

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS
The Ohio State University

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Department of Political Science
Course: PS 101
Course Number: 15876-5
Class Time: T-Th 9:30-11:18 AM
Location: Caldwell Labs (CL), Room 277
Spring Quarter 2003

I. Course Description and Objectives

This is an introductory course providing a general overview of the major theories and topics related to the development and maintenance of the U.S. government. I do not assume that students have had a previous course in political science, although some of this stuff will look familiar to what you covered in your high school history and social studies classes. My goal is to expose you to the “greatest hits” of American politics. These “hits” include, but are not limited to: 1) understanding how the American political system works, 2) learning about political leadership 3) discussing the importance of party identification and political ideology 4) examining political participation, and 5) dealing with the issue of representation. This course lays the groundwork for students who plan to continue studying political science, but I think it is a useful course for majors and non-majors alike. I hope you find this course both challenging and rewarding.

II. Required Text

The following book is available at SBX Bookstore:

- Dye, Thomas and Harmon Zeigler. 2003. *The Irony of Democracy: An Uncommon Introduction to American Democracy, Twelfth Edition*. Belmont, CA: Thompson/Wadsworth Learning.

I will refer to “**Dye and Zeigler**” throughout the reading schedule when I am talking about the textbook. Last time I checked, you could get this book for about \$59.00 (give or take a couple bucks). Be forewarned that this book is elite-focused and somewhat controversial. The authors have strong opinions about American Politics, and they are not afraid to express them. *The Irony of Democracy* is a required text, and **I expect you to have the required readings completed BEFORE each class**. I will make additional readings available, if necessary. These additional readings will be on closed reserve at the OSU Main Library or available online.

III. Course Requirements

You can think of the syllabus as a teacher-student contract. This contract loosely describes what students should expect from teachers and what teachers should expect from students. Here is what you can expect from your teacher. You can expect me to be dedicated to providing you with the necessary skills to do well in this course. Also, I am committed to making this course a worthwhile experience or each of you. Generally, I require that students have an open mind and be willing to learn. Specifically, I require four things from you: First, I will ask you to think and write critically and thoughtfully about the topics we discuss. Second, I want you all to take responsibilities for leading class discussions and doing group presentations. Third, I expect you to attend class faithfully. Finally, the bulk of your grade depends on your class participation and exams. I describe each of the criteria upon which I base your grade below.

- **Attendance and Participation: 20 points**

Critical discussion is **essential** to this course. Trust me, I do not claim to know everything, and class discussion is a way for me to share what I have learned while learning from my students. I have 4 simple rules about class participation:

1. There are no stupid comments, questions, or ideas. (Addendum to rule #1: There are inappropriate ones).
2. It is okay to disagree with others (especially the teacher).
3. Respect each other.
4. Have fun.

Active participation includes completing the assigned reading **before** each lecture and thoughtfully and respectfully participating in class discussions. If necessary, I will give unannounced reading quizzes to ensure that students understand the main points of the readings. I also give quizzes to motivate students to complete readings **before** each lecture. I will factor the scores on these quizzes into the student's overall attendance and participation grade. Meeting the instructor during office hours can earn you participation points; however, *office visits do not replace in-class participation.*

It is easier to participate when you come to class, so failing to show up for lecture will doubly affect your grade. I will take attendance each class period. Students are permitted **three (3)** excused absences during the quarter. Although excused absences do include illness (must be accompanied by a doctor's note), I will not excuse routine appointments because such appointments should be scheduled outside of class time. Students who miss more than three classes will lose one (1) point from their final grade for each additional absence over the three-class limit.

- **In-Class Presentations: 10 Points**

These are group presentations based on the readings. We will decide group members and presentation topics later in the quarter. Presenting a reading to the class has at least three (3) parts. The first part is summarizing the authors' argument and evidence. This does not mean simply repeating what the author wrote. The second part is to relating the authors' arguments and evidence (in your own words) to the other readings, your colleagues' discussions of those readings and their presentations, and your own personal research ideas and experiences. The third part is constructively criticizing the reading presented, explaining what you find unconvincing about the reading and why. It is a good idea to create an outline of your presentation before "show time." Students interested in making PowerPoint presentations must inform me ahead of time so that I can make arrangements and get the equipment.

