

DR. RICHARD L. WHITEHEAD

Sample Syllabus: American Government

Political Science C051, Section 010
The American Political System
Temple University, Fall 2002
TTh 11:40-1:00, Barton Hall 102

Instructor: Richard Whitehead
Office Hours: TTh 1:15-2:15
449 Gladfelter Hall
E-mail: richard@whitehead.cjb.net

Course Description

This course offers a comprehensive introduction to American government. The course objective is to provide you with a basic familiarity of politics in America so that you can engage in political life from a constructive and informed perspective. Since this course approaches the topic of American government from a historical perspective, the topic of this course can perhaps more accurately be described as American political development. The material covered in this class falls within three topical areas.

Topic One: Ideas, Contestation, and the Politics of Constitution-Making

In the first topic, entitled “Ideas, Contestation, and the Politics of Constitution-Making,” we will ground the early formation of the U.S. polity in the philosophical underpinnings of early American political thought. We will compare some works by English and French philosophers, most notably Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and baron de Montesquieu, to the political ideas of people like Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and Thomas Jefferson. What were the various ways in which *the state of nature* was understood and what were the solutions to overcoming natural state problems? What is *Social Contract Theory* and how does it relate to the Constitution? We will also ask about some of the practical problems faced in the Constitution-making process. Why did the *Articles of Confederation* fail? Why was *federalism* the solution? What was the logic behind creating a *bi-cameral* Congress? Why was there so much skepticism toward the idea of direct popular elections? Finally, we will explore the complicated questions about who benefited from the legal framework laid down in the Constitution. Who paid the price of those benefits? How did the emerging polity ensure that the *scope of conflict*, or the arena for legitimate political contestation, did not challenge vested interests? This topic will close by asking a crucial question for understanding American political development: Was the American Revolution truly a *social revolution* or merely a *tax revolt*?

Topic Two: Political Institutions and Processes

The largest course segment is part two, entitled “Political Institutions and Processes.” This segment includes the “nuts and bolts” aspects of American government. For example, how does the Congress, the Courts, and the Presidency work? How does a bill become a law? How does the House and Senate Committee system function? Yet, the intention is to ground some of these nuts and bolts workings in the historical context outlined in segment one. What powers do each branch of government have? How were the concepts of *checks and balances* and *separation of powers* supposed to work? How have they changed over time? For example, the Constitutional role of the Presidency was originally one of head administrator. This was especially important when members of Congress were attending to their personal

affairs back home (which was nearly the entire year). Today however, the President is responsible for an enormous bureaucracy and a foreign policy backed by a powerful economy and a formidable military might. Just as important, since the President today is determined by *indirect popular election*, the President can usually claim to represent the majority of Americans. Consequently, the *State of the Union* address is no longer a verbal or written presentation describing the events that took place while Congressional members were home tending to their farms or business and professional practices, but a televised address with the goal of bringing public pressure to bear on Congress around executive legislative priorities.

We will also examine changes in the other branches of government. Why were Senators originally selected by state legislatures and why was it necessary to pass the *Seventeenth Amendment* to allow for *direct popular election*? How has the work of Congress changed over time? In what ways have the characteristics of the legislators changed? Corresponding with some of these developments, how and why has the federal bureaucracy changed since the days when George Washington managed an administration composed by a mere four *Cabinet* members? How and why has bureaucratic recruitment changed and in what ways does it remain the same? Moreover, one of the most unique aspects of American government is the nature of our elaborate court system and the Supreme Court's power of *Judicial Review*. We will examine a number of defining court cases, such as *Marbury v. Madison*, *Baron v. Baltimore*, *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, and *Gitlow v. New York*, and explore how these impacted the role of the Supreme Court. In week six, we will be catapulted into a discussion about the moral and empirical parameters of state power. Do these changes in executive, legislative, and judicial functions reflect an evolutionary violation of the will of the Constitution's framers, or do they reflect the growing complexity of society and the need to manage that complexity for the public good?

The second segment also examines the role of the media, in what some call the *fourth branch of government*. We will start by asking the following question: what are some of the requirements for a well-functioning democracy and how does the media fit into those requirements? We will examine the relationship between politics and the printed word at the time of the U.S. founding and compare this relationship to the one that exists in the age of radio, television, and the internet. We will look at the relationship between mass education, the media, and *democratic accountability*. We will then move on to ask the critical question about how the media today fulfills some of democracy's needs.

By week nine, our discussion on interest groups, political parties, elections, voting, and campaigns will be picked up. To start off with, we will distinguish between political parties and interest groups and specify the role that each plays in American politics. What role do interest groups play in domestic and foreign policy? This question will in part be answered by looking at an actual case study of how a bill really becomes a law. We will also delve into concepts like the *revolving door of politics*, where former politicians and bureaucrats take up positions as lobbyists or industry leaders, and the *military industrial complex*, where politicians, bureaucrats, and defense contractors cooperate to maintain military spending. We will apply this concept to the U.S. response to the horrors of September 11 and the increasing likelihood of war with Iraq.

