

## INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

(GOVT 151-02)\*

TU and TH 10:30 – 11:50 a.m.

PAC 004

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### Course Description

The course introduces students to American politics by focusing on the founding principles, documents and historical contexts in which the framers established rules and procedures for daily governance. Next, this course will examine the extension and adaptations of the framer's ideas to meet the needs of a changing nation. It will examine the nature of power in the American political system by examining individual participation, campaigns and elections, and the role of external influences such as the media. Last, this course will examine the role of civil liberties and civil rights in expanding the boundaries of citizenship.

This course provides a structured opportunity to struggle with issues challenging both scholars and concerned citizens. What were the underlying themes and debates of the founders? How much influence do individual citizens, interest groups and politicians have on political outcomes? Who participates and why? How has participation changed over time? Addressing these questions serve as the foundation for course readings, lectures, and discussions.

Students who do well in this course will follow a simple but proven formula: come to class regularly and on time; pay attention and ask questions of clarification; read thoroughly and prior to the class period in which readings are discussed; contribute to class discussions; complete assignments carefully and in a timely manner; and finally, use office hours as a resource. Feel free to contact the instructor if you are still experiencing difficulties after completion of the previously outlined steps.

### Course Readings

These required texts are available at the bookstore. Other readings are on electronic reserve at the library web site. The password is the course ID—GOVT151.

David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer. 2006. *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Joseph J. Ellis. 2000. *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*. New York: Vintage Books.

Gerald Rosenberg: 1991. *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Change?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry E. Brady. 1995. *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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\*This is a template and is subject to changes at professor's discretion with prior notification.

## Course Requirements and Grading

**Participation.** Class participation will involve two components: careful and respectful attention to classmates and regular and thoughtful contributions that demonstrate an understanding of the readings. If you are absent when we have special assignments during class your participation grade will be penalized. There are no make-ups

**Reading.** Students are expected to read assigned chapters prior to class and should come to class prepared to participate. Discussion must be based on readings but can move beyond.

**Writing Assignment.** Students will be required to submit **ONE** short essay during the semester. This assignment will be based on readings and class discussion, but also requires outside research. Details about the paper are on the last page of this syllabus. This assignment is due on Tuesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>.

**Exams.** You will have **ONE** exam—a midterm on Thursday, Oct. 18<sup>th</sup>.

**Mini Research Papers.** Students will be divided into groups and assigned an issue and position to take. Each group will be responsible for researching their own topic. More details and deadlines are at the end of this syllabus.

**Group Presentations.** Students will be required to give an in-class presentation on an assigned topic related to the upcoming 2008 election season. This is considered a culminating project and is assigned in lieu of a final. You should treat it with the seriousness of a final exam. Details are at the end of syllabus.

**Grade Distribution.** Final grades will be calculated using the following distribution:

<b>Participation</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>Writing Assignment</b>	<b>20%</b>
<b>Midterm</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>Group Presentations</b>	<b>20%</b>
	<b>Mini Research Assignments</b>	<b>15%</b>	

**Late Assignments and Missed Exams.** *Late assignments are not accepted without a reasonable explanation for the delay (as determined by the professor).* Even with a reasonable explanation, assignments more than a week late will not be accepted. Failure to take exams at the scheduled time will result in a grade of zero.

**Attendance.** Class participation is vital and mandatory. You should consider this syllabus a contract in which attendance is a key component. Absences will negatively impact both your final grade and participation grade. Every two absences will reduce your grade by a third of a letter (e.g. A to A-, B+ to B).

**Academic Honesty.** All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without proper citation) will be tolerated. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will be reported to the university committee on academic misconduct and handled according to university policy.

**Disability.** Students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known, and seeking available assistance, in a timely manner. The instructor should be notified early in the semester, especially before turning in any graded assignments. Any grades earned before notifying the professor will stand.

**Office Hours.** If you are experiencing difficulties, come in early. Taking corrective steps is a strategy that promotes mastery of material and a desirable grade outcome. I will be available in my office on **TU and TH 1-2** and by appt. in cases of class conflicts.

