

POLS 101.006
AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
FALL, 2009

Class Venue and Meeting Times: MAYBANK 111, Tuesday and Thursday, 1:40-2:55

Instructor: J. David Gillespie Office 26 Coming St. Room 301

Office Hours: 3:10-4:00 Tuesday and Thursday

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- Note from your instructor: I want to come to know you and I warmly welcome your contacting me. If your schedule allows, drop by my office some time during my posted office hours; but do not hesitate to contact me if you need to for a meeting or talk at some other time.

Scope and Purpose: The word “politics” is derived from the ancient Greeks, who also originated the systematic study of politics that we know as political science. Aristotle, in fact, declared this to be “the queen of studies.” Although Americans tend not to place politics on such a high plane, there is much to be learned from the Greek embrace of the values of public service and participatory citizenship. Certainly politics is very high-stakes, and we will feel its impact upon us, society, and humankind itself whether we choose to learn and take part or not.

The focus of this political science course will be upon American government and politics at the national level. We will examine the Constitution and the Supreme Court’s interpretation thereof, with respect both to political process and to liberties and rights. We will study political parties, interest groups, media and other connectors between people and the political system. Some of our common study will be of the character and condition of the three branches in the first year of the Obama administration and of key issues and elements of domestic and national security (foreign and defense) policies during this year.

This is an interesting time to be taking American Government. President Obama is the first person of color ever elected as chief executive of a NATO or European or North American G-10 nation. The Obama era began in the context of the worst economy since the 1930s, and a partisanship described by many as “toxic” or “dysfunctional” has been part of the framework within which the new president has showcased his policy decisions and launched his proposals. “Faux news” personalities (John Stewart of the Daily Show and Charleston’s own Stephen Colbert) are among the most influential media figures in

the country, and new technologies attract young people and make the political system more accessible to them. Eighteen to 29 year olds are now the most change-oriented voters; in 2006, 61% of them voted Democratic for Congress, and in 2008, 66 % of the voters in that age group voted for Obama.

Required Texts:

Alan R. Gitelson, Robert L. Dudley, and Melvin J. Dubnick, *American Government: Student Choice*, 9th edition (2009). Referenced below as Gitelson.

George McKenna and Stanley Feingold (eds.), *Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Political Issues*, 16th edition (2010). Referenced below as McKenna and Feingold.

From time to time, I will distribute, or give you information about free online access to, pertinent articles for you to read prior to an upcoming class. Treat these as obligatory reading just as you will the assignments from the two texts.

I strongly encourage you to become (or to remain) a regular reader of one of America's quality national newspapers. Online versions of the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post* are available free at these papers' websites: www.nyt.com, www.wsj.com, and www.washingtonpost.com. Print versions of these papers are available on campus or at nearby vendors.

Methods of Instruction, Criteria for Evaluation, and the Importance of Regular Attendance:

Three pre-exam tests will be given on lectures presented and readings assigned. These tests and the final examination will combine the formats of essay, terms identification, and multiple choice.

A research essay, 5-7 pages in length, typed and double-spaced, with in-text notes and a bibliography, is due not later than **Thursday, October 29**. This essay is to offer the range of published perspectives and also your own concluding views about *one* of the following queries:

- 1) Why on November 4, 2008 did the Democrats win the presidency and substantially increase their two-year-old majorities in the House and Senate?
- 2) What must the Republican Party do to rebuild and reinvigorate itself and to reestablish popular support after the two bruising defeats of 2006 and 2008?
- 3) What was the actual *casus belli* (cause) of the current war in Iraq, and what will historians conclude about whether this war's outcome justified the expenditure of blood and treasure in fighting it?

With respect to the pre-final tests and the research essay, you have the following options:

- a) take all three pre-final tests and write and submit the essay, after which the instructor will drop your lowest one of these grades,
- b) take the first pre-final test, write and submit the essay and skip either the second or third pre-final test, or
- c) take all three pre-final tests and skip the essay.

Although American Government is primarily a lecture course, your participation is expected in discussion of 1) issues presented in lecture and in Gitelson and in McKenna and Feingold and 2) the simulation scenario "The Case of the Speluncean Explorers" (details to be provided).

Please note below that 10% of your grade for this course will be based upon participation. *Obviously, it is impossible to participate when you are not present.* Attendance is required on the day of the simulation and on all test days (unless you are skipping the test and doing the essay), and *you are strongly encouraged to attend all other class sessions* unless pressing considerations require that you be away.

