



From the SelectedWorks of Richard M. Skinner

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Syllabus for Introduction to American Government

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Spring 2011
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POLITICAL SCIENCE 160: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

The purpose of this course is to provide you with the opportunity to develop a critical understanding of American Politics. We will spend our time analyzing the working of the American political system; we will examine the workings of the three branches of government, as well as the interest group system, elections, the media and public opinion. This course will prepare you for further, in-depth study of American politics and equip you with the tools necessary for responsible citizenship.

Your most important responsibility in this course will be the careful and reflective reading of the assignments listed in the outline that follows. Throughout the term we will also want to pay close attention to the political process as it unfolds in front of us.

REQUIREMENTS:

One midterm (30 points)
Two short essays (15 points each)
One final exam (30 points)
Attendance and participation (10 points)

ATTENDANCE / PARTICIPATION: You are required to attend class. I will take attendance on a regular basis. If you come late, please see me after class. While regular attendance is expected, by itself it does not guarantee a perfect participation grade. Discussion is a central component of this class. You should come to each class meeting prepared to talk about the arguments made by the section's authors and about your response to them. A guide to my expectations for class participation can be found at the end of the syllabus.

ESSAYS: You will have to write two essays of three to five pages each; there will be three opportunities to submit it. You will have to choose your topic from lists that I will provide. While these essays are designed to be written using the readings assigned for class, you may choose to engage in additional research. If you do so, please make sure to cite your sources, using a commonly used system such as that used by the Modern Language Association or that found in *The Chicago Manual of Style*. The essay will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade for each day it is late. After the third day, papers will not be accepted. You may choose to rewrite your essay, in which case, your final grade will be an average of the original and the rewrite.

Unless you have a specific reason to so (which you have cleared with me), I prefer that you not use laptop computers in this class.

REQUIRED READINGS:

Kenneth Janda, Jeffrey Berry, and Jerry Goldman, The Challenge of Democracy, 10th Edition.

Samuel Kernell and Steven S. Smith. Principles and Practice of American Politics. 4th Edition.

Robert Dahl, How Democratic is the American Constitution? 2nd Edition.

Gary C. Jacobson, A Divider, Not a Uniter: George W. Bush and the American People, The 2006 Election and Beyond

All other readings will be on electronic reserve.

NOTE: The dates listed below are for your convenience only. The instructor reserves the right to change the class schedule as needed.

I. Introduction – Democracy and American Culture (January 11 – 20)

J, B, & G: chs. 1 & 2

Declaration of Independence.

II. The Constitution and Federalism (January 25-February 3)

J, B, & G: chs. 3 & 4

U.S. Constitution

Dahl (entire)

Kernell and Smith, chs. 2 & 3

Opportunity 1: February 8

III. The Congress (February 8-15)

J, B, & G: ch. 11

Kernell and Smith, ch. 6

Barbara Sinclair, “The New World of U.S. Senators”

Morris Fiorina, “Keystone Reconsidered.”

Midterm: February 17

IV. The President and the Executive Branch (February 22-March 17)

J, B, & G: chs. 12-13, 17 & 19-20

Kernell and Smith, chs. 7-8

John P. Burke. “The Institutional Presidency.”

Andrew Rudalevige. “The President and the Cabinet.”

Terry M. Moe. “The Presidency and the Bureaucracy: The Presidential Advantage.”

George Edwards. “Strategic Assessments: Evaluating Opportunities and Strategies in the Obama Presidency.”

Opportunity 2: March 22

V. The Courts (March 22-29)

J, B, & G: ch. 14

Kernell and Smith, ch. 9

Ronald Dworkin, "The Temptation of Elena Kagan"

Justin Driver, "It's Alive. Can Elena Kagan save the legal left?"

Jeffrey Rosen, "Roberts Versus Roberts. How radical is the chief justice?"

Lauren Collins, "Number Nine. Sonia Sotomayor's high-profile debut."

VI. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights (March 31-April 5)

J, B & G: chs. 15 & 16

Re-read the Bill of Rights (Amendments 1-10) and the Civil War Amendments (Amendment 13-15)

Kernell & Smith, ch. 5

Opportunity 3: April 12

VII. Political Behavior (April 7 – 26)

J, B, & G: chs. 5-10

Kernell and Smith, chs. 10-14

Jacobson (entire)

Gary Jacobson, "Barack Obama and the American Public: The First 18 Months."

Expectations for Class Participation

A Daily Guide

Grade	Criteria
A / A-	<p>Demonstrates excellent preparation: has analyzed readings exceptionally well, relating it to other readings, course material, discussions, experiences, etc.</p> <p>Offers analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of reading material.</p> <p>Contributes in a very significant way to ongoing discussion: keeps analysis focused, responds thoughtfully to other students' comments, contributes to the cooperative argument-building, suggests alternative ways of approaching material, etc.</p> <p>Demonstrates ongoing very active involvement.</p>
B+ / B	<p>Demonstrates good preparation: knows reading facts well, has thought through implications of them.</p> <p>Offers interpretations and analysis of reading material (more than just facts) to class.</p> <p>Contributes well to discussion in an ongoing way: responds to other students' points, thinks through own points, questions others in a constructive way, offers and supports suggestions that may be counter to the majority opinion.</p> <p>Demonstrates consistent ongoing involvement.</p>
B- / C+	<p>Demonstrates adequate preparation: knows basic reading facts, but does not show evidence of trying to interpret or analyze them.</p> <p>Offers straightforward information (e.g., straight from reading), without elaboration or very infrequently.</p> <p>Does not offer to contribute to discussion, but contributes to a moderate degree when called on.</p> <p>Demonstrates sporadic involvement.</p>
C / D	<p>Present.</p> <p>Tries to respond when called, but does not offer much.</p> <p>Demonstrates very infrequent involvement in discussion.</p>
F	<p>Absent.</p>