

Power and Politics in America 100
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
TR 9:30-10:20
Love Library 102

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Purpose and Reinforcements:

This course introduces students to the workings and inter-workings of the American political system in broad strokes. The course begins with a discussion of the values and principles that are at the foundation of the American political system. The writings of the Framers will be explored to gather an understanding that the Constitution is more than ideas, but a reflection of the deed of the person who wrote it. The American Constitution grew out of conflicts and aspirations of the Framers. How the Framers resolved their conflicts and pursued their aspirations through the document we call the Constitution holds importance for every American in the 21st century. These values are examined in the context of diversity, i.e., religious diversity, ethnic diversity, gender diversity, and racial diversity. Attention is also given to how these values and principles are practiced in the 21st century. Additionally, the course explores the forces that influenced the character and content of the Constitution.

Next, the effort turns to assessing the relationship that exists between the national government and the states. Federalism has exerted and continues to exert enormous influence on the formulation of public policy as well as shaping the nature and complexion of conflicts in the American political system. During the discussion of federalism, there is a comparison of the distribution of power in the United States with the distribution of power in countries such as Canada, France, Japan, Mexico, and Sweden.

The course also examines the assorted linkages between the people and the government, i.e., public opinion, the news media, interest groups, political parties, and elections. Ultimately, the aim is to gain insights into how these linkages influence support for democracy and the development of policy and the flow of information between the people and governmental officials. These linkages are of utmost importance in understanding the concept and notion of democracy in the twenty-first century. Students will discuss issues of democracy with respect to themselves as individuals and persons living in a specific period of America.

Special attention is given to the meaning and obligations of citizenship, which include participation (voting, participating in campaigns, letter writing, interest group involvement, running public office), patriotism in its many and varied forms, and the citizen's role in the creation of a more perfect union. Since the founding of America, citizens have played a signal role in broaden the scope of American democracy.

Another thrust of the course is the salience of institutions. That is, we focus on the Congress, the Presidency, the bureaucracy and the judiciary. A considerable portion of the class will be devoted to institutions. For example, an understanding of American government is grossly

incomplete without acknowledge of the development and role of the above-mentioned institutions in America. Finally, we look at various areas of public policy--civil liberties, civil rights, social welfare among others. These policy areas, often, reflect efforts to include the voices and personage of the excluded, which continues to challenge the precepts and fundamental principles of this nation across the centuries. Civil liberties and civil rights might be characterized as the struggle for fairness and equality in American. Both civil liberties and civil rights have significantly altered the meaning and content of various provisions of the Constitution.

Learning Outcome

POLS 100 satisfies Learning Outcome #6 (“Use knowledge, theories, methods, and historical perspectives appropriate to the social science to understand and evaluate human behavior.”)

Opportunities for Learning the Outcome

The lectures and recitations, and written assignments will be used to encourage students to probe more deeply in garnering an understanding of the elements of American governments. Each topic covered in lectures and recitations will challenge students to think critically and analytically about American democracy. Class discussions and written assignments will be used to assess how you as scholars have succeeded in this effort. The professor will use questions, answers and discussion periods to assess how well students have grasped the materials.

How your achievement of the outcome will be assessed

Learning objectives:

1. To introduce students to American government in broad strokes.
2. To examine those principles those are the foundation of the American political -legal culture.
3. To heighten students’ awareness of the issues and struggles that gave rise to the development of constitutional democracy in America.
4. To analyze the advantages and disadvantages of the linkages between the people and government and its officials.
5. To enhance students’ capacities to engage in critical thinking and analytical reasoning.
6. To assist students in the formulation and the critique of arguments.
7. To aid students in the development of their communication skills.

Organization:

While this is an introductory course, it is organized to maximize and encourage student participation. A considerable portion of the course is devoted to discussion of the reading assignments and current events that are within the scope of the class. The instructor will lecture

at least 60 to 75 percent of the time. However, our discussions will be designed to achieve the learning outcomes and objectives of the class. This means that students are expected to be prepared on a daily basis.

Requirements:

Please note the Instructor will assign supplemental readings as the semester progresses to achieve learning outcomes and objectives.

1. Each student is expected to do the required reading prior to class meetings.
2. Each student is expected to participate in class discussions.
3. Each student is expected to attend all classes and recitation sessions, and is responsible for materials missed due to absent. Attendance at recitation sessions will be worth ten bonus points toward your semester grade. After the first week of class, students must sign in for their recitation sessions. Every un-excused absent will result in two points being deducted from the ten possible points for attendance. Five or more un-excused absents will result in the loss of the ten points which will be deducted from your total points for the course.
4. Each student is required to do a three page typewritten paper, double spaced (15 points). The topic for the paper will be given at a later date. The paper will be due April 1. Students who do not perform the assignment will lose 15 points from their total points for the semester.
5. Each student is required to take examinations at the assigned time: Tuesday, February 18 and Thursday, February 20; Thursday, April 3. The final will be announced in class. The Professor reserves the right to change the examination schedule based upon the progress the class is making on the materials. This does not include the final.
6. The first examination will be multiple choice and essay. Subsequent examinations will be multiple choices.
7. The grading scale is:
100-90=A 89-79=B 78-65=C 64-53=D 52-below=F
8. The final grade will be computed as follows:
 - a) Short discussion paper possible 15 bonus points
 - b) First Examination, 100
 - c) Second Examination, 100
 - d) Final Examination, 100
 - e) Attendance possible 10 bonus points
9. The total points for the course are 300 points.

