

Intro to American Politics

Political Science 101

MWF, 11:00-11:50am, 201 NSC

Fall Semester, 2009

Instructor: Nicholas Seabrook

Office Hours (416 Park): Mondays, 12:00-1:00; Wednesdays 12:00-1:00

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Course Description:

The purpose of this course is to provide students with a comprehensive introduction to the political life of the U.S., with a particular focus on the role and importance of elections in American politics. We will explore how Americans think about politics, how they organize themselves politically, and how institutions interact with opinion and ideas to produce government policy. Topics covered will include the theory and practice of the American political system, the three government branches, federalism, political parties, groups in the electoral and governmental process, public policy making, and contemporary political problems.

The focus of this course will be conceptual rather than historical – this is not a class on U.S. political history! While we will cover the theories and ideas that formed the basis of the U.S. political system, as well as some of the major events that have shaped political thought and debate in this country, the focus will be on the major features of American political life, and how political scientists have attempted to categorize and explain various political phenomena.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Although attendance is not mandatory in the sense that I will not be recording or checking up on it, students are expected to attend all lectures, and to have completed all the assigned readings for that lecture before each class meeting. Be aware that you will not be able to learn all the materials from the textbook – the readings will merely serve to structure the class and provide the basis on which the lectures will be based. Poor attendance, therefore, will have its consequences when it comes to exam time.

Grades for the course will be determined by four non-cumulative “Midterm” style exams given throughout the semester. There will be no cumulative Final exam, no attendance, participation, or paper requirement. At the end of the semester each student’s lowest exam score, including missed exams, will be dropped. Each student’s three highest exam scores will therefore count equally (1/3) towards their final grade for the class.

If you have a disability requiring some accommodation, please let me know *early* in the semester.

I will drop the lowest exam grade, including a zero from a missed exam. This is intended to deal with most missed exams. Makeup exams will only be given in extraordinary circumstances where there is documented evidence of a personal illness, family emergency, or other situation such as jury duty or military deployment. All I ask is that you show up to 3 of the 4 exams over the course of the semester – this should not be too burdensome a requirement!

Textbook:

There is one required textbook for this course. The book is available for purchase from the University Bookstore, The College Store (on Maple opposite the Boulevard Mall), and from Greeks and Sneaks (on Main near South campus).

Fiorina/Peterson/Johnson/Mayer. 2009. *The New American Democracy*, 6th Edition.

Note: If you plan on purchasing a used copy online be aware that there is an “Alternate Edition” of the book available that omits the final section on Public Policy. **This section will be included in the exams!** You should make sure that you are purchasing the full, 6th Edition of the book. Prior editions (i.e. those before the 6th Edition) and the “Alternate Edition” will not be acceptable.

New copies of the book purchased from official University outlets also include access to MyPoliSciLab, an online resource that includes study guides, practice exam questions and other supplemental materials specifically tailored to this particular class. Used copies and those purchased from other retailers do not include this. Access to MyPoliSciLab is not mandatory for the class, but may be a helpful study resource for students when preparing for exams.

Tentative Class/Reading Schedule:

This reading schedule may be subject to change as the semester progresses.

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS (as in 6 th Ed.)
August 31, Sept 2	Democracy in the U.S.	Chapter 1
Sept 7 Sept 9/11	Labor Day Establishing a Constitution	Chapter 2
Sept 14/16/18	Federalism	Chapter 3
Sept 21 Sept 23/25	EXAM 1 Public Opinion	Chapter 5
Sept 28 Sept 30, Oct 2	Yom Kippur Individual Participation	Chapter 6
October 5/7/9	Parties/Interest Groups	Chapters 7,8

Oct 12/14/16	The Media	Chapter 9
Oct 19	EXAM 2	
Oct 21/23	The Presidency	Chapters 10,13
Oct 26/28/30	Congress	Chapters 11,12
Nov 2/4/6	Courts	Chapter 15
Nov 9/11/13	Bureaucracy	Chapter 15
Nov 16	EXAM 3	
Nov 18/20	Civil Liberties	Chapter 16
Nov 23	Civil Rights	Chapter 17
Nov 25/27	Fall Recess	
Nov 30, Dec 2/4	Civil Rights/Public Policy	Chapter 18
Dec 7/9	Public Policy	Chapter 19,20
Dec 11	EXAM 4	

Incompletes:

As a general rule, incompletes will not be given. However, a grade of incomplete may be assigned under extenuating circumstances which prevent the student from completing the course requirements on schedule. Requests for incompletes must be made in advance, and include documented evidence of the extenuating circumstances. The University's Incomplete Policy can be found in the Undergraduate Catalog.

(<http://undergradcatalog.buffalo.edu/policies/grading/explanation.shtml#incomplete>).

Academic Integrity:

“In order to enhance UB’s academic culture and promote awareness of academic integrity issues, it is crucial that all students are reminded of the importance of academic honesty and made aware of UB’s academic integrity policy” (Dean of Undergraduate Education). Students should refer to the University’s Academic Integrity Policy in the Undergraduate Catalog. (<http://undergrad-catalog.buffalo.edu/policies/course/integrity.shtml>).

Students With Disabilities:

“Students and faculty should be aware that the Office of Disability Services is available to assist them” (Dean of Undergraduate Education). Information concerning the University’s Disability Services Office is available on line at <http://www.student-affairs.buffalo.edu/ods/>. Note that students must register with that office in order to receive accommodation for physical and learning disabilities. Any student with a diagnosed physical or learning disability which impedes his or her carrying out of required coursework, or which requires accommodations such as readers or

extended time on examinations and/or assignments must register with ODS and advise me *during the first two weeks of the semester* so we can review possible arrangements.

Schedule and/or reading assignments, as well as the other contents of this syllabus, are tentative and are subject to alteration during the semester at the instructor's discretion.