

Comprehensive Course Syllabus

United States Government and the Constitution

Course Description:

This course will give students a broad, introductory analytical perspective on government and politics in the United States with the Constitution as a central document informing class discussions. In addition to becoming familiar with the Constitution, students also learn about the interactions of various institutions, political groups, beliefs, and ideas that constitute U.S. government and political life as well as a variety of theoretical perspectives for understanding these interactions.

INSTRUCTOR(S):

- Name(s): Eric Smith
- Email address(es): esmith@imsa.edu

Text(s) / Materials:

Students will use the ABC-Clio US Government material available through the IRC. We have no textbook in mind at this time.

The Course

This course will give students a broad, introductory analytical perspective on government and politics in the United States with the Constitution as a central document informing class discussions. This course considers both general concepts used to interpret U.S. government and politics as well as an analysis of specific examples. It will develop a familiarity with the various institutions, political groups, beliefs, and ideas that constitute U.S. government and political life. Students will become acquainted with a variety of theoretical perspectives and explanations for various behaviors and political outcomes.

Learning Goals and Outcomes

Students successfully completing this course will:

- know important facts, concepts, and theories pertaining to U.S. government and politics by collaborating with peers, and discussing in class, to build an understanding of history and policy.
- understand typical patterns of political processes and behavior and their consequences (including the components of political behavior, the principles used to explain or justify various government structures and procedures, and the political effects of these structures and procedures) by synthesizing information and ideas into a coherent argument in papers and discussions.
- be able to analyze and interpret basic data relevant to U.S. government and politics (including data presented in charts, tables, and other formats) by discussing ideas in class

and attempting to resolve differing conceptions involved in the production of a research paper.

- be able to critically analyze relevant theories and concepts, apply them appropriately, and develop their connections across the curriculum by drawing appropriate conclusions and making generalizations based on reliable information in both discussions and writing.

Primary SSLS

A Develop automaticity in skills, concepts, and processes that support and enable complex thought.

IV.A Construct and support judgments based on evidence.

IV.B Write and speak with power, economy, and elegance.

V.A Identify, understand, and accept the rights and responsibilities of belonging to a diverse community.

Instructional Design and Approach

Group projects, presentations and quizzes, as well as reading discussions will accompany each of the themes listed below. Two major papers will synthesize the material in the course. Class discussions are a primary mode of teaching and learning in history courses.

- I. Constitution, Rights, and Liberties
- II. Political Beliefs and Behaviors
- III. Political Parties, Interest Groups and Mass Media
- IV. Institutions of National Government
- V. Public Policy

Assessment Practices, Procedures, and Processes

Each quarter there will be at least four short formative assessments (e.g. reading quizzes, short paper), and two longer assessments (e.g. a paper, presentation or project). In addition there will be one longer summative semester project (i.e. a research paper).

Assessments in the class fall into three basic categories with the following weights for the semester: essays (60 percent), presentations and participation (20 percent), and in-class assessments (20 percent).

Students will confront source material on their own, before class discussion in formative papers. Frequent quizzes will also hold students accountable for course material. Longer essays will give students the opportunity to make their own conclusions about the subject matter and to practice writing and the construction of arguments. Students will turn in two summative assessments.

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

Attendance: Attendance policy in this class is consistent with the school policy contained in your Student Handbook.

Laptop Use: Use of the tablet in class for anything other than assigned class work will result in a loss of participation points for the day. Doing other work means partaking in any of the following during class time: viewing Facebook or other social networking sites, checking PowerSchool (e.g. obsessive-compulsive checking of updated grades for other classes), checking e-mail, IM-ing, taking phone calls, or ***viewing any other material not pertinent to current classroom discussion.***

Respect Accorded Students and Faculty: Courtesy and respect to each other and to the instructor should be maintained at all times in both e-mail correspondence and in class. The right to dissent shall not be stifled, but the need to reflect and articulate intelligently is also demanded. Questions should be directed toward the instructor. Class debates should address the issue at hand and its supporting evidence, not differences in student personalities.

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Late Work: Be on time and turn in assignments on time. Back up your files! Use a USB drive. Use the student server. There are no extensions except in the most unusual of circumstances.

Collaboration: Every member of a group is responsible for collaborative assignments. This means that not only is each member responsible for knowing what the other members have found in their research but the resulting final assignment is expected to be turned in on time and with all necessary parts. Each individual grade is affected by the collective effort.

Participation: students are expected to participate in class by asking questions, answer questions, and offering assessments of documents. Students are required to log their participation each time they contribute. This should be done in separate Word documents for each class day that they contribute. Each log entry should then be submitted to the students' folder on the student server. Use the folder created for you for this class not the

public server. It can be found at <\\studentserver\DRPBX--SocSci\AmericanStudies\Smith> and then your section number.

GRADING

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Assignments

Constitution and Rights Assignment

Trace the history of a right or liberty through Supreme Court decisions. (3 pages)

Polarization Essay

Is the country polarized or not? What evidence is there for and against polarization. Is this good or bad? If the electorate is polarized, what solution might work against it?

Media and the Election Essay

In this short essay you will look at how the media and surrogates shape the news cycle and talking points by watching a Sunday morning news program (e.g. NBC) and seeing how the week's talking points were shaped by that program and how the media choose the focus for that week.

Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Mass Media Essay

Develop a thesis and explain the interactions between parties, interest groups, and the mass media. The essay will work best covering one particular subject and must contain intersections between all three groups.

Pew Center Topic (not being assigned in Spring 2016)

Students will work in groups to find a subject that the Pew Center has researched and then combine it with findings from other sources (including, for example, other polling groups). Each student will turn in a short essay on the findings but also be prepared to discuss it in class.

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ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PLAGIARISM

All of the work you turn in for this course should be your own. Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams in their book *The Craft of Research*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) explain:

“You plagiarize when, intentionally or not, you use someone else’s words or ideas but fail to credit that person. . . . You plagiarize even when you do credit the source but use its exact words without using quotation marks or block indentation. . . . You [also] plagiarize when you paraphrase a source so closely that anyone putting your work next to it would see that you could not have written what you did without the source at your elbow.”

Claiming as your own the work of others, in whole *or in part*, will result in an immediate F for the assignment and referral to Keith McIntosh for