POLS 198: Honors American National Government

Washington State University, Spring 2007
Tuesday, Thursday, 10:35-11:50, Room 235 College

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Office Hours: M 10-11:30, Th 1-2:30
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Course webpage: www.wsu.edu/~tnridout/ps198.htm

Introduction

This course is designed to acquaint you with the American political system. But rather than being asked to memorize the branches of government or how a bill becomes a law, you will be asked to understand—an evaluate—several important debates in American politics, both historic and contemporary. To that end, we will devote eight class periods to debating questions ranging from the proper role of religion in politics to whether the war in Iraq was just.

At the end of the course, I expect that you will have improved 1) your critical thinking skills, 2) your ability to communicate with others and to an audience through both writing and speech and 3) your information literacy (i.e., your ability to find, gather, and evaluation information from both the library and the Internet).

Readings

There are four books available for purchase:


Grading

There are 1000 points available for this course. Your final grade in this course will depend on your success in four areas:
1. Participation in two debates (300 points). You will participate in \textit{two} in-class debates this semester, working in teams of two (or possibly three). You will sign up for debate topics the first day of class, along with the side of the issue you want to argue. Along with your partner(s), you should thoroughly research the topic (that means going to the library) so that you can defend your position. The debate format will be as follows.

- Side 1: 4 minute introduction (debater 1)
- Side 2: 4 minute introduction (debater 1)
- Side 1: 4 minute rebuttal (debater 2)
- Side 2: 4 minute rebuttal (debater 2)

- Side 1: poses question to Side 2 (debater 1)
- Side 2: 4 minute response (both debaters)
- Side 2: poses question to Side 1 (debate 1)
- Side 1: 4 minute response (both debaters)

- Side 2: poses question to Side 1 (debater 1)
- Side 1: 4 minute response (both debaters)
- Side 1: poses question to Side 2 (debate 1)
- Side 2: 4 minute response (both debaters)

Questions from class (and professor!) for both sides (up to 15 minutes)

I will judge you using 3 criteria: the quality of your presentation (50 points), the quality of your arguments (50 points), and your use of evidence to defend your arguments (50 points).

2. Two essays (250 points) – due TUESDAY, MARCH 6, 5 p.m. You will research and answer two essay questions that I will distribute two weeks prior to this due date. About 4-5 pages is a good length for each of your answers. You must cite all sources using a generally accepted standard of citation. I will grade your assignment using four criteria: correct spelling and use of English grammar (50 points), the ease with which you express your ideas (50 points), the quality and originality of your ideas (75 points), your use of academic sources, including books assigned for this course, to underpin your arguments (50 points) and your thoroughness in completing the assignment (25 points).

3. A final examination (250 points) – WEDNESDAY, MAY 2, 10:10 a.m. This exam will consist of two broad essay questions.

4. Class participation and attendance (200 points) – The bulk of class time will consist of debates and discussion of the assigned readings, and thus I expect that everyone will make contributions to our class conversations. That said, the quality of your participation is much more important than its quantity.

5. Finally, I will be starting a Fantasy Congress league (very similar to fantasy football), and I will offer 30 extra credit points to the first-place finisher, 25 points to the second place finisher, and 20 points to the person who finishes third. More details to follow!
GRADING SCALE:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>930-1000</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>900-929</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
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<td>B+</td>
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Other information

If there are things I talk about in class that you do not understand, do not hesitate to talk to me about them. I am here to help you learn the course material. And if there are other matters that you think should be brought to my attention, let me know.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS. Assignments must be at my office by 5 p.m. on date they are due or they will be considered late. For each day an assignment is late, including weekends, I will subtract 10 percent of the assignment’s total point value from your score. I prefer to receive hard copies of assignments in my office, but if you are turning in a late assignment, please also email me an electronic copy so I know exactly when it was submitted.

ACADEMIC ETIQUETTE. Do not carry on side conversations or read the newspaper during class. Doing so is disrespectful to your classmates, and I will ask you to leave the room if you are disturbing others. Turn off all cellular phones during class.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT. I do not tolerate plagiarizing or cheating of any kind. Such behavior will result in failing the course and other disciplinary action. Please see the Student Handbook at the Division of Student Affairs website at www.studentaffairs.wsu.edu for a full description of the types of academic misconduct. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, see me immediately.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION. Students with Disabilities: I am committed to providing assistance to help you be successful in this course. Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. Please visit the Disability Resource Center (DRC) during the first two weeks of every semester to seek information or to qualify for accommodations. All accommodations MUST be approved through the DRC (Admin Annex Bldg, Rooms 205). Call (509) 335-3417 to make an appointment with a disability counselor.
Course Outline

Introduction (Jan 9)
   Sign up for debates

American Political Culture (Jan 11)
   Canon 1.1, 1.2, 1.3

Debate: What is the proper role of religion in American politics? (Jan 16)
   Canon 1.4, 1.5, 1.6

The Founding and the Constitution (Jan 18, 23, 25)
   The Declaration of Independence (Canon, p. 673)
   The U.S. Constitution (Canon, p. 677)
   Canon 2.7, 2.8, 2.9
   Ellis (all)

Federalism (Jan 30)
   Canon 3.12, 3.13, 3.14, 3.15, 3.16, 3.17

Civil Liberties and Civil Rights (Feb 1)
   Canon 4.18, 4.19, 4.20

Debate: What is the proper trade-off between liberty and security? (Feb 6)
   Canon 4.21, 4.22

Congress (Feb 8, 13)
   Canon 5.23, 5.24, 5.25, 5.26, 5.27, 5.28
   Price (all)

Judiciary (Feb 15)
   Canon 8.39, 8.40, 8.41

Debate: What is the proper way to interpret the Constitution? (Feb 20)
   Canon 8.42, 8.43

Presidency (Feb 22, Feb 27)
   Canon 6.29, 6.30, 6.31, 6.32, 6.33
   Clinton (all)

Public Opinion and Mass Media (Mar 1, 6, 20)
   Canon 9.44, 9.45, 9.46

Debate: Are the media biased? Should they be? (Mar 22)
   Canon 9.47, 9.48, 9.49
Elections (Mar 27, 29)
   Canon 10.50, 10.51, 10.52

Debate: Voter Fraud or Suppression? (Apr 3)
   Canon 10.53, 10.54

Political Parties (Apr 5)
   Canon 11.55, 11.56, 11.57

Debate: Is there a fundamental red-blue divide in America? Or shades of purple? (Apr 10)
   Canon 11.58, 11.59

Interest Groups (Apr 17)
   Canon 12.60, 12.61, 12.62

Debate: Are interest groups dangerous to American democracy? (Apr 19)
   Canon 12.63, 12.64, 12.65

Hot Topics: Economic Inequality, Same-Sex Unions, and Social Security Reform (Apr 24)
   Canon 15.76, 15.77, 15.78

Debate: Was the Iraq war a good idea? (Apr 26)
   Canon 16.84, 16.85, 16.86