

Political Science 001
Fall 2005
Dr. Sanders
Meredith 212
x3172
E-mail: arthur.sanders@drake.edu

The American Political System

COURSE:

This course is designed to introduce students to the workings of the American political system. In class, through lecture, discussion and readings, we will examine the processes and institutions of the United States Government and how these various factors interact to bring about policy outcomes. Politics in this country is, I think, a fascinating process. It is often unpredictable and sometimes seems beyond explanation. The American public, when asked, expresses strong support for democracy and our political system, yet even in a time of heightened political conflict and struggle, close to 40% did not vote in our most recent Presidential election. We want political leaders we can trust and respect, but our system almost seems to force those same leaders to bend the truth (at best), raise ridiculous amounts of money (which we then complain about), and engage in activities that do not seem to fit the "dignity" of their offices. We sell our politics and policy on talk shows and in commercials just like any other product. Buy Coke. Eat at McDonalds. Watch RockStarINXS. Vote for George Bush. Politics becomes just another product competing (usually unsuccessfully) for the attention of the American consumer. The events of September 11, 2001 led to a public rallying behind the nation and our President. But in elections since that time, there has been only a small increase in voter turnout and public levels of interest in government are almost back down to pre 9/11 levels. And polls indicate more people think the nation is headed in the wrong direction than think we are making progress.

The goal of this course is to bring this political system into clearer focus to better understand the value of that system. We will go beyond simple description to an analysis of the structures and forces that guide American politics. In addition, as you know, this particular section of this class is part of a learning community. You are all simultaneously enrolled in the first year seminar American Character and Society. Thus, we will pay particular attention to issues of individual rights and community and how they help

structure, for better or worse, our political system, and how our political system encourages or limits the possibilities of building community in America. You will find, we hope, that the issues you discuss in your FYS will be relevant to the issues we raise here (and vice versa) and that combining these experiences will enrich both classes.

I hope that in the course of this semester, we will all gain a better understanding of politics in America. I also hope that this course will be a joint venture. If you come to class, sit in your seats, take notes, and spit back what I say on exams, none of us will be any better off than we were before the class began. If you come to class prepared, raise questions, discuss the issues and think critically about the topics we discuss, both you and I will enjoy the course much more. As I wrote already, I find politics in the United States fascinating. I hope you do as well, and that we can share that fascination together.

For more information about other course offerings and policies of the Department of Politics and International Relations, see the Department's [home page](#).

REQUIREMENTS:

1. Regular attendance, preparation for, and participation in class discussions. You are expected to have the readings done by the day on which they are assigned. Please note that at times it may seem that we are falling behind the syllabus. However, unless I tell you otherwise, keep up with the reading as assigned. Some of these "lags" are by design. And we will, at some point, catch up. I will take attendance (If you are absent, I will assume you are not prepared). 10%.

2. Group Essays. Each of you will be placed in a group of approximately six people. These groups will get together to discuss particular topics of concern in the course, and the group will then be responsible for handing in a written summary of their thoughts on the issue at hand. There will be four such assignments over the course of the semester, and the details for each assignment will be handed out at least one week before they are due. If, for some reason, you cannot work with your group, you are expected to complete the assignment on your own. Each of the assignments will be worth 4% of your grade for a total of 16%

3. Individual essays. There will also be three topics for which you will write your own essays. On these essays the work you hand in should be your own. For more information about [academic dishonesty](#), see the discussion found on the Department of Politics and International Relations Home Page. Each assignment will be handed out at least one week before it is due. Each of these will be worth 10% of your grade, for a total of 30%.

4. Exams. There will be two in-class exams and a final. Each of the exams will be a mixture of short answer questions, and short essays. The final exam will also include a longer essay. The first exam is worth 13% of your grade. The second is worth 13%. And the final exam will be worth 18% of your grade.

