

## **Political Science 211: Introduction to American Politics**

Chaminade University Online

<http://chaminade.ecollege.com>

Spring Term: April 5 – June 12, 2010

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As the title would indicate, this course will serve as an introduction to American politics. However, instead of taking a conventional approach to the study of power and politics in America, we will critically examine American politics and society through the lens of race, gender and class relations. We will study some of the basic founding documents of this country, but we will also attempt to hear and understand the voices of those silenced by the founding fathers. By doing this we will be able to understand the significance of those voices' struggles to be heard, and how they have shaped contemporary American politics and governmental institutions.

This class will serve as a space for students to question their assumptions about American politics and government. Together, we will create an arena for online conversations about different points of view within American politics, as well as think critically throughout the session about the answers we are able to come up with to several central questions in American politics. Some of those questions may be: How did America's founding documents affect or ignore race, gender, and class? Are race gender and class relations solely based on those attributes or are there other factors which play a central role within these tensions? How much does political economy play a part in American politics? Is public policy solely shaped by political economy, or do other factors play an integral part as well?

Some learning outcomes of this course are:

- Students should understand key concepts and tensions in American politics;
- Students should be able to think critically about and through these concepts;
- Students should be able to re-examine some of their assumptions about political issues;
- Students should develop empathy for, and open-mindedness about, viewpoints different and sometimes opposite to their own.

Some of the strategies used to obtain these outcomes are:

- Reaction journals used to facilitate inquiries into topics that are related to students' personal lives;
- Online discussions, projects and papers;
- Questions and responses to the reading;
- One midterm paper and a comprehensive final discussed below.

## Course Requirements:

**\*Participation (10%):** The exchange of ideas is a vital element in a successful online course. It is essential that you attend class prepared and ready to participate. Since this is an online course and is based on discussions, your weekly participation is absolutely critical to your success in this class and to the success of your fellow students. If you don't attend online, you can't participate. You are expected to contribute your thoughts, reactions, questions and responses online.

**\*Questions and responses (10%):** One critical question from the weekly **reading** should be posted on our class's website by Wednesday at midnight to be read by *all* students before the week is over. This question should be open ended and critical in nature, not "how many pages did we have to read last week?" or "Who were the founding fathers?" The responses should be a paragraph in length and your considered and respectful attempt at answering your classmates' questions. You will not get credit for "I agree" or "Good point" type of responses. These are due by Fridays at midnight and should be a **minimum of 100-150 words EACH**.

**\*Journal entries (10%):** These are your personal critical reactions to the **course lectures** posted on the course website you are required to view for the course. Please try to tie in current events with the lectures. If you need to, please use your own experiences to inform your reactions. They should be one page in length. These are due on Fridays by midnight and they are to be sent directly to me via the ecollege dropbox. Please do not post your journals to the discussion board. Each week, I will pick the best student journal and post it as the "journal of the week." You will not get any extra points if your journal is picked. You will just know that you have done a good job thinking critically through some of the material we are covering. For those students whose journals are not picked, you can refer to the "journal of the week" for inspiration or ideas on how to write and think critically in future assignments. I always take the names off of the papers, so the entries are anonymous by the time they are posted to the discussion board.

**\*One midterm paper (30%):** The midterm paper will be 4-5 pages in length. This is your opportunity to show me what you have learned thus far from our critical analyses of the readings and lectures. Students will post their choices of questions during the beginning of Week 4 (by Tuesday midnight). Then, students will vote as to which question they would like to answer for the midterm paper (by Thursday midnight). Please, let's not have everyone vote for their own questions since that defeats the purpose. I will then post the chosen question at the end of Week 4 and you will have until the Friday of Week 5 to return your paper to me. There will be no journals due on the Friday of Week 5. The midterm questions will be posted and voted on in the midterm question discussion board. Please continue to post your regular questions and responses under the normal weekly discussion board.

**\*Comprehensive final exam (40%):** This exam will be an in-person comprehensive exam given at Chaminade University on June 12, 2010. This will be the culmination of

your course experience. If you are off-island, you can arrange for your exam to be proctored at your location. Please contact Donna Yoshimura to make proctoring arrangements at [dyoshi@chaminade.edu](mailto:dyoshi@chaminade.edu) at least two weeks before the final date.

**Note:** because the only ways to improve writing are to write a lot, read a lot, and both give and receive a lot of feedback on writing, this class will focus heavily on these three activities.

