

Brigham Young University
Political Science 391, Advanced Seminar on American Government and Politics
Spring/Summer 2009

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Course Overview and Objectives

This course is required of all participants in the Washington Seminar. It focuses on civic participation and current events within the context of American government institutions and processes. We will discuss various aspects of the American political system by covering topics such as the founding and the Constitution; Congress; the presidency; the judiciary; public opinion; elections and voting behavior; political parties; interest groups; military policy; foreign policy; and so on.

The objectives for this course are:

1. To increase your knowledge of how American political institutions and processes function and how they affect American domestic and foreign policy.
2. To improve your ability to think, discuss, write, and otherwise express yourself effectively.
3. To develop facility in applying new concepts to current political events that will shape your future attempts to evaluate and participate in politics. At the completion of this course you should have an increased capacity to exert political influence.

We will hold class meetings each Friday during the semester. Friday class sessions will typically involve two guest lecturers as well as a separate class meeting for discussion and student presentations. Guest lecturers are chosen to address national and international current events, a broad spectrum of political institutions and processes, and to help you become more civically engaged. Classes will usually be held in the Barlow Center; briefings with guest speakers will take place in the Barlow Center and throughout the Washington area.

Reading

Required readings will be chosen week by week in preparation for each topic and guest speaker. They will be distributed via email or made accessible via the course website on Blackboard under the “Course Materials” section.

Current Events/Washington Post To help you achieve our course objectives you will regularly follow the news through the *Washington Post*. Students are therefore *required to read a major national newspaper each weekday*. Many of you will have copies of the *Washington Post* available to you at your workplace. You may also read it on the Internet. However, keep in mind that some articles in the print edition are not available in the online edition. Other suggested

newspapers with excellent coverage of American politics include: *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Course Requirements

Class Attendance, Participation, and Quizzes

Attendance and *quality* participation are essential to the success of this class. Roll will be taken each week and students will be penalized for absences and lack of preparation and quality participation. Only absences due to illness or work required by your internship supervisor are excused. Work related absences will be rare and must be cleared with me in advance.

The following are not excused absences: job interviews, family events, excursions or out-of-town trips, and alternative briefing opportunities. *You should not schedule anything before mid-afternoon on Fridays, and before doing so, check to make sure we don't have a late briefing scheduled.*

I will give occasional quizzes on assigned readings including Section A of *The Washington Post* (even weekends). You must come to briefings prepared to intelligently discuss the topic of the briefing as well as prominent current events.

Briefings Protocol. The briefings provide one of the most valuable aspects of the Washington Seminar. They will give you a chance to enlarge your understanding of current issues and various aspects of culture and life in Washington, D.C. To receive the greatest benefit from them, remember the following:

- *Be on time.* Arriving late is rude, irresponsible and disrespectful to the speaker. In many cases the briefings will be held in organizations requiring entrance as a group. Coming late will result in your being denied admission. Coming to class sessions on time is part of your participation grade.
- *Dress appropriately.* Men should be in jacket and tie, and women should be in comparable business attire.
- *Come informed about the speaker and prepared with questions.* Read any handouts provided by the faculty advisor, and the assigned readings. Pay particularly close attention to articles in *The Washington Post* during the week that relate to the briefing topic. Look the speaker up on Google and find out what you can about him or her. Write down an appropriate question or two that you could ask.
- *Be attentive.* Many of our speakers will be dynamic and exciting. Unfortunately, some will not. Please continue to be attentive anyway.
- *Ask respectful and reasonable questions.* It is very likely you will disagree with the views of some speakers. This is by design. Remember it is possible to disagree without being disagreeable. You are certainly welcome and encouraged to challenge the assertions, facts or assumptions of any speaker. However, be certain to do so in a *polite and respectful manner.*

I welcome your suggestions for possible speakers or topics. I may not be able to accommodate them all, but especially if you have access at work to someone notable or interesting please let me know.

Short Papers

During the semester or term you will write three short papers. The topic you select to write about must be related to something discussed up to that point in either a class or briefing.

I am very open to topic and approach as long as you follow the guidelines for an “A” paper below. Here are some ideas for these papers to get you thinking about how you might approach them.

1. Use what you learn on our trip to Philadelphia to compare and contrast the federal government's size and powers with what the Founders imagined when drafting the Constitution. Use material from the Constitution Center, the Independence Hall tour, and the presentations at the Freedoms Foundation (as well as other speakers) to form your image of the Founders' state of mind in 1789.
2. Why are some people or groups more effective at influencing government than others? This could be a case study of a single group or you could combine information gained in several briefings on topics such as campaign finance, lobbying, and grass roots organizing. Begin by assessing a group's relative effectiveness at getting the government (bureaucracy, legislature, courts) to do something (or to stop doing something). Then identify three or four factors that increase the odds of being influential in Washington. Illustrate your analysis with examples drawn from the briefing or your reading of *The Washington Post*.
3. Many of our guest speakers weigh career benefits of salary, job security, and social status against family and church responsibilities. Consider what matters most to you in a career (Salary? Social status? Job security? Family time? Intellectual challenge? Making a difference?). What strategies for juggling competing activities have you gleaned from guest speakers?

An “A” paper will:

- Analyze and incorporate material from relevant briefings;
- Incorporate and synthesize assigned readings and relevant articles from the *Washington Post*;
- Include a clear thesis statement and a conclusion supported by actual evidence drawn from the briefings, readings and class discussion;
- Be well written, following the guidelines outlined in “Standards for Student Papers” from the *Washington Seminar Handbook*; and
- Be 1,200 to 1,500 words (approximately four to five pages) long.

Papers which merely summarize or outline the briefings and readings will receive no more than a “C” grade.

