Political Science 110 –
American Government and Politics

Fall 2011
Professor Richard Davis
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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1:30-4 pm

Teaching Assistants

Alyssa Bybee
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Office Hours – Thursday 3-3:50 pm and Friday 11-11:50 am

Kami Nilsen
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Office Hours – Monday 4-4:50 pm and Tuesday 4-4:50 pm

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Office Hours - Tuesday 3-3:50 pm and Wednesday 1-1:50 pm

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Course Description

This course is designed as an introductory survey to American Politics and Government. During this semester we explore the roots of American democracy, including the U.S. Constitution and the early years of the Republic. We discuss how the Constitution is applied today in areas such as freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and other elements of the Bill of Rights. Next we discuss organizations affecting American politics - interest groups, political parties, and the news media.

We then move on to an analysis of the electoral process, particularly as it relates to presidential elections. The institutions of government come next - Congress, the presidency, the Supreme Court, and the bureaucracy. We examine how Congress is organized and how Congress makes policy. We see how the president seeks to assert a leadership role over the Congress and
the nation and how that role has changed during our history. The place of the judicial branch is the next subject with emphasis on the Supreme Court’s policy making role today. In addition, we study the politics of the bureaucracy. The last section of the course handles public policy issues, including domestic, defense, and foreign policy.

Course Objectives

As instructor, my intent is to do more than impart knowledge to you. I want you to develop your critical analysis skills, as well as your oral and written communication abilities. I want you to desire to learn more about American politics than you know now, so that much of what you learn about this subject will not be what you take notes on in class or read in the texts, but instead will be the product of your own thirst for knowledge.

Another objective of this course is to stimulate your effort to learn. Learning requires effort on the part of both the teacher and the student. The teacher must be willing to show the way, but the student has to want to walk down the path. I will do my part to enlighten your mind about this subject and offer opportunities for you to learn independently. But you must walk down that path.

Also, it is my objective not only to equip you with knowledge for effective citizenship, but to encourage your participation in the political process as well. It is my expectation that this course will help prepare you not only to follow American government in the future, but also to help shape it at the national, state, or local level.

Teaching Assistants/Review and Discussion Sections

The teaching assistants are here to assist you in learning. Use them as a means to help you understand the course material and get the most out of this course. During their office hours, each TA will be available to answer questions and offer the opportunity for further discussion.

There are certain things the teaching assistants will not do. They will not take or provide lecture notes for you. They are not expected to schedule times to see you outside their normal office hours.

Required Texts

To start you on your study of American Government, I am assigning the following required texts:


In addition, there will be a set of additional readings you will be expected to read and be familiar
with. These will be available via Blackboard. They will be announced later.

You are also expected to read a serious newspaper. I recommend one of the following: *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post National Weekly Edition*. You can pick up a copy of the *New York Times* at the Kennedy Center or read it online. *The Washington Post* can be read online.

This syllabus and other material relevant to the course are available on Blackboard. Please visit it frequently to view news of the class and complete assignments.

**Course Grading**

1. Two Midterm Exams (in the Testing Center) - 25 percent each  
2. Short Essays (10 percent each) -  
3. Op-ed  
4. Final Examination -

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<tr>
<td>1. Midterm examinations</td>
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<td>2. Short Essay</td>
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<td>3. Op-ed</td>
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<td>4. Final Examination</td>
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1. **Midterm examinations** (See below for dates) The exams will include multiple choice and essay questions from the assigned readings (both online and the texts) and the lecture.
2. **Short Essay** – Two short essays of three to four pages each will be assigned during the semester. Essays must be double-spaced with one-inch margins using 10 or 12 point font. Essays can be submitted in paper or electronic form. If in electronic form they must be in a Word attachment, with page numbering, and have the same length as if they were in paper form. Essays are due by 5 p.m. on the due date designated below. If sending an essay by e-mail, DO NOT SUBMIT IT TO PROFESSOR DAVIS. Send it to your TA. If submitting paper, you can hand it in during class or at the Political Science office on the seventh floor of the SWKT. Essays will be graded down one letter grade for each day submitted late. Due dates are below.

   **Essay Topics:**
   First Essay – Issue 9 or 10 (choose one)
   Second Essay - Issue 3 or 6 (choose one)

   **Essay Guidelines**

   The essay should include an introduction, the main body, and a conclusion. The body should consist of a description of the arguments used in both readings, a critique of both sets of arguments, and a conclusion where you side with one side or the other and why. Be sure you describe the arguments of both sides of the debate, not just one. Be objective in presentation of the arguments. But in the critique and the conclusion you would be expected to take a position. However, make sure you defend your position with your arguments.

   A rule of thumb is to devote a paragraph or two to an introduction, a page or so for one side’s arguments, another page or so to the other side’s arguments, another
page or so for critiques, and then a paragraph or two devoted to your views, and a conclusion of a paragraph or two.

A critique is where you find and state flaws in the essay due to the arguments and/or the evidence presented to sustain the author’s claims. For example, the claim that abortion on demand should not be overturned by the Supreme Court typically is supported by the argument that there is a right of privacy in the Constitution. A critique could note that the Constitution does not enumerate a right of privacy. Another example would be if an author writes that the death penalty deters crime and offers evidence of a low rate of violent crime in states where executions (say, Texas) are common. An example of a critique is the retort that there are multiple factors causing a lower rate of violent crime. How does the author know that the use of the death penalty is the cause?

