

Political Science 101
Introduction to American Politics
Tuesdays and Thursdays 130-318
0205 Koffolt Laboratory
Spring 2007

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Goals and Objectives:

This course is an introduction to American Politics—the founding principles, institutions, and practices that make the American system a unique experiment in democracy. In addition to learning the nuts and bolts of the political system, we will investigate the sources of enduring debates in American politics, from the role of interest groups and money in politics to whether there is a liberal bias in the media and whether the states or the national government should have control over issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage. Almost every issue debated today has its origins in the Constitution and its interpretation and a primary goal of this course is to understand these connections. Thus, even as we learn about the substantive topic we will be developing our critical reading and thinking skills—ultimately perhaps the most important skills you will acquire in college.

GEC Requirement met:

#7. Social Science

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.

The Class:

Each class session will be a mixture of lecture, discussion, and class activities. Lecture will not be a regurgitation of material in your texts, but rather an opportunity for us to discuss the major debates and conflicts that are associated with each topic on the syllabus. For example, our class session on the Presidency will not focus on the Constitutionally-given powers of the President, but whether or not these powers have expanded to a degree unintended by the Founding Fathers. Class is not a time for facts and dates but rather analysis and discussion of the major issues in American politics. Therefore you must do the reading on time and be prepared to discuss the material in class.

Materials:

There are two textbooks required for this class, both available packaged together for purchase at a discounted rate at SBX and OSU Barnes and Noble.

- Barbour, Christine and Gerald C. Wright. Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics. Second Brief Edition. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2006.

- Barbour, Christine and Matthew J Streb, eds. Clued in to Politics: A Critical Thinking Reader in American Government. 2nd Edition. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2007.

Other readings and handouts will be made available throughout the quarter.

Assessment:

Your final grade will be based on the following:

Participation	10%
Critical Thinking Papers (4 total)	40%
Midterm	25%
Final	25%

Final Grade Scale:

A	93-100 %	C	73-76%
A-	90-92%	C-	70-72%
B+	87-89%	D+	67-69%
B	83-86%	D	60-66%
B-	80-82%	E	Below 60%
C+	77-79%		

Participation:

Class participation is essential in a course on politics. Your grade will be based on the quality of your participation in class discussions and activities and on the Carmen course discussion boards. Participation will form 10% of your final grade.

Exams:

There will be two exams during the quarter. They will not be comprehensive and will include a mixture of multiple choice, matching, short answer, and essay questions. They are equal in value and each is worth 25% of your final grade. You must be on-time for exams; I will not allow a student to take an exam once someone else has finished.

Critical Thinking Papers:

During the quarter you will write four short critical thinking responses to the assigned readings from both the main text and the Clued In to Politics reader. These papers should be 2-4 pages in length and will often form the basis of class discussion. I am looking for well-crafted arguments that show an understanding of course content and an ability to engage in critical reading and thinking. You must choose topics for four different days; you cannot write on two separate subjects for the same day. Each paper is worth 10% of your grade; the topics are listed in the course schedule below. Papers are due at the beginning of the assigned class; no late papers will be accepted.

Other Policies:

Make-ups:

Attendance in class is expected, but occasionally students need to be absent from class for legitimate reasons (e.g. personal or family illness). If you will be absent on the day of an exam due to these types of exceptional circumstances, you must inform me **before** the class session and provide some kind of documentation. If you meet these criteria, we can discuss what arrangements can be made for a make-up exam. No make-ups will be given to students that do not follow this policy.

Assignments:

Papers are due at the beginning of each class session for which the reading is assigned. If you are turning in a paper for that session, it must be handed in at that time; **no late papers will be accepted**. It is your responsibility to make sure you turn in four papers during the course of the quarter and it is to your advantage to not leave them all to the last four class sessions.

Technical Glitches:

Technical glitches—a misbehaving computer, uncooperative email program, or printer that decided to punish you by running out of toner—do happen. However, it is your responsibility to account for these in your planning and not use them as an excuse for why you cannot turn in your work. Couldn't print out your paper before class? Do what you can--email it to me or bring me a disk, and then print it out asap after class to get me the hard copy. It is also your responsibility to maintain communication with me by checking the Carmen web site daily to see if any announcements have been made or emailing me if a problem arises.

Respect:

This is a course about politics, and I anticipate that there will be many differing views brought out in class discussions. Every viewpoint is welcome, as long as everyone treats each other with respect. I encourage all students to openly discuss their views, as long as you also listen to the views of others respectfully and with an open mind. As the instructor, I promise to do the same. Fairness is more important than objectivity when it comes to politics. Anyone who shows disrespect to either the instructor or a fellow student will be asked to leave the class, along with any other action as I find appropriate.

