

## INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT (GOVT 151)\*

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JUDD 113

TU and TH 10:30-11:50 p.m.

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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*

The books are required available at the bookstore. Other readings are on electronic reserve.

David T. Canon, John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer. 2003. *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*, Third Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

John Gaventa. 1970. *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Robert Putnam. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

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

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

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\*This is a template for the class and is subject to changes at professor's discretion with prior notification during the semester.

### *Course Requirements and Grading*

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

**Reading Assignments.** Students are expected to read assigned chapters prior to class and should come to each class prepared to participate. Discussions must be based on the readings but can move us beyond them.

**Writing Assignments.** Students will be required to submit **TWO** short essays during the semester. These assignments will be based on readings and class discussion, but they also require outside research. Details about the papers are on the last page of the syllabus.

**Exams.** You will have **TWO** exams—a midterm on March 3<sup>rd</sup> and a final during finals week. These exams are non-cumulative.

**In-Class Debates.** Students will be divided into groups early in the quarter and assigned an issue and position to take. Groups will also be supplied with position articles about their issues. On the assigned days students will be required to participate in a debate by making arguments for their assigned issue position. More details at the end of the syllabus.

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

Participation	10%	Writing Assignment #1	15%
Midterm	25%	Writing Assignment #2	15%
Final Exam	25%	In-Class Debates	10%

**Late Assignments and Missed Exams.** *Late assignments will be penalized one grade for each day they are late including weekends.* Assignments more than one 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 a vital component of this class; therefore, attendance is both critical and mandatory. Students with good attendance records whose final grades fall in the gray zone on the border between grades will be rewarded for regular attendance.

**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.

**Office Hours.** If you find yourself experiencing difficulties with the course, speak with me as soon as possible. Taking corrective steps early is a strategy that promotes mastery of the material and a desirable outcome in terms of your grade. In addition, please stop by to discuss any course-related information or feedback. I will be available in my office on **TU and TH 1-2**. If there are class conflicts, we can schedule an appointment for another time.

## Course Schedule and Reading List

### *The Framers: Designing Democracy and Modeling Leadership*

Jan. 25 Cannon, Declaration of Independence; Ellis, Preface -Chapter 3

Jan. 27 Ellis, Chapters 4-6

### *The Constitution and American Governance*

Feb. 1 Cannon, Chapter One

Feb. 3 Cannon, Chapter Two

Feb. 8 IN-CLASS DEBATE: Do We Still Need the Electoral College?

### *Congress: The First Branch*

Feb. 10 Cannon, Chapter Four, Readings 18, 19, 20

Feb. 15 Cannon, Pork Barrel Politics Readings and information you've collected

### *The Presidency: Chief Executive*

Feb. 17 Cannon, Chapter Five

First Writing Assignment Due

### *The Courts: Static Text or Living Document*

Feb. 22 Cannon, Chapter 7, Reading 36; Rosenberg, Introduction (pages 1-38) Begin Civil Rights Section

Feb. 24 Rosenberg, finish the Civil Rights Section

### *Parties, Campaigns, and Elections*

Mar. 1 Cannon, Chapter Nine

Mar. 3 MIDTERM

Mar. 22 Cannon, Chapter Ten

### *Public Opinion and the Media*

Mar. 24 Cannon, Chapter Eight

Mar. 29 Media's Impact on Political Decision Making (Readings on ERES)

Mar. 31 DOCUMENTARY: "Debating our Destiny"

Apr. 5 IN CLASS DEBATE: Is There A Liberal Bias In The Media?

### *Political Participation*

Apr. 7 Cannon, Chapter 11 (Readings 59 and 60); Putnam, Intro & Chapter 1

Apr. 12 Putnam, Chapters 2, 3, 15, 24

Second Writing Assignment Due

Apr. 14 IN CLASS DEBATE: Should Hate Speech Be Punished?

### *Poverty and Powerlessness in America*

Apr. 19 Gaventa, Chapters 1-3

Apr. 21 Gaventa, Chapters 5, 6, 8-10

Apr. 26 DOCUMENTARY: "American Hollow"

Apr. 28 DOCUMENTARY: "Lalee's Kin"

May 3 Semester Wrap Up

May 4-8 READING PERIOD

May 9-13 Final Exam Week CHECK UNIVERSITY SCHEDULE

### ***Writing Assignments (15% each)***

You are required to write **TWO** papers. These papers should be typed, double-spaced and five pages in length and will require outside research. If you are unsure about the questions or requirements ask before turning in the assignment.

First Paper Due

Feb. 17<sup>th</sup>

Second Paper Due

Apr. 12<sup>th</sup>

### **TOPICS**

**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) Issues and Interest Groups.** Given the number of groups and potential issues available, it has been noted that there is probably a group for every citizen. Choose a political issue of interest to you, and then find an interest group that seeks to influence policy surrounding this issue. (This group does not have to support your opinion.) First, outline the issue and its importance to politics. Second provide a short history of the organization and its goals. How does it recruit new members and mobilize current members? How does it address the political system? Which level of government is its most frequent target? Is it effective? Explain.

**3) 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. 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.

**4) Immigration Post 9-11.** There have been many efforts to ensure and expand American citizenship rights and freedoms. However, for immigrants the story is quite different. Since September 11<sup>th</sup> there has been a greater emphasis on regulating the lives of immigrants. In what ways have immigration laws and enforcement been changed in this new political climate? Choose an immigration concern (e.g. detainment of suspects, deportation of criminals, or monitoring of students) and highlight changes that have occurred. How are these changes meted out? Are there groups that are being affected more? Are there civil rights violations? Are these efforts justified? Explain. Is there popular support and opposition?

**5) 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 your political views. What issue does it address? 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?

### ***In Class Debates (10%)***

Early in the semester students will be divided into a group that will be maintained throughout the semester. The primary purpose of these groups is to prepare and present one side of an in-class debate on a designated topic. On the day that the groups are made students will also find out which topic and side they will be responsible for. **There is no written requirement for this assignment; however, because your presence is necessary for the debate to take place, individuals will be given a grade of zero for absence and points will be deducted for tardiness.** You will be judged based on your in-class presentation and class vote. The majority of your grade will depend on how well prepared you are to make coherent and planned arguments about your topic. This will depend on things like whether or not you did the reading, planned out your presentation order, came up with creative ways to get your point across, and responded during the rebuttal part of the debate. Five points of your grade will be determined by your classmates who will vote for the group that they think did the best job..

Debate One:	Should the Electoral College Be Abolished?	Feb. 8
Debate Two:	Is there a Liberal Bias in the Media?	Apr. 5
Debate Three:	Should Hate Speech Be Punished?	Apr. 14