

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

GVPT 170, Section 0101

Summer Session I 2007

1108 Tydings Hall

9am-12:20pm MW

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GVPT 170 is an introduction to the foundations and workings of the American political system. The main focus of the course is on the institutions and activities of the national government, however, references may be made to state, local, and foreign governments where appropriate. Students from all professional and educational fields can make connections and find the importance of government and politics to their particular interests.

The course will be divided into three areas of substance and understanding.

Part I: Foundations

Constitutional framework, the federal system, civil liberties and civil rights will be detailed and explored in this part of the course. How has economic power and influence become intertwined with political power in the United States? What were the original intentions of the framers of the Constitution? How is the American Federal System unique from any other system of democracy? How have federalism, civil liberties and civil rights changed and evolved over the years, and how have the three branches of government contributed to these changes?

Part II: Institutions

The duties of the three branches of government will be examined in this part of the course (Legislative, Executive, and Judicial). The federal bureaucracy will also be examined as an essential institution. What forces help to determine the balance of power among institutions? How has the role of the presidency evolved and changed over the years? Does the federal judiciary stay out of “politics?” What does Congress actually do and how is it accomplished? How does each institution shape policy and politics? How did the foundations of the American system divide power and what are the realities of these institutions today?

Part III: Politics

The people influence the American government through various aspects of politics. How do elections, parties and interest groups affect American government? Why have interest groups expanded their influence and what would the “founding fathers” think of this? How has the rise of political action committees and interest groups changed American

politics? How did the 2000 presidential election and the ensuing battle change the level of knowledge of American government and politics among the American people? How is public opinion formulated and used in American politics? What is the media's role in politics? How do politics and campaigning differ in various communities?

Themes and Questions:

There are certain themes and questions that will be consistent throughout the session. How do the ideas of American government and politics differ from reality and implementation? How do race, socio-economic status, gender and other classifications factor into American politics? Why are politics, government and economics so closely related in the United States? How are those relationships different than other countries? Why do young Americans not vote? Why should college students and other young Americans get interested and involved in politics and the workings of government?

TEXTS:

American Government, Alternate 2006 Edition
Voices of Dissent, Sixth Edition

O'Connor and Sabato
Grover and Peschek

*The instructor may assign additional readings such as articles over the course of the session.

Grading:

Class meetings will focus attention on assigned readings as well as the ability of students to understand topics and make connections to real life issues. Both attendance and meaningful participation are necessary for success in this course. This is especially true due to the abbreviated nature of the summer session. Students will be required to come to class with printouts of newspaper articles and discuss how they are related to the course material. **Participation and attendance will account for 10% of the final grade. Students will also receive a total of 5% toward the final grade for bringing and discussing current event articles on the following dates: Mon6/11, Mon6/18, Mon6/25, Mon7/2, Mon7/9.**

There will be two exams, each covering half of the material. Each exam will account for 25% of the final grade. One exam will be a midterm and the other will be a final. Each exam will consist of 50 multiple-choice questions accounting for 50% of the exam grade. The exams will also include an essay portion accounting for the additional 50% of the exam grade (students will choose one of two essay questions). A significant portion of the classes before exams will be dedicated to review and preparation; students are encouraged to come in with extensive questions about the materials. **Exam 1: Wednesday June 20th. Exam 2: Wednesday July 11th.**

Students will need to write an opinion piece worth 10% of the grade. This short paper will be in the style of an op-ed article found in most newspapers. Students must write a 2-

3 page paper taking a position on a current issue relevant to American Government and Politics. A one paragraph explanation of the topic is due for discussion in class on Monday June 25th. **The opinion piece is due on Wednesday June 27th.**

Finally, students will be expected to write a 10-12 page research report. This will be worth 25% of the final grade. Topics must relate to the course and must be approved by the instructor. Select a topic narrow enough to expound on in no more than 10 pages. Topics should also be broad enough to make for at least a complete seven-page paper. MLA endnotes will be expected and a works cited page will be required. Plagiarism will not be tolerated (see UMD's honor code). The research papers will be due the second to last week of the session. Precise paper guidelines will be distributed once the session begins.