- **Short Examinations (April 22 and May 22): 15 points each (30 points total)**

I expect students to complete **two (2)** in-class, non-cumulative examinations based on the material we cover in the lecture and readings. These exams may include questions in short answer, essay, fill-in-the-blank, and multiple-choice formats. For information about make-up exams, please read the exam policy below.

- **Final Examination (As Scheduled by the University: Thursday June 12): 20 points**

I also expect students to complete a comprehensive examination on material covered throughout the course. Graduating seniors should notify me early in the quarter so that I can make the appropriate arrangements. Please be sure to consult the university's examination schedule and make your travel plans accordingly; **I will not give early exams for anyone other than graduating seniors.**

- **Writing Assignments (Due April 24 and May 22): 10 points each (20 points total)**

Students will be required to submit two (2) writing assignments. I will hand out a memo (reminder) in class explaining what options are available. In order to avoid getting all the written assignments in the last week, I require you to complete one paper no later than 4/24/2003 and the other no later than 5/22/2003.

IV. Grades and Evaluations

Everyone starts with a perfect grade in this course. I grade on a demerit rather than a merit system because I think it levels the playing field. Also, I think it makes learning less about “proving oneself” and more about “maintaining focus.” Each student comes into class with 100 points, and I evaluate students based on how many points they end up with at the end of the quarter. I translate total points into letter grades using the following formula (please note that anything higher than 93 points is still an “A”, and anything lower than 62 points is still an “E”. Ohio State does not give A+, E+ or E- minus grades):

Points	Grade
93 or higher	A
90-92	A-
87-89	B+
83-86	B
80-82	B-
77-79	C+
73-76	C
70-72	C-
67-69	D+
63-66	D
62 or lower	E

The grading logic is simple. The goals for this course are on the front page of the syllabus, and I measure how successful students are at fulfilling those goals based on how well they meet the course requirements. If you end up with 93 or more points, then you met all the goals. If you end up with between 80 and 89 points, you achieved all the major goals of the class, but you did not fulfill some minor requirements. If you earn between 70 and 79 points, then you met all the major goals, but you did not complete many of the minor requirements. Students with 63 to 69 points at the end of the quarter fulfilled only a few major goals. Students with 62 points or less did not achieve any of the major goals of the class.

V. Class Outline and Reading Schedule

Below is an overview of the topics covered and the assigned readings for this course. The readings listed for each date are what we will cover for that lecture, so have them read for that class. Please note that I reserve the right to change the schedule, as I feel necessary.

Section I: Housekeeping

- April 1 Course Introduction and overview
- April 3 No Class (Teacher will be at a conference. Wish me luck!)
- April 8 What is American Politics?
The Elite Model of American Democracy (Dye and Zeigler, pp. ix-x and 1-22)

Section II: Establishing the Foundation of American Democracy: Principles and Procedures

- April 10 *Chapter 2: The Founding Fathers and the Constitution*
Unpacking Constitutional Democracy
Elitism and the American Constitution (Dye and Zeigler, pp.27 –56)

April 15 *Chapter 14: American Federalism*
Making Sense of Federalism
Dividing Power between the Nation and the States (Dye and Zeigler, pp. 375-319)

April 22 **Short Exam #1 (4/22/2003)**

Section III: Putting the Principles into Action: Political Institutions

April 24 *Chapter 6: The Media and American Politics*
The Media: America's "Other" Branch of Government
The Link between Politicians and the Public (Dye and Zeigler, pp. 153-176)
Written Assignment #1 Due at the Beginning of Class (4/24/2003)

April 29 *Chapter 7: Political Parties*
Parties: Essential to Democracy
Are Parties Declining? (Dye and Zeigler, pp. 179-202)

May 1 *Chapter 9: Interest Groups*
Interest Groups, PACs, Lobbyists, etc.
Organized Interests (Dye and Zeigler, pp. 233-252)

☺ ***Happy Cinco de Mayo*** ☺

May 6 *Chapter 8: Public Opinion, Voting, and Elections*
The Rules of the Game
Money and Elections (Dye and Zeigler, pp. 205-230)

May 8 *Chapter 12: The Legislative Branch*
Congress: The People's Branch?
The Legislative Elite (Dye and Zeigler, pp. 317-349)

☺ ***Happy Mother's Day*** ☺

May 13 *Chapter 10: The Executive Branch*
The Executive Office
Elites and the Presidency (Dye and Zeigler, pp. 255-282)

