

**Introduction to American Politics  
Political Science 101  
Summer Quarter, 2006**

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This is a course in political science designed for non-Political Science majors. However, while you may have registered for this class to fill a general education requirement, my goal is to help you find the course to be of value in and of itself. Six years ago, our presidential election exposed the processes of the electoral college system for the first time to many Americans, and its resolution was quite controversial. Shortly thereafter, a U.S. Senator switched parties, and in this solitary act, a divided government was established. In spite of this chain of division, however, in 2002 the President gained seats in both houses of Congress in a midterm election for only the third time in history. Divisiveness continued in the 2004 elections, and still yet again the President and his party generally benefited. And we have midterm elections this year, with much talk that at least one of the houses of Congress may switch parties. We are truly witnessing a very interesting period in U.S. politics—and we haven't even mentioned the ways we've changed with the war on terrorism. The rate at which our country is reacting to these developments provides us a great opportunity to learn more about how our government works, and such is the goal of our class.

**Course Expectations, Requirements, and Grading**

We'll be going through a fair amount of material in this class, but we'll be doing it in such a way that we don't just gloss over topics, while at the same time we don't spend too much time on one subject. Unfortunately, the field of American politics is just too great to provide a strict focus on one element within a quarter. Some segments of this course likely will interest you more than others. However, I do ask that you familiarize yourselves with the assigned readings before each class period, particularly regarding those topics which seem the most foreign to you.

There is one assigned (and required) text for this course, and it can be purchased at SBX Bookstore. This textbook is:

**Government by the People (6<sup>th</sup> Edition)**, by Magleby, O'Brien, Light, Burns, Peltason, and Cronin. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

As you will note in the Assignments section below, the normal assigned reading for each class period is a chapter from the book, which means (generally) somewhere around 30 pages or so for each class. We've got to get through a lot of material in our short 10 weeks, and thus the reading material may be extensive at times. However, I doubt that you will find this reading to be too much of a chore. The text is very approachable, and, if I may say so, it makes for interesting reading as well. I have faith that you can do these readings.

And get through them you must, because class discussion will play a vital role in our learning environment. Of course, a good part of each class meeting will be devoted to lectures, where I will discuss what the text has said as well as supplement additional information. However, a good learning environment is one in which all members participate, and I expect you to do just that. When you have something to say, I want you to say it. In spite of how politics may often be portrayed, this is not dry material we're discussing, and you're all bound to have interesting input that has not been addressed by the text. With the grand hopes I have for class discussion, it is crucial that you come prepared for each class period.

That said, I will not be grading based on attendance and participation, at least strictly speaking. I believe that should you choose not to attend class, you will find it much more difficult to pass the exams **(especially because there will often be material discussed in class that will not be found in your text)**, and in that sense attendance indirectly affects your grade already.

However, I will be granting extra credit for participation in the form of 8 in-class short quizzes. The quizzes will be unannounced, so it really would be a good idea to make it to every class just to make sure you catch all of them. Each quiz will be worth 2 possible points; you will earn one point if you get at least half of the answers on it correct, and you will receive two points if you get all of the answers on it correct. So, in all, there are 16 possible extra credit points in this course. That may not sound like much, but it could give as much as a 5% boost to your final grade—for example, it could possibly change a B- into a B+. I encourage you all to take advantage of this extra credit opportunity by keeping up with your readings and coming to every class.

One final thing about those extra credit quizzes—you have to come to class to be able to take them. NO MAKEUPS of these quizzes will be allowed. My apologies, but there are no exceptions to this provision.

Further along this line, I strongly encourage each of you to form study groups within the class. Not only will these groups be able to provide you notes for classes you've missed, but they will also be a great forum for discussing what might be on each quiz (as well as on the exams). Even better—they'll get you thinking about the material in greater depth, and you'll all be more prepared to participate in discussion. The more familiar we are with the material and with each other, the better off we'll be in tackling these issues in class.

## Papers

You will write four (4) papers for this course. Do not worry, they will not be long paper assignments—I'm expecting about 2-3 pages for each one (Typed, double-spaced, one-inch margins, and 10 or 12 font). The topics for these papers are found at the end of this syllabus. With a couple of exceptions, you have two potential topics to write about for any given day. Each paper will be worth 2.5% of your final grade.

I am not intending for these to be research papers, so don't worry about looking up a bunch of different sources to write them. Of course, if you'd like to do some outside research to clarify your arguments within them, you may do so. It is just not required for these assignments.

I am looking for your personal arguments on the given topics that you choose. That said, I do want to emphasize that you will be graded on the strength of your arguments within them. So while you don't need a number of sources cited in order to defend your claim, you do need to present me with a well defended argument regarding why you feel the way you do on the given topic. I am especially eager to see you defend your positions using the information you've read in the text that has been assigned in the daily readings.

You will sign up for the four classes for which you would prefer to write your papers. DO NOT think that you can just put these off until the last four classes; **I am only allowing a certain number of papers to be turned in for each class period, and if the sign-up sheet for that class period is already full (without you on it), then you will not be allowed to submit a paper on that day.** Also, if you submit a paper on a day for which you have not signed up, there is no guarantee I will accept it; that will depend on whether there are openings for that day. So please sign up for the days you want as soon as you can.