## Course Schedule and Reading List

### The Framers: Designing Democracy and Modeling Leadership

TH 9/6 Declaration of Independence; Ellis, Preface –Chapter 3  
TU 9/11 Ellis, Chapters 4-6

### The Constitution and American Governance

TH 9/13 *The Constitution*, Cannon, Readings 1, 2, 3, 8, 9 (Divide Class into Work Groups)  
TU 9/18 Cannon, Readings, 8- 13

### Congress and the Presidency: The Perennial Power Struggle

TH 9/20 Cannon, Chapter Five (Readings 23, 24, 25)  
TU 9/25 Cannon, Debating the Issue: Pork Barrel Politics  
TH 9/27 Cannon, Chapter Six  
TU 10/2 **DOCUMENTARY: “Shirley Chisholm : Unbought and Unbossed”**  
**Writing Assignment Due**

### The Courts: Static Text or Living Document

TH 10/4 Cannon, Federalist No. 78, Rosenberg, Introduction (pages 1-38)  
TU 10/9 **Mini Research Project # 1 Important Cases in American Courts**  
TH 10/11 Rosenberg , Civil Rights Section  
TU 10/16 **FALL BREAK—NO CLASS**  
TH 10/18 **MIDTERM and GROUP PROJECT OUTLINE**

### Political Behavior: Groups and Elections

TU 10/23 Cannon, Readings 55, 56, 58, 59, 61, 62  
TH 10/25 Cannon, Chapter 10

### Public Opinion and the Media

TU 10/30 Cannon, Readings 44, 45, 47, 48, 49  
TH 11/1 Media’s Impact on Political Decision Making (Readings on ERES)  
**Mini Research Project #2: The Living Room Candidate**  
TU 11/6 **DOCUMENTARY: “Debating our Destiny: Presidential Debates in the TV**

Age”

### Political Participation

TH 11/8 Verba et. al., Introduction thru Chapter 3  
TU 11/13 Verba et. al., Chapters 6, 7 & 8  
TH 11/15 Verba et. al., Chapter 12, 13, 15, 17  
**Mini Research Project # 3: All Politics is Local**  
  
TU 11/20 **LIBRARY DAY-NO CLASS**  
TH 11/22 **THANKSGIVING**  
  
TU 11/27 **DOCUMENTARY: American Blackout**

**Group Presentations: Important Topics in American Electoral Politics**

<b>TH 11/29</b>	Groups 1-3
<b>TU 12/4</b>	Groups 4-6
<b>TH 12/6</b>	Semester Wrap Up
<b>12/ 11-16</b>	<b>READING PERIOD</b>

## Mini Research Projects (15%)

As a way of getting more in-depth information beyond the readings and class lectures, I have assigned mini research projects that are more interactive and require a small amount of internet research and writing. Each of these assignments is related to a topic that we will be discussing on the day the assignment is due and is meant to augment the information learned in class. **These assignments should be 1 page, 1.5 line-spacing, with a reasonable font and provide the information requested below.**

### Project 1: Important Cases in American Judicial History

Due 10/9

You should write a summary of the following cases. The summary should include the facts of the case, specific amendment or law it addresses, the ruling and how it changed political processes or procedures. You should conclude the assignment with a discussion of how it expanded or narrowed the reach of the government and the Constitution and its current relevance.

- 1) *Gideon v. Wainwright* (1963)
- 2) *Korematsu v. US* (1944)
- 3) *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003)
- 4) *Gratz v. Bollinger* (2003)
- 5) *Jacobellis v. Ohio* (1964)
- 6) *Furman v. Georgia* (1972)

### Project 2: Presidential Campaign Ads in the Television Age

Due 11/1

First, you should watch the ad at <http://livingroomcandidate.movingimage.us/index.php>. What is the content of the commercial? What was the candidate trying to say to the electorate? How were images and ideas manipulated to get that point across? What cultural, political or moral values are they trying to tap into? Did you think the commercial was effective?

- 1) The Peace Daisy Girl ad (Johnson 1964)
- 2) Willie Horton ad (Bush 1988)
- 3) Housewife ad (Eisenhower 1956)
- 4) Busing/ Law and Order (Wallace 1968)
- 5) Morning (Clinton 1992)
- 6) Prouder, Better, Stronger (Reagan 1984)

### Project 3: All Politics is Local: Personal Participation Worksheet

Due 11/15

Many of you will be voting for president for the first time in the 2008 election. This assignment is both informative and practical for you. You should research the political participation rules in the community in which you plan to vote in the 2008 election by answering the following questions. What are the residency requirements for voting? Are there multiple options for how and when you can vote? How do you register and when is the deadline? Are you required to give a party affiliation when you register? What is the absentee voting policy? Are the primaries open or closed? When will the primary and general elections be held and where is your polling site? How often are mayoral and gubernatorial elections held? Are they held during presidential years or off years? If you are not a citizen you have two choices. You can look into the voting rules in your country of origin or you can use your Middletown address to find the information.

