

PSC 101 Fall 2008
American Government

Professor: Dr. Danielle Vinson
Office: 111C Johns Hall, 294-3241
Office hours: 9:15-10:15 a.m. MWF, or by appointment.

Course Description: This course is an introduction to American government. We will explore several themes throughout the course, including who has power in our political system (the president, lobbyists, Congress, ordinary citizens?) and the sources of that power, what limits power of various groups and institutions, and how the political system has developed over time. The first section will cover the historical foundations of the American political system. The next section focuses on the role of the public in the American political process and the channels through which the public participates. The third part of the course looks at the major institutions in American government and how they interact with one another and the public. By the end of the term, you should have some understanding of how the government makes policy and why decisions are made as they are.

This course is also an introduction to political science. Through the readings and assignments, students will learn the kinds of questions political scientists ask about the American political system and how they investigate those questions. Students should develop stronger critical reading skills and understand the kinds of evidence used to study empirical questions about politics.

Course Evaluation: Grades will be based on a combination of exams, papers, and participation. All assignments must be completed to pass the course.

--Exams: There will be a midterm exam (20%) that will consist of identification terms from the readings and lectures and short essay questions. The final exam will be cumulative (30%). All reading, lectures, and class discussions are fair game for exams (whether or not we discuss them in class). The date for the final exam is listed on the syllabus. Do not ask the instructor to change the date or time of the final; she has no authority to do so. Pop quizzes will be given only if it becomes apparent that students are not doing the reading.

--News Analysis (25%): Students will analyze news coverage of one aspect of American government during the term and write a 5-6 page paper evaluating their findings. More information on this assignment is provided at the end of the syllabus.

--Critical Analysis (10% combined): Students will analyze two selections from the CP reader during the term (one during September and one during October) and write a short 2-3 page paper discussing their analysis. More information on this assignment is provided at the end of the syllabus.

--Participation (15%): Students will have ample opportunity to participate in class discussions (large and small groups). To be able to participate effectively, students should complete the reading by the date listed on the syllabus. Discussion questions will be suggested at the end of each class to provide students with some focus for the next day's readings. However, discussion will not be limited to these questions. Students, particularly those who are uncomfortable talking in large groups, are also encouraged to comment on the readings or class lectures and discussion by e-mailing the professor or talking to her outside of class. Merely showing up to class everyday without engaging in some of these other forms of participation will result in at best a C+ on participation.

Attendance will be taken. More than two unexcused absences will begin to affect participation grades. Six unexcused absences will result in a 50 on participation, and for each additional unexcused absence, ten points will be deducted from the participation grade. Generally, an absence is excused if the student has a note from the infirmary or a doctor or if the student is representing the University in some capacity. Students who know that they are going to be absent when assignments are due are expected to turn in papers or take exams in advance. In the case of unexpected absences due to illness, students are expected to make up the work they missed.

Grading scale: Plus grades end in 8 or 9 (88-89= B+). Minus grades end in zero or 1 (90-91= A-).

Academic Dishonesty: Plagiarism or any other form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this class. If it occurs, it will result in a penalty ranging from a reduction of one-letter grade to a zero on the assignment or failure in the course, depending on the severity. If students are unsure what constitutes academic dishonesty or plagiarism, they should consult the professor.

A nod to sustainability: While all assignments should be turned in as a hard copy unless otherwise stated, students are encouraged to print on both sides of the paper.

Books: The following books are required and are available from the Furman bookstore.

--Thomas E. Patterson. *We the People* (7th ed.). Referred to on the syllabus as “text.”

--Christine Barbour & Matthew Streb. *Clued in to Politics* (2nd ed.). Referred to on the syllabus as “CP.”

--Diana Mutz. *Hearing the Other Side: Deliberative versus Participatory Democracy*.

Keeping up with the daily news is essential for this course, particularly for class discussions. Therefore, you will need to get a subscription to the *New York Times*. More information on this will be provided in class.

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments:

I. Historical foundation

A. Creating a Government

Aug. 27—Introduction

Aug. 29—No class. Dr. Vinson at APSA conference.

Sept. 1—No class. Labor Day.

