

Political Science 101
American Government
Spring, 2007
R. H. Bruhl
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Syllabus

The object of this course is to attempt to understand the structure and functions of the government of the United States of America. Institutions, however, emerge from societies, and reflect the character and circumstances of those societies, so to understand the institutions, one needs to understand the societies from which those institutions have emerged. Consequently, in this course we will study not only the structure and function of the American government, but the character and circumstances of the society from which the American government emerged.

Grading for the class will be based on a combination of quizzes, examinations, attendance, and projects. The plan for these will be distributed separately.

The textbooks for the course include: *American Government*, by O'Connor and Sabato; *A Brief History of Western Civilization*, by Kishlansky et al.; and *1776*, by McCullough.

The lecture topics will fall into the following divisions:

1. a. "From Europeans to Americans": who settled America, why did they come here, how did they get here, and what was the result?
b. "From a People to a Government": how and why did the people of the American colonies form the government they did?
2. "The Structure of the American Government and the Functions served by that structure": what does the government do and how are these actions related to the American citizenry?
3. "Policy Formation and Execution": how do the actions of the government affect the daily lives of the citizen and how are these actions chosen?

Any student with special instructional needs is requested to discuss those needs with me at the student's earliest convenience.

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Syllabus, Part II

Assignments and Grading

Overview

Grades will be partly determined by a set of projects, group presentations, and examinations. Also determining the student's grade will be his or her attendance and participation in the scheduled discussion sessions.

A. Group Presentations made before the whole lecture class

1. (20 points) Describe a recent decision made by the U. S. Supreme Court. Describe the issue, briefly describe the opposing sides, and describe the reasoning of the Court. Use at least five sources.
2. (20 points) Describe a current policy initiative of interest to you. Identify the aspect of life in which the policy initiative is concerned, the legislative history of the policy initiative, what the policy is intended to do, and the extent to which the policy has met its objectives. Use at least five sources.

B. Projects

1. (10 points) Compare the coverage of ten political, economic, or social events given by *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*. Use events from ten separate days and include copies of the articles.
2. (20 points) Compare the social, political, geographic, demographic, and economic make-up of three States assigned to you. Use at least nine sources.
3. (20 points) Prepare a report on the legislative activities of a town council (Village or City) based on your attendance of two consecutive sessions.

C. Examinations

1. (15 points) Quiz on the historical foundations of the United States.
2. (20 points) Midterm examination covering the structure and function of the U. S. Government.
3. (20 points) Final examination tying together the concepts covered in the course.

D. Discussion Session Participation (25 points).

Tentative Schedule

- Week 1. Historical foundations. Read pp 1-108 of Kishlansky.
- Week 2. Historical foundations. Read pp. 108-200 of Kishlansky.
- Week 3. Historical foundations. Finish Kishlansky. Read Chapters 1 and 2 of O'Connor/Sabato.
- Week 4. U. S. Government Structure and Function. Read Chapter 7 of O'Connor/Sabato. **Quiz on Historical Foundations (15 points)**.
- Week 5. U. S. Government Structure and Function. Read Chapters 8, 9 and 10 of O'Connor/Sabato.
- Week 6. U. S. Government Structure and Function. **Group presentations of U.S. Supreme Court Decisions (20 points)**.
- Week 7. U. S. Government Structure and Function. **Group presentations of U.S. Supreme Court Decisions continued**
- Week 8. Federalism. Read Chapters 3 and 4. of O'Connor/Sabato.
- Week 9. Parties, Voting, Elections and Campaigns. Read Chapters 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15 of O'Connor/Sabato.
- Week 10. Parties, Voting, Elections and Campaigns. **Comparative News Coverage Assignment due (10 points), Midterm exam on U.S. Government Structure and Function (20 points)**.
- Week 11. Break
- Week 12. U. S. Government Policy: Welfare Policy. **Comparative Analyses of State Social Political and Economic Foundations due (20 points)**.
- Week 13. U. S. Government Policy: Economic Policy.
- Week 14. U. S. Government Policy: Foreign and Defense Policies.
- Week 15. U. S. Government Policy. **Group Policy Initiative presentations (20 points). Town Council Observational Report due (20 points)**.

Week 16. U. S. Government Policy. **Group Policy Initiative presentations continued.**

Week 17. **Final Examination (20 points)**

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