READINGS:

There are six books available for purchase at the University Bookstore. They are:

DiClerico, Robert and Hammock, Allan, *Points of View* (Ninth Edition)

Binder, Sarah, *Stalemate*

Fenton, Tom, *Bad News*

Fiorina, Morris, *Culture War?*

Pomper, Gerald and Weiner, Marc, *The Future of American Democratic Politics*

Skopcol, Theda, *Diminished Democracy*

I also strongly urge you to read a daily newspaper to keep up with current affairs.

All other readings are available on-line. Go to the external links folder on Blackboard. You will find links to those readings there.

ASSIGNMENTS:

I. Foundations of American Politics: Constitutional Arrangements and Ideas:

August 22: Introduction: The Declaration of Independence

August 24: Federalist #10; Federalist #51.

August 26: The Constitution of the United States.
August 29: Pomper and Weiner, chapters 1,2
August 31: DiClerico, Chapter 2; Pomper and Weiner, chapter 5.
September 2: No Class. I will be out of town. Work on the group project.
September 5: No Class. Labor Day
September 7: DiClerico and Hammock, pp. 119-129.
September 9: DiClerico and Hammock, pp. 27-43.
September 12: Pomper and Weiner, chapter 6.
September 14: DiClerico and Hammock, chapter 3.
September 16: *Group essay #1 due: The Constitution, Individual Freedom and Terrorism.*

II. The Media:

September 19: DiClerico and Hammock, pp. 249-259; Fenton, chapters 1,2,3.
September 21: DiClerico and Hammock, chapter 6; Fenton, chapters 4,5,6.
September 23: Fenton, chapters 7,8,9.
September 26: *Individual Essay #1 due: Television News.*
September 28: Catch-up. No new reading.
September 30: *Exam #1.*

III. Public Participation: Elections, Political Parties and Interest Groups:

October 3: DiClerico and Hammock, chapter 4.
October 5: Fiorina, chapters 1,2,3.
October 7: DiClerico and Hammock, pp. 107-118; Fiorina, chapters 4,5.
October 10: Fiorina, chapters 6,7; Pomper and Weiner, chapter 3.
October 12: Pomper and Weiner, chapter 4; Fiorina, chapter 8.
October 14: DiClerico and Hammock, chapter 8, Pomper, chapter 11;
Group essay #2 due: One or Two America(s)?
October 17: No Class. Mid-Semester Break
October 19: DiClerico and Hammock, chapter 9.
October 21: Pomper, chapter 8; Binder, chapters 1,2.

IV. Congress:

October 24: DiClerico and Hammock, pp. 174-183; Binder, chapters 3,4.
October 26: Binder, chapters 5,6; DiClerico and Hammock, pp. 162-173.
October 28: No class. I will be out of town.
October 31: *Individual Essay #2 due: Does Congress Work?*
November 2: Catch-up. No additional reading.

November 4: *Exam #2*.

V. The Executive Branch: The President and the Bureaucracy:

November 7: DiClerico and Hammock, chapter 11

November 9: Pomper and Weiner, chapter 12.

November 11: DiClerico and Hammock, chapter 12.

VI. The Courts:

November 14: Federalist #78; *Marbury v Madison*.

Pomper and Weiner, chapters 9, 10.

November 16: DiClerico and Hammock, chapter 13, pp. 308-336;

Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v Casey.

November 18: *Group Essay #3 due: The Right to Privacy*

VII. The Policy Making Process:

November 21: Skopcol, chapters 1,2.

November 23, 25: No class. Happy Thanksgiving. Eat lots of turkey (or a vegetarian alternative!)

November 28: Skopcol, chapters 3,4.

November 30: DiClerico and Hammock, pp. 277-307; Skopcol, chapters 5. Pomper and Weiner, conclusion.

December 1: *Group essay #4 due: The Future of American Democratic Politics*.

December 5: Skopcol, chapters 6, 7;

December 7: DiClerico and Hammock, pp. 1-26.

Individual Essay #3 due: Building Community in the United States

Final Exam: Thursday, December 15: 9:30-11:20.