Evaluation for the course will be based upon the following:

3 pre-final tests *or* test 1, the essay, and one other test: 20% each (60% total)

Participation grade: 10%

The final examination: 30%

Your grade for the course will be determined using the College of Charleston grading system and will be assigned based upon your standing at semester's end on the following numerical scale:

A = 92-100; A- = 90-91; B+ = 88-89; B = 82-87; B- = 80-81; C+ = 78-79, C = 72-77;
C- = 70-71; .D+ = 68-69; D = 62-67; D- = 60-61; F = 59 and below

Honor Code: You committed yourself to adhere faithfully to the Honor Code when you enrolled at the College of Charleston. Such a code goes far toward providing an atmosphere of civility and trust in the academic environment, and it is the surest protection of the integrity and value of the degree toward which you and your student colleagues are working. In the event of an Honor Code violation in conjunction with this class and fulfillment of the requirements herein, specifications of the Honor System process as set forth in the student handbook would be rigorously followed. Students

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intentionally violating the Honor Code in conjunction with this class should expect to receive the new institutional grade of XF and to face significant further sanction from the Honor Board.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS::

AUGUST 25, 27; SEPTEMBER 1, 3, 8, 10, 15:

(1) Environmental and Constitutional Setting of American Politics

The meaning and significance of politics. Myth and reality in American politics. Creating a new system of government. Principles and provisions of the U.S. Constitution. Character and evolution of American federalism.

Read: Gitelson, Chs. 1 and 2; examine texts of Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and two essays of *The Federalist*, Gitelson, pp. A1-A15;

McKenna and Feingold, Issues 1, 2, 11, and 23..

TEST NO. 1: THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 17

SEPTEMBER 22, 24, 29; OCTOBER 1:

(2) Courts, Rights, and Liberties Under the Constitution

The Supreme Court, the court system, and the role of judicial review in interpreting, preserving, and extending the rights of persons under American jurisdiction. Fundamental liberties of the 1st Amendment: press, speech, religion, association, assembly and petition. Due process rights in the Bill of Rights and 14th Amendment. Remediating racial, ethnic, and gender barriers in civil rights. Rights in a time of war.

Read: Gitelson, Chs. 13 and 4.;

McKenna and Feingold, Issues 5, 8, 10, and 15.

SIMULATION SCENARIO: "THE CASE OF THE SPELUNCEAN EXPLORERS": TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6

OCTOBER 8, 15:

(3) Public Opinion and Media in American Politics

Structure and role of public opinion in relation to U.S. politics. Surveying public opinion. The character and role of American mass media. Interpretation and bias. Agenda-setting. American politics in the "media age": the impact and legacy of media. New technologies and "new media."

Read: Gitelson, Ch. 5.

FALL BREAK: NO CLASS OCTOBER 13

TEST NO. 2: TUESDAY, OCTOBER 20

OCTOBER 22, 27, 29: NOVEMBER 3:

(4) Behavioral Links Between People and Government

American political parties: popular opinion, the two-party system, and third-party challenges. State of the parties today. Elections and voting behavior. Media as intercessors between voters and voter choices. Presidential elections and the Electoral College. Interest groups in American politics.

Read: Gitelson, Chs. 6 and 7.

NOVEMBER 5, 10, 12:

(5) Congressional Politics

Congress as intended agent of representative government. Congressional functions and purposes. Reapportionment, redistricting, and the gerrymander. Other reinforcements of the status quo. Congressional-Presidential relations in the "Bush 2" and early Obama eras. Demographic profile of the 111th Congress. Congressional qualifications, remuneration, and privileges. The lawmaking process. Role and significance of staff. The lawmaking process. Role and significance of the parties in Congress.

Read: Gitelson, Ch. 10;

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McKenna and Feingold, Issues 6, 14, and 22.

TEST NO. 3: TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 17

NOVEMBER 19, 24; DECEMBER 1:

(6) Presidential and Executive Politics

The presidency: institutional and personal. Presidential remuneration and privileges. Qualifications and characteristics of American presidents. Presidential character: the Barber typology. Issues of presidential succession and incapacity. Presidential roles and powers. The Executive Office of the President, cabinet departments, and other executive agencies. Bureaucracy and the bureaucrats. Impact of 9-11-01 on the presidency. The new Department of Homeland Security. Assessing the George W. Bush legacy and Obama's first year.

Read: Gitelson, Chs. 11-12:

McKenna and Feingold, Issues 4, 16, 18, and 20.

THANKSGIVING: NO CLASS NOVEMBER 26

DECEMBER 3

(7) Public Policy

Outlines of the policymaking process. Categories and character of policy: domestic, foreign, intermestic. Fiscal and monetary policy. The issues and politics of health care reform.

READING DAY: NO CLASS DECEMBER 8

FINAL EXAMINATION: THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10, NOON