Papers will be due at the beginning of the class period for which they are assigned. Please bear in mind that I will not accept late papers. If you fail to submit a paper on a day for which you have signed up, you may ask me for an alternative topic and day to write a paper for, but please note that other dates may already be full, and this may be difficult to accommodate. If all other dates are already filled, then "difficult" suddenly becomes "impossible." So please do your best to make sure that you turn in your papers when you have signed up to do so.

### **Examinations**

We will be having two midterm examinations and a final examination. The final WILL NOT be cumulative—it will concentrate on the latter part of the course, although some questions may be included that touch upon topics from the earlier segments. The format of the exams will be discussed in class.

Make-up exams will be allowed ONLY if you have discussed the matter with me BEFORE the exam AND if I have given my permission. Should an extreme case arise, excuses given to me the day of the exam or afterwards will find me quite skeptical, and I will check all sources to verify them. Letting me know AFTER the exam has begun especially will be met with great skepticism. Again, please be aware that just because you request a make-up exam, you are not guaranteed of getting one. Please consult the syllabus to find out the exam dates now, and notify me of any potential conflicts as soon as possible.

**The breakdown of the grading is as follows:**

<b>4 Short Papers</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>Midterm Examination 1</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>Midterm Examination 2</b>	<b>30%</b>
<b>Final Examination</b>	<b>30%</b>

## **Academic Dishonesty**

According to University Rule 3335-31-02, “Each instructor shall report to the committee on academic misconduct all instances of what he or she believes may be academic misconduct.” In other words, not only am I allowed to report such behavior, I am *required* to do so. Above all, please do your own work. Neither plagiarism nor cheating on exams or quizzes will be tolerated.

## **University-Mandated Language for GEC Courses**

### **Goals/Rationale:**

Courses in social science help students understand human behavior and cognition, and the structures of human societies, cultures and institutions.

### **Learning Objectives:**

1. Students understand the theories and methods of scientific inquiry as they are applied to the studies of individuals, groups, organizations, and societies.
2. Students comprehend human differences and similarities in various psychological, social, cultural, economic, geographic, and political contexts.
3. Students develop abilities to comprehend and assess individual and social values, and recognize their importance in social problem solving and policy making.

## **Statement on Disability Services**

(from *Teaching at The Ohio State University: A Handbook*) “Any student who feels he/she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at 614-292-3307 in 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.”

Please contact me with any needs you may have in this class. I want you to have the most efficient learning environment possible.

## Course Assignment Schedule

June 19 Introduction, Go Over Syllabus

### Foundations

June 21 GBTP Ch. 1 (Constitutional Democracy)

### Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

June 26 GBTP Ch. 12 (First Amendment Freedoms)

June 28 GBTP Ch. 13 (Equal Justice Under the Law)

### Political Culture and Diversity

July 3 GBTP Ch. 3 (Political Culture and Ideology)

July 5 GBTP Ch. 4 (The American Political Landscape)

**July 10 1<sup>st</sup> Midterm Exam, in class**

### Political Behavior and Communication

July 12 GBTP Ch. 5 pg. 126-142 (Political Parties)

July 17 GBTP Ch. 5 pg. 142-163 (Interest Groups)

July 19 GBTP Ch. 6 pg. 166-172 (Public Opinion)

July 24 Public Opinion (cont.) **AND**  
GBTP Ch. 6 pg. 172-205 (Participation, Voting, & Elections)

July 26 Participation, Voting, & Elections (cont.)

July 31 GBTP Ch. 7 (The Media and American Politics)

**Aug. 2 2<sup>nd</sup> Midterm Exam, in class**

### Institutions

Aug. 7 GBTP Ch. 2 (American Federalism)

Aug. 9 GBTP Ch. 8 (Congress)

Aug. 14 GBTP Ch. 9 (The Presidency)

Aug. 16 GBTP Ch. 10 (The Federal Bureaucracy)

Aug. 21 GBTP Ch. 11 (The Judiciary)

**Aug. 24 FINAL EXAM, 11:30 a.m.-1:18 p.m.**

## **Paper Topics:**

### (June 26) First Amendment Freedoms:

1. Design a new amendment that you'd like to see added to the U.S. Constitution. Write the amendment in the style in which you see the other Constitutional Amendments written—for example, who gets to decide how this amendment will be enforced? After laying out your amendment, explain why you think it is needed as an addition to the U.S. Constitution. Does it protect “civil liberties” in a way that you think have not been protected so far, or does it do away with a “civil liberties” protection that you think doesn't belong there?
2. Explain the role that you think religion should play, if any, in the workings of our government. How does the wording of the U.S. Constitution figure in, as far as you're concerned? What do you think of the different “establishment clause tests” that the U.S. Supreme Court has used to determine whether the mixing of religion and government are okay?

