

POLS 101.001  
American Government  
TR 10:50 – 12:05p Maybank 316

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Does it matter that one in five adults believes the right to own and raise pets and the right to drive a car are First Amendment rights? The same poll (conducted in 2006) found that more than half of the respondents could name two of the five main characters from “The Simpsons” while only 28% could name two or more of the five fundamental freedoms in the First Amendment—should we care? What does it say about American “democracy” when the United States ranks 21<sup>st</sup> lowest of 22 democratic countries in voter turnout, but 1<sup>st</sup> highest among 18 in incarceration rates? Are we still a “democracy” when only 16 percent seats in the U.S. Congress are held by women? Will there be consequences for you as a result of the differential voting rates of those over 65 (77% in 2008) and those between the ages of 18-29 (51% in 2008)? Can you have real political equality when the top 1% of Americans - who earn an average of \$862,000 each after tax (or \$1.3m before tax) - receives more money than the 110 million Americans in the bottom 40% of the income distribution, whose income averages \$21,350 each year?

These are some of the many questions we’ll confront together in this course about American politics and government. Although this isn’t a presidential or even a midterm election year, elections have consequences. The current debate on health care is being shaped by the outcome of last November’s election as well as by the future congressional elections looming in 2010. The United States is still at war on two fronts and the threat of terrorism is ever-present. In what specific ways are you affected by living in a national at war? Perhaps you don’t feel it directly, perhaps you are someone you love has served or is currently serving in the military. Without a draft, there is a sharp demarcation in *how* we experience living in a nation at war.

Although this course will focus on the structural and procedural aspects of government and governing, the real action is found in “politics.” Politics is all about making choices individually and collectively as a society. As students in a social science course, we’ll also spend some time talking about and analyzing how decisions are made. One of the guiding principles of social science is capacity to make reasoned judgments based on systematic inquiry and the appropriate use of evidence. In politics, emotional appeals often trump systematic inquiry and evidence—we’ll focus on how to tell the difference and how to build a solid argument to formulate and support a personal position.

What matters most in really enjoying this class is that you fully immerse yourself in politics—at least for the semester! We will begin each class with a discussion of politics and current events. To be informed, at a minimum, you have to commit to reading a national newspaper daily. If you live in the dorms or you get to the library coffee shop early enough, you can pick up the *New York Times* for free thanks to the campus readership program. If you prefer a personal subscription, you can get one through the bookstore for \$33.50. You can also read the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* online and I encourage you to sample widely a variety of opinion literature, blogs, late-night comedy, etc. Reading news analysis daily is an acquired habit—one that will last a lifetime if you develop it now. Make the commitment.

***Required Course Materials***

*American Government & Politics Today: The Essentials*, 2009-2010 Edition, Bardes. (AGPT)

*American Democracy in Peril: Eight Challenges to America’s Future*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, Hudson. (ADP)

*Citizen Democracy: Political Activists in a Cynical Age*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Frantzich. (CD)

Additional reading assignments can be found on Electronic Reserve (ER). Password: Vote.

## ***Course Goals***

*Conceptual tools for a lifetime.* A basic goal of the course is to provide you with the conceptual tools that will allow you to stay informed about American politics for a lifetime. While this entails learning some basic facts about American politics, a more important skill is developing the analytical tools and social science disposition that will allow you to understand, interpret, and use standard sources of information on American politics.

*Normative vs. Empirical analysis.* A second goal is to understand the difference between "normative" and "empirical" analysis of politics. "Normative" analysis means applying a value judgment; "empirical" analysis means observing what is. For example, it may be possible for both liberals and conservatives to agree that voter turnout increases when registration laws are relaxed—although they may disagree strongly on whether voter registration laws should be more lenient. Although political scientists inevitably have differing normative perspectives, the discipline is grounded in a shared belief that empirical analysis of politics can advance our understanding of politics through logical argument, the statement of testable hypotheses, and careful empirical investigation of those hypotheses. We also hope that the more we understand about politics, the more likely we are to reach normative agreement. For example, the more we understand about the relationship between poverty and crime, the more we may be able to agree on the appropriate policies.