Disabilities:

I rely on the Office for Disability Services (614-292-3307, room 150 Pomerene Hall) to document and coordinate the appropriate action for students requiring special accommodations as a result of a disability.

Academic Misconduct:

Don't cheat. No, seriously. There is no reason why you cannot pass this class and even do extremely well based purely on your own ability. If you are not doing your own work, you are not getting the education that you are paying for and are therefore wasting your time as well as mine. If anyone is caught violating the University's rules on academic misconduct and cheating, I will forward the case as per University policy to the Committee on Academic Misconduct.

Right to Revise Syllabus:

This syllabus outlines my goals for the course and my expectations for the students. Minor changes may need to be made along the way, particularly to the following schedule, and I reserve the right to revise the syllabus accordingly.

Schedule:

All readings and paper assignments are due for the date they are listed under. "Barbour and Wright" refers to the main text; CLUES refers to the "Clued In" critical thinking reader.

Tuesday March 27th Introduction to the Course

Part 1: Foundations of the American Political System

Thursday March 29th- Citizenship and Political Culture in American Politics

Readings: Barbour and Wright Chapter 1: Power and Citizenship in American Politics

CLUES: "One Nation, Slightly Divisible" p. 13-31; "Get Out, But Leave the Quesadilla" p. 38-41

Paper Topic: Is there one single American political culture? Where do Americans find common ground, and where are they divided?

Tuesday April 3rd - Creating American Democracy

Readings: Barbour and Wright Chapter 2: The Politics of the American Founding;

Skim the Declaration of Independence, Articles of Confederation, and the Constitution Appendix: p. 451-474

CLUES: "I Dissent" p. 55-61; "A Republic, If we Can Keep it" p. 59-61

Paper Topic 1: Should the Constitution be read today in exactly the same way as intended by the Founders when they wrote it? To what extent should we be concerned with the "intent of the Founders"?

Paper Topic 2: How did their experience under British rule influence the Founders' creation of the Articles of Confederation? What lessons learned from the failings of the Articles influenced the structure of the Constitution?

Thursday April 5th - Federalism

Readings: Barbour and Wright Chapter 3: Federalism

CLUES: "Bush, Hill Allies Seem..." p. 50-53; "State's Rights—for the Right Ideas" p. 53-55

Paper Topic 1: What are some issues in your own life that are affected by the Federalist system? What guidelines should be used to determine whether the States or the National government should have jurisdiction over these issues?

Paper Topic 2: Federalism was adopted due to fears about the loss of state rights and a too-powerful centralized government. But that was more than two centuries ago. Is federalism still necessary in the United States today? Why or why not?

Tuesday April 10th - Civil Liberties

Readings: Barbour and Wright Chapter 4: Fundamental American Liberties

CLUES: "Marching as to War" p. 75-81; "Gay Marriage Looms..." p. 81-84; "At Guantanamo, Dying is not Permitted" p. 85-88; Federalist No. 84 p. 92-95.

Paper Topic 1: The Bill of Rights grants a number of liberties to the American people. Which Amendment do you think is the most important and why (pick only one)? Is there any Amendment that you would change or eliminate? Or do you agree with Hamilton that the Bill of Rights itself is unnecessary?

Paper Topic 2: What role should religion play in American politics? When the free exercise clause and the establishment clause of the First Amendment are in conflict, which should prevail?

Paper Topic 3: Where do we draw the line between the protection of individual liberties (such as privacy, freedom of speech, or freedom of the press) and the need to provide for national security?

Thursday April 12th - Civil Rights

Readings: Barbour and Wright Chapter 5: The Struggle for Equal Rights

CLUES: "America is a Class Act" p. 41-44; "I Have a Dream" p. 45-48; "People of Color Who Never..." p. 97-102; "Black and White Proms" p. 102-104; "Nine Nonsense" p. 104-107; "Aint I a Woman?" p. 111-112

Paper Topic 1: What is your opinion of affirmative action policies in university admissions or hiring practices? Do you agree or disagree with them? Why or Why not? To what extent do such policies create more equality in the USA?

Paper Topic 2: Many groups in the US have overcome barriers to equal rights, including African Americans and women. Is the fight for same-sex marriage the next step in promoting equality, or is this a completely separate issue?

Paper Topic 3: To what extent is racial profiling acceptable in the US? Do the events of 9/11 justify increased racial profiling in the US?

