

Government 101
Introduction to American Government

Ron Seyb
Ladd 310
Ext. 5248

Office Hours:
Tu & Th, 1-3
Spring 2006

Course Description

This course provides an overview of contemporary American government and politics. It is designed to: (1) provide you with the essential information and concepts you will need to take upper division courses in American government; (2) introduce you to how political scientists think about the American political system; and (3) help you to analyze some of the key political issues and controversies animating American politics today.

Most of the course will focus on contemporary American politics and government. I will often draw on recent political events and issues to illustrate points in the lectures, and many of the authors you will read will describe current policy debates and political personalities. I will occasionally distribute short newspaper or magazine articles in class to help amplify or clarify points made in the lectures or the course readings. Some of the questions on the midterm and final examinations will come from these articles.

I strongly encourage you to read The New York Times, both because it is a quality publication and because it is a free quality publication (so long as you have the opposable thumbs necessary to grasp and pull a copy out of one of the racks in Case Center). You can also acquire a considerable amount of useful information about and analysis of American politics by perusing the following web sites:

Realclearpolitics.com
CNN's *Inside Politics* at cnn.com/POLITICS/
TheHill.com

Course Requirements

Your final grade will be based on your performance on the following exercises:

- (1) A test on the United States Constitution (10%) on Thursday, February

- (2) Two 5-7 page papers on topics assigned by me (30%)
- 3) An in-class midterm examination on Thursday, March 9 (30%)
- (4) An in-class final examination, date and time to be determined by the inscrutable, omnipotent scheduling gods in the Registrar's Office (30%)

Attendance

I will take attendance at each class meeting. I will allow you two excused absences. You must file your request for an excused absence before or on the day of the class you absolutely must miss. If you know, for example, that you will be running the bobblehead concession at Jack Abramoff's sentencing hearing in March, then inform me of this as early in the semester as possible. You may make your request for an excused absence by phone, via e-mail, or in person. Any unexcused absence, any absence after you have expended your two excused absences, or any lateness to class (i.e., I will treat tardies as unexcused absences) will cause me to deduct 2% from your final grade (e.g., a student who earns a cumulative score of "90" (A-) on the course assignments will receive an "88" (B+) for the course).

You should also keep in mind that according to *The Academic Information Guide*, "any students who miss more than a third of the (class) sessions may expect to be barred from (the) final examination. In such cases, the course grade will be recorded as F."

Books

The following books can be purchased from The Skidmore Shop for less than the cost of a ticket to "Samuel Alito's Cavalcade of Comedy":

Marc Landy and Sidney Milkis, *American Government*
William Lassser, *Perspectives on American Politics*

Weekly Topics and Reading Assignments

An asterisk (*) denotes a reading that will be distributed in class

Week 1 (January 24-26): The Founding

Readings: *Fred Anderson, "The *Real* First World War and the Making of America," *American Heritage* (December 2005)

*Gordon Wood, "Republicanism," from *The American Revolution*

Landy and Milkis, Appendix One: "The Declaration of Independence"

Week 2 (January 31-February 2): From Confederation to Constitution

Readings: Landy and Milkis Chapter 3 and Appendix Two: "The Constitution"

*Bernard Bailyn, "Politics and the Creative Imagination," from *To Begin the World Anew*

**McCulloch v. Maryland*

Lasser, 1.4, Federalist #51

Week 3 (February 7-9): Federalism

Readings: Landy and Milkis, Chapter 5

Lasser 2.1, "What the Anti-Federalists Were For"

Lasser, 1.1, Federalist #10

CONSTITUTION TEST

FEBRUARY 9

Week 4 (February 14-16): Political Parties

Readings: Landy and Milkis, Chapter 11

Lasser, 8.4, "Breaking the Two Party Monopoly"

Week 5 (February 21-23): Political Participation

Readings: Landy and Milkis, Chapter 12

Lasser, 6.4, "A New Form of Lobbying Puts Public Face on Private Interest"

FIRST PAPER DUE

FEBRUARY 23

Week 6 (February 28-March 2): Congressional Elections

Readings: *Dean Murphy, "Who Should Redistrict?," *The New York Times Magazine*, (October 23, 2005)

*Dennis Johnson, "Case Study: Challenging an Incumbent U.S. Senator," from *No Place for Amateurs*

Week 7 (March 7-9): Congress

Readings: Landy and Milkis, Chapter 7

*John Cochran, "Two Years In, Frist Struggles to Tame an Unruly Senate," *Congressional Quarterly* (October 16, 2004)

*Jackie Koszczuk, "The Slow Decline of a GOP 'Godfather,'" *Congressional Quarterly* (October 3, 2005)

MIDTERM EXAMINATION
MARCH 9

SPRING BREAK

Week 8 (March 21-23): Choosing a President

Readings: *Stephen Wayne, "Presidential Selection: A Historical Overview," from *The Road to the White House*, 2004

Week 9 (March 28-30): The Presidency

Readings: Landy and Milkis, Chapter 8

Week 10 (April 4-6): Managing the Bureaucracy

Readings: Landy and Milkis, Chapter 10
Robert Reich, *Locked in the Cabinet*, pp. 41-94

Week 11 (April 11-13): The Supreme Court and Judicial Review

Readings: Landy and Milkis, Chapter 9
Lasser, 12.2, "Marbury v. Madison"

SECOND PAPER DUE
APRIL 13

Week 12 (April 18-20): Civil Liberties

Reading: **Griswold v. Connecticut*
**Roe v. Wade*
**Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey*

Week 13 (25-27): Civil Rights

Readings: Lasser, 4.1, "Plessy v. Ferguson"
Lasser, 4.2, "Brown v. Board of Education"
*Gerald Rosenberg, "Substituting Symbol for Substance: What Did *Brown* Really Accomplish?," *P.S. Political Science and Politics* 38(2) (April 2004)

Week 14 (May 2): Review for the Final Examination

Readings: No Reading

FINAL EXAMINATION
TBA