*Free and open dialogue.* This nation is founded on an ideal of freedom of speech that is often difficult to implement and practice. This course should provide you with the experience of having a free and open dialogue on constitutional, political, and policy issues. One of the premises of democratic government is that it is possible to have such a debate, even involving people with diametrically opposed views, without rancor or harmful emotional attacks. This ideal is sometimes difficult to carry out—one need only look at the “town hall” meetings on health care for a ready example. The College has a special responsibility to demonstrate the possibility and power of free and open democratic discourse, in which individuals are respected and encouraged to present their opinions. The ground rule for debate in our class is respect for other people and their point of view, no matter how different it may be from your own. You should feel that your views are challenged this semester, but you should never feel personally threatened or belittled.

## ***Course Orientation***

Class sessions will involve a mix of lecture, film, and guest presentations, but most centrally, it will include a collective and critical discussion of course concepts based on the assigned reading material. Much of the time, I will begin and facilitate the early discussion, but then I will hand off the discussion to someone in the class. Participants in this course should consider themselves members of a learning community. As such, you all have certain rights and responsibilities in relation one another and with regard to the work we will be doing together. The first of these is that you come to class having thoroughly read the assigned material, thought about the significant themes, and prepared yourself to ask questions and engage in discussion with classmates. Each of you should assume that everyone in class will accept the responsibility to come to class prepared.

## ***Student Responsibilities***

Regular class attendance, on-time arrival, and careful preparation for each class are required. I will not always take formal attendance, but you will be held accountable for your attendance. While I would rather you come late than not at all if rare circumstances conspire against you, chronic tardiness is not acceptable. If you attend class and do the readings, but still have difficulty, I will do everything I can to help you understand the material. Don't expect much sympathy though if you are not holding up your end of the deal by reading, completing the class assignments and coming to class. If a crisis arises, get into see me immediately--don't wait, thinking it will go away. Students are expected to conduct themselves at all times in a manner consistent with the Classroom Code of Conduct. Turn off your cell phones when you enter class—if circumstances require that you be accessible for emergencies, please let me know and turn your phone to vibrate.

### ***Special Circumstances***

If you have any kind of special circumstances that I should be aware of, please let me know right away. If you have Disability or Learning accommodations of any kind, please make the appropriate notifications and arrangements with the Center for Students with Disabilities within the first week of class. Alternatively, if you have any sort of undiagnosed learning disability, a physical impairment of any kind that will require special arrangements for exams or papers, if you are an athlete or member of any club or organization that will travel, let me know. I will keep the information you share with me strictly confidential, but in order to create the best environment for your academic success, I need to know if there are circumstances that may interfere with your performance in the course

### ***Office Hours and Ways to Contact Me***

I have posted office hours every week. You can find these at the top of this syllabus (Monday and Wednesday from 10-12). During these hours I will be in my office as promised. On the rare occasions that I will not be available during office hours, I will do my best to let you know that in advance. That said, you should feel free to simply stop by during my office hours—no appointment necessary. If my posted hours do not fit your schedule, I will be more than happy to make an appointment with you or you can simply stop by at another time—I will usually be in my office (or nearby) between 8:30a-5:00p aside from meetings, classes and other forms of College business. I am very accessible by email for quick questions. Please take the initiative to contact me if you have questions, problems, or if special circumstances arise. I would also encourage you to use my office hours to come in and introduce yourself. I have given you my office phone number at the top of the syllabus and my home number is 723-6910. You should call me at home only if an emergency arises or you have questions that cannot be handled by email prior to the next day. Please call before 10pm. My office phone has Voice Mail. When you leave a message be sure to speak slowly and clearly and to leave your full name and a phone number so that I can return your call.

### ***Electronic Reserves***

This course will occasionally make use of the library's electronic reserves. Access this service from <http://ereserve.cofc.edu> or from the library's homepage. To access our course material, choose my name from the Instructor pull-down menu (Ford), then POLS 101. The password is "Vote" with a Cap V.

### ***The College Reads!***

Beginning this year, a common reading has been selected for the campus. All students, faculty and staff are encouraged to read the selection and then join a reading circle, book club, or discussion group. Information on these will be distributed throughout September. This year the book is *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brien. The author will speak on campus on Friday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Carolina First Arena. There will be additional programs, lectures, films, and exhibits related to the book and its theme announced throughout the year. I encourage you to read the book (available in the library for loan and across campus in a variety of locations) and get involved.