Part 2: Institutions of the American Political System

Tuesday April 17th- Congress

Readings: Barbour and Wright Chapter 6: Congress;

Federalist no. 51 (B&W appendix)

CLUES: “Close Races Go the Way...” p. 114-116; “Politics and Perks” p. 116-119; “If you Give a Congressman a Cookie” p. 119-122; “Another Record Year...” p. 122-128; “Declaration of Conscience” p. 128-132

Paper Topic 1: Incumbents have a huge advantage in winning re-election due to various factors including high name recognition and partisan redistricting. Is incumbency advantage something that concerns you? What reforms could be made that might counteract this trend?

Paper Topic 2: In 2005, Senate Republicans threatened to eliminate the filibuster if the Democrats continued to use it to block judicial nominees. What are the pros and cons of the filibuster? Should the filibuster be allowed to block nominees? Should it be eliminated entirely?

Paper Topic 3: Congress is often criticized for being “in bed” with lobbyists and also for engaging in pork barrel politics. Do you agree with these criticisms? Are there any benefits to lobbyist influence or earmarking funds for individual congressional districts?

Thursday April 19th- The Presidency

Readings: Barbour and Wright Chapter 7: The Presidency

CLUES: “Bush Challenges Hundreds of Laws” p. 62-70; “The Ascent of a Woman” p. 134-137; “The Real Agenda” p. 140-144; “Bush Moves by Refusing to Budge” p. 144-148

Paper Topic 1: Few deny that presidential power has expanded dramatically since the ratification of the Constitution. Do you think this is good or bad for the country?

Paper Topic 2: What would the Founders think of the Bush presidency? Would they approve or disapprove of his style of governance?

Paper Topic 3: The 109th Congress was often called the ‘rubber-stamp’ Congress because it rarely went against the President; in fact, the President only ever vetoed one bill during its tenure. Some argue that even the new Democratic Congress won’t be able to thwart the will of the President, and even if it does, the President will continue his use of signing statements to modify Congressional intent. Does Congress have any power under the Bush presidency, or is it essentially an advising body at this point?

Paper Topic 4: Will a woman ever be President of the United States? Why or why not? Does Hillary Clinton have a shot at winning in 2008? Why or why not?

Tuesday April 24th- The Executive Branch and the Bureaucracy

Readings: Barbour and Wright Chapter 8: The Bureaucracy

CLUES: “ ‘Breathtaking’ Waste and Fraud...” p. 156-159; “Come One, Come All...” p. 160-162; “Burke Burning Over Frying...” p. 162-165

Paper topic 1: Presidents often choose from amongst their friends and financial supporters when nominating positions for the federal bureaucracy; for example, all of the Ambassadorships for Western Europe go to political appointees, rather than career Foreign Service officers. How do you feel about this? What are the pros and cons of such a system? The Senate must confirm these appointments but do you believe that this process is enough to ensure that nominees are qualified? Is there anything else you would suggest to ensure that bureaucratic appointments go to qualified people?

Paper topic 2: In parliamentary systems, Cabinet members are themselves Members of Parliament—ie, elected representatives. Often they are members of different political parties, reflecting the multi-party make-up of the legislative body. In the United States, Cabinet members such as the Secretaries of State and Defense are not elected and are usually all from the same party as the President, yet they wield considerable power and influence. What are the pros and cons of the American Cabinet system? What changes would you make, if any?

Thursday April 26th - The Judiciary

Readings: Barbour and Wright Chapter 9: The American Legal System and the Courts

CLUES: “Can this Nomination be Justified” p. 175-177; “The Souter Factor” p. 177-181, “Obstruction of Judges” p. 181-187; Federalist No. 78 p. 187-193

Paper Topic 1: What are the consequences of lifetime appointments for federal judges and justices? Should we institute term limits? Why or why not?

Paper Topic 2: People sometimes complain of ‘activist judges’ or judges ‘legislative from the bench’. What does this mean? How do you feel about this? Are there times when judicial activism is necessary?

Paper Topic 3: Hamilton argues in Federalist 78 that the judiciary is the weakest of the three branches of government. Do you agree with him? Do you think he would still make this argument if he were alive today?

Tuesday May 1st - Catch up/Review for midterm

Thursday May 3rd - Midterm Exam in Class

Part 3: Political Behavior

Tuesday May 8th - Public Opinion

Readings: Barbour and Wright Chapter 10: Public Opinion

CLUES: “Party On, Dudes!” p. 196-204; “Simply Put, the Public’s View...” p. 204-207; “The Other War Room” p. 207-214; “Will the Polls Destroy Representative Democracy?” p. 217-225

Paper Topic 1: How important should public opinion polls be to our elected representatives? Should what citizens think (as represented by polls) matter to their representatives, or should these representatives follow their own judgment and consciences? What are the pros and cons of each side?

