

Government 101
Introduction to American Government

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Office Hours:
M & W 12:30-2:30 PM
Fall 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 Match.com (it is not a dating site; it is a relationship site).

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. You can, of course, if you are one of those “if it don’t scroll, I don’t roll” people, read the NYTs on-line, but you will by doing so fail to learn to fold pages properly (Good luck with your wedding invitations). 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 **Friday, October 1**

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 date and at a time of your choosing.

(2) Two 5-7 page papers on topics assigned by me due on **Friday, October 15** and **Monday, November 22** (30%)

(3) An in-class midterm examination on **Friday, October 29** (30%)

(4) An in-class final examination scheduled by the Tarantino zealots in the Registrar's Office for **Thursday, December 16 at 6:00 PM** (30%)

Attendance

You are allowed to miss five (5) classes. There are no excused absences. I do not grant excused absences for two reasons: (1) I just do not possess the cranial power to be able to discriminate between those illnesses, events, life changes, restless earlobe disorders, etc. that are serious and those that are trivial; and (2) Five absences allow you to miss 1 ½ of the class sessions without incurring any penalty. Even the UFC is not this generous (and it allows nostril gouging). **I will treat tardies as absences.** I know that 9:05 AM is a heinous time to have class, but we as they say in the convent, "we must persevere, Fraulein Maia." I do often say significant things at the outset of class about readings, assignments, life coaching opportunities, etc. It is hence important that you be at least physically present at 9:05 AM. Your mind belongs to you (while I can access your dreams, I respect your privacy... though I do worry about all those unicorns and rainbows that seem to dance around your unconscious), but I do need at least to feel your presence if I am to summon the strength to love myself (As Darryl Philbin once said to Michael Scott, "Mike, it takes great courage to be you. I could not do it.")

I will deduct 2% from your final grade for each absence over the limit 5 absence limit (e.g., a student who earns a cumulative score of "90" (A-) on the course assignments who compiles 6 absences will receive an "88" (B+) for the course).

If you reach five 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 those I love. All of them are now lost to me (well, the truth is that they never liked me much). 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 (i.e., Friday, September 17)**

Cell Phones, Blackberries, PDAs, and Other Gadgets for Touching Lives and Spreading Your Love

I recognize that these devices (which always prompt from me the exclamation, "Ohhh, shiny") are as much a part of you as obscene fingernail polish messages are to Lindsay Lohan. I shall thus not cause you any feelings of separation or anxiety by having Big Coco confiscate them at the door. But I would be grateful if you turned them off during class. I am quite sensitive to sound. It is the principal reason why I sleep in a hyperbaric chamber. That, and doing so, of course, can make me immortal.

Books

The following books can be purchased from The Skidmore Shop for less than it cost Representative Anthony Weiner for neck vein replacement surgery:

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 you are still dangerous, but you can be my wingman any time.

Weekly Topics and Reading Assignments

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

Week 1 (September 8-10): The Founding

Readings: *Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, pp. 5-31
Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. A3-A6, "The Declaration of Independence"

Week 2 (September 13-17): The Critical Period

Readings: *"The Articles of Confederation"
*Letter from Alexander Hamilton to James Duane, September 3, 1780

Week 3 (September 20-24): 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 (September 27-October 1): Separation of Powers and Federalism

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 3
The Federalist Papers, #10 and #51

**CONSTITUTION TEST
OCTOBER 1**

Week 5 (October 4-9): Political Parties

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

Week 6 (October 11-15): 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
OCTOBER 15**

Week 7 (October 18-22): The Supreme Court and Judicial Review

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

Week 8 (October 25-29): Civil Liberties

Reading: Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. 72-90

**Roe v. Wade*

*Jeffrey Rosen, "The Day After Roe," *The Atlantic* (June 2006)

MIDTERM EXAMINATION OCTOBER 29

Week 9 (November 1-5): Civil Rights

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, pp. 90-112

**Plessy v. Ferguson*

**Brown v. Board of Education*

Week 10 (November 8-12): Congress: The House of Representatives

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 5

Week 11 (November 15-19): Congress: The Senate

Readings: **George Packer, "The Empty Chamber," *The New Yorker* (August 9, 2010)

Week 13 (November 22): Catch-Up

Reading: No Reading

SECOND PAPER DUE NOVEMBER 22

Week 14 (November 29-December 3): The Presidency

Readings: Lowi and Ginsberg, Chapter 6

Matt Bai, "Democrat in Chief?" *The New York Times Magazine* (June 8, 2010)

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Week 15 (December 6-10): The Presidency: What Next?

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

FINAL EXAMINATION DECEMBER 16, 6:00 PM, Ladd 307