

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT & POLITICS
POLITICAL SCIENCE 103

Summer 2012, Session 2 (June 19-July 26, 2012)
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 6 pm – 9pm
Location: TBD

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SYLLABUS

I. DESCRIPTION. This course explores the distinctive structure and dynamics of American national government, providing a broad-based introduction to the ideas, ideals, practices, and institutions that have defined – and continue to define – political life in the United States. To this end, the course will focus on three key areas: (1) the Constitution and the debates of the founding era, through which we will examine the fundamental logic and rules that shape American government and politics; (2) the core institutions of the national government – the presidency, the Congress, the courts, and the bureaucracy (the so-called “fourth branch”) – with particular emphasis on their original design, their contemporary expression, and the ways in which they contribute to (or inhibit) the common good via the creation of public policy; and (3) the political beliefs and behaviors of the American people, both governmental actors and ordinary citizens, including the principal reasons behind their willingness or disinclination to participate actively in political life.

Our exploration of these three core areas will be mediated by the following theme: that the United States is – or, at any rate, has always aspired to be – a “democracy.” Indeed, we often hear Americans declare that their nation is “the most democratic” in the world. Yet, given that there is no single agreed-upon definition or theory of democratic government and politics, it is far from clear what this assertion is intended to mean. Does the description of America as a democracy entail that “the people” should engage directly in the activity of “ruling” themselves, as its literal translation connotes? Is electing one’s representatives a truly or sufficiently democratic practice? What is the relationship between democratic self-government and freedom – and what, for that matter, does a properly democratic liberty look like? Does democracy require equality and, if so, of what kind? Is democracy unavoidably chastened, to some degree, by the long-regnant (though by no means unchallenged) philosophical liberalism of American citizens? These and similar questions – as well as the various answers to them offered by several of the predominant theories of democracy, particularly those articulated by leading American political thinkers, both historical and contemporary – will guide our analysis of the United States’ political foundations, institutions, and practices.

The ultimate goal of this course is to help the student acquire a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the various ideas and forces that shape American government and politics, so
that he or she may not only become a more discerning student of this system but also a more informed and reflective participant in it.

II. REQUIREMENTS. This course will proceed through a combination of lectures by the instructor and class discussions, both of which will draw heavily on but also supplement the assigned readings. Students are responsible for material covered both in class and in the readings.

Regular attendance is expected, as class participation will count in the course grade. You will be responsible for completing and handing in, before each each class, a 1-2 page response paper based upon that day's assigned readings. A final paper (maximum 8 pages, double-spaced), on a topic to be assigned by the instructor, will be due at the conclusion of the semester.*

All reading and written assignments are required, unless otherwise indicated. Assignments must be completed in accordance with Drew's academic integrity rules. Plagiarism of any kind will be dealt with severely.

Grading for this course is broken down as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Response papers</td>
<td>45%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper</td>
<td>35%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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*Caveat discipulus! Grammatical, syntactical, spelling, and proofreading errors in written work will result in a 10% reduction in one's grade.

III. EXPECTATIONS. I expect students to attend class regularly, to pay attention to – and to ask questions during – classroom lectures, and to participate actively in discussions. Absences are excused only for legitimate medical and personal reasons. If you miss a class, you are responsible for obtaining the material covered in that session, along with any announcements and handouts. Please turn off all cell phones. If you bring a laptop to class, please refrain from surfing the Internet, visiting Facebook, tweeting, etc.

IV. ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS. Should you require academic accommodations, you must file a request with the Office of Educational Affairs (BC 114, extension 3327). It is your responsibility to self-identify with the Office of Educational Affairs and to provide me with the appropriate documentation from that office at least one week prior to any request for specific course accommodations. There are no retroactive accommodations.

V. REQUIRED TEXTS. The following books are required for the course and may be purchased at the bookstore:


Additional required readings will be available on Moodle or sent by the instructor via e-mail prior to the first class. These readings are marked on the syllabus with an asterisk (*).

VI. SCHEDULE OF LECTURES AND ASSIGNMENTS

A. Foundations of American Government and Politics

June 19, 2012  
*Introduction: The Nature of Politics, Political Theory, and Political Science*  
George Orwell, “Politics and the English Language”*

*What is Democracy? A Primer on Democratic Theory and Theories of Democracy*  
Barbour and Wright, chapter 1  
Tocqueville, 11, 12, 13

June 21, 2012  
*An Overview of the American Political Tradition: The Founding of the Republic and the Constitution*  
Barbour and Wright, chapter 2  
Declaration of Independence (in Barbour)  
Articles of Confederation (in Barbour)  
U.S. Constitution (in Barbour)  
Federalist Nos. 1, 10  
Brutus, Essay I, 18 October 1787*

June 26, 2012  
*The Founding and the Constitution (continued)*  
Tocqueville, 27, 28

June 28, 2012  
*Checks and Balances: Federalism and the Separation of Powers*  
Barbour and Wright, chapter 3  
Federalist Nos. 6, 51  
Tocqueville, 52, 53  
Patrick Henry, 9 June 1788 Speech*

July 3, 2012  
*Additional Checks? Civil Liberties and Civil Rights*  
Barbour and Wright, chapters 4 and 5  
Bill of Rights and Amendments to the U.S. Constitution (in Barbour)  
Federalist No. 84  
Tocqueville, 26


July 5, 2012  
*The Legislative Branch: “Here, the People Rule” (Maybe)*  
Barbour and Wright, chapter 6  
Federalist Nos. 62, 63  
U.S. Constitution, Article I
July 10, 2012  
*The Executive Branch (the Presidency and Bureaucracy)*  
Barbour and Wright, chapters 7 and 8  
Federalist No. 70  
Tocqueville, 56  
U.S. Constitution, Article II

July 12, 2012  
*The Judicial Branch: The Least Powerful Branch?*  
Barbour and Wright, chapter 9  
Marbury v. Madison (1803)*  
Federalist No. 78  
Tocqueville, 6  
U.S. Constitution, Article III

July 17, 2012  
*Interest Groups and Political Parties: Connecting Citizens to Government, and the Powerful to Those in Power*  
Barbour and Wright, chapter 11  
Tocqueville, 8  
*The Mass Media: Help or Hindrance?*  
Barbour and Wright, chapter 13

C. American Political Beliefs and Behaviors

July 19, 2012  
*The Public and Public Opinion*  
Barbour and Wright, chapter 10  
Tocqueville, 30-32

July 24, 2012  
*Voting and Elections*  
Barbour and Wright, chapter 12

July 26, 2012  
*Public Policy, Domestic and Foreign*  
Barbour and Wright, chapter 14

***FINAL PAPER due by 5 pm on August 2***