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Political Science 211: Introduction to American Politics
Chaminade University Online
Fall Quarter October 1-December 8
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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 objectives 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 objectives 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 course. It is essential that you come to class prepared and ready to participate. This is a time intensive class. 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 day's reading should be posted on our class's website by Friday 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 attempt at answering your classmates' questions. You will not get credit for "I agree" or "Good point" type of responses.

***Journal entries (10%):** These are your personal critical reactions to the readings and class discussions you are required to do for the course. However, for this assignment, please tie in current events with the reading. Use your own experiences to inform your reactions. They should be one page in length.

***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. We will come up with the paper topic and format together as a class, (*but with my final approval*). Let's be creative and have some fun with it. This is your chance to impress me with your inventiveness during this project.

***Comprehensive final exam (40%):** This exam will be an in-person comprehensive exam given at Chaminade University on December 8, 2001. This will be the culmination of your course experience. If you are off-island, we will arrange a way for your exam to be proctored at your location.

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.

You will have an opportunity to rewrite your papers in a *timely* manner throughout the quarter (this means that you can't turn everything in on the last day). If you need assistance with your writing please come see me before the paper's due date.

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. 1997. *Government by the People Brief Edition*. Second Edition. Prentice-Hall: New Jersey.

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: p 1-64

Questions and Journals due by midnight on Friday, October 5.

Week 2: How does capitalism affect our political system and the power relationships within it?

Reading: p 66-94

Questions and Journals due by midnight on Friday, October 12

Week 3: 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: p 96-133

Questions and Journals due by midnight on Friday, October 19

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

Reading: p 135-182

Questions and Journals due by midnight on Friday, October 26

POST MIDTERM QUESTIONS THIS WEEK

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

Reading: p 184-249

Questions and Journals due by midnight on Friday, November 2

MIDTERM PAPERS DUE

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

Reading: p 251-273

Questions and Journals due by midnight on Friday, November 9

Week 7: A closer look at congress and the presidency

Reading: p 274-332

Questions and Journals due by midnight on Friday, November 16

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

Reading: p 334-385

Questions and Journals due by midnight on Friday, November 23

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

Reading: p 386-448

Questions and Journals due by midnight on Friday, November 30

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 - DECEMBER 8, 2001