

Texas A&M University * Department of Political Science * Allen Building

**PS206H-200 Revised
American National Politics and Government
Honors Section**

Professor John D. Robertson
Office: 2096 Allen
Phone: 845-2511
e-mail: jrobertson@tamu.edu
Office Hours: T-TR 3 - 4 and by appt

Fall 2008
Allen 1005
8:45 - 10:00am

Professor James Dyer
Office:

Introduction

This course (PS206H) is an examination of the major components (culture, constitution, institutions, organizations, and social policies) shaping the American political narrative today. We consider why these components are important, the logic that underlie their role within the American political system, and the impact they have on how we establish our political preferences, how those preferences change, and how those preferences are realized in the broader policy process.

Part I is a basic review of the American system of government and politics.

Part II explores the basic preferences and issues shaping the American political agenda and narrative.

This course is co-taught by Professors Robertson and Dyer. While the introductory lectures will be shared between these two instructors, Part II of the class will be designed to facilitate class discussion over the key political issues shaping politics today, and both Robertson and Dyer will conduct these classes (except in a few instances) .

Course Requirements and Weights

Class Participation (other than oral presentation, and including classroom attendance) (20%).

Note: Class attendance is not required, but non-University Excused Absences will affect your classroom participation grade.

Two Essays: Mar 18 and Apr 15 (each worth 20% of final grade)

Two Exams: Feb 28 and Apr 24 (each worth 20% of final grade)

Grading Scale

≥89.5% (A)
89.49 - 79.5% (B)
79.49 - 69.5% (C)
69.49 - 59.5% (D)
<59.5% (F)

Papers:

You are to compose two essays (see class schedule) and within each essay consider within 5-7 pages how these authors have helped you understand key aspects of the American political system. Specifically, with respect to Tushnet, you must discuss in your paper these two questions:

- What is and has been the role of the constitution in shaping the political agenda in the United States?
- What is and has been the role of the constitution in resolving deep disputes in the American political arena over major issues dividing the American public?

With respect to Caplan, you must discuss in your paper these two questions:

- How the electoral process both shapes and resolves conflict over preferences and issues within the American political system?
- How well served is the American democracy by the electoral process?

Two class periods have been set aside to discuss the basic arguments and implications of each book prior to the essay's due date. We will discuss later in more detail these two paper assignments.

Each paper is to be double spaced, 12-pt Times Roman Font. It is an essay, no need to have a bibliography. Make sure you cite thoroughly any source you use as a quote or from which you borrow an idea to make your argument. REVIEW THE UNIVERSITY POLICY ON PLAGIARISM. All references in the essay to other works are to be included in endnotes.

Responsibilities of Student With Respect to Grades

All grades will be posted on the class home page. However, these posted grades are not the official record of the student grades. They are posted on the web for PS206H only for the *convenience* of the student. It is the *responsibility* of the student to obtain in class from the instructor the graded assignment/exam so the student will know the "official" grade. Website:

<http://www-polisci.tamu.edu/faculty/robertson>

In order to post grades on the web, each student will be assigned a *Personal Identification Number* at beginning of semester. The PIN will be distributed at beginning of semester and cannot be sent over email.

Texts

Paul Soiffer, Abraham Hoffman, D. Stephen Voss. *American Government*. Cliff Quick Review. Wiley Publishing. 2001.

David T. Canon, John Coleman, Kenneth Mayer. *Faultlines: Debating the Issues in American Politics*. 2nd Ed. W. W. Norton, 2007.

Mark V. Tushnet. *Out of Range: Why the Constitution Can't End the Battle Over Guns*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

Bryan Caplan. *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies*. Princeton University Press, 2007.

All texts for class are ordered through exclusively Loupot's Northgate

Late Work

Please review in detail the University Regulations regarding University Excused Absences. These will be strictly enforced, and without exception. All excused absences from exams/presentations must be verified in writing, and students are required to notify me or my Graduate Assistant PRIOR to an exam of absence-- unless an EXTREME circumstance prevents this. See <http://student-rules.tamu.edu> on web for details.
Course Schedule

Part I: Review of the Basics of the American System of Politics and Government

Jan 15 Class Intro: Syllabus Review

Jan 17 Constitution & Federalism:
Soifer, Hoffman, Voss, Chaps. 1&2

Jan 22 Congress & Judiciary:
Soifer, Hoffman, Voss, Chaps. 3 & 5.

