

Department of Political Science
SUNY Oneonta
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Political Science 121

Introduction to U.S. GOVERNMENT

Section 7: 10-11:15 a.m., Tuesdays and Thursdays, HIRC 5
Section 8: 12-1:15 a.m., Tuesdays and Thursdays, Fitzelle 319

Course Description

This course will introduce students to national government and politics in the United States. It will survey the development and functioning of the institutions and actors that constitute the American political system, including the Congress, the presidency, the courts, the federal bureaucracy, political parties, interest groups, the media, and the general public. This course has no prerequisites, other than an interest in understanding American politics and a willingness to read, think, debate, and write in a critical and informed manner. Political Science 121 is both a general education course and, for students interested in the Political Science program, a gateway to more advanced courses in Political Science.

This section of Political Science 121 will focus on controversies and debates that have divided Americans, both in the past and in the present. We will begin with an examination of the contested origins and development of the U.S. federal government. Next, we will investigate the Congress and the emergence of party politics and organized interest groups. Third, we will examine the Presidency, campaigns, and the media. Then, we will investigate the federal bureaucracy, divisive social policies, public opinion, ideology, and voting behavior. The semester will end with discussion of the Courts and controversies over basic rights and liberties.

Course Goals

The course has three main goals: first, to give students a solid, basic understanding of the American political system; second, to help students develop an informed perspective on the issues that divide and animate the American polity; and third, to give students an opportunity to begin reading carefully, thinking critically, and writing clearly.

Course Requirements

Students in this course ought to plan on being engaged both in and out of class. Most of the readings in this course will come from one textbook (see below). Students will be expected to read the assigned texts *before* attending class and to be ready to discuss those readings in class. Supplemental, required readings may be added from time to time and distributed on a course website or by other means. At times, students may also be asked, without warning, to write a short reaction to the reading in class. Outside of class, students may be required to post questions or reactions on the course website, or to use other on-line materials. Participation in class and on line will be graded.

Most of the course grade will be determined by performance on 4 objective reading tests; 4 short (2 page) minimally-graded essays; and one longer (4-5 page) graded final project based upon the four short essays; and an objective final examination based largely on the earlier four tests. Each student, in addition, will be assigned the task of helping to lead one formal class discussion. Please note that this entire syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the instructor.

Required Text

Edward Sidlow and Beth Henschen, *America at Odds: The Essentials*, 2nd ed. (Wadsworth Publishing, 2002).

Grading and Attendance Policies

Assignments will be assigned on an 100-point scale and weighted in the following manner when the final grade is calculated:

1. Test 1	Tues., 10 September	10%
2. First Paper (2 pages)	Tues., 24 September	3%
3. Test 2	Thurs., 10 October	10%
4. Video Reaction Paper	Tues., 22 October	3%
5. Test 3	Tues., 5 November	10%
6. Second Paper (2 pages)	Tues., 12 November	3%
7. Test 4	Tues., 19 November	10%
8. Third Paper (2 pages)	Tues., 26 November	3%
9. Final Project (4-5 pages)	Thurs., 12 December	20%
10. Final Examination	Thurs., 12 December	25%
11. Discussion	varies	5%
12. General Participation		<u>8%</u>

TOTAL: 110% (100% after lowest 10% test grade is dropped)

Written assignments will include four objective reading comprehension tests; four informal 2 page papers; one formal 4-5 page paper; and an objective final examination.

The schedule of tests and exams appears above and below. You will be expected to attend all of them. The lowest of your four test grades will be dropped. If you miss a test for any reason, that test will be the one dropped. Late make-up tests and exams will not be given.

The four papers will be graded minimally: plus, check, check/minus, minus. Pluses will earn extra credit (3.5%), with checks gaining full credit (3%), check/minus partial credit (2%), and minuses reduced (1%) or zero credit. Details on this requirement will be given later in the course.

Regular, timely attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences and tardiness will be noted and will affect grades negatively. After the third unexcused absence, your grade will drop one step (for example, from a B+ to a B). Each subsequent absence will lower your grade another step. Six or more unexcused absences may result in a failing grade or involuntary withdrawal from the course.

Tardiness will also be noted. After the third late arrival, every instance of tardiness will be treated as an absence. Course meetings are few and brief, so be in class and be on time.

If you have a good reason to be absent or late, notify me in writing as soon as possible, explaining and documenting your absence. Either give me a note in class or send me an e-mail message. I will notify you if I accept your explanation or if we need to talk more about it during my office hours.

Expect to attend class for the whole period, focusing on coursework throughout. As a courtesy to all, please turn off pagers and telephones while in class.