Evaluation of Written Work

1. The clarity of the writing.
2. The coherence of the argument.
3. The strength of the analysis.
4. The integration of appropriate readings and/or research materials.

ADA REQUIREMENTS

Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with disabilities (SSD) Office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

Required Texts:

Welch, Gruhl, Comer, and Rigdon, *American Government*, Thirteenth Edition

Course Outline:

- I. American Democracy
 - A. The American People
 - B. The Political Culture of America
 - C. The Core Values of American Democracy
 - D. American Democracy in Practice

Welch et al. Ch. 1

- II. The Constitution
 - A. The Colonial and Revolutionary Experiences
 - B. The Constitutional Convention
 - C. The Motives and Philosophical Ideas of the Framers
 - D. The Impact of the Civil War and the Great Depression
 - E. The Constitution in Practice

Welch et al., Ch. 2

- III. Federalism
 - A. Federal and Unitary Systems
 - B. Federalism in Historical Perspective
 - C. The Evolution of Federalism
 - D. Power Sharing in American federalism
 - E. Governing in the States
 - F. The People in the Federal Relationship

Welch et al., Ch. 3

- IV. Public Opinion
 - A. The Shaky Foundations of Democracy
 - B. Formation of Public Opinion

- C. Measuring Public Opinions
- D. Knowledge and Information
- E. Red States and Blue States
- F. Public Opinion Towards Race
- G. Public Opinion and the Role of Government

Welch et al., Ch. 4

- V. News Media
 - A. The Development of the News Media
 - B. Politicians and the Media
 - C. The Media as Link
 - D. Bias of the Media

Welch et al. Ch.5

- VI. Interest Groups
 - A. The Interest Group System
 - B. Types of Interest Groups
 - C. Political Strategies & Tactics of Interest Groups
 - D. Success of Interest Groups
 - E. The Group System: Indispensable But Biased

Welch et al., Ch. 6

- VII. Political Parties
 - A. Characteristics of American Parties
 - B. The History of U. S. Parties
 - C. Electoral and Party systems
 - D. The Rise, decline, and Resurgence of American Parties
 - E. Party Organizations
 - F. The Party Realignment
 - G. Party Identification

Welch et al., Ch. 7

- VIII. Political Participation and Voting
 - A. The American Electorate
 - B. Voter Out
 - C. Presidential Nominating Campaigns
 - D. The General Election
 - E. Voter Behavior

Welch et al. Ch. 8

- IX. Money and Politics
 - A. Money and Politics in America
 - B. Regulating Money in Modern Campaigns
 - C. The impact of Campaign Money
 - D. Reforming Campaign Finance
 - E. Conflict of Interest
 - F. Democratic and Republican Corruption

Welch et al. Ch. 9

- X. Congress
 - A. Members and Constituencies
 - B. Electing Members of Congress
 - C. The Organization of Congress
 - D. The Work of Congress
 - E. Members on the Job
 - F. Diversity of Congress
 - G. Congress and the Public

Welch et al., Ch. 10

- XI. The Presidency
 - A. Terms of Service
 - B. Growth of the Modern Presidency
 - C. Presidential Powers
 - D. Presidential Staff
 - E. Presidential Persuasion
 - F. The President and Congress

Welch et al., Ch. 11

- XII. The Bureaucracy
 - A. The Federal Bureaucracy
 - B. The Development of the Federal Bureaucracy
 - C. Types of Federal Agencies
 - C. The Work of Bureaucracies
 - D. Bureaucratic Accountability

Welch et al., Ch. 12

XIII. The Judiciary

- A. The Federal Judicial System
- B. Federal Court Appointees
- C. Diversity on the Courts
- D. Access to the Courts
- E. The Function of Courts
- F. The Responsiveness of the Court
- G. The Courts and the Role of Government

Welch et al., Ch. 13

XIV. Areas of Public Policy

- A. Civil Liberties
- B. Civil Rights

Welch et al., Chs. 14, 15

XV. Public Policies

- A. Economic Policy
- B. Social Welfare and Health Policy
- C. Foreign Policy
- D. American Democracy

Welch et al., Chs. 16, 17, 18, 19