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PSC 100S.01: Introduction to American Government

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Political Science 100
INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
Spring 2001

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Office: LA 352 Phone: 243-2721
Office hours: M, W, F 8am-3pm with some exceptions.

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. Emphasis is placed on explaining that which is puzzling.

Course Objectives

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

Required Text

Walter E. Volkmer, American Government (Prentice-Hall, 2001).

Course Requirements and Grading

Students are required to read all assigned readings, attend all lectures, and take three exams (130 points each) and one quiz (40 points). There is no final exam or extra credit.

Each exam is comprised of one essay question and 15 multiple choice questions.

Note: Make-up exams are allowed in the event of illness or death in the family. If either should occur, please leave a message on my phone (243-2721) or e-mail me at tompkins@selway.umt.edu.

Final grades will be determined as follows:

- 306-340 points - A (90%)
- 272-305 points - B (80%)
- 238-271 points - C (70%)
- 204-237 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 hundred students packing their things is truly awesome).

Schedule of Lectures and Reading Assignments

Thurs., Feb. 1 Our Liberal Ideology
Read Chapter 1, and Handout on Classical Liberalism.

Theme: Why can't we agree on anything? Ideological differences as a source of political conflict (See exam question #1)

Puzzler 1: In what sense are all Americans Liberals?

Puzzler 2: What distinguishes a liberal from a conservative?

Tues., Feb. 6 Our Liberal Ideology (continued)

Thurs., Feb. 8 ****Quiz over Constitution**** (Read Appendices E and F)

Tues., Feb 13 The War of Independence and the Articles of Confederation
Read Chapter 2 and the Declaration of Independence, Appendix A.

Theme: Why did the colonists separate from England and create a weak form of government? Political action as a product of fear. (See exam question #2).

Puzzler 1: Was the War of Independence a social revolution or a political rebellion?

Puzzler 2: Why does the Declaration make no mention of parliament, nor the colonists' rights as English citizens?

Thurs., Feb 15 Constitutional Principles
Read Madison's The Federalist, No. 10, Appendix D.

Theme: Why so many checks and balances? Government inefficiency as the price of liberty. (See exam question #3)

Tues., Feb. 20 The Federal System
Read Chapter 3.

Theme: Federal-state relations: How did the balance of power become lost? (See exam question #4)

Thurs., Feb. 22 Fiscal Federalism **and review for test**

Puzzler: What do federal grants-in-aid and narcotics have in common?

Tues., Feb. 27 ***Exam #1***

Thurs., March 1 Political Parties as Linkage Mechanisms
Read Chapter 5 (first half dealing with parties).

Theme: Can we really influence government? The linkage mechanisms that make democracy possible. (See essay question #1)

Tues., March 6 The Structure of Political Parties

Thurs., March 8 Interest Groups and PACs as Linkage Mechanisms
Read Chapter 5 (second half of chapter).

Tues., March 13 The Presidential Nominations Process
Read Chapter 6.

Theme: The complex and grueling presidential nominations process. Is there a better way? (See exam question #2)

Thurs., March 15 The Electoral College System
Chapter 6.

Theme: The electoral college system. Why did we create it, how does it work, and why don't we change it? (See exam question #3)

Tues., March 20 Spring Break

Thurs., March 22 Spring Break

Tues., March 27 Congress
Read Chapter 7

Theme: The responsible party model of government. Why is it so difficult for the majority party leaders to enact their legislative agenda? (See essay question #4).

Thurs., March 29 The Legislative Process

Tues., April 3 **Optional Review for Exam**

Thurs., April 5 **Exam # 2**

Tues., April 10 The Chief Executive
Read Chapter 8.

Thurs., April 12 The Chief Executive (continued)

Tues., April 17 The Federal Bureaucracy
Read Chapter 9.

Thurs., April 19 The Myth of Bureaucratic Neutrality

Theme: Do career civil servants make policies? The myth of bureaucratic neutrality (See essay question #1).

Tues., April 24 The Judicial System
Read Chapter 10.

Thurs., April 26 Supreme Court as a Policy-Making Body

Theme: Do Supreme Court justices make policy? The myth of objective judicial review. (See essay question #2)

Puzzler: Why does the Supreme Court promote the myth?

Tues., May 1 First Amendment Freedoms
Read Chapter 11.

Theme: Our First Amendment freedoms. What are the costs and benefits? (See exam question #3)

Puzzler: The First Amendment states "Congress shall pass no laws" abridging our freedoms. Why does this apply to state and local legislative bodies as well?

