Department of Political Science

POLS 101, National Government of the United States
Tuesdays and Thursdays @ 3:40PM

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Course Description and Requirements

Harold Lasswell informed us decades ago that politics is the process of determining who gets what – when and how. Politics determines which ideas governments accept and implement, and what ideas are not. These decisions at the federal level are a product of the machinations that occur within our national government. This course is designed to expose students to the major political and policy making institutions of the U.S. government.

We will explore the philosophical and historical roots of American politics and major institutions including, but not limited to Congress, the presidency, the judiciary, and the bureaucracy. We will also consider the role and function of state and local governments in the American political system.

More specifically, you should be able to:

• Explain how government and politics impacts your daily life;
• Recognize and evaluate the basic debates and issues in American government and American political history;
• Explain and critically assess the formal and informal political institutions, and their respective roles, in American politics;
• Identify and describe the key functions of the three branches of government;
• Assess the causes and consequences of different forms of political participation, and outline the ways in which individuals and groups can affect political outcomes in the United States;
• Identify the ways in which government, politics, and society interact; and
• Assess the impact of structural factors, such as the economy, culture, and technology, on the process of governance in the United States.

You should be able to discuss each of these areas confidently and in depth. Upon completion of this course, students will be familiar with the fundamental aspects of American government and the context in which they exist.
Course Goals

1. Gain a better understanding of key structures, functions, and processes of American concepts and assigned readings in national government.

2. Develop ability to construct well organized, clearly written, informatively presented, and effectively persuasive analytic arguments on issues pertaining to national government.

3. Improve ability to engage in oral debate and dialogue concerning issues and ideas concerning national government.

Course Objectives

1. Students will be better, more confident writers and thinkers.

2. Students will analyze critical concepts in a variety of settings.

3. Students will improve their ability to analyze historical and contemporary political events and claims.

Instructional Methods

This is a lecture course. A premium is placed on quality writing and class participation. You are expected to ask questions and offer informed analysis and commentary in class. That said, please be civil to and respectful of your colleagues, particularly if they express opinions that are unpopular. Also, make sure that your commentary is relevant to the discussion/literature.

Textbooks and Other Resources

Required


Note: Please get the most recently published edition. A number of journal articles will be available through JSTOR on the Howard University library’s online research database.

Recommended

There are a number of recommended readings listed throughout the syllabus. They are intended to provide you with additional knowledge on selected topics. You will not be tested on any of the material listed as recommended. However, they are very useful to read to gain a deeper understanding of the issues they address.
Student Assessment

Students will be evaluated on the following:

- **A mid-term examination** that will test your knowledge and understanding of the assigned reading and class discussion from the first half of this semester. (40% of your final grade).
- **General participation:** Active participation in class discussions, demonstrating understanding of assigned reading, short writing assignments, and unannounced quizzes (as needed (20% of your final grade).
- **A final examination** that will test your knowledge and understanding of the assigned reading and class discussion from the second half of this semester. (40% of your final grade)

**Please Note:** For this course, an A grade is reserved for sustained outstanding performance in all aspects of the course – examinations and class participation. A B grade is assigned to those who demonstrate mastery of the course readings and above average performance in all aspects of the course. The grade of C denotes average/marginal performance.

A few words on class participation: Class participation encompasses questions and comments that demonstrate knowledge of – though not necessarily agreement with – assigned course readings or other information that sheds light on a topic relevant to the course. Remember, professionals in public policy must be able to speak effectively in small groups and to make presentations of their work. The only way to learn these skills is to practice, so students are expected to contribute to discussions and will be required to present summaries of selected readings. I place a heavy emphasis on class participation. Consequently, *each week’s assigned readings must be read before each class discussion.* Students should also be prepared to summarize, offer critical assessments – or both – of the literature as well as the comments of classmates. *It is quite possible that a student who earned an “A” on both examinations can end up with a final grade of “B” if he or she does not regularly participate in class discussions.*

Class attendance is taken into account in evaluation for the course. While it is understandable that other requirements will occasionally conflict with class times, missing more than four class sessions will make it virtually impossible to earn a grade better than B for the course. *Missing more than five sessions will make a grade of C likely.*
Policies

Mobile Phones: Please be courteous to your colleagues and instructor by turning off your mobile phone before entering the classroom.

Extra Credit: No extra credit assignments will be given in this course.

Late Submission of Research Papers: All papers should be submitted on time. Any paper submitted after the deadline will be penalized one full letter grade (no exceptions).

Incomplete Grades: No incomplete grades will be assigned at the end of this semester, except in the case of extraordinary, officially validated emergencies.

