



American Political Process

Professor Nicholas Tampio

Hamilton College

Spring 2008, GOV 116W

ntampio@hamilton.edu

Class Hours: KJ 223,

Section 1: WF 1-2:15

Section 2: WF 2:30-3:45

Office Hours: KJ 135, WF 4-5

Course Overview

The United States of America is arguably the first country built on Enlightenment principles. The American Founders—after reading Hobbes, Locke, Montesquieu, and Hume—designed a country that continues to inspire, perplex, and infuriate the rest of the world. What are the principles of American politics? How do government institutions—the presidency, Congress, and the judiciary—express those principles? How do nongovernmental actors, such as the media and interest groups, affect the political process? One aim of this course is to understand the machinery of American politics.

Though the founders drew the contours of the American political system, they also expected and desired future generations to steer their own course. A second aim of the course, then, is to debate many of the pressing issues of contemporary American politics, including the power of the presidency, the prerogatives of the federal government, the future of political parties, and the justness of affirmative action, redistributive economic policies, and post-9/11 security measures. Students will think about these controversies and, more broadly, learn about how to make a strong political argument.

The lectures and textbook will examine the American political process from several perspectives, including:

- Philosophical – defining key terms of political science
- Historical – tracing the events that shape current politics
- Popular – measuring democratic influence on public policy
- Global – comparing American politics to those of other countries

This course succeeds if, at the end, you can visualize how the American political system operates and how you can successfully participate in it.

Texts

(1) Dautrich and Yalof, *American Government: Historical, Popular, and Global Perspectives* (Cengage, 2008)

- (2) *Faultlines: Debating the Issues in American Politics: Second Edition*, ed. David T. Canon, et.al. (Norton, 2007)
- (3) David Hackett Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas* (Oxford, 2004) * recommended

Course Requirements

As an introductory course, students are expected to learn the basics of the American political process. The midterm will primarily test your knowledge of historical events, facts, and concepts.

As a writing intensive course, students have the opportunity to research and present on controversies in American politics. On the days of the debates, two or three students will argue **yes** and two or three students will argue **no** (each student will present twice in the semester). At the start of the class you present, turn in a 6-8 page research paper on the history of the issue, popular opinion on the debate, global perspectives on the matter, and your own position on the controversy. Students are expected to read the best scholarly materials on the issue—e.g. 4-6 academic articles and books found on Academic Search Premier— and go to the **Writing Center** for the first research paper. The first research paper may be revised (i.e., clearer and deeper thinking, increased evidence, better organization) within one week of its return, for up to a one-letter grade improvement. The format for the debates is that the yeses each speak for 5-7 minutes, the nos each speak for 5-7 minutes, we have 10 minutes of questions for the presenters, and then open discussion. I ask that you space out your presentation dates.

Students also are required to write two 4-page response pieces to two debates, one before the break and one after. After listening to the speakers, how would you answer the question? Provide facts and ideas from the presentations and additional evidence. Responses are due the class after student presentations.

Grade Distribution

First research paper	20
First research presentation	5
Second research paper	25
Second research presentation	5
First response piece	10
Second response piece	10
Midterm	20
Class participation	5

Class Schedule (*denotes student presentations)

1. January 23 – Introduction: Perspectives on American Government
American Government, Chapter 1
Office hours: 10 am – Noon

2. January 25 – Rebecca Hewitt on Research Methods in KJ 220
3. January 30 – The Founding and the Constitution
American Government, Chapter 2
Students sign up for class presentations.
4. February 1 – American Political Culture: Liberty and Freedom
David Hacker Fisher, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas*, Introduction
5. February 6 – Federalism
American Government, Chapter 3
6. February 8 – Should states be allowed to legalize marijuana?*
Faultlines, Chapter 3
7. February 13 - Individual Rights and Liberties
American Government, Chapter 4
8. February 15 – Should national security trump civil liberties?*
Faultlines, Chapter 4
9. February 20 - Civil Rights, Equality, and Social Movements
American Government, Chapter 5
10. February 22 – Should colleges practice affirmative action?*
Faultlines, Chapter 5
11. February 27 – Congress
American Government, Chapter 6
12. February 29 – Should Congress distribute ‘pork’?*
Faultlines, Chapter 12
13. March 5 – The Presidency
American Government, Chapter 7
14. March 7 – Should the US have an imperial presidency?*
Faultlines, Chapter 13
15. March 12 – Midterm Review

16. March 14 – **Midterm Exam**
17. April 2 – The Federal Bureacracy
American Government, Chapter 8
18. April 4 – The American Judidiciary
American Government, Chapter 9
19. April 9 – Public Opinion
American Government, Chapter 10
20. April 11 – Is America polarized?*
Faultlines, Chapter 6
21. April 16 – Interest Groups
American Government, Chapter 11
22. April 18 – The Media and Politics
American Government, Chapter 12
23. April 23 – Do democracies require print newspapers?*
Faultlines, Chapter 7
24. April 25 – Political Parties
American Government, Chapter 13
25. April 30 – Should America have a third political party?*
Faultlines, Chapter 9
26. May 2 – Voting and Participation
American Government, Chapter 14
27. May 7 – Campaigns and Elections
American Government, Chapter 15
28. May 9 – How has the American political system changed after 9/11?
9-11: Aftershocks of the Attack