

POLS& 202

American Government

SYLLABUS

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I. Course Description

In this course we will examine the form and function of government and politics in the United States. We will provide analysis to, and interpret the documents on which the government is based and examine the historical foundations for constitutional government. We will look closely at the three branches of government, the electoral process, and provide a critique of some current political issues.

II. Texts and Documents

Texts:

Michael Parenti, *Democracy for the Few*

Joseph Melusky, *The American Political System*

Terence Ball and Richard Dagger, *Political Ideologies and the Democratic Ideal*

Documents: (all of which can be found on the web):

The Federalist Papers

The Declaration of Independence

The Articles of Confederation

The Constitution and Amendments

III. Course Objectives/Outcomes

The objectives of this course are to improve students' proficiency in both understanding course content and perfecting skills through mastery in the five areas covered by the Grays Harbor College "Desired Student Abilities."

A. Disciplinary Learning

Knowledge of content in prerequisite or transfer courses, as well as preparation for a career.

B. Literacy

Skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and quantifying, as well as

awareness and appreciation of learning styles and lifelong learning options.

C. Critical Thinking

Competency in analysis, synthesis, problem solving, decision making, creative exploration, and formulating an aesthetic response.

D. Social and Personal Responsibility

Awareness of and responsiveness to diversity and commonality among cultures, multiplicity of perspectives, ethical behaviors, and health and wellness issues.

E. Using Resources

Skills in accessing and evaluating information resources including campus resources, awareness of the role of information resources in making sound decisions, and command of the skills required to use appropriate technologies effectively.

The letters cited after the individual outcomes listed below, and elsewhere in the syllabus, refer to the abilities A through E listed above.

Regarding Course Content, students will have as objectives or outcomes the understanding of:

- *the “WHY” of U. S. government
- *the basic documents from which government in the United States is derived [A, B, C, D, E]
- *the political scientist's methods [A, B, C]
- *the political scientist's vocabulary [A, B, C]
- *the reasons why and how government functions as it does [A, B, C, D]
- *cause and effect [A, B, C, D]
- *the relevance of studying political science and American government [A, B, C, D, E]
- *the meaning of the past on the present [A, B, C, D, E]
- *the relationships between and among the various peoples who have and do inhabit the United States [A, B, C, D, E]
- *the race, class and gender diversity of people in the United States [A, B, C, D, E]

Regarding the skills gained in the course, students will have as goals the improvement of their ability to:

- *adopt and maintain an open mind about new issues and ideas [A, B, C, D]
- *read texts for comprehension of meaning, analysis and evaluation [A, B, C, D]
- *think critically about texts and arguments [A, B, C, D]
- *effectively communicate knowledge and perspectives in writing [A, B, C, D]
- *support arguments with evidence [A, B, C, E]
- *make use of information resources in building opinions and arguments [A, B, C, D, E]
- *identify and use an expanded vocabulary [A, B, C]

- *apply knowledge of course content in written and oral presentations [A, B, C, D, E]
- *work together in groups [A, B, C, D]
- *take charge of one's own learning [A, B, C, D, F]

IV. **Methods of Assessment**

Students will be provided with on-going assessment opportunities to demonstrate learning and will be evaluated on the following elements of their performance in this class:

- *reading comprehension
- *participation
- *writing (content and structure)

Assessment and Grading

Students will earn points for the course in the following ways:

40 Questions Developed From Reading For Monday Lecture/Discussion [four questions due every week beginning with week 2] [A, B, C, D]

40 Questions Developed From Reading for Tuesday Lecture/Discussion [four questions due every week beginning with week 2] [A, B, C, D]

40 Questions Developed From Reading for Wednesday Seminar [four questions due every week beginning with week 2] [A, B, C, D]

40 Questions Developed From Reading for Thursday lecture/discussion [four questions due every week beginning with week 2] [A, B, C, D]

6 Periodical Articles [read an article from a publication on the approved list, discuss it in class, turn it in to the instructor] [A, B, C, D]

2 Argumentative Essays [750 word minimum, due Friday of weeks 6 and 11] [A, B, C, D]

2 Draft Thesis Statements [one for each essay, due Friday of weeks 5 and 10] [A, B, C, D]

2 Scheduled appointments with the instructor [Friday of weeks 5 and 10] [D]

1 Final Exam [a take-home exam that will be due at the time scheduled for the final] [A, B, C, D]

5 Visits to local governmental bodies [A, B, C, D]

NOTE: Assigned work is due at the beginning of the class period for which it is assigned. Late

work will not be accepted.