Short papers are **due in class on June 5, July 10, and July 31**. Papers submitted after these dates will be penalized 10% for each day they are late.

Final Paper

Identify a problem confronting your local community, state, or the nation and present how you would seek to solve it based upon what you have learned from the briefings, class discussions and readings. The topic for this paper is purposely broad. I welcome creative ideas. Here are some hints to help you write an effective paper. Choose an issue you are passionate about. Assess your available resources (knowledge, skills, finances, etc.) as well as what level (local, state, or national) you want to influence and what branch or branches of government are most involved with your issue. Be specific when you discuss the problem or policy area you would like to influence. Improving national education policy is impossibly vague while working to improve hiring and retention standards for school teachers in your local district is much more specific. While I recognize that some of you will likely be elected to the U.S. Senate or begin a foundation with billions of dollars in assets someday, be at least somewhat realistic with your plans. I need to be persuaded that you have the skills and resources to have a chance at following through with your plan.

An “A” paper will conform to all of the guidelines indicated above but should integrate two or more course topics. This paper may be submitted any time during the last three weeks of the internship, but **is due in class on August 7, 2009**. Papers submitted after that will be penalized 10% for each day they are late.

Enrichment Activity

One Friday during the semester no briefings will be held so that you can pursue an enrichment activity in the Washington, D.C. area. This activity should focus on history or the arts. A variety of activities are possible, such as visiting a historical site or museum, touring one of the many art museums, or attending a play or concert (no movies). This is an opportunity for you to visit a site that may only be open during business hours when you are either at work or in class. Write a two to four page paper briefly summarizing the experience and detailing what you learned from the activity. **This paper is due in class on Friday, July 17, 2009**. Papers submitted after that will be penalized 10% for each day they are late.

Service Learning Project

One Saturday during the program will be dedicated to a group service project in the District of Columbia. This is scheduled for Saturday June 13th. Your grade will be based on your participation in the project.

Grading

Your grade will be computed as follows:

Class Attendance, Participation, and Quizzes	20%
3 Intermediate Papers	30%
Final Paper	30%
Enrichment Activity	10%
Service Learning Project	10%
Total	100%

A weighted average will be calculated to assign a grade based on the scale below.

A	>	93 %
A-	=	90-93 %
B+	=	87-89 %
B	=	83-86 %
B-	=	80-82 %
C+	=	77-79 %
C	=	73-76 %
C-	=	70-72 %
D+	=	67-69 %
D	=	63-66 %
E	<	63 %

Other Course Policies

Late Work Late work will be penalized at a rate of ten percent of the points possible per working day that the assignment or paper is late. For example, an essay worth 100 points that is due in class on a Friday will be penalized 10 points if turned in the following Monday (1 working day) and 20 points if turned in the following Tuesday. Exceptions to this policy are *rare* and must be cleared with me *in advance*. *When turning in late work, please email me a copy. Then slide a printed copy under my office door. To eliminate ambiguity in applying this policy, I will use the date and time stamp on the email for when it is received to assess late penalties.*

Email Policy All class members are *required* to maintain an active email account. It is your responsibility to ensure that the email address that is listed for you in the BYU directory is accurate. To update your email address, log in to Route Y and select “Update Personal Information.” Here you can specify a current email address if you are not using the one assigned to you by BYU, or you can have your BYU email forwarded to the account you plan to use. The instructor and teaching assistants will communicate important and time-sensitive class announcements via email. Informational announcements or those that are not time-sensitive will be posted to Blackboard. Email is also a very good way to reach me with questions. I strongly encourage you to check your email daily throughout the semester.

Academic Honesty All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. While all students sign the Honor Code, there are still specific skills most students need to master over time in order to correctly cite sources, especially in regards to the internet, as well as deal with the stress and strain of college life without resorting to cheating. I will notice instances of cheating on exams or plagiarizing on papers. Cheating, plagiarism (using someone else’s words or ideas without proper citation), and other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated, and they will be handled according to university policy. A review of the Honor Code can be found here: <http://honorcode.byu.edu/content/view/3585/4643/>. Some examples of various forms of academic misconduct can be found at: <http://honorcode.byu.edu/content/view/3567/4621/>.

Violating BYU's academic honesty policy includes "submitting the same work for more than one class without disclosure and approval." Thus, if you write a paper for another course that uses the same topic or material as a paper for this course, you need to approve it with me *first*, and then you must turn in to me a copy of the paper from your other course

If you have any questions about academic conduct, I encourage you to consult these web pages and/or come speak with me.

Disability I am committed to providing a learning atmosphere that reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability that may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, you are responsible for making your needs known to me and seeking available assistance from the university in a timely manner. In addition to notifying me, you must contact the University Accessibility Center (UAC) at 422-7065, 1520 WSC. The UAC reviews requests for reasonable academic accommodations for all students who have qualified documented disabilities, and any accommodations for this class must be coordinated with the UAC office. See <http://uac.byu.edu/> for more information.

Discrimination/Harassment Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex discrimination against any participant in an educational program or activity that receives federal funds. The act is intended to eliminate sex discrimination in education. Title IX covers discrimination in programs, admissions, activities, and student-to-student sexual harassment. BYU's policy against discrimination and sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the university but to students as well (see: <http://www.byu.edu/hr/human-resource-services/equal-employment-opportunity>) If you encounter sexual harassment or discrimination, please talk to me; contact the Equal Employment Office in D-282 ASB or by telephone at 422-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office at 422-2847.

Learning Outcomes The BYU Political Science Department has developed a set of expected student learning outcomes. These will help you understand the objectives of the political science curriculum, including this class. See: https://learningoutcomes.byu.edu/wiki/index.php/Political_Science. Feedback on the expected student learning outcomes can be given to me or sent to FHSS@byu.edu.