

Government 101
Introduction to American Government

Ron Seyb
Ladd 310
Ext. 5248

Office Hours:
W & F, 1:00-2:30 PM
Spring 2010

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 via email to help amplify or clarify points made in the lectures or the course readings. **Please check your email at least once a day.** If you do not receive a life-changing message from me, you may receive one from a Nigerian millionaire.

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 (“And this bird you cannot channgeeee”). If you prefer to get digital, then you can access the online version of *The Times* at the following link:

[http:// www.nytimes.com/](http://www.nytimes.com/)

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/](http://cnn.com/POLITICS/)

ABC's “The Note” at [http:// abcnews.go.com/ Politics/ TheNote](http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/TheNote)

Course Requirements

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

(1) A multiple-choice test on the United States Constitution and its first 10 amendments (aka, "The Bill of Rights") (10%) on **Thursday, February 18**

This test will be graded pass/fail. You will need to answer 80% of the questions correctly to earn a "pass." Should you fail the test the first time, you may take it once more on a day and time of your choosing.

(2) Two 5-7 page papers on topics assigned by me due on **Thursday, March 4** and **Thursday, April 22** (30%)

(3) An in-class midterm examination on **Thursday, April 1** (30%)

(4) An in-class final examination on **Wednesday, May 12** (30%)

Attendance

You are allowed to miss three (3) classes. I will treat tardies as absences ("Chloe hit my boyfriend" does not work as an excuse outside of the E! Biohazard Dome). **I will deduct 2% from your final grade for each absence over the limit (e.g., a student who earns a cumulative score of "90" (A-) on the course assignments will receive an "88" (B+) for the course).**

There are no excused absences. I will not count an absence only if I receive a note from the Office of Academic Advising telling me that you have either been quarantined due to illness (or, of course, *Jersey Shore* proselytizing) or were compelled to leave campus.

When you reach three absences, I will send you an email alerting you that your next absence will cause me to deduct 2% from your course grade.

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."**

Laptops

Laptops are not allowed in class. I have seen what Facebook has done to my sister-in-law (three more hours on it and the Chinese will have successfully programmed her to assassinate the president). I want to help you to avoid becoming the same freak show (I will make an exception of Cirque du Soleil performers). Students who have a disability that precludes them from taking notes with any instrument other than a laptop must provide me with

documentation testifying to their “laptop needs” **by the end of the second week of classes.**

Books

The following books can be purchased from The Skidmore Shop for less than the cost of a bottle of *Scott Brown’s Pec Bronzing Solution*:

Morris Fiorina, *Culture War?*

Theodore Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, and Kenneth Shepsle, *American Government*

Jeffrey Toobin, *The Nine*

Important Note Pertaining to The Hodges Harbrace Handbook

All Government majors are now required to **own** a copy of the 17th edition of *The Hodges Harbrace Handbook*. Copies of the HHH can be found on the bottom shelf of the “Government” section at The Skidmore Shop. **If you do not yet own a copy, then you must purchase one for this course.** If you already own a copy, then give yourself a hug.

Weekly Topics and Reading Assignments

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

Week 1 (January 26-28): The Founding

Readings: *Sean Wilentz, “Prologue,” *The Rise of American Democracy*

Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. A3-A6, “The Declaration of Independence”

Week 2 (February 2-4): The Critical Period

Readings: *”The Articles of Confederation”

*Letter from Alexander Hamilton to James Duane, September 3, 1780

Week 3 (February 9-11): From Confederation to Constitution

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 2

Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. A7- A27, “The Constitution of the United States and Amendments”

Week 4 (February 16-18): Separation of Powers and Federalism

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 3

The Federalist Papers, #10 and #51

Andrew Jackson, “Proclamation Regarding Nullification,” December 10, 1832

**CONSTITUTION TEST
FEBRUARY 18**

Week 5 (February 23-25): Political Parties

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 11
Fiorina, *Culture War?* Chapters 1-4

Week 6 (March 2-4): Campaigns and Elections

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 10
Fiorina, *Culture War?* Chapter 7
Michael Tomasky, "How Historic a Victory?" *The New York Review of Books* (December 18, 2008)

**FIRST PAPER DUE
MARCH 4**

Week 7 (March 9-11): The Supreme Court and Judicial Review

Readings: Toobin, Prologue, Chapters 1-4 and Chapters 11-13
**Marbury v. Madison*

SPRING BREAK

Week 8 (March 23-25): Civil Liberties

Reading: Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. 72-90
**Roe v. Wade*
*Jeffrey Rosen, "The Day After Roe," *The Atlantic* (June 2006)

Week 9 (March 30-April 1): Civil Rights

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. 90-112
**Plessy v. Ferguson*
**Brown v. Board of Education*

**MIDTERM EXAMINATION
APRIL 1**

Week 10 (April 6-8): Congress: The House of Representatives

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 5

Week 11 (April 13-15): Congress: The Senate

Readings: *Joshua Green, "Take Two," *The Atlantic* (November 2006)
*Jonathan Chait, "Why the Democrats Can't Govern," *The New Republic* (April 15, 2009)

Week 13 (April 20-22): The Presidency

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 6

**SECOND PAPER DUE
APRIL 22**

Week 14 (April 27-29): The Presidency: What Next?

Readings: *David Kennedy, "What Would Wilson Do?" *The Atlantic*
(January/ February 2010)

Week 14 (May 4): Review for the Final Examination

Readings: No Reading

**FINAL EXAMINATION
WEDNESDAY, MAY 12, 1:30-4:30 PM, LADD 307**