Points:

- 40 Questions for Monday lecture/discussion @ 2 points each, 80 points
- 40 Questions for Tuesday lecture/discussion @ 2 points each, 80 points
- 40 Questions for Wednesday seminars @ 2 points each, 80 points
- 40 Questions for Thursday lecture/discussion @ 2 points each, 80 points
- 6 Periodical articles @ 10 points each, 60 points
- 2 Argumentative Essays @ 80 points each, 160
- 2 Draft Thesis Statements @ 20 points each, 40 points
- 2 appointments with instructor to discuss draft thesis statements @ 10 points each, 20 points
- 1 Final Exam @ 140 points
- 5 Visits to local government bodies @ 20 points each, 100 points

840 Points Possible For the Course

Questions

Questions should be framed in such a way that they could be the basis for an extended discussion and so that they help the class understand some component of the reading. The assignment does not call for you to provide an answer to your questions. Don't try to write trick questions and be sure to use the concepts and ideas that prompted the question in the first place - - don't hide the meaning. For instance, don't write a question like this: "What happened _____ on September 11th that changed life for the people of what _____ country?). The intent of the assignment is to mine the text for meaning, for the WHY of history. Be sure to remember that writing questions is one way that you can organize evidence for your argumentative essays. If an emergency or schedule conflict should occur once or twice during the term, students may turn in questions for Monday, Tuesday or Thursday early or email questions. Questions for Wednesday will not be accepted if students do not attend seminar. Questions, like all work for the course, should be typed (computered), double-spaced, at least 12 point font. Please put your name, the course number (American Government) the day of the week (Monday, Tuesday, etc.) and the week of the term (2-10) in the upper right-hand corner of your paper. Bring two sets of questions with you to class - - one to turn in at the beginning of class when questions are due and one to deep for discussion.

Questions will not be counted for points:

- *if the question calls for a one-word response (don't tack a why onto a one word answer).
- *if the question is a fill-in-the-blank
- *if the question asks for a definition
- *if the question calls for the name of a person
- *if the question can not be answered from the assigned reading
- *if the question does not have a corresponding citation using Chicago Style format.

Periodical Article

Each week which has a Friday class, students will read an article that relates to some aspect of the material under study or that relates directly to some aspect of American government, politics, economics, or social life. The instructor will hand out an approved periodicals list from which students will choose a different periodical every week. Students should copy the article, make annotations, be prepared to discuss the article in class each week, and turn the article in to the instructor at the end of class for points assessment.

Articles will not be counted for points:

- *if the student does not attend class
- *if the source of the document is not clearly identified
- *if the student can not clearly present the main thesis/argument/point of the document.

Argumentative Essays

Each argumentative essay must be typed (computered), double-spaced, with 12 point font and 1" margins. In addition to content, essays will be assessed for grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Essays will be due on Friday of weeks 6 and 11.

First Essay Prompt

Support or refute the following statement using specific evidence and examples:

An examination of the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation and the Constitution of the United States reveals that all these documents were influenced by the concepts put forward by “social contract” theorists, that is, that the authors of each document agreed that certain powers should be granted to government while specifying that certain rights, including natural rights, were retained and protected against government encroachment.

Second Essay Prompt

Michael Parenti argues in his book, *Democracy for the Few*, that “A nation’s greatness can be measured by the democratic nature of its institutions.” Use the Constitution of the United States, in its present form and any other resources at your command to support or refute the following statement:

After studying the politico-economic system established and carried forward by the Constitution of the United States, one can argue with certainty that society in the United States, founded on that Constitution, is most assuredly a democratic, “happy, pluralistic polity, . . . [where] existing political institutions operate with benign effect; that power is not highly concentrated nor heavily skewed toward those who control vast wealth; and that the state is a neutral entity with no special linkage to those who own the land, technology, and capital.”

Draft Thesis Statement

During the week prior to the due date of the essay, students will turn in for assessment a draft of the thesis for the essay. Each student will make an appointment with the instructor during office hours or by separate appointment to discuss the thesis.

Self Evaluation Essay/Final Exam

The final is a self-evaluation essay. Students will use the Grays Harbor College Desired Student Abilities, the course objective/outcomes defined in the syllabus and the student-generated Student Responsibilities List as tools for self-evaluation. Students will complete the essay outside of class and turn it in at the time scheduled for the final during finals week.

Visiting Governmental Bodies

Every other week, beginning with week 2, students will attend a meeting of a local governmental body – city council, county commission, PUD commission, port commission, college trustees, local Democrat or Republican party meeting, legislative hearing, school board meeting. On Friday of Weeks 2, 4, 6, 8 and 11, turn in a short (250 type-written words or so) report detailing the content of the meeting.

