INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT, PS201

Course Syllabus
Fall, 2003

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Purpose and Description of the Course: This is a course about politics: the struggle among groups and individuals over how costs and benefits are distributed among us. This is a course about American politics: the particular methods and values that shape how people engage in the struggle as a result of the historical circumstances of the development of the United States—the culture, society, and production system. This is a course about government in the United States—the formal organization of rules and methods by which the political struggle is managed. And most importantly, this is a course about ideology: beliefs, values, and priorities—the stuff we argue over—the conflicting answers to questions such as “who should get what?” “who should decide?” “what are our priorities?”

Government and politics in the US at the turn of the millenium is not a subject about which Americans feel comfortable, encouraged, or optimistic. A growing disillusionment and impatience with politics have accompanied the past couple of decades in general and the Bush I and Clinton administrations in particular. And, since 9-11 we can add a large dose of public fear to the political mix. The 2000 presidential election and the 2002 Congressional elections revealed a society as deeply divided in values and ideology as ever in our 200+ year history. What is its source? What are we arguing about? How has 9-11 shaped the argument? How well or how poorly is the US constitutional system operating? For whom? Is there much reason to claim victory in the Cold War? What did the American people win and lose? Has the promise of American democracy been fulfilled or has it become just another gimmick in the commercial culture? And, what of the future of a capitalist system which has become truly global and truly top-heavy? What has been the impact of the “war on terror” and the “enron” problem?

In this course, we will be exploring these and many more questions in the context of the long run-up to the 2004 presidential elections, post-war Iraq policy, economic hardship and fiscal crisis at national and local levels. In other words, this course is an inquiry into the nature and state of American politics. As we pursue our inquiry we will learn the basic history and theory that underlies the American political system. We will evaluate the limits and problems with “democracy” in the US by focusing our attention on three main themes: 1) the dominant political questions and the points of view that shape our public arguments—this is the ideological conflict; 2) the state and the capitalist economy—this is political-economy; and 3) the state and democracy—the focus here is on who rules in America—issues of power and authority.

We will be successful if we increase our awareness of the nature of the economic and political conflicts that characterize this society, the ideologies that provide the lenses through which most of us see the world and our place in it, and the power structure that shapes who gets what, how and when in American life. As the author of our text says, “don’t look here for the ‘answers’ to political questions.” Start here on the long process of working out your political consciousness—your questions and the beginnings of answers on the road to your definition of your political interests.

“Real individuality…..cannot be attained in a single sitting, or even in a hundred sittings. It is an ongoing task, the occupation of a lifetime. But it is the task that everyone wanting to be a good thinker must undertake. Self-knowledge, as Socrates said, is the beginning of wisdom.”
Texts and Readings:

**WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON?** by Stephen Shalom  
**On-line notes** [http://cf.linnbenton.edu/artcom/social_science/clarkd/web.cfm?pgID=1180](http://cf.linnbenton.edu/artcom/social_science/clarkd/web.cfm?pgID=1180)

Additional Readings: Additional readings are listed in the Course Calendar. Also you will find a variety of topical references and links at my Political Science Website.

Note: You should be observing and absorbing information about American politics daily. I cannot recommend a “best” source to you—all sources of information have points of view, biases and limitations. It is important however that you “stay tuned” and in the process approach the subject as a student: with curiosity, courage, and commitment. I find the following sources particularly useful. I expect you to use at least one of them each week.

The Oregonian [http://www.oregonlive.com/oregonian/](http://www.oregonlive.com/oregonian/)
The International Herald Tribune [http://www.iht.com/frontpage.html](http://www.iht.com/frontpage.html)

The Nightly Newshour (7pm, Channel 10) [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/)
Morning Edition or All Things Considered (radio 550AM) [http://www.npr.org/](http://www.npr.org/)

Methods of Instruction and Evaluation:

**Classroom:** This is an introductory college class. I do not assume that you have prior knowledge of the substance and methods we use to develop an analysis of American politics and government. I start with the assumption that you want to be a free individual and that you have an appetite for knowledge and insight into the culture and society that has shaped who you are to this point. A variety of methods will be used in our pursuit: there will be an occasional lecture but most of our class time will be taken up with discussions, seminars, group presentations, and videos. This is an introductory but challenging course so missing a class period is extremely costly. Please plan on attending all class meetings—your success and the success of the course depends on you coming to class, doing the reading on time, and discussing ideas and issues. Remember! This is not a correspondence class! You need to be in class, always.