**Writing Assignment (15%)**  
(Due in Class on Tuesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup>)

**General Instructions for All Writing in this Course:**

This paper should be typed, double-spaced and five pages in length, it must be stapled, have page numbers inserted and your name on it. **Failure to comply with these basic requirements will result in a TEN point deduction from the final grade of your paper. Papers turned in after class are considered late and will be reduced by a full letter grade.**

**Specific Instructions:**

If you are unsure about questions or requirements ask before submitting the assignment. Please address all questions asked under each topic in one organic essay. This is not a job interview so you do not have to answer each question separately. Clearly some of them overlap and should be treated as such. This paper should be based on research from multiple kinds of sources and not just the web (e.g. newspaper, books, magazines, journals), which means that every paper should have a Works Cited page that clearly shows where you are using these references in the text. The following are not considered legitimate research sources: *The Argus*, wikipedia, your parents (unless they are directly involved with the topic), class lectures, and other professors' web sites. **Failure to consider these things in the process of writing the paper will severely and negatively impact your grade.**

**Topic Choices:**

**1) Amending the Constitution.** The U.S. Constitution is viewed as a living document because as new political challenges arise, there are mechanisms for creating statutes and amendments to address those issues? There have been several proposed amendments that for various reasons were never ratified. Identify one of these amendments and briefly discuss the purpose and history of it. Why would this be important enough for an amendment? What prevented ratification? If this amendment had been ratified, which groups would be impacted (both positively and negatively)? What impact would this amendment have on the current political landscape? Is there a contemporary basis for the ratification of this amendment?

**2) Congressional Representation.** Through smaller districts and shorter terms, members of the House of Representatives are supposed to be the voice of their constituents. Scholars have noted that many citizens love their Congressmen while simultaneously hating Congress. Who represents your district? Provide a brief history of their length of service, previous career and elective offices, party affiliation, and issues emphasized. Then reflect on those political issues that are important to you. Which of those issues positions are shared or opposed by your Congressman? Consider the make-up of your district. What are the demographic characteristics, party affiliation, etc.? Does this Congressman adequately represent your district? Explain. What issues should they emphasize more? Please provide the address that you are using to determine your representative. **You MUST talk about the make up of your district based on factual research not just your opinion of your neighborhood since districts are much larger than neighborhoods and our views of our neighborhoods are often biased.**

**3) Alternative Political Expression.** Political expression can move beyond traditional behavior like voting and lobbying. Often, many people learn about politics through more creative forms of expression such as music, poetry, or theater. Choose a song, poem, movie or play that played an important role in shaping politics. What issue does it address? What was the political landscape in which your choice was written, composed and released? What position does it take? Did many people view it or is it more underground?

How was it received at the time of its release? Has the issue it addresses been resolved or is it on going? Have sentiments changed or remained the same since its release? **If you cannot find information on your choice other than your opinion pick another choice in this category or another topic.**

## **Group Presentations on Important Topics in American Elections**

Usually around this time next year, we would be gearing up for the final push of the 2008 presidential election season. The 2008 election season has begun earlier than ever, which might have serious consequences election outcomes. Debates are being held a full eighteen months before the election, there are more debates, there are record amounts of fundraising, and the race for earlier primaries is quite contentious. Your assignment is to look at a particular aspect of the election from an historical perspective to assess the potential impact of the issue on the 2008 and future elections. Submit one copy of any audiovisuals and a bibliography with all references for the entire group.

### **Overview of Presentation due on October 18<sup>th</sup>**

This outline should contain a detailed description of how you plan to frame your presentation. The kinds of sources and information you have found up to the point. You should discuss the division of labor and tentative meeting dates. Discuss creative ideas for making your presentation more interesting and memorable. Outline what you need to finish the project.

### **Presentation Dates: November 29<sup>th</sup> and December 4<sup>th</sup>**

This presentation will be graded on multiple levels. First, and most importantly, the content of your presentation will be evaluated based on the accuracy, breadth and detail of the information you provide. Next, you will be graded on the creativity and initiative used by the group to make the actual presentations. This includes, but is not exclusively, any visuals. The quality and breadth of your sources of information (citations) will also be evaluated. Last, you will be evaluated based on how well you are able to answer questions and respond to comments from the rest of the classes. It is not necessary for you all to stand up in front of the class during the presentation, but it is important for you all to make a contribution to its success. Each group will receive ONE grade for the entire group.