Following our discussion on interest groups, we will shift our focus to political parties, or organizations that pool resources together around a common agenda for the purposes of placing its members into elected offices. We will start off by discussing the traditional *tripartite party model*, where the political party consists of three parts: the party in the electorate, the party in government, and the party organization. Using this model, we will ask about the implications that the rise of *independent voters*, or ones with no party affiliation, has for the relevance of political parties. Does the *party-decline thesis*, which suggests that political parties have become less relevant in organizing politics, make sense? Alternatively, are parties simply evolving into different types of organizations with weaker electoral ties, but stronger ties between the between party elites and government? The discussion of political parties and

interest groups will come to a close by tackling the question of *who has power* in the American polity, or alternatively *how is power exercised*? What are some of the features of the American political system that obstructs contestation and under what conditions is contesting the status quo successful?

In the sessions following our discussion of political parties and interest groups, we will briefly talk about *party systems*. Compared to other highly developed democracies, the American political party system is unique insofar as there are two hegemonic political parties rather than a system of three or more dominant parties. Hence, we will talk a bit about the basis of America's *two-party system* versus Continental Europe's *multiparty* models, and then go on to talk about its advantages and disadvantages.

In the final week of segment two, we look at voting, elections, campaigns, and democracy. Some of the most notable topics will include *dealignment*, where political loyalties are abandoned and not replaced by new ones, and *realignment*, where voters rapidly shift their loyalties from one party to another. We will look at several *critical elections*, such as the elections of 1828, 1860, 1932, and 1980, and discuss the basis for realignment and their consequences for policy-making. We will also discuss the *Electoral College* in light of the 2000 election, before focusing on concepts like *soft-money* and *campaign finance*. Most importantly, in the final session, we will raise the question about the relationship between voting, elections, and democracy. Are elections necessary for democracy? Why are they necessary or unnecessary? Do elections necessarily produce democracy? If not, why?

Topic Three: Inclusion and Exclusion in American Political Development

The third and final segment tackles questions of "Inclusion and Exclusion in American Political Development." Stated differently, this segment addresses the shifting boundaries of American citizenship, including questions about who counts as full citizens and what rights and liberties full citizenship entails.

This topic will start off on week eleven, when we break open the concepts of *civil liberties*, or freedoms protected from government interference, and *political rights*, or the right to vote or join political associations. We will then synthesize these concepts with our earlier discussions on the *Bill of Rights*, federalism, and the role of the Supreme Court in arbitration between national and state authority, and between citizens and government authority. We will examine some landmark court cases, such as *Schenck v. United States*, *Mapp v. Ohio*, *Roe v. Wade*, and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. We will also take on some controversial topics, including freedom of speech and assembly, freedom of religion, the right to vote, and the right to privacy. Finally, civil liberties will be wrapped up with a discussion on the act for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism, otherwise known as the Patriot Act.

By week twelve, we will pick up our discussion on *civil rights*, or the use of governmental power to protect individual rights based on group affiliations. As will be shown, the challenge of civil rights can be understood as challenging the ethnic, racial, and gendered parameters of citizenship. In other words, the application of Constitutional liberties and rights is shaped by discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. Civil Rights involve the creation of legal protections to ensure that all Americans enjoy the same rights, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation.

Our civil rights excursion will start by revisiting the *Three-Fifths Compromise*, Slavery, the Civil War, and the *Thirteenth* and *Fourteenth Amendments*. We will expand our discussion by talking about the *Abolitionist Movement*, *Jim Crow* laws, *National American Women Suffrage Association* and the *Nineteenth Amendment*, and the contemporary Civil Rights Movement. Since so many of the civil rights battles were fought in the courts, it will be useful for us to look at several landmark Supreme Court cases, including *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and *Brown v. Board of Education*. Some of the

defining acts and policies that came out of the Civil Rights Movement included the *Civil Rights Act of 1964*, which outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, national origin, and sex; the *Voting Rights Act of 1965*, which gives the federal government the power to monitor elections in cases where discrimination has been a problem, and *Affirmative Action*. In addition to these policies, we will also examine the *Equal Rights Amendment*, which attempted to amend the Constitution by guaranteeing that equal rights could not be denied based up sex. Finally, we will examine the emerging push to constitutionally ban same sex marriages.

The final segment of this topic will be a broad discussion about the politics of race, class, and the welfare state. Here, we will try to find an explanation as to why the U.S. has a *weak welfare state*, e.g. no national healthcare, weak role of demand/employment management, etc. We will start off by looking at America’s minimalistic social safety net in comparison to the approaches taken among Western European countries. We will then explore some explanations for this difference, including the hegemony of anti-statism and private property found in Lockean liberalism and *social contract theory*, the assumption that all people are born equal, the centrist tendencies of America’s two-party system, and the racial bifurcation of the *New Deal* and the realignment that ensued when civil rights attempted to address this bifurcation. We will finish up this discussion by talking about the morality of *social and economic rights* and whether or not they should be incorporated into the U.S. Constitution.