**Note:** Please turn in ALL of your assignments in on time. It's not fair for some people to take more time to turn in assignments than others. Therefore, your questions and responses, if they are not posted by the due date, will no longer be counted towards your grade. I will not accept a bunch of journals during the last week in order for you to make up work that you are missing. For your midterm papers, each day that the paper is late, 3 points will be deducted from your grade. It is very easy to go from an A to a B to a C in just four days, so please make sure you turn in your assignments on time.

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense. Taking credit for someone else's work is a grave ethical offense. It is especially tempting to engage in this practice in an online setting, but *don't*. After reading your short journals and questions and responses throughout the quarter, I become quite proficient at discerning your writing from someone else's. If I do find that you are engaging in this practice, you will receive an "F" for that assignment and be placed on probation in my course, where I will keep a sharp eye on your further work. Therefore, please cite your sources in an appropriate way, (see the citation for the required text below as an example) and if you have any questions you can either ask me, refer to your library, or to any style manual you have available.

### **Required Reading:**

Burns, James McGregor, J.W Peltason, Thomas Cronin, and David Magelby. 2004. *Government by the People Brief Edition*. Fifth Edition. Prentice-Hall: New Jersey.

Please note that we are not reading the chapters in the order that they are listed in the book.

### **Course Schedule:**

This schedule is not set in stone. With class consensus, we can alter it to fit our needs.

**Week 1: Introductions. Revision of the assumptions we bring to class. Where did we learn them? Why were they taught this way?**

Reading: Ch 1 and 2

Post introductions by Monday, April 5

Questions due to the discussion board by midnight on Wednesday, April 7

Responses due to the discussion board by midnight on Friday, April 9

Journals due to the dropbox by midnight on Friday, April 9

## **Week 2: Rights and Liberties**

Reading: Ch 13

Questions due to the discussion board by midnight on Wednesday, April 14

Responses due to the discussion board by midnight on Friday, April 16

Journals due to the dropbox by midnight on Friday, April 16

**Week 3: Equal justice under the law. How does what we've learned about political economy so far affect public policy regarding women, people of color, and working class people? Where do race, class, and gender relations fit into the picture? What is being done about inequality at the national level?**

Reading: Ch 14

Questions due to the discussion board by midnight on Wednesday, April 21

Responses due to the discussion board by midnight on Friday, April 23

Journals due to the dropbox by midnight on Friday, April 23

**Week 4: How do political culture and ideology shape our political landscape?**

Reading: Ch 3 and 4

Questions due to the discussion board by midnight on Wednesday, April 28

Responses due to the discussion board by midnight on Friday, April 30

Journals due to the dropbox by midnight on Friday, April 30

Please don't forget to post your midterm questions by Tuesday night and vote on which question you would like to answer by Thursday night. I will post the question over the weekend.

**Week 5: How do political parties fit into that landscape? How is power distributed in our political system?**

Reading: Ch 5 and 6

Questions due to the discussion board by midnight on Wednesday, May 5

Responses due to the discussion board by midnight on Friday, May 7. No journals this week due to the midterm.

MIDTERM PAPERS DUE to the dropbox by midnight on Friday, May 7.

**Week 6: How does the media affect our notion of politics in America? How has this changed in the past 10 years?**

Reading: Ch 7

Questions due to the discussion board by midnight on Wednesday, May 12

Responses due to the discussion board by midnight on Friday, May 14

Journals due to the dropbox by midnight on Friday, May 14

**Week 7: A closer look at congress and the presidency**

Reading: Ch 8, 9 and 10

Questions due to the discussion board by midnight on Wednesday, May 19

Responses due to the discussion board by midnight on Friday, May 21

Journals due to the dropbox by midnight on Friday, May 21

**Week 8: A closer look at the judiciary and the bureaucracy**

Reading: Ch 11 and 12

Questions due to the discussion board by midnight on Wednesday, May 26

Responses due to the discussion board by midnight on Friday, May 28

Journals due to the dropbox by midnight on Friday, May 28

**Week 9: Are public and foreign policy shaped by our political culture, real and actual needs, or giant corporations?**

Reading: Ch 15 and 16

Questions due to the discussion board by midnight on Wednesday, June 2

Responses due to the discussion board by midnight on Friday, June 4

Journals due to the dropbox by midnight on Friday, June 4

**Week 10: Final Week**

No Readings this week. Please use this time to review and study our course discussion archives so that you are ready for the final.

COMPREHENSIVE FINAL EXAM – At main campus, the in person final will be held June 12, 2010. Location TBA.