POLS 100 (Section 4)
American Government

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Classroom: 461 DuSable Hall
Class Hours: Wednesdays 6:00-8:40 pm

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This is an introductory course in American Government designed to provide students a
background understanding of government and politics in the United States. It is designed to
examine constitutional principles such as separation of powers, checks & balances, federalism,
constitutionalism, civil rights, civil liberties, etc. Attention will be provided to the foundations of
the system of operational democracy in the United States; an understanding of the role of citizens
and other key political actors; examination of the institutions, structures, processes and systems;
presenting contemporary issues within the context of our complex society; and, how diverse
political approaches to solving social issues has permitted this oldest living constitutional
democracy to survive and flourish.

TEXTBOOKS FOR READING:
978-1-285-87028-1.

Bruce Miroff, Raymond Seidelman, and Todd Swanstrom, Debating Democracy: A Reader in

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
Subject Matter Outcomes
Each student should be able to demonstrate the following competencies upon completion of the
course:
1. Describe and define the unique political and legal characteristics of the U.S. system of
governance at the national, state and local levels.
2. Describe the importance and articulate the role of the U.S. Constitution in the U.S.
system of governance.
3. Describe, define, and assess the role of interest groups, political parties, elections, public
opinion Congress, the Presidency, the U.S. courts, governmental and non-governmental
elites in the context of the American Political System.
4. Assess the current state of U.S. democracy and its institutions and the need for reforms.
Class Design:
This class will be divided into three segments. The first segment will be a formal lecture on important issues raised in the reading, supplementing the reading with additional information and considerations. The second segment will be an interactive class discussion of current political events related to the reading, where students will be challenged by the instructor to apply what they have learned from the reading to help explain current political issues. The third segment will be a student-led debate where teams of two will be assigned opposing positions on a topic from the Debating Democracy text to argue before the class, with the remainder of the class evaluating each student’s oral presentations. The third segment will also be a time where quizzes will be administered.

EVALUATION:
Team oral presentation  25 points (Class assessment)
Individual paper  25 points
Midterm exam  75 points
Final Exam  75 points
Quizzes (10 @ 10 points each)* 100 points

Total points  300 points

*Your top ten quizzes (out of 12) will be scored, the lowest two quizzes will be dropped.

Grading Scale for this Class:

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<th>Points Range</th>
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<td>290-300</td>
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<td>280-289</td>
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<td>270-279</td>
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<td>250-269</td>
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* The instructor reserves the right to raise the grade of any student who makes substantial contributions to class discussions during the second segment of the class.
CLASS EXPECTATIONS:

It is expected that each student will have read and comprehended the assigned readings for the week prior to participating in weekly class discussions.

It is expected that students will complete exams and other assignments in a timely manner. Late work will be substantially penalized or not accepted, at the discretion of the instructor.

There are no make-up quizzes, as their purpose is to ensure students are well prepared for class participation for that day. Instead the lowest two quizzes will be dropped when total quiz points are determined at the end of the course.

There are NO extra credit opportunities so please do not request special considerations regardless of your circumstances. The only opportunity to improve your grade will be substantive and frequent contributions to class discussions during the second segment of each class.

Late arrivals or early departures from class are inappropriate behaviors as they interfere with the learning environment. If you have to leave early or arrive late to class, please do so in a quiet and non-disruptive manner.

Although absences from class are not directly penalized, any information missed because of absences are solely the student’s responsibility to discover.

EXAMINATIONS AND QUIZZES

Quizzes will comprise of 10 objective questions based on the readings for that week. The midterm and final exams will be a combination of objective and short essay questions. Subject matter for the major exams will be a combination of the readings, class lectures, and class and team debate discussions. The final exam will be comprehensive.

Study guides will be provided for the two major exams the week prior to the exam.

STUDENT PAPER REQUIREMENTS

Each week two students will be selected at random to debate the topic for the following week. Each student will write a paper in accordance with the position assigned to him or her by the instructor. The paper should be 3-5 double-spaced typed pages and emailed to the instructor no later than one day prior to the presentation and should include the following elements:

1. A fair and objective description of the problem to be debated
2. Arguments for and against resolving the problem presented
3. A strong and reasoned analysis of why the position you have been assigned is the appropriate one, using the Miroff readings and any other research you feel appropriate to support you position (cite sources to support your opinion, not just your personal views)
WEEKLY READINGS AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Week 1 (January 17) Elite Theory