V. RULES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Student/instructor generated responsibility list for students [B, C, D]

No Plagiarism

Attend class and be on time

Listen

Have knowledge of your work

Ask questions

Respect others

Participate

Come prepared

Maintain a positive attitude

Remain calm

Keep an open mind

Turn off cell phones

complete work on time

Turn in work on time

Take notes when necessary

Take charge of your own education

Don't pack up early

Don't interrupt others

Complete the reading

Bring materials to class

B. Student/instructor generated responsibility list for the instructor [B, C,]

Keep class focused

Maintain a positive attitude

Remain calm

Maintain relevance of material

Present class material in a clear, logical and insightful way

Attend class

Be prepared

Be available at scheduled times

Keep up with assignments and graded work

Respect others

Keep an open mind

Maintain a productive class environment

Make expectations clear

American Government Reading and Assignment Schedule

NOTE: With the exception of Week 1, all reading assigned for discussion on Monday, Tuesday and Thursday is to be completed prior to coming to class on those days. Documents assigned for Wednesday seminar must be read before coming to seminar. Students will be responsible for finding, reading, and copying periodical articles. Be sure to bring your books and documents to every class meeting.

With the exception of week 1, our schedule should look something like this every week:

Monday -- lecture/discussion
 Tuesday -- lecture/discussion
 Wednesday -- seminar
 Thursday -- lecture/discussion
 Friday -- discussion based on periodical articles

Week 1

* Carefully read the class syllabus. Come prepared with your questions on Wednesday and bring with you a list of student and instructor responsibilities that we will negotiate and solidify to complete the syllabus.

Read for Thursday: [handout] John Taylor Gatto, "Against School."

Read for Friday: [handout] *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, Introduction and Chapter 1

* Start reading for next week. Look over the learning objectives and the questions provided by the instructor before you begin the reading. Be sure to keep the week's writing assignment in mind as you read.

Week 2

Read for Monday:

Melusky: Introduction, Chapter 1

Read for Tuesday:

Parenti: Chapter 1 and 6

Learning Objectives

- What is politics and why study politics
- Understanding the place of political myth
- Locating some of the controlling myths about the American political system
- Recognizing that economics and politics are intertwined
- Establishing the purpose of government
- Providing analysis to the Declaration of Independence
- Understanding the Declaration in its time and place
- Defining welfare
- General welfare or welfare for generals
- Understanding how taxation works
- Defining "imperialism" and "colonialism"
- The two party system
- Understanding the role of political parties
- Understanding elections and the role of citizen and politician in a republic
- "Winner-take-all"
- "Proportional representation"

Read for Wednesday seminar:

The Declaration of Independence.

Keep the following questions in mind as you read and come prepared to discuss them at seminar:

- What is the Declaration?
- What is the author's purpose?
- Who is the audience for the Declaration?
- What rights and duties does the author claim citizens have?
- Where do citizen's rights come from?
- Is the Declaration a useful document for governing today?
- Do citizens still retain the rights outlined in the Declaration?

Read for Thursday:

Ball and Dagger, Chapter 1

Friday:

Periodical Article

Friday: Turn in a report on your visit to a governmental body

Week 3

Read for Monday:

Melusky: Chapter 2

Read for Tuesday:

Parenti: chapters 2 and 3

Learning Objectives

Understanding Hobbes and Locke concept of "Social contract"

Defining "class"

Defining capitalism

Defining socialism

Understanding the distribution of wealth in the United States

James Madison's understanding of the purpose of government

Understanding plutocracy

Defining "cultural hegemony"

Locating ideologies on the political spectrum

Defining democracy and republic

Read for Wednesday seminar:

The Articles of Confederation [NOTE: After you read the Articles, devise some kind of visual format in which you represent the government set up by the Articles. Bring the results of your effort with you to class. For assistance, see the questions below.]

Keep the following questions in mind as you read and come prepared to discuss them at seminar:

What kind of government did the Articles establish?

What role does the President have? What are the President's powers?

How many houses does Congress have? Why?

What are the powers of Congress?

Which is supreme, Congress or states?

What powers does the central government wield under the Articles?

Read for Thursday:

Ball and Dagger, Chapter 2

Friday -No class/Faculty Prep Day

Week 4

Read for Monday:

Melusky: Chapter 3

Read for Tuesday:

Parenti: Chapter 4

Learning Objectives

Understanding the dangers of democracy

Examining the concept of a “Living” constitution

Explaining the role of class power in early America

Understanding the limitations on power invested in the constitution

Understanding the consolidation of power invested in the constitution

Read for Wednesday Seminar:

Preamble and Article I of the Constitution

Come prepared to discuss the following questions:

What is the Preamble? What purpose does it serve? Is it enforceable?

What is the purpose of Article I?

What kind of legislature does Article I establish? Why?

How does the legislative branch outlined in the Constitution differ from the Articles of Confederation?

In what ways do the Senate and House differ?

What powers does the Constitution give to Congress?

What are the qualifications for electors? Significance?

