

EXPLORING AMERICAN POLITICS

POSC 151 | Fall 2008

INSTRUCTOR: Matthew Davis
TIME: M (151-010D), W (151-011D), or F (151-012D) 12:20pm-1:10pm
ROOM: Purnell 228 (010D & 011D) or Sharp Lab 116 (012D)
OFFICE HOURS: Wednesday 10am-11am & 1:10pm-3pm, or by appointment
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Course Description and Objectives

Exploring American Politics (POSC151) is a one credit course which serves to satisfy the university First Year Experience requirement. POSC151 will complement POSC150 (American Government), but will be conducted independently of your coursework in that class and will operate under its own guidelines and grading criteria. This class has been designed to help give you the skills necessary to succeed in a university environment, as well as offer an opportunity to explore topics in American politics in a small group, discussion-based setting.

The course will be divided into three major themes. The first third of the course will examine the concept of democracy, and what it means in the context of the United States political system. During the middle third we will examine the US electoral system and the ongoing Presidential election campaign. Finally, we will conclude with a discussion of the US foreign policy process. Throughout, we will focus on building practical skills that will be useful during your university career, such as public speaking, debate, research skills, citation skills, and writing skills.

Readings

Students are expected to both do the required readings and be prepared to discuss them in class on the date they are assigned. There are no required texts – all readings will be distributed either in class or electronically via e-mail.

E-mail:

I will regularly use the UD POBox system to send e-mails to the class, including readings, important e-mails such as updates to the syllabus, last minute schedule changes, etc. Therefore, it is imperative that you have an activated UD account that you check regularly (or have your UD e-mail forwarded to an account that you check regularly).

Grading:

Your grade in this class will be based on attendance, class participation, debate memos, a group position paper, and a group presentation.

15% Attendance
25% Class Participation
25% Debate Memos
25% Group Position Paper
10% Group Presentation

Grading Scale:

A	93-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D	65-69
F	64 and below

Class Participation: Since this is a small class, your participation is crucial. Class will alternate between lecture and seminar formats, and I expect that you will be prepared to discuss the readings each day that class is held. Students who are consistently unprepared for discussion or do not do the readings will find this is reflected in their final participation grade. The majority of your participation grade, however, will be determined by your participation in the two debates which are scheduled to take place at the beginning and the end of the semester.

Debate Memos: There will be two scheduled debates throughout the semester. On the day of each debate, you will be expected to turn in a two page paper outlining your assigned position on the topic under discussion. Your position (for or against) will be assigned randomly, so be prepared to argue a position which you yourself may not agree with. These memos should not require any outside research; however, if you do use outside research or if you directly draw ideas from the assigned readings, they must be properly cited.

Position Paper & Presentation: The class will be divided into groups of three. Each group will write a four to five page paper discussing the United States electoral system. The paper should summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the electoral system, discuss arguments for and against it, and then offer a convincing argument about why the system should (or should not) be changed. Some outside research should be used; it and all ideas not your own must be properly cited. You will each then have the opportunity to submit your argument to the class in a brief (no more than five minutes) presentation.

Requirements & Administrative Notes:

Attendance is required for this course. Everyone starts out with a 100% score for attendance. You may miss two classes for unexcused reasons. After that, I will deduct 10% from your grade for each class missed. If you arrive late, you will receive half credit for attendance on that day.

Since we are discussing political issues, class debates during discussion may at times become heated. Please be polite to your peers and respect their different opinions. Students who are rude or disrespectful during class discussion may be asked to leave. Anyone disrupting lecture will be asked to leave. Please turn off your cell phones before coming to class, and mute your laptop if you are using one to take notes. **Do not send text messages during class.** If I see you doing so, you will be asked to leave.

Papers should be turned in on the dates due, as indicated on the syllabus. Late work will be penalized by one-half a letter grade for each day that it is late (but the lowest grade I will give is an F (50%), so it is always to your advantage to turn in your work, no matter how late). Extra credit papers (if offered) **may not** be turned in late.