Office Hours/Communication

I will hold regular office hours on Mondays from 5:15-6:15 p.m., Tuesdays from 1:30-2:30 p.m., and Wednesdays from 1-2 p.m., in my office at 412 Fitzelle Hall. I can also make appointments at other times and on other days, if necessary. My telephone number is 436-2754. Notes can be left for me in my mailbox at the Political Science/Sociology Office, 418 Fitzelle Hall. E-mail messages can also be sent to me at:

mcennedj@oneonta.edu

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS, TOPICS, AND ASSIGNMENTS

Note: All assignments are to be completed *before* class.

I. Constituting Politics and Imposing Government

Tues., 27 August	<p><u>Introduction: Divided We - Rise or Fall?</u></p> <p>Reading: No assignment.</p> <p>Class: Introduction to the course.</p>
Thurs., 29 August	<p><u>What Are Politics and Democracy? / Origins of the United States</u></p> <p>Reading: 1. Sidlow and Henschen, chap. 1 and selection from chap. 2, pp. 1-29; and 2. The Declaration of Independence, in Appendix B, pp. 379-80.</p> <p>Note: All reading assignments are to be completed <i>before</i> class.</p> <p>Class: Lecture and discussion - Why care about politics? How did American politics begin?</p>
Tues., 3 September	<p><u>Origins of the Constitution and the United States Government</u></p> <p>Reading: 1. Sidlow and Henschen, selection from chap. 2, pp. 29-50; 2. Federalist Paper Nos. 10 and 51, in Appendix F, pp. 389-94; and 3. The Constitution of the United States, in Appendix A, pp. 369-77.</p> <p>Class: Lecture and discussion - Is the U.S.A a democracy? What is the Constitution about?</p>
Thurs., 5 September	<p><u>Discussion 1 / Federalism and States' Rights</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, chap. 3, pp. 52-76; "The Power of Judicial Review," in chap. 15, p. 360.</p> <p>Class: 1. Discussion 1 – How democratic is the United States? 2. Lecture – What is union?</p>
Tues., 10 September	<p><u>Test 1 / Discussion 2</u></p> <p>Class: 1. Test 1 on chaps. 1-3. Value: 10% of final grade. 2. Discussion 2 – How centralized ought American government be?</p>
Thurs., 12 September	<p><u>The History of Political Parties</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, selection from chap. 8, pp. 177-88.</p> <p>Class: Lecture and discussion – Are parties relics of the past?</p>
Tues., 17 September	FIRST FALL BREAK – ENJOY!

II. Congressional Government

Thurs., 19 September	<p><u>Parties, Third Parties, and Partisanship in Contemporary America</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, selection from chap. 8, pp. 188-98.</p> <p>Class: Lecture and discussion - Is partisan conflict good for democracy?</p> <p><i>Assignment: First Paper Topics Distributed.</i></p>
Tues., 24 September	<p><u>Discussion 3 / The History of Congress</u></p> <p>Reading: 1. Sidlow and Henschen, selection from chap. 12, pp. 269-78; and 2. Review Federalist Paper No. 51, in Appendix F, pp. 392-4.</p> <p>Class: 1. Discussion 3 – Are parties good? 2. Lecture - Is the system balanced?</p> <p><i>Assignment: First Papers Due. Value: 3 % of final grade.</i></p>
Thurs., 26 September	<p><u>How Congress Works Today (1)</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, selection from chap. 12, pp. 279-93.</p> <p>Class: Lecture and discussion - Is divided government a good idea?</p>
Tues., 1 October	<p><u>How Congress Works Today (2) / Discussion 4</u></p> <p>Reading: Catch up!</p> <p>Class: Discussion – Is Congress representative?</p>
Thurs., 3 October	<p><u>Interest Groups and Factions</u></p> <p>Reading: 1. Sidlow and Henschen, chap. 7, pp. 153-75. 2. Review Federalist Papers Nos. 10 and 51, in Appendix F, 389-94.</p> <p>Class: Lecture and discussion - How can we find a common good?</p>
Tues., 8 October	<p><u>Representing at What Price? / Discussion 5</u></p> <p>Film: “Congress: A Day in the Life of a Representative”</p> <p>Class: 1. Lecture – What is the profession of politics in America today? 2. Discussion 5 – Does Congress work?</p>

