

Course Syllabus

Introduction to American Politics Texas A&M University Spring, 2008

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Lectures: Tuesday/Thursday
11:10 a.m. to 12:25 p.m.
Chemistry 100

Course Website: <http://elearning.tamu.edu>

Office Hours: Tuesday/Thursday 1 p.m. to 2 p.m., or by appointment

Introduction

Welcome to class! With the 2008 presidential election around the corner, now is an especially exciting time to learn about American politics. Studying politics from an objective standpoint can be challenging because our perception of actors and their behaviors is often colored by our own ideological and partisan preferences. Nonetheless, we will try to overcome these biases, and instead rely on systematic reasoning to guide our understanding of the American political system, and why it works as it does. The goal of this class is to use theories to explore why the American political system was designed the way that it is, and to evaluate the extent to which it fulfills its purpose. After taking this class, I hope you are better able to analyze and understand American politics for yourself. This syllabus is designed to give you an outline of what lies ahead of us this semester; however like most things in life, the dates, times and assignments may be subject to change at any point in the semester.

Required Readings

Text: Bond, Jon R., Kevin B. Smith and Richard A. Watson. 2007. *The Promise and Performance of American Democracy*. 8th Edition. Belmont, CA: Thomson/Wadsworth.

Course Requirements

Attendance

I will not take class attendance. However, a substantial portion of questions for exams will come directly from lecture. Therefore, if you want to do well in the class, it is imperative that you attend lecture on the scheduled dates and times. At a bare minimum, this means coming to class alert, free from distractions, ready to take notes, and willing to ask and answer questions. If you need help understanding any of the material covered in lecture, I urge you to come to my office hours. If necessary, I am also available by appointment.

Reading

Each week, I will assign approximately 30 to 40 pages of reading from the textbook. You should complete the assigned reading for the week before coming to class that week. Depending upon your reading ability, you should dedicate at least 3 hours each week to carefully reading and analyzing the assigned text. Beyond reading passively, this means thinking analytically about what tables and charts say, understanding the logic of the author's main argument, and developing your own opinions about the content of the material. Completing the assigned reading – and understanding it thoroughly – will be instrumental to doing well in this class. If you have questions about any of the assigned readings, I encourage you to visit me in office hours that are listed on the front page. I am also available by appointment, if you are unable to come during my scheduled office hours.

Exam I (25%), Exam II (35%) and Last Exam (40%)

Everyone is expected to take exams on the scheduled days: Tuesday, February 12th; Thursday, March 6th; and Thursday, April 24th. All exams will be administered promptly at the beginning of class in our normal classroom. Please make a note of these dates and times. If your schedule does not permit you to take exams on these dates, you should drop the course now. Exams will be comprised of true/false and multiple choice questions only. On exam dates, students should come to class with their University ID card, a Scantron (large gray, form # O-101607-TAMU), a #2 pencil, and eraser. I will be verifying your identity through your University ID card, so it is your responsibility to bring it. If you do not have your University ID card, you will not be allowed to turn in your exam. While the exams will not be cumulative regarding names and facts, they will reflect common theories we will address throughout the course.

Make-Up Exam Policy

For Midterms 1 & 2: If you miss a midterm exam due to a university-excused absence and have a letter from your dean explaining your absence, you will have the choice between two options:

- (1) You may take a make-up examination on Tuesday, March 18th in 2029 Allen Building; OR
- (2) You may have your next exam pro-rated to compensate for the exam that you missed.

For Last Exam: If you miss the last exam due to a university-excused absence and have a letter from your dean explaining your absence, you may take a make-up examination on Friday, May 2nd at 3 p.m. in 2029 Allen Building.

For all make-up examinations, you should arrive with your University ID card, blue book and pen.

For the rest of the class who took exams on time, there will be no class on March 18th or May 2nd.

Learning Outcomes

Students can expect to learn the following by the end of this course:

1. To define, understand and use concepts and terms relevant to the study of American politics.
2. To comprehend the origins and evolution of American political institutions with an emphasis on understanding the effects these institutional structures have on elite and mass political behavior.
3. To evaluate problems in the American political system and develop creative potential solutions.
4. To critique theories of elite and mass political behavior using principles of logic and reasoning.

A Word About Academic Dishonesty

Please be advised that I take academic dishonesty very seriously. You should be familiar with the Aggie Honor Code regarding academic misconduct: <http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor>

Plagiarism consists of passing off as one's own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of the person. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues without which research cannot be safely communicated. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, please consult the Aggie Honor System Office website (<http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor>) or the latest version of the Texas A&M University Student Rules, under the section "Scholastic Dishonesty."

Any student who violates the code of conduct will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

Students With Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be 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, Disabilities Services in Room B118 of Cain Hall, or call 845-1637.

Copyrighted Course Materials

The handouts used in this course are copyrighted. By "handouts," I mean all materials generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, quizzes, exams, lab problems, in-class materials review sheets, and additional problem sets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission.

Readings and Lectures

Introduction to the Logic of American Politics

January 15th & 17th

- Text, pgs 2-33 (Chapter 1)

The Constitution

January 22nd & 24th

- Text, pgs 34-69 (Chapter 2)
- Text, pgs A17-A25, A1-A12 (Federalist #10; Federalist #51; the Constitution)

The Congress

January 29th, 31st, February 5th & 7th

- Text, pgs 380-423 (Chapter 12)

MIDTERM #1 ON TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 12TH AT 11:10 A.M. IN 100 CHEMISTRY

The Presidency

February 14th & 19th

- Text, pgs 424-467 (Chapter 13)

The Bureaucracy

February 21st & 26th

- Text, pgs 468-501 (Chapter 14)

The Judiciary

February 28th & March 4th

- Text, pgs 502-543 (Chapter 15)

MIDTERM #2 ON THURSDAY, MARCH 6TH AT 11:10 A.M. IN 100 CHEMISTRY

SPRING BREAK – NO CLASSES ON MARCH 11TH & 13TH

MAKE-UP FOR MIDTERMS 1 & 2 ON MARCH 18TH AT 11:10 A.M. IN 2029 ALLEN BLDG. / WALK FOR REST OF CLASS WHO TOOK EXAMS ON TIME

Public Opinion and Political Socialization

March 20th & 25th

- Text, pgs 276-303 (Chapter 9)

Campaigns and Elections

March 27th, April 1st & 3rd

- Text, pgs 304-347 (Chapter 10)

Voting and Participation

April 8th & 10th

- Text, pgs 348-379 (Chapter 11)

Political Parties

April 15th & 17th

- Text, pgs 206-245 (Chapter 7)

Interest Groups

April 22nd

- Text, pgs 170-205 (Chapter 6)

LAST EXAM ON THURSDAY, APRIL 24TH AT 11:10 A.M. IN 100 CHEMISTRY

MAKE-UP FOR LAST EXAM ON FRIDAY, MAY 2ND AT 3 P.M. IN 2029 ALLEN BLDG.