

Introduction to American Government  
POL K111  
Spring 2010  
Tues/Thurs 11:00-12:15 – Room E225

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**Required Text:**

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

ISBN: 978-1-60229-392-2

**Learning Community:**

This course is part of a learning community with ECN 101 and the theme is “Government Involvement in the American Economy.” The advantage of participating in a learning community is that Professor Phil Mayer and I have worked to coordinate syllabi and assignments in order to reinforce and enhance learning. The result is a pair of classes where students and faculty help each other learn, grow, and succeed.

**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.
- Critique views of modern American economic thought through congressional profiles.
- Formulate views of organizational interaction between different levels of 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: Papers are due on the date listed on the schedule. Late work will not be accepted without previous authorization by me.**

**Participation – 15%** (1% for each week)

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

**Homework – 15%**

A brief pop quiz will be given on 10 Tuesdays during the semester. The quiz will involve multiple choice, fill-in-the blank, and true false questions about the reading for the week. I will drop the lowest two quiz grades. If you miss a class when a quiz is taking place that will be one of your two quizzes I will drop. There will be no make-up quizzes.

**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:

- 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 – 20% (10% individual, 10% group)**

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

As a group, 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 the groups' recommendations. Half of your grade will be based on the group presentation; the other half will be based on peer evaluation. The peer evaluation will be a one page double spaced document that lists the members of your group with everyone's roles and responsibilities and a brief analysis of how you thought the group worked together. Each member of the group does their own peer evaluation and it is due one week after the group presentation.

### **Mid Term – 10%**

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

### **Town Budget Analysis – 10%**

Get a hold of your most recently publicized town budget. Analyze the budget and write a 4-5 page double-spaced paper that includes the following information but is not limited to:

- How much money (amount and percentage) does your town spend on education? Why?
- How much money comes from the state and federal government? Where do those funds go?
- What is "the cost" of receiving funds from the state and federal government in terms of regulation?

- Do you think the town spending priorities encourages economic development (e.g. businesses to move to the town)? Think in terms of what businesses need from towns.

**School of Economic Thought – 10%**

Pick a name of a member of Congress. Once you have selected your member of Congress, write a 4-5 page double spaced paper that includes the following information:

- Give a brief bio of the person and describe the district (if you chose a representative) or state (if you chose a Senator) they represent.
- Describe their economic philosophy and how it fits into one of the four major schools of economic thought (Keynesian, supply side, classical, or monetarist).
- Critique the economic thought.

**Final Exam – 10%**

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](mailto: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](http://www.trcc.commnet.edu/Registration/reg_index2.htm#Withdraw)

**Calendar of Weekly Topics:**

**Week 1** – 1/21 Introductions and General Knowledge Test; Why do politics matter? (Intro)

**Week 2** – 1/26, 1/28 Constitution (Ch 1)

**Week 3** – 2/2 Federalism (Ch 2), *Note: No class 2/4*

**Week 4** – 2/9, 2/11 Civil Liberties and Civil Rights (Ch 3)

Constitution Paper Due

**Week 5** – 2/16, 2/18 Ideology (Ch 4)

**Week 6** – 2/24, 2/25 Public Opinion (Ch 5)

**Week 7** – 3/2, 3/4 Mass Media (Ch 6)

Mid Term Exam handed out at end of class

**SPRING BREAK MARCH 7-13. ENJOY YOUR TIME OFF!**

**Week 8** – 3/16, 3/18 Parties and Interest Groups (Ch 7)

Mid Term Exam Due

**Week 9** – 3/23, 3/25 Campaigns and Elections (Ch 8)

**Week 10** – 3/30, 4/1 Congress (Ch 9; Ch 14 page 423-424)

Town Budget Analysis Due

SPRING RECESS. COLLEGE CLOSED APRIL 2-4. THIS DOES NOT AFFECT OUR CLASS

**Week 11** – 4/6, 4/8 Presidency (Ch 10; Ch 14 page 421,423)

**Week 12** – 4/13, 4/15 Domestic Policy (Ch 16)

**Week 13** – 4/20, 4/22 Foreign Policy (Ch15)

School of Economic Thought Paper Due

**Week 14** – 4/27, 4/29 Group Projects Presented

**Week 15** – 5/4, 5/6 Bureaucracies (Ch 11), The Supreme Court (Ch 12)

Final Exam handed out at the end of class

**Exam Week** – 5/11, 5/14 No class. Your assignment is to work on your Final Exam – Take Home **DUE 5/18 via email.**