Political Science 10100-003
Introduction to American Government

Professor Shaffer
MWF 3:30 P.M
Office: 2226 BRNG
Phone: (49)6-3921
Email: wshaffer@purdue.edu
Office Hours: By Appointment

Purpose

The basic purpose of the course is to provide the student with an increased awareness and understanding of the manner in which the American political system functions. Toward that end, the course will focus upon the theory and philosophy underlying the American system, political elites in America, mass attitudes and behavior, political parties, policy-making institutions (e.g. Congress, presidency, courts) and the performance of democracy in the United States.

In an introductory American government course, it’s tempting for you to assume that you “already know this stuff.” After all, most all of you grew up in the U.S., breathed American air, and took “this stuff” in high school. I ask that you fight this natural temptation. Please don’t assume automatically, for example, that you know what federalism is and why it was adopted in the U.S., or what liberalism means, or how the Supreme Court got its powers, or why American political parties came into existence. You may recognize these terms, but remember that you really can increase your understanding of American politics and government.

When studying the various topics we shall cover, you will encounter a number of important political science concepts. Please strive to understand (1) how these concepts/topics are defined/described, (2) their relevance for democratic governance, and (3) how they might affect your personal lives. The questions and concepts reported in at the end of each chapter of the main textbook in the list of reading assignments should assist in this process. If you can answer those questions and know the concepts rather completely, then you’re off to a good start—but only a start!

Course Approach

Class sessions will involve lecture and discussion. However, there is one important exception to this general rule. I have selected some videos which explore important themes in the reading and lectures. These videos can be viewed in one class period, a particularly attractive feature. As with the lectures and reading assignments, examination questions will include points made in these films. This is not Friday afternoon at the movies—or Monday or Wednesday at the movies for that matter! The films selected as of this writing are as follows:

“Just the Facts”: This is a carefully constructed assessment of the Declaration of Independence, arguably one of the most important documents in the American political experience. The film covers the Declaration’s immediate impact, as well as its long-term relevance for Americans’ liberties and rights.

“Unfinished Business”: In assessing American lapses in the protection of freedoms, the U.S. internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II is an instructive case in point. The constitutional principles at issue then certainly have continued relevance today.

“Free Speech for Sale”: Freedom of Speech is a basic requirement for democratic governance. Otherwise, how will government leaders know what citizens want? However, a very real problem arises when we consider that the flow of information and preferences is often determined by vested interests with very deep pockets.
In *The Warning*, veteran FRONTLINE producer Michael Kirk unearths the hidden history of the nation's worst financial crisis since the Great Depression. At the center of it all he finds Brooksley Born, who speaks for the first time on television about her failed campaign to regulate the secretive, multitrillion-dollar derivatives market whose crash helped trigger the financial collapse in the fall of 2008.

Scalia and O’Connor interviews: Antonin Scalia is a sharp-witted conservative justice on the U.S. Supreme Court, while Sandra Day O’Connor was more of a centrist during her tenure on the Court. These interviews will convey the importance of the ideologies justices bring to their decisions on constitutional principles.

**Attendance**

Overall, attendance is a good thing. Why? The answer is two-fold: (1) Not all material is covered in the reading, and (2) as Woody Allen once quipped, “half of life is just showing up.” So, why am I not taking attendance in this class? After all, it is quite clear that a higher percentage of students come to class when attendance is taken and given some weight in the final grade. Therefore, I am assigning a small weight to attendance in your overall grade.

**Mutual Respect**

Students will ask questions or state an opinion on a range of topics. There is an old expression to the effect that one should discuss anything other than religion or politics, and the reason is simple—people feel passionately about those two topics. As a result, sometimes debate can be heated, and even become downright nasty, even personally nasty. You have the right to hold and express whatever opinions you like, no matter how unacceptable they may seem to your classmates. They can disagree with you, even vehemently, but they must accord you proper respect. Likewise, you must respect their right to express their views freely. By the way, no one will be graded on the basis of their personal political attitudes, regardless of the content of those opinions.

**Reading Assignments**

Why, you may ask, should I complete the readings the week they are assigned? He’s not going to know, and I can read all the stuff before the exam. My answer is two-fold: (1) I think you will absorb more of the material, and (2) it will make rereading and reviewing the material for exams more productive. Simply stated, we seek to convey a knowledge base for some of the most important features of the American political system. We can achieve this primary goal only if you immerse yourself in the reading material, incorporate material from class sessions, and master the subject matter in preparation for exams.

**Essay**

Late in the semester an essay assignment will be completed. More on that as the semester unfolds.

**Academic Integrity**

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. For purposes of this course, we are talking about any form of cheating on the exams. It is the policy of the instructor to assign an F to anyone caught cheating on an exam. Violations will be reported to the Dean of Students, accompanied by a recommendation that the student be reprimanded by the Dean of Students. For a general review of Purdue University’s policy on academic integrity, please read Purdue’s policy at this link: [http://www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/academicintegritybrochure.php](http://www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/academicintegritybrochure.php) We are all expected to adhere to Purdue’s policy on academic integrity.
Required Books


Examination Dates

Exam #1: Friday, September 20  
Exam #2: Friday, October 25  
Exam #3: To Be Announced

Grading

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<th>Component</th>
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<tr>
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Reading Assignments

**August 19-23:** Theories of Governance  
Janda, *et.al.*, Chapter 14  
Fiorina, Chapter 1

**August 26-30:** Political Culture  
Janda, *et.al.*, Chapter 1  
Fiorina, Chapters 2-3

**September 2-6:** Origins And Development Of Government Structure  
Janda, *et.al.*, Chapter 2  
Fiorina, Chapter 4
SEPTEMBER 2: LABOR DAY

September 9-13: Federalism
Janda, *et al.*, Chapter 3
Fiorina, Chapter 5

September 16-20: Civil Liberties
Janda, *et al.*, Chapter 12
Fiorina, Chapter 6

Examination #1: Friday, September 20

September 23-27: Civil Rights
Janda, *et al.*, Chapter 13
Fiorina, Chapters 7-8

Sept. 30-Oct. 4: Public Opinion
Janda, *et al.*, Chapter 4, pp.111-130
Fiorina, Chapter 9

October 7-11: The News Media
Janda, *et al.*, Chapter 4, pp.130-146
Fiorina, Chapter 10
Yates, Introduction and Chapter 1

OCTOBER 7-8: OCTOBER BREAK

October 14-18: Political Parties
Janda, *et al.*, Chapter 6
Yates, Chapter 2

October 21-25: Campaigns And Elections
Janda, *et al.*, Chapter 5
Yates, Chapter 3
Examination #2: Friday, October 25

Oct. 28-Nov. 1: Interest Groups
Janda, et.al., Chapter 7
Yates, Chapter 4

November 4-8: Congress
Janda, et.al., Chapter 8
Yates, Chapter 5

November 11-15: The Presidency
Janda, et.al., Chapter 9
Yates, Chapter 6

November 18-22: The Bureaucracy
Janda, et.al., Chapter 10
Yates, Chapter 7

Essay Paper: Friday, November 22

November 25-29: The Federal Courts
Janda, et.al., Chapter 11

November 27-29: Thanksgiving

December 2-6: Some Final Thoughts
Fiorina, Chapter 11
Yates, Chapter 8

Examination #3: TBA