Jan 24 President & Bureaucracy:
Soifer, Hoffman, Voss, Chaps 3 & 6.

Jan 29 Parties, Voting & Interest Groups:
Soifer, Hoffman, Voss, Chaps 9, 10 & 11

Part II: Issues, Preferences and the American Political Narrative

Jan 31 – Feb. 5 *Faultlines* Chap 1: Culture

Samuel P. Huntington, "One Nation, Out of Many"

Louis Menand, "Patriot Games"

Feb 7 *Faultlines* Chap 2 : Constitutionnel Change

Kathleen M. Sullivan, "What's Wrong with Constitutional Amendments?"

Adrian Vermeule, "Constitutional Amendments and the Constitutional Common Law"

Feb 12 *Faultlines* Chap 4: Civil Liberties

The Progressive, "Casualties of War"

Andrew C. McCarthy, "How to 'Connect the Dots'"

Feb 14 *Faultlines* Chap 6: Public Opinion

Morris P. Fiorina, "What Culture Wars? Debunking the Myth of a Polarized America"

James Q. Wilson, "How Divided Are We?" and a response from Morris Fiorina

Feb 19 Class Discussion:

Mark V. Tushnet. *Out of Range: Why the Constitution Can't End the Battle Over Guns.* Oxford University Press, 2007.

Feb 21 - 26 *Faultlines* Chap 3: Federalism

Nelson Lund, "Putting Federalism to Sleep"

John Tabin, "Supreme Substances"

George J Annas, "Jumping Frogs, Endangered Toads, and California's Medical-Marijuana Law"

Feb 28 Exam 1

Mar 4 – 6: *Faultlines* Chap. 5: Civil Rights

Justice Clarence Thomas, dissent in *Barbara Grutter v. Lee Bollinger, et al.* (2003)

Timothy A. Nelsen, Frances P. Kao, Eric J. Gorman, and Amy M. Gardner, "Brief of the Clinical Legal Education Association as Amicus Curiae Supporting Respondents"

SPRING BREAK

Mar 18: Class Discussion:

Bryan Caplan. *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies.* Princeton University Press, 2007.

PAPER 1 DUE TODAY, BY CLASS TIME

Mar 20 *Faultlines* Chap 7: Media/blogs

David D. Perlmutter and Misti McDaniel, "The Ascent of Blogging"

Cass R. Sunstein, "Democracy and Filtering"

Ted Vaden, "Blogs Challenge Newspaper Standards"

Mar 25 - 27 *Faultlines* Chap. 9: Political Parties

Peggy Noonan, "Third Time"

Dick Meyer, "A Recipe for Third Party Victory"

Representative Tom DeLay, "Farewell Address"

David Brooks, "Don't Worry, Be Happy"

Apr 1 – 3 *Faultlines* Chap 11: Interest Groups

Earl Latham: "The Group Basis of Politics: Notes for a Theory" (excerpts)

Jonathan Rauch: "The Hyperpluralism Trap"

Apr 8 - 10 ***Faultlines* Chap 13: Imperial Presidency**

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Imperial Presidency Redux"

Isaacs, John, "Congress goes AWOL"

Robert F. Turner, "FISA vs. the Constitution"

Apr 15 ***Faultlines* Chap 14: Bureaucracy**

James Q. Wilson, "What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It"

Jacob S. Hacker, "Bigger and Better"

PAPER 2 DUE TODAY, BY CLASS TIME

Apr 17 . ***Faultlines* Chap. 16: Economic Policy/Economic Inequality**

Anna Bernasek, "Income Inequality, And Its Cost"

Donald Luskin, "Still Movin' On Up"

The Economist, "Inequality and the American Dream"

Apr 22 **Course Review and Wrap Up**

Apr 24 **Exam 2**

Note: Students with disabilities are guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities in Room 126 of the Koldus Building, or call 845-1637.