**Grades:** You will be evaluated on the basis of your commitment to the course and your performance on two take-home tests and two projects plus several short reading, writing and research exercises, and a first shot at trying out your political voice.  
**Grades will be calculated as follows:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 take-home tests @ 50 points each</td>
<td>= 100 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 projects @ 50 points each</td>
<td>= 100 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 discussion sheets @ 10 points each (minus low score)</td>
<td>= 60 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 topical position paper</td>
<td>= 60 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pop quizzes</td>
<td>= 30 points</td>
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350 total possible points-----------------------------A = 90%, B = 80%, C = 70%, D = 60%

**Bonus Points:** I will check attendance randomly three times this quarter. Each check is worth five bonus points. Additional bonus points will be available on take-home assignments.
**LATE ASSIGNMENTS:** All of the written assignments are take-homes. They should be turned in on time. I will not accept papers that are more than three (3) class meetings late. Within this time-frame, late papers will lose 10% of their value. Discussion sheets will not be accepted after the due date. I will try to return on-time papers within two class meetings. For late papers, I make no promises. If your attendance is good and your papers on time, you can re-write papers to improve your grade. Of course, there will be no penalty if you are late due to circumstances beyond your control.

**COURSE CALENDAR:** Readings and Topics

Regularly assigned readings are from Shalom. On-line readings and resources are listed below. Notes provide additional information and perspective and are available on the course web-site.

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**Week #1 (Sept 29)** Politics and Ideology: What You See is Where You Sit

**Reading:** Shalom,

- Chapter 1, “Introduction”
- Chapter 2, “Ideology”

**Notes:**

A Comparative Note on American Ideology
Theoretical Foundations: Libertarian/Communitarian
The Displacement of Conflicts

Michael Lewis, “All Politics Are Loco!!”


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**Week #2 (Oct 6)** Conservatism: Economic and Social and Don’t Forget the Neos

**Reading:** Shalom,

- Chapter 3, “Conservatism”

**Notes,**

“The Democratic Debate”

“Hamilton and Jefferson: Two Visions of America”

“Early Colonial Ideology and Political-Economy”

“The US as a Superpower”

“Empire Builders: Neo-conservatives and Their Blueprint for US Power”
Week #3 (Oct 13) Liberalism: Sheep in Wolves Clothing
Reading: Shalom,
Chapter 4, “Liberalism”
Notes: “Property, Freedom and Democracy”
“Notes on Modernization and its Complications”
“Industrialism: 1865-1900”
“Profile of the Gilded Age”
“Notes on Progressivism”
“FDR: Economic Bill of Rights”
“LBJ and the Great Society”
Jack Beatty, “The Democratic Difference” Atlantic Unbound

Week #4 (Oct 20) Human Nature and Real Democracy: Seeing The Political Universe
Reading: Shalom,
Chapter 5, “Democratic Socialism”
Chapter 6, “Other Ideologies”
Notes: “From Artisan’s Republic to the Factory System”
“Industrial Capitalism and the Meaning of Democracy”
“When Democracy Failed: The Warnings of History”
“Why Business Privilege is a Threat to Democracy”

Week #5 (Oct 27) Governing: Accident, Force, or Reason
Reading: Shalom,
Chapter 7, “The Institutions and Structure of Politics”
Chapter 8, “Representation”
Notes: “First New Nation”
“The Politics of Representation”
Nicholas Lemann, “The Controller”
Week #6 (Nov 3)  
**Propaganda, Public Opinion, and Thinking for Ourselves**

*Reading:*  
*Shalom,*

**Chapter 9,** “Where do Political Beliefs Come From?”

**Chapter 10,** “Civil Liberties”

*Notes:* “Notes on Elite-Mass Communication”

Richard J. Ellis, “*Under God*”

Jack Beatty, “The Tyranny of Belief”  
*Atlantic Unbound*


“George W. Bush and the Ghosts of Presidents Past”  
[http://www.apsanet.org/PS/march01/greenstein.cfm](http://www.apsanet.org/PS/march01/greenstein.cfm)

Week #7 (Nov 10)  
**Political-Economy: The Big Questions—Market and/or State**

*Reading:*  
*Shalom,*

**Chapter 11,** “Government and the Economy”

*Now,* “Inside the Pentagon: Defense Dollars”  
[http://www.pbs.org/now/politics/defensedollars.html](http://www.pbs.org/now/politics/defensedollars.html)

*Video:*  
*The Two Nations of Black America*

Week #8 (Nov 17)  
**Political-Economy: More Big Questions--Taxation**

*Reading:*  
*Shalom,*

**Chapter 13,** “Taxation”

Paul Krugman, “The Tax-Cut Con”  

Week #9 (Nov 24)  
**What Ever Became of Social Policy? The Values Struggle**

*Reading:*  
*Shalom,*

**Chapter 14,** “Social Issues”

*Notes:* “Classes in American Society: Middle Class Morality”

Week #10 (Dec 1) Alienation, Deviance, Freedom and Security
   Reading: Shalom,
           Chapter 16, “Crime and Punishment”

   “Fairness and Felons” [http://www.csmonitor.com/2003/0925/p02s02-usju.html]
   NOW, “Civil Liberties and National Security”
           [http://www.pbs.org/now/politics/civilliberities.html]

Week #11 (Dec 8) Final Exams