### (June 28) Equal Justice Under the Law:

1. What are your thoughts regarding affirmative action policies in hiring practices and university admissions? Do you agree with them? Why or why not? Is your view an absolute, or do you think that there are some places where such policies are okay, while there are other places where they aren't?
2. Do you think there are too many protections for “rights of the accused”? That is, do you think it is too difficult to convict a guilty person of a crime? Or, conversely, do you think that it is too easy to convict an innocent person, and that we should have greater protection for the “accused”? Outline your position and defend it.

### (July 3) Political Culture and Ideology:

1. What do you make of the different kinds of “equality” that are talked about in Chapter 3? Which one (or ones) do you think is the kind of equality that we should seek here in America? Do any of these kinds of equality ask for too much, in your opinion? Why?
2. One of the things we most value is that which early political thinkers most feared—majority rule. What reasons do we have to fear majority rule? What reasons do we have to demand it? What limits should be placed upon it?

(July 5) The American Political Landscape:

1. Social class often plays a big role in the way people form their political opinions and in the way they make their voting decisions. Why do you think this is, and how do you feel about it? That is, do you think we should be guided in our decision making by what social class we belong to? Why or why not?
2. How do you feel about the immigration debate? Should we make it easier or more difficult for citizens of other countries to enter the United States and become citizens? And how does the language issue figure in for you—should we require people to learn English before they can become citizens? Why or why not?

(July 12) Political Parties:

1. Are our two main political parties enough? Or should we have other options in our elections? What is it about the two main parties that often makes many people feel discouraged about politics? And yet, given that discouragement, why haven't third parties been more successful?
2. The text argues that political parties add another “check and balance” to our political system, because they make sure that temporary majorities can never get too far away from public accountability. How do you feel about this? Do you think that the majority party should be able to push through its agenda, or do you think that the minority party should be able to stall debates and votes to make sure that legislation is not too extreme in their eyes?

(July 17) Interest Groups:

1. With the important part that interest groups play in our political system, obviously money becomes very important as well. How do you feel about money being so important in politics? And how do you feel about campaign finance restrictions—are you for or against them? Why?

(July 19) Public Opinion:

1. How important should public opinion polls be to our elected officials? Should they do what the polls say that the public wants, because they were elected to represent us? Or should they ignore what the polls say, because they were elected based on their principles, and should do what they think is right?
2. What concerns do you have about public opinion polls? Do you tend to believe them or not believe them? What could news networks and newspapers and all that do to allow you to better understand whether a poll was trustworthy or not?

(July 26) Participation, Voting, and Elections:

1. What are your thoughts on the Electoral College system? Should we keep it, or should we get rid of it? Why?
2. What keeps a person from voting? Do you think it is a responsibility that we all hold to vote? Should we do something to encourage more people to vote (and if so, what?), or should we view it as people's rights to choose not to vote if they don't want to? Why?

(July 31) Media and American Politics:

1. Do you think that the American news media is biased in some way? If so, how is it biased? What kinds of things do our news reporters and anchors do that shows this bias? If you don't think that the news media is biased, what leads you to believe this? What would you say to someone that accuses it of having some kind of bias?
2. Do you think that the mass media has an effect on how people form their political opinions and/or make their voting decisions? If so, what kind of an effect? Are such effects generally positive or negative, in your opinion? If you don't believe that the mass media has such an effect, why do you feel this way? What prevents the mass media from having an effect?

(Aug. 7) American Federalism:

1. The battles between our national government and our state governments have gone on for as long as our country has existed. How do you feel about the matter? Should the national government be more powerful, or should the state governments have more power? Why?
2. The issue of gay marriage has been one that has been at the center of recent federalism debates. Who should have the authority to determine whether gay marriage should be allowed—the national government or individual state governments? Why?

(Aug. 9) Congress:

1. Should we have term limits (meaning Congressmen could only serve for a set number of terms, and then they cannot run for anymore) for U.S. Congressmen, or should we not have them? What are your reasons for your position?
2. Do you think that the filibuster should be allowed within the U.S. Senate, or do you think it should be prohibited? Why do you feel the way that you do?

(Aug. 14) The Presidency:

1. Does the U.S. President have too much authority in matters of war and foreign conflict, or do you think that the office of the President needs the level of authority that it has taken in the past 100 years or so regarding such matters? Why?
2. Do you think that the President should have the power to use the “line-item veto,” or do you think it gives the President too much authority over the realm of legislation? Why?

(Aug. 16) The Federal Bureaucracy:

1. Presidents have often chosen to nominate officials to posts in the federal bureaucracy based at least in part on their past loyalty to them and to their political party. How do you feel about this? The Senate has to confirm many of these appointments, but do you feel that is enough of a check? Do you think anything more should be done to make sure that bureaucratic appointments go to qualified people? What?

(Aug. 21) The Judiciary:

1. Federal judges and justices have life-time appointments. How do you feel about that? Should we institute term limits of some kind for these positions? Why or why not?
2. People often complain about “activist” judges and justices “legislating from the bench.” How do you feel about this? Are there times when you think judicial activism of some sort is necessary? Why or why not?