May 15 *Chapter 13: The Judicial Branch*
The Judiciary: The Balancing Branch
Elites and the Courts (Dye and Zeigler, pp. 351-372)

May 20 *Chapter 11: The American Bureaucracy*
Bureaucracies: The Real Power?
The Bureaucratic Elite (Dye and Zeigler, pp. 285-314)

May 22 **Written Assignment #2 Due at the Beginning of Class (5/22/2003)**
Short Exam #2 (5/22/2003)

Section IV: Contemporary Politics in American Society

May 27 *Chapter 15: Equal Rights under the Law*
Minorities, Protests, and Elite Response (Dye and Zeigler, pp. 397-421)
Video: Eyes on the Prize

May 29 *Chapter 16: Public Policy*

Elite Decision Making (Dye and Zeigler, pp. 425-434)
Foreign Policy and 9-11

June 3 **In-Class Presentations**

June 5 Final Exam Review
Teacher Evaluations

Final Exam: As Scheduled by the University (Thursday, June 12, from 9:30 AM to 11:18 AM)

VI. The Fine Print

Course Policies: I will penalize late assignments two and a half (2.5) points for each day they are late. I will not accept assignments that are more than a week late. Failure to take exams at the scheduled time will result in a grade of zero (0) with no exceptions. Students with legitimate reasons (*i.e.* documented medical emergencies, etc.) for missing an assignment deadline must notify me in advance so that we can arrange an extension. Please note that students must provide me with appropriate documentation before I will extend the deadline for an assignment. Students will be penalized points unless they can demonstrate (to my satisfaction) that it was impossible to complete the assignment at the scheduled time. Since I grade the “extended” assignment harder than I grade the original assignment, students are strongly encouraged to take exams at the scheduled time.

Extra Credit: Usually, these opportunities entail filling out surveys or participating in research projects in the Political Science Department; however, they may also involve additional assignments related to the course material. I will make five 5 extra credit opportunities available during the quarter at my discretion. Extra credit is worth 1 point apiece, so you can earn a total of 5 points. Extra credit can really improve your final grade (for example, from a C- to C or from a B+ to A-). However, attendance is worth more than extra credit, and students with excessive absences will get lower grades regardless of how many extra credit points they earn.

Academic Honesty: All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else’s words or ideas without proper documentation) will be tolerated. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will be handled according to university policy, and, when appropriate, reported to the University Committee on Academic Misconduct.

Disability: Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office for Disabilities will be appropriately accommodated, and should inform the instructor of their needs during the first week of the quarter. Students may also contact the department’s coordinator, Mr. Wayne DeYoung (292-2880) for more information about specific services.

Office Hours: Office hours are a time for you to come visit the instructor outside of class to discuss readings, lectures, discussions, presentations, papers, exams, assignments, or anything else remotely related to one’s life as a student at this university. I strongly encourage students to meet with me throughout the quarter. *Coming to office hours is a great way to boost your overall class participation grade.* Although office visits do **not** replace in-class participation, students can interact with the instructor in a more relaxed environment if they are not always comfortable with speaking out in class. Most importantly, office hours help me to remember students’ names. If the office hours on the syllabus are not feasible for you, please call or e-mail me to arrange an appointment.

Top 10 List of Ways to Irritate Your Instructor (Adapted from Dr. William Nish, Georgia College)

- Do not read your assignments before class lecture and discussion

- Label as “busy work,” “irrelevant,” and “boring,” anything that you do not like to do or that you do not understand.
- Read a newspaper, make cell phone calls, or talk to classmates if you are not interested in the lecture topic.
- Avoid using the instructor’s office hours for appointments.
- Be consistently late to class and other appointments.
- Be very casual about class attendance.
- Avoid taking exams at the same time and under the same conditions as the rest of the class.
- Always be ready with reasons why you are an exception to the rules established for the class.
- Expect your professor to be waiting at home to take your calls.
- Do not participate in such mundane activities as departmental advising appointments.

Top 6 List of Ways to Impress Your Instructor

(Students who wish to do well in this course should do the following)

- Come to class regularly and on time.
- Read thoroughly and before the class period in which the readings will be discussed.
- Contribute regularly to class discussion.
- Pay attention and ask questions when you do not understand.
- Complete your assignments in a timely manner.
- Take the initiative to contact your professor if you are having any difficulties.