

**Political Science 101**  
**Introduction to American Politics**  
**Spring Quarter, 2009**  
**Instructor: Todd Makse**

Class: Tuesday and Thursday 12:30-2:18pm in Macquigg Laboratory 162  
Office Hours: Tuesday 11:00am-Noon; Thursday 3:00-4:00pm, and by appointment  
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**Course Description:**

This course is intended to introduce students to the way the political process works in contemporary America. We will begin by thinking about the context of modern politics, including the Constitution and its current interpretation by the courts, as well as the nature of modern American society. We will then look at mass political behavior, exploring how the American public thinks, acts, and votes. We will consider the roles of political parties, interest groups, and the media, which shape the relationships between the public and elites. Finally, we will discuss the roles of the major political institutions: Congress, the executive branch, and the courts, and ascertain whether and how these institutions respond to the desires of the public.

This is not solely a lecture-based course. Part of each class session will be dedicated to group activities including debates, political simulations, and role playing activities that illustrate political phenomena. You are expected to attend class, be prepared by doing the readings every day, and contribute to class discussion.

There are no pre-requisites for the course. If you have had a high school government course, some of the textbook material will be familiar. However, some of the textbook material and most of the lecture material will be more analytical in nature. During the course, you are expected to keep up with current events in American politics. You should make a habit of watching the news or reading the newspaper on a daily basis.

**University-Mandated Language for GEC Courses: Rationale and Learning Objectives**

“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.”

## **Textbook**

The textbook for this class is “Understanding American Politics and Government” by John J. Coleman, Kenneth M. Goldstein and William G. Howell. Any other course materials will be posted on Carmen. We will use Carmen frequently in this class, and you should make a habit of checking Carmen on a daily basis.

## **Grading:**

Midterm exam 30%

Final exam 30%

Quizzes 20%

Group work and presentations 20%

The grading scale will be no more difficult than the following:

93-100 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+

60-66 D

59 and below E

## **More about grading criteria:**

*Midterm Exam:* The midterm exam will cover material from the first five weeks of the course. It will be a closed-book, in-class exam, and will draw heavily from lecture material. The exams are likely to be curved, and the size of the curve will not depend on the scores of a small number of individuals.

*Final Exam:* The final exam will cover material from the second five weeks of the course, but may require some synthesis of broad themes from the entire quarter.

*Quizzes:* There will be a quiz on the reading due at midnight the night before each Tuesday class. However, Week 1 is a practice quiz to familiarize you with the format, and there is no quiz Week 6 because of the midterm. The quizzes will be posted on Carmen under the ‘Content’ tab, and you should post the answers in a clearly-marked Microsoft Office (.doc) or .txt file in the Carmen Dropbox. The quizzes are open-book, but you should complete quizzes on your own. There will be a total of eight quizzes, and I will drop the lowest grade. Answer keys will be posted shortly after the midnight deadline, so you can review the answers before coming to class.

*Lecture notes:* An outline of each day's lecture will be posted on Carmen the night before class. These notes are not all-inclusive and not intended as a substitute for attending lecture, but taking notes in class will be considerably easier if you print the outline and annotate it during lecture.

*Group Activities:* Throughout the quarter, there will be daily interactive activities that include debates, simulations, and short research projects. Each activity is designed to familiarize you better with the inner workings of American political institutions. Some activities will be completed entirely in class, while others will require you to prepare a short presentation outside of class. You are expected to be an active participant in class and contribute your fair share to the out-of-class preparation. In addition to my own observations, at the end of the quarter, I will ask fellow members of your group to evaluate the effort put in by each member, and this will factor into your grade. Activities will be posted the night before class and I encourage you to read the activities ahead of time and print a personal copy; I will only provide one copy of the activity for each group in class.

*Attendance:* Attendance is required throughout the entire course. You are permitted two absences, no questions asked. There will be a one percent deduction from your final grade for the third and fourth absence and a two percent deduction for each absence thereafter. To avoid subjective judgments, I do not distinguish between "excused" and "unexcused" absences. Thus, it is not necessary to bring in notes for absences. If extreme circumstances arise which will force you to miss multiple classes, please let me know, and I will try to make fair accommodations. Finally, please arrive on time. Tardy arrivals will be treated as one-half of an absence.

*Extra Credit:* There will be opportunities for extra credit for participating in the Political Science Department's experiment pool, and/or other research-related activities outside of class. More details will be announced in the third week of the quarter. Each extra credit opportunity will be worth 2% added to your final grade, and you may participate in two of these.

### **Miscellaneous:**

**Makeup Exams:** I do not offer makeup exams without prior notice, except in **emergency** situations. If you have non-emergency reasons for missing an exam, please notify me at least one week ahead of time. If you have a genuine emergency (family or medical), please inform me as soon as you can. Also please note that the format of makeup exams may differ from the format of the regularly administered exam.

**Availability:** Students should feel free to contact me by email with any concerns about the class or course material. I will make every effort to respond to all messages within 24 hours. In addition, if my office hours are inconvenient for your schedule, email me and I will be happy to set up an appointment to the extent that my schedule allows. However, I am rarely in my office outside office hours, so drop-ins are unlikely to be successful.

**Academic Misconduct:**

Academic misconduct is defined by Ohio State University Rules as “any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the institution, or subvert the educational process. (Rule 3335-31-02).” Examples include violation of program or course rules stated in the syllabus, cheating on tests, plagiarism, dishonesty in reporting research results, and alteration of grades or forms.

**Disability Services:**

Students with disabilities who feel they may need special assistance should inform me of their needs in a timely manner. These discussions will remain confidential. Course materials are available in alternative formats upon request. For such materials, please contact Mr. Wayne DeYoung, 2140 Derby Hall, 154 North Oval Mall, 292-2880.

**Class Topics and Reading Schedule:**

March 31: Introduction and organizational session

April 2: No class

Quiz due (practice): Chapters 1 and 2

Additional reading: Appendices 1-3

April 7: Elections and democracy

Quiz #1 due: Chapters 3 and 5

Additional reading: Appendix 4 (The Constitution)

April 9: The Constitution

April 14: Civil liberties and civil rights

Quiz #2 due: Chapter 6 and 7

April 16: Public opinion

April 21: Political participation

Quiz #3 due: Chapters 8 and 9

Additional reading: Presidential election maps, inside front cover

April 23: Presidential elections

April 28: Congressional and state-level elections

Quiz #4 due: Chapters 10 and 11

April 30: Political parties

May 5: Midterm exam

May 7: The media and political campaigns

May 12: Interest groups

Quiz #5 due: Chapters 12 and 13

May 14: Congress, Part I

May 19: Congress, Part II

Quiz #6 due: Chapters 14 and 16

May 21: The Presidency

May 26: The Executive Branch and the Bureaucracy

Quiz #7 due: Chapter 15

May 28: The Judiciary

June 2: State politics

Quiz #8 due: Chapters 4 and 19

June 4: American federalism

Final Exam: Wednesday June 10, 11:30am