Sept. 3—Constitutional Background

Readings: Text, Chapt. 1- 2; Roche (“Reform Caucus in Action” available on Moodle <http://courses.furman.edu/>)

Sept. 5—Constitution

Readings: Constitution (text A-5); CP 3.3

Sept. 8—**Readings**: CP 3.6, 12.5

B. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Sept. 10—Development and Current Issues in First Amendment

Readings: Text, Chapt. 4 (pp. 109-132); CP 4.1, 13.4; *Near v. Minnesota* (available on Moodle)

Sept. 12—Due Process and Post 9/11 Liberties

Readings: Text, Chapt 4 (pp. 132-149); CP 4.3; Taylor (“Rights, Liberties, and Security” available on Moodle)

Sept. 15—Development of Civil Rights

Readings: Text, Chapt. 5; CP 2.5, 5.5

Sept. 17—Current Issues in Civil Rights

Readings: CP 2.4, 4.2, 5.3, 5.4

C. Federalism

Sept. 19—Development of Federalism

Readings: Text, Chapt. 3

Sept. 22—Federalism Today

Readings: CP 3.1, 3.2

II. Political Participation and Political Intermediaries

A. Public Opinion

Sept. 24—Defining and measuring public opinion

Readings: Text, Chapt. 6; CP 10.2, 10.4

Sept. 26—Role of Public Opinion

Readings: CP 10.1, 10.3

B. Participation

Sept. 29—Why don't people vote?

Readings: Text, Chapt. 7 (pp. 223-236); CP 1.1, 1.2

Critical Analysis 1 due no later than class Sept. 29.

Oct. 1—Other forms of participation

Readings: Text, Chapt. 7 (remainder);

Oct. 3—No class. Fall break.

Oct. 6-10—Deliberative vs. Participatory Democracy

Reading: Mutz, *Hearing the Other Side* (all)

Oct. 13—Midterm Exam

Oct. 15—Discussion of news analysis assignment.

C. Political Parties

Oct. 17—Party organizations and platforms

Readings: Text, Chapt. 8 (p. 251-280); CP 2.1, 11.2

Oct. 20—Party activities and strength

Readings: CP 11.3, 11.4

D. Interest Groups

Oct. 22—Group Formation and Maintenance

Readings: Text, Chapt. 9; CP 12.4

Oct. 24—Group influence

Readings: CP 6.2, 12.2, 12.3

E. Campaigns and Elections

Oct. 27—What affects the way people vote?

Readings: Text, Chapt. 8 (pp. 280-291)

Oct. 29-31—Campaign Strategies

Readings: CP 13.2, 13.1

Oct. 31—Critical Analysis 2 due by class Oct. 31.

III. Political Institutions

A. The Presidency

Nov. 3—Presidential Power

Readings: Text, Chapt. 12; CP 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 9.1

Nov. 5—Discuss election results

Nov. 7—Presidential power

Readings: CP 3.4, 3.5

Nov. 10—Discuss news analysis assignment

B. The Bureaucracy

Nov. 12—Organization and purpose

Readings: Text, Chapt. 13; Wilson ("Bureaucracy" available on Moodle)

Nov. 14—Control of the bureaucracy

Readings: CP 8.2, 8.3

C. Congress

Nov. 17—Representation and Members

Readings: Text, Chapt. 11 ; CP 6.1, 6.4

Nov. 19—Congressional Organization

Nov. 21—Congress in Action

Readings: CP 6.3, 6.5; Sinclair (“Senate” available on Moodle)

Nov. 24—News analysis due at the beginning of class.

Nov. 26-28—Thanksgiving break. No class.

D. The Judicial Branch

Dec. 1—The Supreme Court

Readings: Text, Chapt 14; CP 9.3, 9.4

Dec. 3—Power and Purpose of the courts

Readings: CP 9.5; *Marbury v. Madison* (available on Moodle)

Dec. 5—Decision-making

Readings: Posner, “What am I? A potted plant?” (available on Moodle)

Dec. 8—Wrap up and review

Final Exam—

PSC 101 Section 03 (12:30 class): Monday, Dec. 15, 12:00-2:30 p.m.

PSC 101 Section 02 (10:30 class): Tuesday, Dec. 16, 8:30-11:00 a.m.