Academic Accommodation for a Disability: Howard University is committed to providing an educational environment that is accessible to all students. In accordance with this commitment, students in need of accommodations due to a disability should contact the Office of the Dean for Special Student Services for verification and determination of reasonable accommodations as soon as possible after admission to the University, or at the beginning of each academic semester. Contact the Office for Special Student Services, Howard Center Suite 725, 2225 Georgia Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20059, at 202-238-2420 for more information. Please notify me within the first two weeks of class if you require such accommodation.

Howard University Academic Code of Student Conduct

(Revised 2010)
Approved by the Board of Trustees, June 29, 2010

Howard University is a community of scholars composed of faculty and students both of whom must hold the pursuit of learning and search for truth in the highest regard. Such regard requires adherence to the goal of unquestionable integrity and honesty in the discharge of teaching and learning responsibilities. Such regard allows no place for academic dishonesty. To better assure the realization of this goal any student enrolled for study at the University may be disciplined for the academic infractions defined below.

Definitions of Academic Infractions

- Academic Cheating—any intentional act(s) of dishonesty in the fulfillment of academic course or program requirements. This offense shall include (but is not limited to) utilization of the assistance of any additional individual(s), organization, document, or other aid not specifically and expressly authorized by the instructor or department involved. (Note: This infraction assumes that with the exception of authorized group assignment or group take-home assignments, all course or program assignments shall be completed by an individual student only without any consultation or collaboration with any other individual, organization, or aid.)
• **Plagiarism**—to take and pass off intentionally as one’s own the ideas, writings, etc. of another without attribution (without acknowledging the author).

• **Copy Infringement**—Copy infringement occurs when a copyrighted work is reproduced, distributed, performed, publicly displayed, or made into a derivative work without the permission of the copyright owner.

**Administration of the Code**

This Academic Code of Student Conduct applies in all schools and colleges. In professional schools and colleges that have adopted honor codes, the honor code may supersede this Code. The authority and responsibility for the administration of this Academic Code of Conduct and imposition of any discipline upon any particular student shall vest in the Dean and faculty of the School or College in which the student is enrolled but may be delegated by the faculty to the Dean of the School or College in which the student is enrolled. The Dean shall be assisted in this responsibility by any faculty members and administrative officers in the School or College the Dean shall consider appropriate. Any student accused of an infraction of this Code shall have a right to a limited hearing, as described herein, of the charges against him before a committee of faculty members, at least three in number, none of whom shall be the accuser or witness to the alleged infraction. The committee may be either a standing of the School or College, whose responsibilities are considered appropriate by the Dean to conduct a hearing under this code, or a committee appointed by the Dean for the special purpose of conducting only a particular hearing or all such hearings that may arise during an annual period. The hearing committee shall be chaired by a member designated by the Dean and the chairperson shall have the right to vote in cases of a tie vote.

**Procedure**

Any faculty member who has knowledge of an infraction of this Code shall assemble all supporting evidence and identify any additional witnesses to the infraction and make this information known to the Dean of the School or College in which the student is enrolled at least ten (10) business days after the date of the infraction.

Upon being notified of an alleged infraction of this Code, the Dean shall, as soon as possible, consider the weight of the assembled evidence and, if the Dean considers the evidence sufficient to warrant further action the dean shall notify the alleged offender of the charge(s) against him/her together with a designation of a hearing time and place where the accused may respond to the charge(s). The hearing date shall be no later than ten (10) business days after notification to the accused of the charge(s) against him/her. The Dean shall similarly notify the hearing committee members of the time and place of the hearing together with identification of the accuser and accused.

The “limited hearing” authorized by this Code is not an adversarial proceeding. Constitutional principles of “due process” are not applicable to these proceeding. The faculty member concerned shall present the case for the University. Both shall be allowed to present witnesses and evidence in support of their positions concerning the charge(s). However, no legal counsel for either side shall be allowed.
The members of the hearing committee may question the accused and the accuser and examine all evidence presented. The standard of proof for the proceeding under this Code shall be the standard of “substantial evidence.” The proceedings may be tape recorded but will not be transcribed.

After the hearing of the charge(s) against the accused, the hearing committee shall, in closed session, vote by secret ballot to sustain or reject the charge(s). If the charges are sustained, the committee shall transmit the results and recommendation of the hearing committee to the Dean five (5) business days after the hearing.

Upon receipt of the results and recommendations of the hearing committee, the Dean may sustain the recommendation of the Committee concerning the penalty or may reduce or increase the severity of the penalty, and shall, within five (5) business days, notify the student of the Dean’s determination. The student may appeal directly to the Provost and Chief Academic Officer or Senior Vice President for Health Sciences (Health Science students) for reconsideration of any disciplinary penalty. The student shall have five (5) business days to make such appeal from date of receipt of notification.