II. The Imperial Presidency and the Struggle to Control the Nation

Thurs., 10 October	<p><u>Test 2 / The Presidency and Partisan Power Struggles</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, selection from chap. 13, pp. 295-310.</p> <p>Class: 1. Test 2 on chaps. 7, 8, and 12, and the video. 2. Lecture and discussion – Is it good for the President to be a “uniter”?</p>
Tues., 15 October	<p><u>Executive Powers and World Politics / Discussion 6</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, selection from chap. 13, pp. 311-20.</p> <p>Class: 1. Lecture - The Powers of the President. 2. Discussion 6 - How involved ought the U.S. be in world politics?</p>
Thurs., 17 October	<p><u>An Electoral Marketplace?</u></p> <p>Class: Bill Moyers, “Free Speech for Sale” (video)</p> <p>Assignment: <i>Two- page reaction paper summarizing and reacting to the video due next class.</i></p>
Tues., 22 October	<p><u>National Candidates and Campaigns</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, chap. 10, pp. 224-45.</p> <p>Class: Lecture and discussion - Is the electoral system sensible?</p> <p>Assignment: <i>Two-page reaction paper summarizing and reacting to the video is due. Value: 3%.</i></p>
Thurs., 24 October	SECOND FALL BREAK – ENJOY!
Tues., 29 October	<p><u>Elections and Television</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, selection from chap. 11, pp. 247-57.</p> <p>Class: Lecture and discussion – On television.</p>
Thurs., 31 October	<p><u>Media and Political Identity / Discussion 7</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, selection from chap. 11, pp. 257-68.</p> <p>Class: 1. Lecture – On media politics. 2. Discussion 7 – Are media campaigns corrupting politics or making it more responsive? Do we get what we deserve?</p>

IV. Balance of Powers? Government of the People?

Tues., 5 November	<p><u>Test 3 / The Federal Bureaucracies: An Arm of the Presidency? The Congress? Or interest groups?</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, chap. 14, pp. 321-44.</p> <p>Class: 1. Test 3 on chaps. 10, 11, 13, and the Moyers video. Value: 10% of final grade. 2. Lecture and discussion - Is bureaucracy unfairly attacked?</p>
Thurs., 7 November	<p><u>Bureaucracy (2) / Ideology and American Identity</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, chap. 6, pp. 133-51.</p> <p>Class: Lecture and discussion - What does it mean to be American?</p> <p><i>Assignment: Second Paper Topics Distributed.</i></p>
Tues., 12 November	<p><u>Public Opinion and Voting</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, chap. 9, pp. 199-22.</p> <p>Class: Lecture and discussion - Does “the public” exist? Do “the people” rule?</p> <p><i>Assignment: Second Papers Due. Value: 3% of final grade.</i></p>
Thurs., 14 November	<p><u>The Decay of Citizenship? / Discussion 8</u></p> <p>Reading: Robert D. Putnam, “The Strange Disappearance of Civic America.” Note: this article will be made available on the course website.</p> <p>Class: 1. Lecture – Voting and Putnam’s worries. 2. Discussion 8 – Is America in trouble, or are we just too satisfied?</p>

V. Law: Freedom in the Balance?

Tues., 19 November	<p><u>Test 4 / Introduction to the Law</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, selection from chap. 15, pp. 345-50.</p> <p>Class: 1. Test 4 on chaps. 6, 9, 14, and the Putnam reading. Value: 10% of final grade. 2. Lecture – The origins of American law</p>
Thurs., 21 November	<p><u>Supreme Politics</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, selection from chap. 15, pp. 350-68.</p> <p>Class: 1. Video – “The Judicial Selection Process” 2. Lecture and discussion - Is there really an original intent above politics?</p> <p><i>Assignment: Third Paper Topics and Final Project Instructions Distributed.</i></p>

Tues., 26 November	<p><u>Discussion 9 / Constituting Liberties and Modernizing Basic Rights</u></p> <p>Reading: 1. Sidlow and Henschen, chap. 4, pp. 78-104. 2. Review the Bill of Rights (Articles I-X of the Constitution), Appendix A, pp. 374.</p> <p>Class: 1. Discussion 9 – Ought the courts be above politics? 2. Lecture – What are your liberties and rights?</p> <p>Assignment: <i>Third Papers Due. Value: 3% of final grade.</i></p>
Thurs., 28 November	THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY – ENJOY!
Tues., 3 December	<p><u>Discussion 10 / Equality/Difference - Sexual and Racial Struggles to Affirm Difference or Gain Unequal Treatment?</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, selection from chap. 5, pp. 106-22.</p> <p>Class: 1. Discussion 10 - How far ought civil rights go? What makes people equal? 2. Lecture – On civil rights.</p>
Thurs., 5 December	<p><u>Equality/Difference (2) / Discussion 11</u></p> <p>Reading: Sidlow and Henschen, selection from chap. 5, pp. 122-32.</p> <p>Class: Discussion 11 – How open should American society be?</p>
<p>Tues., 10 December</p> <p>(Follow Thursday schedule)</p>	<p><u>Test 5 / Review and Conclusion</u></p> <p>Reading: No new assignments.</p> <p>Class: 1. Test 5 on chaps. 4, 5, and 15. 2. A review and conclusion in preparation for the final examination.</p>
Thurs., 12 December	<p><u>Final Examination</u></p> <p>Section 7: 8-10:30 a.m. Section 8: 2-4:30 p.m.</p> <p>Assignment: <i>Final Projects Due.</i></p>