

American Studies
Fall 2018

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and by appointment

About the Course:

American Studies considers our Constitutional and institutional history from the seventeenth century to the present. It begins with the origins of the Constitution as its precepts were forged in English history and then the Revolution. The course then considers the challenges to the compromises that shaped the Constitution and eventually result in Civil War. The final section of the course takes up the historical legacies that inform contemporary American politics including issues of race, gender, and immigration. While the course is structured around the Constitution and contains some civics, the course itself is historical and follows a progressive arc that is not merely thematic. A composition component also runs through the curriculum and will teach expository writing.

Course Objectives:

- To understand citizenship, ethical behavior and human rights in a democracy.
- To explore the relationship between individual freedom and community responsibility.
- To analyze the complexity of constructing public policy in an atmosphere of ethical pluralism.
- To express both written and oral opinions clearly and elegantly and defend them with the use of primary evidence.
- To evaluate the roles of different groups in the political institutions and social fabric of pluralistic societies over time.

Text(s) / Materials:

Clarence L. Ver Steeg and Richard Hofstadter, *Great Issues in American History*, Vols. I-III

Additional readings from academic books, journals and primary sources, will be posted on Moodle throughout the course.

courses.imsa.edu (American Studies – Kearney F18)

Components of the Grade

Essays – 50%

- Three papers (5-7 pages) detailed below along with any *other* writing (one pagers, outlines, intros, bibliographies, re-writes, etc.) associated with these papers.
- We will discuss throughout the semester the proper way to write a paper in the social sciences, including the need for students to properly cite sources, how to identify good sources, write a thesis, etc.

Exams(2) – 30%

- There will be an in-class **Constitution Exam** around mid-term and a **final**.

Participation - 10%

- Students are expected to complete all readings assigned for class and contribute to class discussions. Student comments need to demonstrate thoughtful consideration of core ideas in the assigned texts.

Quizzes – 10%

- Quizzes will be given periodically throughout the semester to hold students accountable for reviewing content on a regular basis. Quizzes may be administered announced or unannounced. If students are prepared and engaged, I reserve the right to not implement quizzes in this course in which case this component of the grade will be distributed between the other categories.

Assignment Policies:

All written work will be submitted via the website Turnitin.com (I will provide you with details of how to access the site for this course). When given the prompt for each assignment you will also be given a due date and time. This time is binding (as the ability to upload the assignment will be locked afterwards). Late papers will lose one full letter grade for each day they are late.

There are no make-up quizzes for unexcused absences. Excused absences will be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Additional Expectations:

Classroom Behavior

Above all, I expect you to respect your classmates. Social Science courses offer the opportunity for students to express a wide variety of opinions, but an open mind and respect are necessary for us to learn from one another. Part of learning the social sciences, however, is understanding that opinions must be backed up with evidence. As such, I expect all debates to be of the scholarly variety. Finally, I expect this professionalism to extend beyond the classroom, be it office hours, e-mail correspondence or any other interaction you might have with me or your classmates. I also understand that technology and devices are a part of the learning process. That said, it is easy to become distracted when devices are in front of us. I expect students at IMSA to employ proper judgement when it comes to the use of devices in

classrooms. Phones used improperly during class will be taken and handed over to Student Life. Improper computer usage will result in a decrease in one's participation grade and/or dismissal from class accompanied by an unexcused absence.

Academic Integrity

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

"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 failure (here no credit) for the assignment and referral to Student Affairs for disciplinary action. See the IMSA Student Handbook for specific details. Such activity can result in being dismissed from IMSA, so if you are in doubt, come see me.

Course Outline

Below you will find the ***tentative outline*** for the semester. Be aware that these topics and dates are ***subject to change***. This is especially important since we will take this course at your pace (i.e. if we need to spend more time on certain topics, we will). As such, consult Moodle, your e-mail and/or in class announcements for up to date changes.

_The course is divided into three broad units.

Unit I: The Origins of the Constitution

1. Identify the purposes of government
2. Sources of local autonomy in American traditions
3. The conflicting goals inherent in the ratification of the Constitution

Unit II: Civil War and its Legacy

1. Geographic, economic, and political forces that strained the Constitution in the decades leading up to the Civil War.
2. Students will understand the expansion of federal power in the Civil War period.
3. Students will understand the extent and limits of the federal Reconstruction effort.
4. How the Constitutional amendment process works.
5. Origins of the filibuster

Unit III: Making of Contemporary America

1. Identify the role of demographics and the economy in shaping the politics of the last century.
2. Students will understand the events that encouraged the expansion of executive authority
3. Students will understand the reaction to the changes above.
4. How a bill becomes a law.
5. How Supreme Court is selected.

At the end of each unit, you will be expected to complete an essay. Those essays, while ***subject to change*** at the discretion of the faculty of the Social Studies Department, are tentatively scheduled as follows:

Essay #1: Essay on National, State, and Local Authority

What historical developments put limits on absolute monarchy and preserved local autonomy? In other words, is the American obsession with self-government a result of: 1) demographics? 2) historical ideas? or 3) is it geography and circumstance that determines the American course toward self-rule? (4 PAGES)

Essay #2: In what way was the Civil War a result of the failure of the Constitution's compromises on federalist separation of powers?

Was the outbreak of the Civil War a result of: 1) a structural failure of the Constitution? (a result of the failure of the Constitution's compromises on federalist separation of powers?) or 2) demographic pressures (social changes pushing on various people)? or) a conflict over resources? (5-6 PAGES)

Essay #3: Contemporary America

The Progressives confronted what appeared to be the subversion of democracy by the new industrial order. Were they successful? (6 PAGES)

Finally, about the course as a whole.

The skills common to this course on an iterative basis are:

1. Reading for meaning
2. Expository writing
3. Oral communication
4. Responsible citizenship

The habits of mind derived from the core competencies will be:

1. Study problems, not eras.
2. Recognize the existence of multiple perspectives.
3. Engage in public discourse in an atmosphere of ethical pluralism and mutual respect.
4. Evaluate the quality of evidence drawn from varied media.