The TAs are available during office hours to look over drafts of essays in advance of the due date.

3. **Op-ed** – The op-ed is to be no less than three pages and should be written as if it you were writing for a newspaper opinion page. You should take one of the propositions in the Taking Sides book (except for 3, 6, 9, or 10) and write an opinion piece taking a side on that issue and then using arguments to support that position. You can use arguments made by the writers in the Taking Sides book if you wish, but you also need to add one or more arguments of your own. You will be graded on the quality of the arguments you make in supporting your position. Your op-ed is due by 5 p.m. on the due date designated below. If sending an op-ed by e-mail, DO NOT SUBMIT IT TO PROFESSOR DAVIS. Send it to your TA. If submitting paper, you can hand it in during class or at the Political Science office on the seventh floor of the SWKT. Op-eds will be graded down one letter grade for each day submitted late. Due date is below.

4. **Final examination** - The final examination will be held in-class during the final exam period. It will not be comprehensive. Travel arrangements, weddings, vacations, etc. at the end of the semester will not be considered an acceptable excuse for missing the final. Please plan accordingly.

5. **Extra Credit Opportunities** – There will be extra credit opportunities provided to you during the semester. I do not expect any student to be able to take advantage of all of them. No duplicate work will be offered since these opportunities are purely extra credit. You will be informed of them through the semester.
   a. One opportunity will be involvement in a local electoral campaign. There are races for city council going on in Provo, Orem, and surrounding communities in Utah County. This involvement CAN ONLY TAKE PLACE IN UTAH COUNTY. To qualify for the extra credit, you will be required to submit a note saying which campaign you wish to work for and the name and contact information for the candidate or campaign manager. That is due no later than October 14 to your TA. You then will be expected to work for at least 10 hours on the campaign. After the campaign is over, you will need to hand in a two page
report describing what you did during the campaign and what you learned from the experience. You must attach as well a breakdown of the hours you worked (when you worked and what you did during that time.) After successful completion of this extra credit exercise, you will receive five extra credit points on the final examination.

b. Another is visiting with Professor Davis during his office hours to ask him a question about American politics. That must be done prior to the second midterm. That will be worth 2 points on the second midterm.

**Learning Outcomes**

Students will be able to:

1. Analyze current events in American politics using Political Science concepts.

2. Describe the most important constitutional provisions in American national government and how they have changed over time.

3. Explain the role individuals play in American government and what factors influence their behavior.

4. Assess the functions and interactions of American political institutions.

5. Evaluate how you as an individual can effectively participate in the political process.

**Plagiarism/Other Work**

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 this new age of the internet; as well as deal with the stress and strain of college life without resorting to cheating. Please know that as your professor I will notice instances of cheating on exams or plagiarizing on papers. See [http://www.byu.edu/honorcode](http://www.byu.edu/honorcode) for specific examples of intentional, inadvertent plagiarism, and fabrication, falsification. Work for other courses will not be accepted for assignments in this course.

**Sexual 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 sexual harassment extends not only to employees of the university but to students as well. If you encounter unlawful sexual harassment or gender based discrimination, please talk to your professor; contact the Equal Employment Office at 422-5895 or 367-5689 (24-hours); or contact the Honor Code Office. Information about that office is available at honorcode.byu.edu.

**People with Disabilities**
Brigham Young University is committed to providing a working and learning atmosphere which reasonably accommodates qualified persons with disabilities. If you have any disability which may impair your ability to complete this course successfully, please contact the University Accessibility Center. They are located at 2170 WSC and their phone number is 422-2767. Reasonable academic accommodations are reviewed for all students who have qualified disabilities. Services are coordinated with the student and instructor by the SSD office. If you need assistance or if you feel you have been unlawfully discriminated against on the basis of disability, you may seek resolution through established grievance policy and procedures. You should contact the Equal Employment Office at 422-5895, D-240C ASB.

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

**Week of**

**August 29** 
Introduction, Patterson, ch. 1; Framing of the Constitution, Patterson, ch.2

**September 5** 
Framing of the Constitution, Patterson, ch.2; Taking Sides, Issue 1, 2, 22

**September 12** 
Federalism/State and Local Government, Patterson, ch 3,18

**September 19** 
Civil Liberties, Patterson, ch.4; Taking Sides, Issues 8, 10, 15, 16, 20, 23

**September 26** 
Civil Rights, Patterson, ch.5; Taking Sides, Issues 9

**October 3** 
Public Opinion and Participation, Patterson, chs 6 and 7

**October 10** 
Political Parties and Elections, Patterson, ch. 8, Taking Sides, Issues 3

**October 17** 
Interest Groups, Patterson, ch. 9

**October 24** 
News Media, Patterson, ch.10

**October 31** 
Congress, Patterson, ch.11; Taking Sides, Issue 6, 7

**November 7** 
Presidency, Patterson, ch.12; Taking Sides, Issue 4, 8

**November 14** 
Bureaucracy, Patterson, ch 13.

**November 28** 
Judiciary, Patterson, ch.14; Taking Sides, Issue 5

**December 5** 
Public Policy, Patterson, chs 13, 15-17; Taking Sides, Issues 11, 12, 13, 14, 17-19, 21

**Midterm and Final Exam Dates:**

- September 30
- November 4
- Tuesday, December 13, 11 am

**Op-ed Due Date:** October 4

**Essay Due Dates:**

- First Essay: October 16
- Second Essay: November 20

**Extra Credit Campaign Involvement Report Due Date:** November 11