## **TOPICS**

### **Topic 1: Stand by your (Wo)Man? The Role of First Ladies (and someday Gentlemen)**

There has been much debate about recent contentious comments levied against presidential candidates by the wives of fellow candidates. This has reignited discussions of the historical and changing role of the First Lady in political decision making. Begin by researching the historical role of first ladies during presidential campaigns and terms? How has that role changed over time and how have the American people reacted to these changes? How has the first lady been viewed in recent elections? What is their role in governance? Are there particular models? Is one more popular than others? What kinds of images have more modern first ladies courted? What might change about the presidential spouse's role, if that spouse is male?

### **Topic 2: Is Age More than a Number: Age Requirements and Debates over Readiness for Participation**

Over time many criteria for vote eligibility have changed as the country's demographic and political character have changed. Probably, one of the most important debates has been around the age at which Americans are ready to take on the responsibility of voting. This was particularly important during the Vietnam era. Interestingly, many western democracies have reconsidered this debate and decided that their citizens are responsible enough to vote as early as sixteen. First, you should look at some of the reasons historical given

for lowering the voting age. Then, you should look at European democracies that allow teenagers to vote and assess the possibility of this happening in the American political process. What are the justifications of those nations and how relatable are they to the US.

**Topic 3: What's so new about New Hampshire?: The Race for the earliest Primary**

New Hampshire has become the bellwether state for presidential elections. It is commonly assumed that all roads to the White House start in that state and proceed to Iowa. This year, however, other states have begun to challenge New Hampshire and Iowa's role in presidential politics by setting their primary date for earlier in the election year. Indeed, there is a chance that some states might even hold their primary elections during the coming holiday season. Why is New Hampshire the first state to hold primary elections and how long has it been that way? What are the benefits of having New Hampshire go first for candidates and the state of New Hampshire? What arguments do other states use for why they want to change this tradition? How would the nature of presidential politics change if New Hampshire's primary is no longer the first and candidates are forced to campaign in other states first?

**Topic 4: Diversifying the "WHITE" House: Race and Gender in Campaigns and Elections**

This election season is historic because of the diversity of candidates. For the first time ever the campaign can boast having a diverse set of candidates, which includes an African American, a Latino, and female candidate. For this assignment I would like you to examine previous attempts by women and minority candidates to win the office of the presidency. Next, examine the impact of race and gender previous presidential campaigns by women and minority candidates. What were the major challenges for these candidates historically and are these challenges different now? Were the early candidate symbolic or actual candidates? How do parties and party activists respond to women and minority candidates? How are their campaign styles and strategies different from white male candidates? What are specific challenges they face? How have they been received and perceived by the American public? Are whites willing to elect a minority candidate? Will males vote for a woman candidate? How have they fared in elections? What does history tell us about the potential for a female or minority candidate winning the presidency? What are some of the pitfalls they should avoid; what are some things they should emphasize?

**Topic 5: Swift Boats and Swayed Votes: The Role of 527s in Swaying Elections**

We all remember the swift boat ads in 2004 that derided John Kerry's military service and fit for the presidency. These ads, and others from organizations like Moveon.org, have a unique position in the election process. They are not funded by candidates or political parties and they are not covered by campaign finance laws. Why have these organizations emerged? How have they impacted recent elections? What are the arguments for and against these types of organizations? Is there anyway to regulate their content or assess the accuracy of their claims? Do candidates see these ads as helpful to their campaigns when they are levied against their opponents or do they see them as hurtful? What do the organizations themselves say about what they're doing, why they're doing it, and the impact it has on elections? What role do you think they will play in the next election?

**Topic 6: Withstanding the Permanent Spotlight: 24-7 News and Blog impact on Elections**

When Roosevelt was president in the thirties and forties, many Americans were unaware of his physical disabilities and reliance on walkers and wheelchairs to get around. Besides the lack of television, there was also an unwritten assumption by the media that this was something that they would not talk about in the press. Prior to the television and internet age there was a belief that being president did not remove total privacy from the lives of the person holding office? Now, presidential candidates are under constant media

scrutiny from the hopeful stage until they leave office. The rise of around-the-clock news and internet bloggers has seemingly led to a feeding frenzy of information about candidates (both positive and negative). How much attention does the American public pay to political news? What has led to the rise of intense scrutiny of presidential office holders? How has it changed the campaign process and the individual decisions to run for presidential office? In what ways have blogs and their authors changed election reporting? Is it better for democracy for the media and the president have a more adversarial relationship? What role do the media play in current elections?