***Illness and Class Attendance*** As most of you know, there are a variety of fears surrounding an outbreak of H1N1 (also known as swine flu) on campus. If you experience flu-like symptoms, please visit Health Services immediately. If you test positive for the flu, you should take steps to limit your exposure to other people—this means do not go to class! Use email to alert your professors that you are ill and then follow the instructions of the medical professionals about your immediate care and recovery. When the flu vaccines are available, I encourage you to get the shot! There will no doubt be other announcements coming from the College of Charleston administration

## ***Course Requirements***

There will be two in-class examinations and a final examination given in December, two participation essays, and a “getting involved” exercise required for the course. There will be other assignments that you complete during class time.

***Examinations*** There will be two midterm examinations during the semester and a final exam (each worth 20%) as scheduled by the College on Tuesday, December 15 from 8am- 11am. Each exam will cover one-third of the course material. The final exam will feature a more comprehensive essay question as well. The exam format for all three will be a combination of objective, short-answer, and essay questions. I will distribute a study guide one week in advance of each exam. You are encouraged to form study groups to use in reviewing the material.

***Getting Involved Assignment*** This exercise, worth 20% of your final grade, is designed to introduce you to the community, to politics, and to one another--face to face. The assignment requires that you engage in a political activity—some of the options are more involved than others—and then write me a paper explaining what you did and reflecting on the various incentives or barriers to participation, and including some reflection on what your chosen activity meant to you. See the assignment sheet at the end of the syllabus for details.

***Participation Essays (2 @ 10 % each)*** In order to help me assess the quality of your participation in the seminar and in other aspects of our work this semester, you will write two essays detailing and assessing your own participation in and outside of class. Effectively, this will allow me to evaluate your participation beyond simply the number of times you might speak in class. I will be looking for ways that you connect this class to events on campus, to your daily news consumption, and to your reflection on the issues we discuss. This exercise is described in more detail on the assignment sheet at the end of the syllabus.

## ***Paper Policies and Due Dates***

Unless otherwise specified, all writing assignments are due at the start of class on the date noted on the syllabus or paper assignment sheet. For each day an assignment is late, 5% will be deducted from the final grade. This applies to everyone, no exceptions. You should print out a copy of your work a full 24 hours before it is due to avoid any delays due to computer problems or other glitches. Make sure to keep a hard copy of your work until I have graded and returned the paper you submitted. No work of any kind will be accepted after 5:00p on December 15, 2009.

### ***Important Dates***

- Examination #1 (in class): Tuesday, September 22 (20%)
- Participation Essay #1: Due at the start of class on, Tuesday, October 6 (10%)
- Examination #2 (in class): Tuesday, November 3 (20%)
- Getting Involved Exercise/Paper: Due at the start of class on Thursday, November 5 (20%)
- Participation Essay #2: Due at the start of class on Tuesday, December 1 (10%)
- Final Examination (in classroom): Tuesday, December 15 @ 8-11am (20%)

***Grades*** Grades for individual assignments and the final grade in the course will be based on the following scale: 93-100 A; 90-92 A-; 88-89 B+; 83-87 B; 80-82 B-; 78-79 C+; 73-77 C; 70-72 C-; 68-69 D+; 63-67 D; 60-62 D-; below 60 F. If you have any questions about how your work is evaluated or the basis for a grade, come and see me.

***Academic Dishonesty*** This subject is very important! When you enrolled in the College of Charleston, you agreed to abide by the Honor Code. I expect you to abide by that code and indeed it is the only way for you to maintain the integrity and value of your degree. If you are found to have cheated on an exam, plagiarized any portion of a paper, or engaged in any other form of academic fraud, you will fail this course and I will vigorously pursue prosecution under the Honor Code. Penalties may include expulsion or a grade of XF. Ignorance is never a defense—if you have questions, please ask.

## Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

### *August*

25: Introductions and Expectations

### Foundations of American Government: Values, Structures, Documents

27: Is Government Necessary? If so, what type of government is best?