What is the term of service for members of Congress? Why two and six?

What is the ratio of representation? How was the ratio established?

Why is election to the House based on population?

Why is election to the Senate based on equality of States?

Read for Thursday:

Ball and Dagger, Chapter 3

Turn in report on your visit to a governmental body

Friday: Periodical Article

Week 5

Be sure to make an appointment with the instructor for draft thesis assessments!

Read for Monday:

Melusky: Chapter 7

Read for Tuesday:

Parenti: Chapter 14

Learning Objectives

Understanding the principles and theory of constitutional government

Analyzing the Preamble to the Constitution

Understanding the constitutional role of the legislature

Read for Wednesday seminar:

Article II of The Constitution of the United States

Federalist # 69, 70 (Melusky, pp. 302 - 307)

Come prepared to discuss the following questions and try to develop questions of your own:

What is the role of the President in government

What powers does the constitution allocate to the president?

Why is the president's power simple? Complex?

What are electors and why do they elect the president?

Read for Thursday:

Ball and Dagger, Chapter 4

Friday - - Individual Appointments With The Instructor

Week 6

Read for Monday:

Melusky: Chapter 8

Read for Tuesday:

Parenti: Chapter 15

Learning Objectives

Understanding the constitutional role of the president
Examining the Electoral College

Read for Wednesday seminar:

Article III of the Constitution of the United States
Federalist # 78 (Melusky, pp. 308-310)

Some questions to keep in mind for consideration at seminar:

What is the Supreme Court?
What is the scope of the power of the Supreme Court?
How long do federal judges hold office?
Can Congress regulate the court?
What is the length of term for Supreme Court justices?

Read for Thursday:

Ball and Dagger, Chapter 5

Friday:

Periodical Article

Friday: Turn in report on your visit to a governmental body

Turn in your completed essay

Week 7

Read for Monday:

Melusky: Chapter 10

Read for Tuesday:

Parenti: Chapter 9 and 17

Learning Objectives

Providing analysis to Article III of the Constitution:

Understanding the role of the judiciary through the Federalist Papers
 Understanding the extra-constitutional powers in Judicial Review
 Understanding a “judicial interpretation” of the Constitution
 Making sense of judicial objectivity
 Understanding the limits of the courts
 Reversals in the Supreme Court
 The purpose of law
 Understanding legal double-standards
 Understanding Federalism

Read for Wednesday seminar:

Articles IV, V, VI, and VII of the Constitution of the United States

Read for Thursday

Ball and Dagger, Chapter 6

Friday:

Periodical Article

Week 8

Monday: No Class - - Veterans Day

Read for Tuesday:

Parenti: Chapter 16; Melusky: Chapter 9

Learning Objectives

Understanding the role of bureaucracy in the government of the United States

Read for Wednesday seminar:

Review Melusky pp. 33-38

Federalist # 10 and 51

Read for Thursday:

Ball and Dagger, Chapter 7

A periodical article which you will bring to class to discuss and hand in

Thursday: Turn in report on your visit to a governmental body

Friday - Periodical Article

Week 9

Please note the changes to the schedule this week! Thanksgiving

Read for Monday:

The Bill of Rights
Federalist # 84, (Melusky, pp. 311-313)
Melusky: Chapter 4

Read for Tuesday:

Review the First Amendment to the Constitution
Parenti, Chapter 10 and 12

Learning Objectives

Providing analysis to the First Amendment to the Constitution
The role of change in a Constitutional system
The role of a “Free” press
The role of dissent in a democratic political system
The history of government response to dissent
The meaning of a "police state"
The meaning of pluralism in a democracy
Democracy as “class struggle?”

Read for Wednesday seminar:

The Amendments to the Constitution

Questions to keep in mind:

How have the various amendments changed the constitution
How are the first ten amendments different from the remaining amendments

Week 10

Be sure to make an appointment with the instructor for draft thesis assessments!

Read for Monday:

Melusky: Chapter 5 and 6

Learning Objectives

The role of political parties in the United States

The role of interest groups in governing
The process of electing public officials

Read for Tuesday

Parenti: Chapter 11 and 13

Read for Wednesday:

Ball and Dagger, Chapter 8

Read for Thursday:

Ball and Dagger, Chapter 9

Friday: Individual Appointments With The Instructor

Week 11

Read for Monday:

Melusky: "Conclusions," pp. 258-265

Read for Tuesday:

Parenti: Chapters 7 and 18

Learning Objectives

Making Connections

Read for Wednesday:

Ball and Dagger, Chapter 10

Thursday: Seminar on American Government and Ideology

Friday: Periodical Article

Friday: Turn in your completed essay

Week 12

Finals Week

Turn in your final exam at the time and on the day scheduled for the final.