Critical Analysis Assignment

One objective of this course is for students to develop their critical thinking skills and learn how to analyze reading, research, and data. The book *Clued in to Politics* introduces students to a framework to encourage critical thinking and a series of questions following each reading to help students analyze that specific piece. While we will discuss some of these readings in class, using the editors’ questions as a starting point, students can help prepare themselves to participate in class discussion by critically evaluating the readings on their own prior to class.

Students will be required to write two critical analysis papers during the term. The first can be on any CP reading assigned prior to Sept. 29, and the second should be on any CP reading assigned during October. The critical analysis is due by the date that specific reading is listed on the syllabus, so that students will turn in their analysis before we actually discuss that reading in class. The last possible day to turn in the first paper is Sept. 29, and the last possible day for the second paper is Oct. 31.

In the paper, students should address some of the questions posed by the editors at the end of the reading. Students must evaluate the evidence and discuss the implications of the reading they choose. Each paper should be 2-3 pages in length, double-spaced (please number pages). It should be properly documented using parenthetical citations for direct quotations or paraphrases. Students should also pay attention to good grammar and proofread papers carefully.

News Analysis

Students will be assigned randomly one of the following aspects of the American political system: the president, Congress, political parties, the courts, presidential campaigns, or the Iraq war.

Students will write a 5-6 page paper analyzing *New York Times* coverage of their assigned aspect of the political system during three weeks of the term (Oct. 20-Nov. 7). During that time, students will keep track of every article dealing with their topic in the A section of the paper (you may include other sections if you would like). If the total at the end of 3 weeks is more than 25 articles, students can limit the number of articles to a minimum of 25 through a process of random selection (any other method must be approved by the professor in advance). Students must have at least 15 articles for the analysis. If you are not finding at least 5 articles per week on your subject, see me at the end of the first week to make sure you are not missing articles related to your topic.

The paper must not be a summary of the news coverage related to the topic. Instead it should analyze it and consider how it relates to what political scientists say about the subject. To this end, before looking at the news coverage, students should read the chapter in the textbook on the subject they are assigned so they will know what could be reported about that aspect of government. To conduct the analysis, try asking a series of questions about each article selected and keep track of the results. Some questions to consider in your analysis might include the following:

- What is covered about this subject? Try to create categories that capture the range of possibilities. For example, with the campaigns, does the article cover fundraising, campaign strategies, issues, candidate personalities, etc.?
- Who speaks on this issue in the coverage (who are the sources reporters use to cover this subject)?
- Is coverage positive, negative, ambiguous? How can you determine this?
- I will also post questions specific to each aspect of the political system on Moodle.

Once you have answered all the questions for all the articles in your analysis, you can organize your paper around the questions and the answers you found (essentially, each question will be a section of your paper, and you will report what you found in the coverage in answer to that question).

The paper should include the following:

- Introduction of your subject and your method for selecting the articles. Be sure to include how many articles you found and if more than 25, how you narrowed them down to 25.
- Your findings (the analysis section of the paper).
- Conclusions. You might address the following questions in your conclusions:
 - Based on the coverage of this aspect of the political system, what role does it play in American government? Does this differ from what we have learned in class or what you have read in your textbooks?
 - What are the implications or consequences of the patterns of coverage you have observed? Does coverage give an accurate and complete portrayal of this part of the political system? Does it encourage support or confidence in the political system?

Papers should be at least 5 pages double-spaced using standard fonts and absolutely no more than 6 pages. Please number pages, and staple or paper clip them; no folders please. They should be properly documented with both a bibliography and parenthetical citations in the text as needed. See the *American Political Science Review* for the proper format of parenthetical citations. If you quote from a specific article or use an example from a specific article, you will need to cite it in the text and in the bibliography. Whether or not you cite articles specifically in the text, you need to include all newspaper articles you use for your analysis in the bibliography, which should be alphabetized by the author's last name. The proper bibliographic format for a news article is as follows:

author (last name first). Year. "title of article." *New York Times*. Month and day, page number.

Papers are due by the beginning of class Nov. 24. Late papers will be penalized 10 points per day (each day of the weekend is a separate day).