**Major Concepts in the reading**
- Iron law of oligarchy
- Elitism and pluralism dimensions
- Iron law of democracy

**Read** Dye and Zeigler Chapter 1 and Miroff Chapter 1 (Federalist papers)

Week 2 (January 24) The Constitution

**Major concepts in the reading**
- Origins of elitism in the Constitution
- Constitutional compromises
- Republican form of government
- Checks and balances and elitism

**Read** Dyke and Zeigler Chapter 2 and Miroff Chapter 2 (Democracy overrated?)

**Take Quiz 1**

Week 3 (January 31) The Elites

**Major Concepts in the reading**
- New Deal and Progressive era and elite self-interest
- Government versus private sector elites
- Expanding government and the role of government elites

**Read** Dye and Zeigler Chapters 3 and Miroff Chapter 5 (Political Economy)

**Take Quiz 2**

Week 4 (February 7) The Masses

**Major Concepts in the reading**
- Wage stagnation
- De-unionization
- Income and wealth inequality
- Mass dissatisfaction and apathy with politics
- Mass unrest dangers

**Read:** Dye and Zeigler Chapter 4 and Miroff Chapter 4 (Immigration)
Take Quiz 3

Week 5 (February 14) - The Political Roles of the Media

**Major Concepts in the reading**
- Television network and the elites
- Concentration of media power
- Media political functions
- Bias in television news
- Politics and the internet

**Read** Dye and Zeigler Chapter 5 and Miroff Chapter 9 (Digital Media)

Take Quiz 4

Week 6 (February 21) Interest Groups

**Major Concepts in the reading**
- Interest groups: pluralist versus elitism
- Elite bias of interest groups
- Lobbying influence on government

**Read** Dye and Zeigler Chapter 7 and Miroff Chapter 11 (Negative campaign ads)

Take Quiz 5

Week 7 (February 28) – The Election Process

**Major Concepts in the reading**
- Function of elections
- Why people vote

**Read** Dye and Zeigler Chapters 6 and Miroff Chapter 6 (Corporate election spending)

Take Quiz 6

Week 8 (March 7) Course review and questions followed by the midterm exam
Week 9 (March 21) How Congress works

**Major Concepts in the reading**
- Elites and Congressional recruitment
- Who does Congress really represent?
- Checks and balances and the elite
- Polarization in Congress

**Read** Dye and Zeigler Chapter 8 and Miroff Chapter 13 (Serving the public good)

**Take Quiz 7**

Week 10 (March 28) The Roles of the President

**Major Concepts in the reading**
- President as a symbolic leader
- President’s formal powers
- Limits on Executive power

**Read** Dye and Zeigler Chapters 9 and Miroff Chapter 14 (Does the individual President matter?)

**Take Quiz 8**

Week 11 (April 4) The Bureaucracy

**Major Concepts in the reading**
- Sources of bureaucratic power
- Control of the bureaucracy
- The regulatory quagmire

**Read** Dye and Zeigler Chapter 12 and Miroff Chapter 12 (Federal deficit)

**Take Quiz 9**

Week 12 (April 11) The Roles of the Courts

**Major Concepts in the reading**
- Judicial review
- Structure of the federal court system
- Supreme Court Politics
Read Dye and Zeigler Chapter 10 and Miroff Chapter 15 (Constitutional interpretation)

Take Quiz 10

Week 13 (April 18) Our Civil Liberties

**Major concepts in the reading**
- Minorities and the elite: access issues
- Civil Rights Act of 1964
- Women and politics

Read Dye and Zeigler Chapter 13 and Miroff Chapter 7 (Same sex Marriage)

Take Quiz 11

Week 14 (April 25) Defining U.S, Federalism

**Major Concepts in the reading**
- Federalism
- Federal state division of power
- Power of the national elite
- Evolution of U.S. Federalism

Read Dye and Zeigler Chapter 12 and Miroff Chapter 3 (New Federalism)

Take Quiz 12

Week 15 (May 2) Review
- Overview of the course, discussion of polarization in the U.S., and questions in preparation for the final examination.

Read Miroff Chapter 10 (Political Polarization)

Additional Notes:

Please notify me during the first week of class of any student disability issues you have that require special accommodation in order for you to successfully complete this course.

Free and open expression of views and opinions are encouraged in this class, with the caveat that your views are presented in a civil and respectful manner and that the views of our peers are treated with equal respect.
Please read this syllabus carefully, as it is my contract with you. By enrolling in this class, you agree that you understand your responsibilities and accept the manner by which your class performance will be evaluated. If you have any questions about the syllabus, please raise them in the first class period.