

MEREDITH COLLEGE
Politics 100: American Political Systems
Autumn 2009

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Course Description and Goals:

This course is an introduction to American government and politics with an emphasis on the basic constitutional structure of the government and on the political institutions that surround it. Special attention is given to current political events and issues.

Divided into three parts, the course first focuses on the principles, or basic definitions and concepts used to describe American political systems: *What is “American” politics? What are its founding values? How were these arrived at and how have they changed over time?* The second part deals with specific, leading actors in present-day American political systems such as the Congress, the Presidency, the Judiciary, the Media, etc. Finally, the third part examines how principles and actors interact today in various arenas such as those of campaigns & elections, states’ rights, foreign policy, etc.

In addition to these substantive areas, students will also develop their abilities in oral communication through two informal and one formal presentations during the course of the semester. These presentations will deal with the three-part substantive material of the course as outlined above.

Educational Outcomes:

By semester-end, students will

- 1) know basic theoretical frameworks within the field of political science;
- 2) explain scientific discovery and process, and the ability to explain the primary research methods of the field;
- 3) connect primary supporting research with a particular theoretical position in the field;
- 4) apply theoretically-based explanations and solutions to individual behavior or societal phenomena;
- 5) solve problems by analyzing data, thinking critically, and selecting optimal results.
- 6) develop and demonstrate oral communication skills conveying their knowledge of American Political Systems in a systematic and formal manner

The underlying motivation for the course content and these objectives is to equip students not only for further study of political systems but also for further action as participants within them.

Texts

The following text is required for this course:

Keeping the Republic: Power & Citizenship in American Politics.

By Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright

CQ Press, 2rd Brief Edition (2006); ISBN 978-1933116877

Other short readings may be assigned by the instructor during the course. These will be provided in electronic or hardcopy format by the instructor to students. Finally, in addition to the above text, students will be required to keep abreast of political news by reading one of the major national newspapers with significant political coverage.

Requirements

The course is centered on a comprehensive text which investigates– using different methods and demonstrating a variety differing conclusions – the history, form and functioning of American political systems. Daily reading assignments are brief (approximately 30 pages) but dense, therefore requiring careful consideration. Students are expected to have finished all assigned readings prior to class in order to participate in discussion. In addition, each student will complete two exams (one midterm and one final), two brief presentations (informal) and one longer presentation (formal) all of which will be based on additional readings done outside of class time (such as coverage of class-related issues in newspapers.) Each of these requirements is elaborated in detail below.

The grading weights and the dates when requirements are due are as follows:

Informal Presentations	Various (two total)	20%
Midterm	October 31	20%
Formal Presentation	Various Current Event Days (one total)	30%
Final Exam (3)	December 5 at 1 PM	30%

Please note that all required work is due on the assigned date and cannot be made up except for reasons of medical or family emergencies. No late work will be accepted.

Detailed descriptions of each of these requirements are provided below:

Participation:

Students are expected to come to class prepared. This includes having read the material, having formulated opinions on the material and/or having generated questions regarding unclear aspects of the material. Study guides in the form of glossaries, summaries, outlines, reading questions and sample quizzes are included as a part of each chapter in the text in order to facilitate these tasks. Students are encouraged to share their thoughts during regular class discussions moderated by the instructor. Participation grades may also include grades earned on unannounced reading checks (AKA pop-quizzes.) Attendance is important and every three unexcused absences will result in a letter grade reduction. In general, however, participation is *based on intellectual engagement, not physical presence*. Students are encouraged to check with the instructor regularly in order to learn their current participation score and (if necessary) ways to improve it.

Exams:

Exams will test the student’s comprehensive learning at the two points during the semester. They will include multiple choice and short essay questions. Study guides and sample

questions will be circulated well in advance of exams. Each exam is cumulative in that it covers all material between exam day and the start of class (i.e., not just the material between exams.) Finally, excused absences from examinations can only be obtained in advance or for medical or other emergencies. Such emergencies must be documented to the satisfaction of the instructor. An unexcused absence from an examination will result in a grade of zero for that examination.

Informal and Formal Presentations

American political systems provide a number of wonderful opportunities for civic engagement and the development of personal connections with one's community. One such opportunity is through the discussions of political affairs. Often, however, individuals feel unprepared to engage in such discussions, not for lack of concern or knowledge about the issues, but rather for lack of confidence and knowledge regarding the structure of such discussions. In other words, many lack the skills of oral communication that would facilitate the raising of their voices and the sharing of their insights.

