarborough at 860-892-5751 or cscarborough@trcc.commnet.edu ASAP so that the necessary accommodations can be implemented in a timely fashion.

Refund/Withdraw Policy:

See http://www.trcc.commnet.edu/Registration/reg_index2.htm#Withdraw

Calendar of Topics:

September 1 – Introductions/ General Knowledge Test; Why do politics matter? (Intro);

September 8 - Constitution (Ch 1)

September 15 – Federalism (Ch 2)

September 22 – Civil Liberties and Civil Rights (Ch 3)

September 29 – Ideology (Ch 4)

October 6 - Public Opinion (Ch 5)

Constitution Paper Due

October 13 – Mass Media (Ch 6)

Mid Term Exam handed out at end of class

October 20 – Parties and Interest Groups (Ch 7)

Mid Term Exam Due

October 27 – Campaigns and Elections (Ch 8)

November 3 – Congress (Ch 9; Ch 14 page 423-424),

November 10 - Presidency (Ch 10; Ch 14 page 421,423)

November 17 – Bureaucracies (Ch 11); The Supreme Court (Ch 12)

Group Project Presentations

November 24 – Thanksgiving Week *Class Not in Session*

December 1 – Domestic Policy (Ch15);

December 8 - Foreign Policy (Ch 16)

Final Exam handed out at end of class; Perception of American Politics Paper Due

December 15 – Future Challenges, I.O.U.S.A movie. No readings assigned.

Final Exam Due in Class