

Introduction to American Government
POL K111
Spring 2009

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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% (1% for each week)

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

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 (Week 5), Social Security (Week 6), Environment (Week 7), Health Care (Week 11), Trade (Week 12).

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.

Mid Term – 15%

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

New Nation Paper – 20%

You are a Founding Father/Mother of a country and must decide on the best way to form your new nation. This nation is similar in terms of current population, demographic background, etc as the United States.

Based upon what you have learned, how would you like the government to look? What form of government makes the most sense and why? How many branches will you have and why? How will bills pass? How do you elect your leaders? Would you have states and if so what powers would they have? What would your budget look like?

Your paper should be 5-7 pages double spaced.

Final Exam – 20%

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 Weekly Topics:

Week 1 – 1/23 Introductions and General Knowledge Test; Why do politics matter? (Intro)

Week 2 – 1/30 Constitution (Ch 1)

Week 3 – 2/6 Federalism (Ch 2)

Week 4 – 2/13 Civil Liberties and Civil Rights (Ch 3)

Constitution Paper Due

Week 5 – 2/20 Ideology (Ch 4)

Week 6 – 2/27 Public Opinion (Ch 5)

Week 7 – 3/6 Mass Media (Ch 6)

Mid Term Exam handed out at end of class

Week 8 – 3/13 Parties and Interest Groups (Ch 7)

Mid Term Exam Due

SPRING BREAK MARCH 15-22. NO CLASS 3/20. ENJOY YOUR TIME OFF!

Week 9 – 3/27 Campaigns and Elections (Ch 8)

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

SPRING RECESS. COLLEGE CLOSED APRIL 10-12. NO CLASS 4/10

Week 11 – 4/17 Presidency (Ch 10; Ch 14 page 421,423)

Final Paper Outline Due

Week 12 – 4/24 Bureaucracies (Ch 11)

Week 13 – 5/1 The Supreme Court (Ch 12)

New Nation Paper Due

Week 14 – 5/8 Domestic Policy (Ch15)

Week 15 – 5/15 Foreign Policy (Ch 16)

Exam Week – Final Exam – Take Home **DUE 5/22.**