POLS 1101: American Government

University of North Georgia
Spring 2015
MWF 10am – 10:50 am

Professor: Glen Smith
Office: Strickland 106
Office Hours: MW (9 – 10, 12 – 1, 4 – 5), & Friday (12 – 3pm).
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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. More 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 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 answer two broad essay questions that address topics covered during class lectures. 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.

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 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?

Policy Proposal (200 points)

For this assignment, you will come up with a solution to a political problem. You should begin by thinking of (what you think) is the biggest problem facing the country or society in general. Once you have identified a problem, take time to think of the best solution to that problem. Try to be as specific as possible in outlining your policy proposal. In your paper, write each of the questions below (in bold) and then answer them in order. You will be graded on 1) your evidence that a problem exists, 2) how well you identify the benefits and consequences of the policy, 3) the strength of the arguments in favor AND opposed to your policy, and 4) your knowledge of the current political landscape. Each question below is worth 25 points.

Answer each of the following questions in order:
1. **What is the problem?** (2-3 pages)
   - Provide detailed evidence that a problem exists. You must conduct substantial research to complete this section of the paper.

2. **What is your solution?** (1 page)
   - Discuss how you plan to solve the problem, paying specific attention to how you will pay for the policy, where any increased savings will go, and which executive department will implement your policy.

3. **Who will benefit from this policy?** (1 page)
   - Discuss the social groups or entities that will stand to benefit from your policy. Examples of social groups are: the elderly, welfare recipients, illegal immigrants, the wealthy, blacks, women, fast food eaters, or any type of person affected by your policy.

4. **What interest groups are likely to support this policy?** (half of 1 page)
   - You must research specific interest groups on both sides of your policy. Provide the names of interest groups and a brief description of what they do. Interest group websites typically provide this information.

5. **Who will this policy harm?** (1 page)
   - See question 3.

6. **What interest groups are likely to oppose this policy?** (half of 1 page)
   - See question 4.

7. **What are the best arguments opposing your policy?** (1-2 pages)
   - Provide the best arguments opposing your policy. Pretend that you were making the best case against your policy.

8. **Would this policy pass in the current political environment?** Why or why not? (1 page)
   - The purpose of this section is to show me that you understand the current players in the American political system. Would the president support it? Would the policy be blocked in the house or senate? Would powerful interest groups be effective at blocking it in committee?

Papers are due on **Friday, April 24th**. I provide length guidelines above, but some will write more or less depending on writing style and the issue you choose. The paper must be typed and double spaced using 12 point *Times* font with one-inch margins on all sides. You are required to conduct research on the problem, and provide a citation (in text) any time you 1) use someone else’s words, or 2) report any data or facts retrieved from a source. You must also search for the best arguments on each side and identify the interest groups (provide specific names of interest groups) that would lobby in support or opposition to the policy. If you are at all unclear about my expectations, come see me during office hours or after class. Below are some common mistakes that students make on this assignment:

1. Failure to provide any (or insufficient) data and evidence that a problem exists. In other words, you did not conduct any research on the problem.
2. Facts are reported without an in-text citation.

3. A reference page is not included. If you did the assignment correctly, you must have a reference page listing all of your sources. There is an automatic 15 point deduction if you do not include a reference page that lists your sources.

4. Papers do not include the names of interest groups both for and against the policy and how those interest groups try to affect policy.

5. The arguments opposing the proposed policy are too weak. The opposing argument section should present the best possible arguments against your policy and should not include your opinion on why those arguments are invalid.

Examples of policies include the following:

The Fair Tax
The Dream Act
Legalization of Marijuana
Taxing Fast Foods
Banning Abortions
Improving Renewable Energy
Terms Limits on the Supreme Court
Private Accounts for Social Security
Legalizing Gay Marriage
National Education Standards

**Attendance (100 Points)**

I will take attendance daily, with a final score being given at the end of the semester.

**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 10 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

Outline of the Course

Section 1 (1/5 – 2/6)
Political Theory, Constitution, Civil Liberties and Federalism
First Exam on Friday February 6th

Section 2 (2/11 – 3/13)
Congress, Executive, Judiciary and Public Policy
Second Exam on Wednesday March 11th

Section 3 (3/23 – 4/24)
Public Opinion, Media and Elections
Policy Papers Due Friday April 24th
Final Exam on Friday, May 1st from 10:20 – 12:20