Thurs., May 3 ****Optional Review for Exam****

Tues., May 8 ???

Thurs., May 10 ****Exam #3****

****Pick up exams during final exam period: 8 am, Tuesday, May 15.****

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

Reminder: The ability to reason and develop ideas logically are important. Did you remember to:

- 1) place the essay in an appropriate context by establishing its importance/significance in the introductory paragraph (by introducing theme)?
- 2) identify the purpose of the essay in the introductory paragraph?
- 3) begin each paragraph with a topic sentence borrowed from your essay outline?
- 4) back up your key points with analysis, e.g., by providing examples and explaining the significance of each point?

Exam #1

1. **Theme: Why can't we agree on anything? Ideological differences as a source of political conflict.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to define Classical Liberalism and its principles, explain how certain historical events caused our commitment to these principles to change over the years, distinguish a modern "conservative" from a modern "liberal", and explain how differences in ideological values can be a source of political conflict in our society. Use examples as appropriate.

2. **Theme: Why did the colonists separate from England and create a weak form of government? Political action as a product of fear.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to explain how the actions taken by Parliament after 1763 caused the colonists to fear that they were losing their liberties. With this foundation in place you will want to explain why the colonists decided to a) declare independence from England and b) create a weak form of national government. Use examples as appropriate.

3. **Theme: Why so many checks and balances? Government inefficiency as the price of liberty.** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to identify Madison's three fears regarding democracy, explain how he designed the Constitution to address these three fears, and assess the results in terms of efficiency and liberty. In the process you will want to distinguish democracy as traditionally defined from the liberal democracy that Madison sought to establish. Use examples as appropriate.

4. **Theme: Federal-state relations. How did the balance of power become lost?** 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 early Supreme Court, Congress's use of the elastic clause, and the grants-in-aid programs have upset the balance of power between the states and the national government.

Exam #2

1. **Theme: Can we really influence government? The linkage mechanisms that make democracy possible.** Organize an essay around this theme. After introducing the concept of linkage mechanism, you will want to describe in some detail how Americans "link" themselves to government by participating in political parties, interest groups, and political action committees. (Explain the logic: how do they participate and what do they hope to accomplish by doing so). You will also want to assess how well these linkage mechanisms allow us to influence government policies.

2. **Theme: The complex and grueling presidential nominations process. Is there a better way?** Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to explain what must take place at the party convention for a candidate to capture the party nomination, explain what must take place before the convention in order to win the nomination, and assess the merits of this particular method for selecting candidates.

3. **Theme: The electoral college system. Why did we create it, how does it work and why don't we change it?** 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, and why we have not yet changed it.

4. **Theme: The responsible party model of government. Why is it so difficult for the majority party leaders to enact their legislative agenda.** Organize an essay around this theme. In the introduction be sure to clarify what is meant by a legislative agenda. Then you will want to define the "responsible party model of government" and explain how the presidential system in the United States diverges from it. Lastly, explain the difficulties confronting party leaders in terms of a) the amount of power party leaders have relative to committee chairpersons, b) the lack of party discipline in voting, and c) the fact that the president is elected separately from congress. (Perhaps choose a policy, such as tax reform legislation, to illustrate these difficulties).

Exam #3

1. **Theme: Do career civil servants make policy? The myth of bureaucratic neutrality.**

Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to explain the problem of bureaucratic accountability and explain how the myth of bureaucratic neutrality provides assurance that accountability is not a problem. Next, review the evidence that the myth is false. Explain how civil servants do in fact make important policy decisions and involve themselves in politics, and describe how both congress and the president attempt to hold them accountable to the public interest.

2. **Theme: Do the Supreme Court justices make policy? The myth of objective judicial review.**

Organize an essay around this theme. You will want to define the myth, explain why and how the Supreme Court promotes it, review the evidence suggesting that the myth is false, and explain why the Court is unlikely to make decisions that greatly alter the status quo.

3. **Theme: Our First Amendment freedoms. What are the costs and benefits?**

Organize an essay around this theme. In the introduction make sure that you identify what these freedoms are. In assessing the benefits of protecting them, explain the classic Liberal defense of freedom of expression offered by John Locke and John Stuart Mill. Use appropriate examples to assess the costs and benefits involved in protecting these freedoms.

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 development	1	2	3	4	5	X5 =
4. Clarity of expression	1	2	3	4	5	X3 =
5. Grammar and punctuation	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

However, no points will be lost due to spelling mistakes.