Academic Integrity:

Cheating and/or plagiarism **will not be tolerated.** Anyone caught cheating or submitting work that is not their own **will be reported to the Judicial System as outlined in the Student Guide to University Policies.**

Illnesses & Extenuating Circumstances:

If you cannot fulfill the course requirements due to a legitimate extenuating circumstance (illness, death in the family, emergency, etc.) please contact the Office of Campus Life (<http://www.udel.edu/campuslife/>). The staff there will help you with the necessary documentation and notify your professors as needed.

Schedule and Assigned Readings:

Week 1 - Course introduction, get to know you, etc.

Week 2 – What is democracy?

Readings:

“The Economist Intelligence Unit’s Index of Democracy”
http://www.economist.com/media/pdf/Democracy_Index_2007_v3.pdf

Week 3 – The state of democracy in the United States

Readings:

The Federalist #10
<http://www.constitution.org/fed/federa10.htm>

Freedom House 2005 Country Report
http://www.freedomhouse.org/inc/content/pubs/fiw/inc_country_detail.cfm?year=2005&country=6858&pf

Week 4 – DEBATE #1 – Is the United States a democracy?

Debate Memo #1 due

Week 5 – Problems of the US electoral system

Readings:

“The Election that Got Away”
http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1960/6/1960_6_4.shtml

“Was Nixon Robbed?”
<http://www.slate.com/id/91350/>

“The Brilliance of the Electoral College”
http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/oped/articles/2008/07/16/the_brilliance_of_the_electoral_college?mode=PF

“The Indefensible Electoral College”
http://www.motherjones.com/cgi-bin/print_article.pl?url=http://www.motherjones.com/commentary/columns/2004/10/10_202.html

Week 6 – Doing political science research

Readings:

“Guide to Library Research”
<http://www2.lib.udel.edu/usered/starting.htm> (browse through the links)

“Reliability of Wikipedia”
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reliability_of_Wikipedia

Start research for position paper (in class)
Meet in library computer lab (tentative)

Week 7 – Media, Elections, & Public Opinion

Readings:

“Bad News”
<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/31/books/review/31POSNER.html>

“The Polarization Express”

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A56431-2004Dec10.html>

“Red Media, Blue Media”

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/03/AR2006050300865.html>

“Early Media Coverage Focuses on Horse Race”

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/politics/jan-june07/mediaprimary_06-12.html

Hand in list of sources for position paper

Week 8 – How to write (and cite in) an academic paper

Readings:

“How to Write a Five Paragraph Essay”

Handout

“How to Write a Position Paper”

<http://homepages.uhwo.hawaii.edu/~writing/position.htm>

Why, when, and how to cite sources, from:

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~sources/contents.html>

“Chicago Manual of Style Author-Date System”

<http://library.osu.edu/sites/guides/chicagogd.php>

Meet in computer lab (tentative)

Create an outline of position paper (in class)

Week 9 – Electing the President

Video – The Architect (in class)

Outline of position paper due

Week 10 – Position paper presentations

Position paper due

Week 11 – The case for (and against) the War in Iraq

Readings:

“Why We Went to War”

<http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/003/236jmcdbd.asp>

“Because We Could”

<http://www.cnn.com/2003/US/06/04/nyt.friedman/>

“Iraq: Wrong Place, Wrong Time, Wrong War”

<http://www.cato.org/research/articles/healy-030101.html>

“The Moral Case Against the Iraq War”

<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20040531/savoy/single>

Week 12 – Did the policy process go wrong?

Readings:

“Intelligence, Policy, and the War in Iraq”

<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20060301faessay85202/paul-r-pillar/intelligence-policy-and-the-war-in-iraq.html>

“How did we get it so wrong?”

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2004/feb/04/iraq.iraq3>

“How did I get the Iraq war so wrong? I didn't”

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,23404628-7583,00.html>

Week 13 – DEBATE #2 – Was the invasion of Iraq appropriate?

Debate Memo #2 Due