Precis

This course examines national politics in the United States of America. It studies how historical patterns of political, economic, and social relations shaped contemporary US political institutions, broadly understood, and how such contemporary relations are altering those institutions. It will also examine contending ideas about how domestic life within the US should be ordered and how these ideas affect and are affected by political institutions. We will also examine the concept of “American Exceptionalism” – the idea that politics and society in the United States evolved in a fundamentally different way from that of democratizing and industrializing countries, especially European ones.

Requirements

All students must do the assigned reading. I reserve the right to distribute unannounced in-class quizzes on the assigned readings for the week. In addition to course readings, students should follow current events in US politics. The New York Times, The Washington Post or National Public Radio (NPR) news broadcasts (on WOI 640 AM and KTPR 91.1 FM) are excellent daily news sources. I will also post items on the course website.

The main course website is at this URL: <http://www.public.iastate.edu/~pol_s.215/>. For regular information and relevant links you should monitor the main course website. There is also a WebCT site for participating in the discussion forum, releasing test grades, and posting non-public copyrighted material under fair use provisions. The WebCT site also has a number of study tools linked to the main text American Government and Politics Today.

ISU advises: “If a student has a disability that qualifies under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and requires accommodations, he/she should contact the Disability Resources (DR) office for information on appropriate policies and procedures. DR is located on the main floor of the Student Services Building, Room 1076; their phone is 515-294-6624.”

Class Participation: All students should be prepared to participate in class discussions and in the on-line discussion via WebCT. Class participation on the WebCT discussion forum is worth 10 percent of the course grade. Each student has a D as his or her default grade. If students participate well, their grades will be increased. Students who fail to participate or who do so poorly will get a D.
Students are not expected to perform Periclean orations, but everyone should be prepared to discuss the assigned readings, current events, and question that I pose. Criticisms of points made in readings, by fellow students, and by yours truly are welcome, and debates may emerge among students. Students should respect their classmates’ contributions, and refrain from partisan or parochial philippics. The purpose of these discussions is not to win imaginary debating points, but to learn beyond solitary reading and unexamined listening.

**In-Class Quizzes:** There will be four in-class, written quizzes. Each is worth 10% of your course grade (40% total). The highest grade will replace the lowest grade at the end of the term. The quiz dates are:

- 8 Sep.
- 22 Sep.
- 27 Oct.
- 1 Dec.

**Extra-Class Essays:** There will two essays, similar to an op-ed article. Each will be 800-1000 words long based on a question that I present. The first essay will count for 5%, the second for 15% of the course grade. Students will be assigned to teams with different due dates.

**Final Exam:** There will be a final exam similar in format to the in-class quizzes. It will count for 30% of the final grade.

**Penalties:** Students must submit take-home assignments on time and sit at the designated in-class tests. Students may not ‘make-up’ tests or papers at will. There are two exceptions. First, for personal emergencies (e.g., a death in the family, medical problems), students should obtain a note from the dean of students or their physician. Second, for students with extra-curricular activities that conflict with in-class tests, arrangements for an alternate date and time must be made at least a week in advance. The student must provide verification of the activity in order to be eligible for an alternate test appointment. I do not accept notification after the fact (e.g., “I didn’t turn in my paper last week because I had a match/concert”).

A computer mishap will not excuse a late paper. You should make frequent and multiple back-ups of your work (to at least 2 separate floppy disks or other removable media), so that you never lose more than one hour’s worth of work. If you own your own computer, be sure you familiarize yourself with the ISU’s computer labs in case your system breaks down.

**Grade Components**

Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

- Participation: 10%
- In-Class Tests: 40%
- Take-Home Essays: 20%
- Final Exam: 30%

Each component will be assigned a letter grade, converted to a grade point, and multiplied by its percentage weighting. I do not accept make-up assignments, re-writing of papers, or extra-credit work.
Academic Honesty

Iowa State University regulations regarding academic honesty will be enforced. See Iowa State University Catalog, “Academic Dishonesty,” p.38-39. The penalty for plagiarism or cheating on exams is failure for the course.

Readings

There is one main text for this course at University Bookstore (294.5684) in the Memorial Union and the Campus Bookstore (292.1616), 2300 Lincoln Way.):


The boldface abbreviation AG indicates that a reading is in that book. Other readings are either available via WebCT or from a terminal on the campus network via the URL listed.

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23, 25 & 30 Aug.
Introduction: The American Political System
Chap. 1-2, AG

No Class on 1 Sep

6 & 8 Sep.
Federalism and Its Discontents
Chap. 3, AG
Selections from The Federalist Papers

13 & 15 Sep.
Liberty, Freedom and Equality
Chap.4, AG

20 & 22 Sep.
Rights, Equality, and “Fraternity”
Chap. 5, AG

27 & 29 Sep.
The Public and “Public Opinion”
Chap. 6, AG
“The Persuaders”, Frontline video (in class 27 Sep.)
4 & 6 Oct.
Pluralism and Organized Interests…
   Chap. 7, AG

11 & 13 Oct.
…v. Civil Society and Associational Life
   Selections from Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*
   - Of the Uses which the Americans Make of Public Associations.
   - Of the Relation of Public Associations and the Newspapers.
   - Relation of Civil to Political Associations.

18 & 20 Oct.
Parties and Politics
   Chap. 8, AG

Campaigns and Elections
   Chap. 9, AG

1 & 3 Nov.
Congress and Representative Democracy
   Chap. 10, AG

8 & 10 Nov.
The Presidency
   Chap. 11, AG

15 & 17 Nov.
The Bureaucracy
   Chap. 12, AG

29 Nov. & 1 Dec.
The Judiciary
   Chap 13, AG

6 & 8 Dec.
Conclusions

   Final Exam: 13 Dec. 9:45-11:45 a.m. (tentative)