Grade Breakdown

Classes will include lectures and discussions in line with the course progression listed below. As for the discussions specifically, the topics will generally revolve around a news event as it relates to a particular lecture topic, and around some of the specific questions listed in the description above. So, this course will ask you to stay on top of current events and participate in class discussions. Furthermore, disagreement during debates is encouraged and must be respected. Please remember, freedom of speech is to be honored, but so too is the responsibility of respecting others.

Component	Percentage of Final Grade	Calculation	Date
Midterm Exam	40%	(grade * .40) +	TR 10/17: 11:40-1:00
Final Exam	40%	(grade * .40) +	TR 12/19: 11:00-1:00
Article Reviews (4)	20%	(grade * .20) =	TU 12/10
Final grade			

Reading Materials

The following book(s) can be purchased at the campus bookstore: O’Connor, Karen and Sabato, Larry. *American Government: Continuity and Change*.

In addition, I will provide reading handouts in line with the course outline below.

Policies

I do not give make-up exams. Exams are conducted on the aforementioned dates only. Only dire circumstances warrant exceptions. Also, I do not accept late review articles. Please, use this syllabus as a basis for integrating your workload with the demands of personal life and other course obligations. I am here for you if you need help managing your workload.

Since this course is based on the philosophy that experiential learning is the best route for enhancing understanding and critical thinking, attendance is mandatory. Failure to attend on more than TWO

occasions will result in a FIVE point penalty from the final grade for each absence. Perfect attendance (missing no classes) results in a FIVE point bonus added to the final grade.

Important Information

Disability Accommodations and Services

I take disability accommodations very seriously. Any student who has a need of an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss the specific situation as soon as possible. Contact Disability Resources and Services at 215-204-1280 at 100 Ritter Annex to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. If you need assistance, please see me. I will be more than happy to help.

Temple University's Policy on Academic Honesty

"Academic cheating is, generally, the thwarting or breaking of the general rules of academic work or the specific rules of individual courses. It includes falsifying data; submitting without the instructor's approval, the work in one course which was done in another; helping others to plagiarize or cheat from one's own work or another's work; or actually doing the work of another person. The penalty for plagiarism or cheating as a first offense is normally an **F** in the course in which the offense is committed and a report to the Dean. A subsequent offense may in addition be referred to the University Discipline Committee."If you have questions about plagiarism, come see me or send me an email.

Course Outline

Week 1: Sept 3, 5 - Ideas, Contestation, and the Politics of Constitution-Making. Introduction to concepts. Read chapter 1 and handout pp. 1-5

Week 2: Sept 10, 12 - Tax Revolt, Articles of Confederation, Constitutional Convention, Ratification. Read chapter 2

Week 3: Sept 17, 19 – Political Institutions and Processes. Checks and Balances, Separation of Powers, Presidential Systems, and Federalism. Read chapter 3 and handout

Week 4: Sept 24, 26 - The Judiciary: Organization, perspectives on roles, and trends. Read Chapter 9

Week 5: Oct 1, 3 - Congress: Organization, law-making, and trends. Read Chapter 6

Week 6: Oct 8, 10 - The Presidency and Bureaucracy: Organization, administration, and trends. Read Chapters 7 and 8

Week 7: Oct 15, 17 - Midterm Week: Finish uncovered material and review. EXAM: TR 10/17. Study

Week 8: Oct 22, 24 - Politics the Media and Public Opinion. Read Chapter 10

Week 9: Oct 29, 31 - Political Parties, Party Systems, and Interest Groups. Read Chapter 12 and handout

Week 10: Nov 5, 7 - Voting, Elections, Campaigns, and Democracy. Video on campaigns, Read Chapter 11 and handout

Week 11: Nov 12, 14 - Inclusion and Exclusion in American Politics. Civil liberties, state rights versus national authority, the role of the courts, free speech, religion, due process, and privacy. Read Chapter 4 and handout

Week 12: Nov 19, 21 - Civil liberties, civil rights, social exclusion and contestation over citizenship. Read Chapters 4, 5

Week 13: Nov 26 - Civil rights, social exclusion and contestation over citizenship. Video “Eyes on the Prize”, Read Chapter 5

Week 14: Dec 3, 5 - The Politics of Race, Class, and the Welfare State: Why does the U.S. have a weak welfare state? Read handout and section on ‘Policy Portfolio’

Week 15: Dec 10 - Review for Final Exam

Week 16: Dec 19 - FINAL EXAM: TR 12/19: 11:00-1:00