Please inform the instructor of any special needs during the first week of class. Each student is expected to adhere to the University's honor code in all tests and assignments. **Paper Topics due: Monday June 11th. Paper Outlines due: Monday June 20th. Final Papers Due: Monday July 9th.**

Participation: 10%
Current Events: 5%
Exam 1: 25%
Exam 2: 25%
Opinion Paper: 10%
Final Paper: 25%

Final Grades:
A+=97%, A=94%, A-=93% or lower (A range: 90-100)
B+=87%, B=84%, B-=83% or lower (B range: 80-89)
C+=78%, C=75%, C-=74% or lower (C range: 70-79)
D+=68%, D=65%, D-=64% or lower (D range: 60-69)
F= anything under 60%

******ALL ASSIGNMENTS MUST BE COMPLETED TO PASS THE COURSE!!!!******

O&S= American Government by O'Connor and Sabato
W&P= Voices of Dissent by Grover and Peschek

Week One 6/4 & 6/6

1. The Political Landscape (O&S Chapter 1)
What is the American Dream? by Jennifer Hochschild. (G&P, p. 46)
Power of Majority Opinion in America Over Thought by Alexis De Tocqueville (G&P, p. 69)
2. The Constitution (O&S Chapter 2)
The Dark Side of the Constitution by Kenneth Dolbeare and Linda Medcalf. (G&P, p. 88)
Some Truths Are Not Self-Evident by Howard Zinn. (G&P, p.107)

Week Two 6/11 & 6/13

1. Federalism (O&S Chapter 3), State and Local Government (O&S Chapter 4)
The Constitution, the Supreme Court and the Decline... by Daniel Lazare. (G&P, p.100)
American Exceptionalism and the Politics... by Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers (G&P, p. 81)

Paper Topics due Monday 6/11

2. Civil Liberties (O&S Chapter 5), Civil Rights (O&S Chapter 6)
Is Free Speech the Enemy of Democracy? by Cass Sunstein (G&P, p. 266)
Letter From Birmingham Jail by Martin Luther King, Jr. (G&P, p. 331)

Week Three 6/18 & 6/20

1. Congress (O&S Chapter 7) & Exam Review.
Congress and Big Business by John C. Berg (G&P, p. 181)
Courage in Congress by Senator James Jeffords and Representative Barbara Lee (G&P, p. 196)

Paper Outlines due Monday 6/20

2. **Exam 1 Wednesday 6/20** (O&S Chaps. 1-7 + G&P readings.)

Week Four 6/25 & 6/27

1. The Presidency (O&S Chap. 8), The Executive Branch and the Federal Bureaucracy (O&S Chap. 9), The Judiciary (O&S Chap. 10)
The Limits of Presidential Power by Michael Genovese (G&P, p. 215)
The Presidential Spectacle by Bruce Miroff (G&P, p. 220)

2. Public Opinion and Political Socialization (O&S Chapter 11), Political Parties (O&S Chapter 12), Voting and Elections (O&S Chapter 13)
Why Americans Still Don't Vote by Frances Piven and Richard Cloward (G&P, p. 152)
After the Deluge: Electoral Reform... by Lani Guinier (G&P, p. 175)

Opinion Paper due Wednesday 6/27

Week Five 7/2

1. The Campaign Process (O&S Chap. 14), The Media (O&S Chap. 15), Interest Groups (O&S Chap. 16)
News Content and Illusion: Four Information Biases that Matter by Lance Bennett (W&P, p. 125)
Closing the Democracy Gap by Ralph Nader (W&P, p. 354)

Week Six 7/9 & 7/11

1. Wrap-up and Review
Final Paper Due Monday 7/9

2. **Final Exam**

*Extra credit may be given throughout the course for pop quizzes or optional writing assignments at the instructor's discretion.