Paper Topic 2: What are the differences between Green’s and Robinson’s conclusions in their respective articles? What role does each think public opinion plays in policymaking, and who does each hold responsible for their manipulation of public opinion?

Thursday May 10th - Political Parties

Readings: Barbour and Wright p. 314-331

CLUES: “In Kansas, A Troubling Fissure for GOP” p. 227-230; “Lieberman’s Real Problem” p. 234-236; “Introducing the Purple Party” p.237-241

Paper Topic: What are the pros and cons of a two-party system? Why haven't third parties been more successful in US politics? Do you think we should change our electoral rules so that third parties can have more power? Why or why not?

Tuesday May 15- Interest Groups

Readings: Barbour and Wright p. 331-349

Federalist no. 10 (appendix; also in CLUES p. 265-270)

CLUES: "Money, Power, Respect" p. 253-256; "Not One Dime" p. 257-260

Paper Topic 1: In Federalist 10, Madison warned against factions. Do you think his fears of powerful special interests are borne out in today's interest groups? In other words, do interest groups have too much power? Why or why not?

Paper Topic 2: Money is clearly important in politics—Democrat Tom Vilsack dropped out of the 2008 presidential race more than a year before the election because his war chest was too small. Politicians need money to get elected—and interest groups are a big source of that funding. How do you feel about the role of money in politics? Are you in favor of campaign finance restrictions? Why or why not?

Thursday May 17th- Voting Behavior, Campaigns, and Elections

Readings: Barbour and Wright Chapter 12: Voting, Campaigns, and Elections

CLUES: "Voter's Ed" p. 3-5; "Arizona Man Urges Lottery Lure..." p. 5-8; "Was the 2004 Election Stolen? No." p. 272-283; "Electoral College: Keep it or Dump it?" p. 283-286; "Campaign Bill to Kids: Take a Hike" p. 289-292

Paper Topic 1: What are your thoughts on the Electoral College system? Should we keep it or get rid of it? Why or why not?

Paper Topic 2: Voter turnout is exceptionally low in the United States. Why is this the case? Do you think low voter turnout is a problem that needs to be solved? If so, what changes would you make to increase turnout?

Paper Topic 3: Do you think children under the age of 18 should be allowed to vote or give campaign donations? What should the role of children be in politics? How much of a voice should they have?

Tuesday May 22nd- The Media

Readings: Barbour and Wright Chapter 12: The Media

CLUES: "The Real Media Bias: Profits" p. 300-303; "Why Brian Keeler..." p. 306-308; "Mr. Hearst Answers..." p. 308-310

Paper Topic 1: Do you think the American media is biased in some way? If so, how is it biased? What kinds of things do our news reporters, anchors, and networks do that shows this bias? If not, what leads you to believe this? What would you say to someone that accuses the media of having some kind of bias?

Paper Topic 2: Do you think that the need for profit influences the mainstream media in a negative manner? What role should the netroots—ie, internet political blogs—have in politics?

Part 4: Policy Making

Thursday May 24th- Domestic Policy

Readings: Barbour and Wright p. 411-437

CLUES: "Altered States" p. 323-326; "The Non-Taxpaying Class" p. 327-329; "Changing Social Security" p. 329-335; Fireside Chat p. 336-340

Paper Topic: Before the New Deal was adopted to handle the Great Depression,, the government's role in social policy was fairly limited. One of the main debates between the parties is their support for 'big' or 'small' government—ie, how much of the social welfare should be the responsibility of governments vs. individuals or communities. Where do you come down in this debate? Are there particular issues that you feel are best handled by individuals and private forces vs. the government or vice versa?

Tuesday May 29th - Foreign Policy

Readings: Barbour and Wright p. 437-449

CLUES: "Is America the "Good Guy"?" p. 350-361; "The Kidnapping of Democracy" p. 366-368; "The Case for Missile Defense" p. 361-365 "Speech Before the National Association" p. 368-371

Paper Topic 1: Is it important that other nations like and respect the United States? What price might we pay for our newfound global unpopularity?

Paper Topic 2: What should America's priority be right now—the terrorist threat or preventing nuclear attacks from rogue states and more traditional enemies (such as North Korea, Iran or even China)?

Paper Topic 3: To what extent has 9/11 and the war on terror changed the rules of the game? Do the events of that day justify the expansion of presidential power, the curtailing of particular civil liberties or other changes in the political system?

Thursday May 31st - Catch up/Review for Final

Final Exam: Tuesday June 5th at 130pm in the usual classroom.