POLS 1101: American Government

University of North Georgia
Fall 2015
TR 9:30 am – 10:45 am

Professor: Glen Smith
Office: Strickland 106
Office Hours: TR (12:15 – 1:45pm) & Monday (12 – 4pm).
Email: glen.smith@ung.edu

Overview of the Course

This course is structured to move from an examination of the structures of the American governmental system to the actors within the system and finally to the outside pressures on those actors. We begin by examining the structure of the American governmental system as established by the constitution, statutes and precedent. Next we examine the actors who work within that political system including congressmen, the president, Supreme Court justices and bureaucrats. Finally, we end the course by discussing the pressures brought upon the governmental system by outside actors such as interest groups, mass media and public opinion. I hope that by the end of the course you will understand how it all fits together.

Course Objectives

The purpose of this course is to provide you with a basic understanding of American politics including its institutions, processes and practices. In the process of learning the material, this course helps develop skills such as writing and critical thinking. An additional goal of this course is to promote civic engagement in political affairs. In general, my hope is that you will leave this course with both a better understanding of politics and a desire to become engaged in the political system. Specifically, by the time students have finished this course, they should be able to:

1. Describe how the American political system works.
2. Describe and explain the historical and philosophical roots of America’s system of government and its Constitutional components.
3. Explain the importance of civic responsibility in a participatory republic, including involvement in issue debates and elections.
4. Formulate and defend logical arguments in discussing a variety of contemporary political questions, including those arising from cultural differences within the United States and from the evolving status of the United States within the global area.
5. Demonstrate well-developed analytical thinking, writing and oral communication skills as they describe the strengths and weaknesses of the American political system.
6. Use computer technology to discover information relating to politics and government.
7. Assess the accuracy, completeness and potential bias of sources of information pertaining to politics and government.

Course Readings

I require the following book for this class, which is available for purchase in the bookstore:


Course Requirements

Exams (600 Points)
There will be three exams worth 200 points each, for a total of 600 points. Each exam will require you to discuss 10 topics from class discussion, with each topic worth 20 points. The topics will come from a list provided on Elearning. I will elaborate on my expectations during the first class session, but you are always welcome to ask me (in person, not by e-mail) about my expectations for the exams. I will regularly discuss what you can expect on the exams, so attendance is essential.

Quizzes (200 Points)
There will be five quizzes held throughout the semester. Each quiz is worth 50 points, with the lowest grade dropped. Quizzes will require you to answer one or two questions from the readings required for that week. The quizzes will test reading comprehension prior to class, so it is important to keep up with the required readings listed in the course outline below. Again, the quizzes will usually (but not always) be held on the Monday that the readings are due.

Short Paper (100 Points)
During class, I will show a PBS Frontline episode titled The Storm. You will write an essay (3-4 pages) analyzing how the video illustrated principles of federalism. You should structure your essay around the following three questions.

1. Who were the main political actors involved, and what were their political interests?
2. Why was it difficult to coordinate emergency response across federal, state and local governments?
3. How is this event likely to change emergency response in the future?
Current Events Paper (100 points)

Throughout the semester, we will watch clips from news programs that discuss current events. This assignment requires that you write a paper discussing how the videos relate to the topics discussed in class lectures. In other words, explain how this course helped you better understand politics in the real world. Although most videos are available online, I will not provide the link to the videos to those missing class. If you were unable to watch a video, for whatever reason, just write about the videos that you did watch. Papers are due on the last day of class. All papers must be typed and double spaced using 12 point Times font with one-inch margins on all sides.

Course Grading Scale

A  900-1000
B  800-899
C  700-799
D  600-699
F  Below 600

Other Information

Make-up Exams: If you miss an exam, you must contact me immediately and request a make-up. I will only grant make-up exams if you have (what I consider) a valid excuse. Regardless of your reason for missing the exam, there will be a 20 point deduction in your exam grade if the exam is not taken at the scheduled time. The final exam is an exception as the university has a 48 hour deadline for grade submission. You are not entitled to take a make-up exam, so the onus is on you to find me and schedule a time within one-week of the original exam date. Depending on the circumstances, I might not allow you to take a make-up exam after that one-week period, resulting in a 0 for that exam.

Disruptive Behavior: Students who exhibit behaviors that are considered to obstruct or disrupt this class or its learning activities will be considered under the Board of Regents Policy on Disruptive Behavior. Behaviors which are considered to be inappropriate in this classroom include sleeping, eating, coming in late, interrupting others, talking out of turn, inappropriate behavior during group work, verbal behavior that is disrespectful of other students or the faculty member, or other behaviors that may be disruptive. Students who exhibit such behavior may be temporarily dismissed from the class by the instructor and may be subject to disciplinary procedures outlined in the Student Handbook.

Academic Misconduct: I do not tolerate plagiarism or cheating of any kind. If you are caught cheating or plagiarizing you will fail the course and be subject to further disciplinary action by the university. Plagiarism is trying to use another person’s work as your own. The best way to avoid plagiarism is to describe things in your own words. If you are unsure of the rules regarding plagiarism, talk to me during office hours or after class.
Supplemental Course Information: Students are responsible for accessing supplemental course information common to all courses at http://ung.edu/academic-affairs/policies-and-guidelines/supplemental-syllabus.php

Accessibility Statement: If you need this (or any other) course document in another format, please e-mail Andrew Eade at Andrew.eade@ung.edu or call 706-864-1628.

Outline of the Course

Week 1 (8/18 & 8/20)
Introduction
-No Assigned Readings

Week 2 (8/25 & 8/27)
Political Theory
Readings: Chapters 1-2 & 11-1

Week 3 (9/1 – 9/3)
Constitution
Readings: Chapters 2-1 & 2-4

Week 4 (9/8 – 9/10)
Civil Rights & Liberties
Readings: Chapter 5-1

Week 5 (9/15 – 9/17)
Federalism
Readings: Chapter 3-2

*First Exam on Tuesday 9/22

Week 6 (9/24)
Congress
Readings: Chapter 6-1

Week 7 (9/29 – 10/1)
Presidency
Readings: Chapters 7-1 & 7-2
Week 8 (10/6 – 10/8)
Bureaucracy & Judiciary
Readings: Chapters 9-1 & 9-2

Week 9 (10/13 – 10/15)
Political Parties
Readings: Chapters 12-1 & 12-3

Week 10 (10/20 – 10/22)
Interest Groups
Readings: Chapters 1-1 & 13-1

*Second Exam on Tuesday 10/27

Week 11 (10/29)
Party Identification
No Readings

Week 12 (11/3 – 11/5)
Public Opinion
Readings: Chapters 10-2 & 10-4

Week 13 (11/10 – 11/12)
News Media
Readings: Chapters 14-1 & 14-2

Week 14 (11/17 – 11/19)
Participation
No Readings

Week 15 (12/1 – 12/3)
Elections
Readings: Chapters 11-4
*Current Events Paper Due Thursday 12/3

*Final Exam on Thursday, December 10th from 10:20 – 12:20