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PSC 100S.02: Introduction to American Government

Jonathan R. Tompkins

The University Of Montana, jonathan.tompkins@umontana.edu

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PSC 100 INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

Professor Tompkins
Spring 1996

Office: LA 352 Phone: 243-2721
Office hours: every morning 8:30 till noon.

Course Content

This course is an introduction to American government and politics. It combines factual description of institutions and processes of American government with critical analyses of how well the political system works.

Course Objectives

1. to increase factual knowledge.
2. to increase writing skills.
3. to develop analytical skills.

Required Text

Burns, Peltason, Cronin, and Magleby. Government by the People: Brief Edition
(Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1994).

Course Requirements and Grading

Students are required to read all assigned readings, attend all lectures, and take four exams (120 points each) and one quiz (40 points). There is no final exam or extra credit.

Note: Make-up exams are given only in the event of illness or death in the family. If either should occur, please leave a message on my phone (243-2721).

Final grades will be determined as follows:

- 360-400 points - A (90%)
- 320-359 points - B (80%)
- 280-319 points - C (70%)
- 240-279 points - D (60%)

Classroom Etiquette

1. Kaiman Readers - Please put your Kaimin away by the time class begins (the rustling of papers distracts from the learning process).
2. Sleepers - Please stay home in bed if you need more sleep (it is distracting to some, particularly the teacher, and probably doesn't contribute to effective learning).

3. Gabbers - Please don't talk with your neighbors (it is distracting and makes it difficult for others to hear). If you need clarification of a point, please raise your hand.

4. Early Packers - Please sit quietly until the teacher dismisses class (the noise generated by a hundreds students packing their things is truly awesome).

Schedule of Lectures and Reading Assignments

Thurs Feb 1 Our Liberal Ideology
Read Burns et al., Chapter 5 and Handout on Classical Liberalism.

Theme: Understanding the values and ideas that divide us. (See exam question #1)

Thurs Feb 8 Constitutional Principles
Read Burns et al., Chapter 1.

Theme: The Constitution as planned inefficiency. (See exam question #2)

Thurs Feb 15 ***Quiz over Constitution***

Tues Feb 20 American Federalism
Read Burns et al., Chapter 2.

Theme: Federal-state relations: the lost balance of power. (See exam question #3)

Tues Feb 27 First Amendment Freedoms
Read Burns et al., Chapter 3.

Theme: The costs and benefits of our commitment to First Amendment freedoms. (See exam question #4)

Tues March 5 ***Exam #1***

Thurs March 7 Political Parties and Elections as Linkage Mechanisms
Read Burns et al., Chapters 7 and 8.

Theme: The linkage mechanisms that make democracy possible. (See essay question #1)

Theme: Why "responsible party government" doesn't work in the United States. (See exam question #2)

Theme: Is the electoral college system obsolete? (See exam question #3)

Thurs March 21 Interest Groups and PACs as Linkage Mechanisms
Review Burns et al., Chapter 7.

Thurs March 28 ***Exam #2***

Tues April 2 Congress
Read Burns et al., Chapter 10,

Theme: Why it is so hard for Congress to enact the majority party's agenda.
(See essay question #1).

Tues April 16 The Presidency
Read Burns et al., Chapter 11.

Tues April 23 The Judiciary
Read Burns et al., Chapter 12.

Theme: The Supreme Court as a policy making body: the myth of judicial review. (See essay question #2)

Tues April 30 The Bureaucracy
Read Burns et al., Chapter 13.

Theme: The career civil service: to whom are they accountable? (See essay question #3).

Tues May 7 Review

Thurs May 9 ***Exam #3***

Essay Exam Questions (One question will be selected at random on the day of the test)

Exam #1 (Tuesday, March 5)

1. **Theme: Understanding the ideas and values that divide us.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to discuss Classical Liberalism and its principles, explain how our commitment to these principles has changed over the years, distinguish a modern "conservative" from a modern "liberal", and explain how all of this helps us understand political conflict in our society.
2. **Theme: The Constitution as planned inefficiency.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to define liberal democracy, identify Madison's three fears regarding liberal democracy, explain how he designed the Constitution to address these three fears, and assess the results in terms of efficiency and liberty.
3. **Theme: Federal-state relations: the lost balance of power.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to define federalism, explain why the Founding Fathers chose this type of system, and explain how the Supreme Court and grants-in-aid programs have upset the balance of power between the states and the national government.
4. **Theme: The costs and benefits of our commitment to the First Amendment freedoms.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to explain the classic Liberal defense of freedom of expression and freedom of religion, and use appropriate examples to assess the trade-offs that result from our commitment to these freedoms.

Exam #2 (Thursday, March 28)

1. **Theme: The linkage mechanisms that make democracy possible.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to describe in some detail how Americans are "linked" to governments by political parties, interest groups, and political action committees. You will also want to assess how well they seem to be performing their linkage roles.
2. **Theme: Why "responsible party government" doesn't work in the United States.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to define the concept of party government and discuss impediments to it created by the Constitution, the party system, and citizens themselves.
3. **Theme: Is the electoral college system obsolete?** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to discuss why the founding fathers selected this system over the direct popular vote method, how the system operated during the first few elections, and how it works today. You will also want to provide an argument regarding why it should or should not be reformed.

Exam #3 (Thursday, May 9)

1. **Theme: Why it is so hard for Congress to enact the majority party's agenda.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to discuss such things as the decentralized and fragmented structure of congress, how members of congress decide how to vote, and the role played by the president.
2. **Theme: The career civil service: to whom are they accountable?** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to explain the kinds of policy decisions civil servants make (and thus why the accountability issue arises), how both congress and the president attempt to direct and control their behaviors, and how civil servants themselves may perceive the issue of accountability.
3. **Theme: The Supreme Court as a policy-making body: the myth of judicial review.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to define the myth, explain why and how the Supreme Court protects and promotes it, review the evidence suggesting that the myth is false, and explain why the court nonetheless is unlikely to make decisions that greatly alter the status quo.

Criteria for Grading Essay Questions

1. Thoroughness of answer	1	2	3	4	5	X6 =
2. Sophistication of analysis	1	2	3	4	5	X6 =
3. Organization & logical devel.	1	2	3	4	5	X5 =
4. Clarity of expression	1	2	3	4	5	X3 =
5. Grammar, punctuation & spelling	See Below					

1. Thoroughness of answer. The best essays respond to each part of the question thoroughly and with sufficient detail to demonstrate that the subject is fully understood.

2. Sophistication of analysis. In the best essays, the author does much more than just explain or describe. He or she shows evidence of having thought about the subject in depth. The subject is analyzed from many angles and assessed critically.

3. Organization and logical development. The best essays show evidence of prior planning as if they have been outlined in advance. They have a purpose or theme which is introduced in the introduction, developed in the body of the essay, and returned to in the conclusion. Paragraphs are well constructed and are linked to each other in a logical sequence using transitional sentences. Arguments, examples, facts, opinions, and details explain the main point and lend credibility to each point being developed.

4. Clarity of expression. In the best essays, words are chosen carefully and sentences are constructed purposefully so that each point the author makes is expressed as exactly, precisely, and clearly as possible.

5. Grammar, punctuation, and spelling. The best essays are characterized by consistently correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Verbs agree with their subjects. There are no single-sentence paragraphs, sentence fragments, or run-on sentences.

One point will be subtracted from the test score for each occurrence of the following:

- single sentence paragraph
- verb-subject disagreement
- sentence fragment (incomplete sentence)
- run-on sentence