

Political Science 101
American Government
Fall, 2005
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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.

The plan for the course includes no lecture-based examinations and no term papers, and relies instead on a number of primary data research projects to assess the students' understanding of the course topics. These projects will be announced in class as they become appropriate for the lecture topic at hand and in combination will represent 75% of each the student's grade for the class. The actual number of projects assigned will likely be four or five, some of which may be done in small groups. The remaining 25% of each student's grade will be determined by activities arranged for the Discussion Sections by the Teaching Assistants. It should be noted that Discussion Section activities may include quizzes intended to encourage students to properly prepare for discussion.

The textbooks for the course include: *American Government*, by O'Connor and Sabato; *A Brief History of Western Civilization*, by Kishlansky et al.; chapters from *A History of the American People*, by Morrison; chapters from *Economic History of the United States*, by Poulson; and *1776*, by McCullough.

The exact timing of the lecture topics will depend upon the understanding demonstrated by the students, but will fall into the following divisions:

1. "From Europeans to Americans": who settled America, why did they come here, how did they get here, and what was the result?
2. "From a People to a Government": how and why did the people of the American colonies form the government they did?
3. "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?

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