In POL100 students will develop and demonstrate these skills through ungraded and graded, informal and formal exercises. The content of these exercises will perfectly parallel the substantive content of the course (e.g., the history, form and functioning of American political systems) therefore no additional work is required in that regard.

Students will incrementally develop their oral communication skills, with the concluding formal presentations representing a competent demonstration of the skills acquired during the semester.

Students will not be graded on whether they agree or disagree with other's opinions or perspectives, but rather on how well they argue their own personal viewpoints using the available evidence (e.g., the textbook, newspaper reports) as their touchstone. Since structure and style problems can weaken otherwise strong arguments (and your objective is to make a strong argument) students should be sure to practice (especially their formal) presentations before the demonstration. All presentations must have been completed by the last day of class. We will schedule individual presentations throughout the semester. Once scheduled, presentation dates cannot be changes except in the case of a medical or other serious emergency. The grading rubric on the next page indicates the areas in which students will develop and demonstrate their oral communication skills.

ORAL PRESENTATION EVALUATION

PRESENTATION			
Loudness & Articulation:	Easy to hear and understand	Fades away in places	Often too soft or unclear
Fluency:	Easy to follow	Too slow – stutters, "ums/uhs"	Too fast
Intonation:	Appropriate, effective	Phrases statements as questions	-low energy -little enthusiasm - -monotone
Eye Contact:	-frequent -most of audience	-some -few people	-little or none
Posture & Gestures:	-upright -Fluid-movements	-slouches -hides behind podium -no gestures	Stands on one leg -off balance -jerky movements
Use of AV:	Effective, helpful	None	Poorly used, poor quality
Manner:	Effective	Obviously nervous or tense	Too casual, silly, informal

CONTENT Organization:	Clear, easy to follow, interesting, good examples, illustrations	Mostly clear, some examples, mostly abstract	Loses place - jumps around
Support:	Ample evidence, statistics, logic, research	Some evidence, statistics, logic, research	Few or no examples, opinion, little support
Time:	Uses time well	Too much material	Too little material

Final Letter Grades

Final scores are determined using the weights mentioned above and according to the breakdowns listed below:

A: 93-100 B: 84-92 C: 70-83 D: 60-69 F: 0-59

Meredith Code of Honor

We, the Meredith Community, are committed to developing and affirming in each student a sense of personal honor and responsibility. Uncompromising honesty and forthrightness are essential elements of this commitment. The Honor System is a method by which individual honors are protected and maintained. Any dishonorable action will be regarded as a violation of this commitment, and corrective action will be taken. If I am in violation of the Honor Code, to prevent jeopardizing the Honor System or weakening our system of self-government, I have an obligation to report myself to the proper authorities. If I am aware of a violation of the Honor System by another student, I shall call this matter to the attention of that student as a violation of responsibility to the community. In choosing Meredith College, I am accepting the Honor System as a way of life. As a Meredith student, I am responsible for insuring that the Honor System is at all times carried out.

Students with Disabilities

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with documented disabilities. In order to receive accommodations, students must go through the Counseling Center/Disability Services Office. Disability Services is located in 106 Carroll Hall and can be reached at 760-8427 or disabilityservices@meredith.edu. For additional information see the website at <http://www.meredith.edu/students/counsel/disability>.

Weather

We will follow the college policy on inclement weather.

Course Timeline

The following lists the tentative assignments for the semester. All readings are from **Keeping the Republic**.

8/20 -	Intro/ Philosophies of Learning/ Communicating Your Ideas
8/25 & 27 -	Ch 1 Power and Citizenship
9/1 & 3 -	Ch 2 Politics of the American Founding
9/8 & 10 -	Ch 3 Federalism and the US Constitution
9/15 & 17 -	Ch 4 Fundamental American Liberties
9/22, 24, 29 -	Ch 5 The Struggle for Equal Rights
10/1 -	Review
10/6 -	** Midterm Exam **
10/13 & 15 -	Ch 6 Congress
10/20 & 22 -	Ch 7 The Presidency
10/27 & 29 -	Ch 8 The Bureaucracy
11/3 & 5 -	Ch 9 The American Legal System and the Courts
11/10-	Ch 11 Political Parties and Interest Groups
11/12 -	Ch 12 Voting, Campaigns and Elections
11/17-	Ch 10 Public Opinion
11/19 -	Ch 13 The Media
11/24 & 12/1 -	Presentations
12/5 -	** Final Exam (1 PM) **