After hearing any appeal from a student, the Provost and Chief Academic Officer or Senior Vice President for Health Sciences shall make a decision that shall be communicated to the student within ten (10) business days. This decision shall be final.

Penalties

The minimum disciplinary penalty imposed upon a student found to have committed an infraction(s) of this Code shall be no credit for the course assignment or examination in which the infraction(s) occurred; however, a more severe penalty, such as failure in the course involved or suspension from the University, may be imposed depending upon the nature and extent of the infraction(s).

Additional Thoughts on Plagiarism

The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university as well as the field of political science inquiry depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the university and the purpose of the Department of Political Science. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and it is unacceptable.

Plagiarism is the use of another’s words or ideas presented as one’s own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another’s work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined.

Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. But it is also wrong because it constitutes lying to one’s professional colleagues. From a prudential perspective, it is shortsighted and self-defeating, and it can ruin a professional career.
The following poem offers some food for thought about the importance of politics.

“Why You Should Be Involved in Politics”

Politics and politicians decide
the wars you fight
the interest you pay
the speed you drive
the taxes you pay

Politics and politicians control
the purity of your food
the schooling of your children
the value of your money
the weights and measures you use
the floor under your wages

Politics and politicians use taxpayer money to hand out
subsidies to farmers
subsidies to airlines
subsidies to oil companies
subsidies to magazines and newspapers
subsidies to bankers
subsidies to builders

Politics and politicians protect or destroy
your right to speak freely
your right to worship freely
your right to organize
your right to vote

Politics and politicians control your life

The author of this poem is unknown to me, but his or her words strike at the core of my professional and political interests. There may well be very few things in this world you can do that are not shaped, directly or indirectly, by politics. To sit on the sidelines and not be involved could literally be hazardous to your health.
Course Outline and Assigned Reading

1. (August 27) Course Overview and Introduction

2. (August 29 and September 3) The Principles, Foundations, and Constitution of the United States

   Required Reading—


   *The Articles of Confederation*

   *The Constitution of the United States*

   *The Federalist* No. 10 and No. 51

   Recommended Reading—


3. (September 5) Federalism

   Required Reading—

   McClain and Tauber, Chapter 3.

   Recommended Reading—


4. (September 10) Civil Liberties

**Required Reading**–

McClain and Tauber, Chapter 4.

**Recommended Reading**–


5. (September 12) Civil Rights

**Required Reading**–

McClain and Tauber, Chapter 5.

Public Statement by Bishop C. C. J. Carpenter *et. al.* To Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter From a Birmingham Jail”.

**Recommended Reading**–


6. (September 17, 19, 24, and 26) The Congress of the United States

Required Reading–

McClain and Tauber, Chapter 6.

*The Constitution of the United States*, Article 1

*The Federalist* No. 51


Recommended Reading–


7. (October 1, 3, 8, and 10) The Presidency

**Required Reading**–

McClain and Tauber, Chapter 7.

The Constitution of the United States, Article II


**Recommended Reading**–


8. (October 15, 17, and 22) The Bureaucracy

**Required Reading**–

McClain and Tauber, Chapter 8.


**Recommended Reading**–


9. (October 24, 29, and 31) The Judiciary

**Required Reading**–

McClain and Tauber, Chapter 9.


**Recommended Reading**–


10. (November 5) Public Opinion and Its Impact on Politics and Policy

Required Reading–

McClain and Tauber, Chapter 10

Recommended Reading–


11. (November 7 and 12) Media

Required Reading–

McClain and Tauber, Chapter 11

Additional Reading: TBA

Recommended Reading–


12. (November 14) Social Movements

Required Reading–
McClain and Tauber, Chapter 12

Recommended Reading–

13. (November 19 and 21) Interest Groups and Lobbying

Required Reading–
McClain and Tauber, Chapter 13

*The Federalist* No. 10


Recommended Reading–


Laura Langbein and Mark Lotwis, “The Political Efficacy of Lobbying and Money: Gun Control


14. (November 26) Political Parties

Required Reading–
McClain and Tauber, Chapter 14.

Recommended Reading–

15. (December 3) Elections

Required Reading–
McClain and Tauber, Chapter 15

Recommended Reading–


League of United Latin American Citizens v. Wilson, CV-94-7569

Gray v. Sanders, 372 U.S. 368 (1963)

Westberry v. Sanders, 376 U.S. 1 (1964)

Reynolds v. Sims, 377 U.S. 533 (1964)


16. (December 5) Public Policymaking

Required Reading–

Joseph Stewart, Jr., David M. Hedge, James P. Lester, *Public Policy: An Evolutionary Approach*, 3rd edition, Chapter 1 (to be distributed via.pdf on November 15).

Recommended Reading–