Reading: Chapter 1, AGPT

Introduction: Models of Democracy, ADP

Introduction and Chapter 12, *Citizen Democracy*

\*\*College Calendar Note: 8-31-09 is the last day to Drop or Add a course for fall

### *September*

01: An Emerging Philosophy of Government: a statement of values and principles

Reading: Declaration of Independence, Appendix A, AGPT

Chapter 2, AGPT, pp. 31-37

Chapter 3, ADP

03: No class, No Office Hours—Professor Ford attending the APSA meeting in Toronto

Reading: Chapter 7, Inequality, ADP

08: Foundations of American Government—building a government based on principles/values

Reading: Articles of Confederation (ER)

Chapter 2, AGPT, pp. 37-49

U.S. Constitution, AGPT, pp. 62-71

Chapter 1, *Citizen Democracy*

10: Constitutional Mechanisms designed to Control Government: Separation of Powers

Reading: *The Federalist Papers*, # 47, 48, 51 (ER)

Chapter 1, ADP

15: Constitutional Mechanisms designed to Control Government: Federalism

Reading: Chapter 3, AGPT

Chapter 2, *Citizen Democracy*

In class: “Moment in Crisis—System Failure” (DVD)

17: Discussion and Reflection Day—Evaluating the Constitution—Is it time for a change?”

Reading: excerpt from *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* (ER)

\*\*Constitution Day Lecture—September 17, 2009 @ 3:00p—Tate Center 207

“Criminals and Victims: Is Mediation Possible?” by attorney Jill HaLevi

**22: Exam One—in class** (study guide distributed in class on 9/15/09)

## II. Government’s Limits and Obligations: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

24 - 29: Limits on Government—Civil Liberties

Reading: Chapter 4, AGPT

Chapters 5 and 6, *Citizen Democracy*

## **October**

01 - 06: Rights and Obligations: Civil Rights

Reading: Chapter 5, AGPT

Chapters 3 ,4, and 17 *Citizen Democracy*

**\*\*Reminder**—Participation Essay #1 due at the start of class on Tuesday, October 6

02: Tim O'Brien, author of *The Things They Carried*, speaks on campus. Your attendance at this event is strongly encouraged. This is also Family Weekend and your parents and guests are invited to attend the author's talk with you. Details to follow.

**\*\*College Calendar Note:** Tuesday, October 6 is the last day to drop a class with a "W"

## **III. Politics in Life, Engaging People in Politics**

08: Public Opinion and Political Socialization

Reading: Chapter 6, AGPT

12 – 13: Fall Break – no classes on Monday and Tuesday.

15: Interest Groups

Reading: Chapter 7, AGPT and *Federalist Paper* #10, Appendix C (p. A-4)

Chapter 6, ADP

Chapters 8 and 9, *Citizen Democracy*

20: Political Parties

Reading: Chapter 8, AGPT

Chapter 4, ADP

22 – 27: Campaigns and Elections

Reading: Chapter 9, AGPT

Chapter 5, ADP

Chapters 10 and 11, *Citizen Democracy*

29: Discussion and Reflection Day—Should the US adopt compulsory voting?

Reading: "The Case for Compulsory Voting in the United States" *Harvard Law Review* (ER)

## **November**

**03: Exam 2—in class** (study guide distributed in class on 10/27/09)

## **III. Political Institutions and Institutional Behavior**

05 - 10: Congress

Reading: Chapter 10, AGPT

Chapters 13 and 14, *Citizen Democracy*

**\*\*Reminder:** "Getting Involved" Paper due at the start of class on 11/5/09

12 – 17: President and the Executive Branch

Reading: Chapter 11 and 12, AGPT

Chapters 15 and 15, *Citizen Democracy*

19 - 24: The Judiciary  
Reading: Chapter 13, AGPT  
Chapter 2, ADP

**25 – 29: Thanksgiving Holiday Break – no classes**

*December*

01: Reflection and Discussion Day—Governing a Constitutional Democracy in an Age of Terrorism  
Reading: Chapter 8, ADP and other readings TBA

\*\*Reminder—Participation Essay #2 due at the start of class on December 1

03: Last Day of Class—moving forward, next steps  
Reading: “What Sort of Despotism...” Alexis de Tocqueville (ER)

08: Reading Day—no classes, no examinations; Extra Office Hours will be scheduled for today

**Tuesday, December 15--POLS 101 Final Examination—8:00 – 11:00am in Maybank 316**