

POLS 102-090
Spring 2007 MW 4:00 p.m.-5:15 p.m.
Office Hours, MW 2:30-3:30 p.m.
TR 1:30-3:00 p.m. and by appointment

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Contemporary Political Issues

Course Objectives

This course is designed with three primary sets of goals in mind. First, it is constructed to help us better appreciate the nature and dynamics of contemporary politics (both domestic and international) as well as aid us in understanding and elaborating on our personal ideas while subjecting these to critical analysis and reassessment. We will do this by tracking a host of issues over the span of the semester while simultaneously 1) exploring where we have come from -- how our ideas have been shaped by the social forces of everyday life; 2) discussing what our options are -- how our ideas fit within the context of contemporary political ideologies; and 3) examining what we can do -- what alternatives are available for expressing our ideas through political conversation and participation.

Second, the course is intended to be a vehicle for helping us become stronger critical thinkers and more able to pursue politics actively. Most attempts at instruction in these areas are passive – one is given assignments which, if completed, are presumed to teach the skills adequately without ever helping us learn what is entailed or assessing whether the capacities are actually acquired. This setting seeks to explicitly teach aspects of critical thinking and political action and allow us to judge how much we have attained through our efforts.

Third, because this year marks the start of a new congressional session and the return of divided government to the US, as well as a time of ongoing confrontation with adversaries throughout the world, many of our sessions will be devoted to analyzing selected domestic and international issues and we will scrutinize these from several different ideological perspectives. This will improve our substantive understanding of important challenges we face as a society and hopefully allow us to make more informed political assessments. Just as we explore our own ideas about politics, so too will we investigate where these issues have come from, what different perspectives see as they evaluate these matters, and what we can do about them.

Method of Presentation

Many class meetings will be organized as discussions of either assigned readings or new materials introduced by the instructor and members of the class. These discussions will sometimes take place in small groups. Lectures and top-down instruction will occur periodically, with clarifying questions and discussion encouraged.

Skills This Course Will Seek to Improve

This class will attempt to challenge and improve a number of skills that are considered vital for students of Political Science (and students of the Liberal Arts and Sciences more broadly) to master. These include:

- **reading speed and critical comprehension (through constant reading and periodic reading quizzes);
- **oral communication, listening and presentation abilities (through class discussions, exploratories, as well as in-class and out-of-class activities);
- **effective writing and development of arguments (through homework assignments, response papers and OP-ED, letter writing projects);
- **critical thinking and analytical capacities (through homework assignments, entire content of the course);
- **comprehension of other's views and capacity to formulate, defend one's own position (through reading, class discussions and exercises, class writing assignments);
- **library research and locating relevant sources (through select homework assignments);
- **cooperative work and active learning (through in-class exercises and out-of-class activities);
- **time management and personal responsibility (through set-up of the entire course);
- **awareness of how to be political active and why it is important (through writing assignments, entire content of the course)

Special Circumstances

If you have any kind of special circumstances that I should know about, please make me aware **right away**. For example, if you have a diagnosed (or undiagnosed) learning disability, if you have a physical impairment of any kind, or if you are an athlete or club member who will travel, I need to know at the start of the semester in order that we may determine how to best meet your needs. It will be infinitely more difficult to accommodate you sufficiently if you delay in disclosing such circumstances. In addition, if you are a student who has problems writing, taking class notes, etc., there are many resources and programs you can take advantage of to improve your class performance. All you have to do is ask.

Please note: If you are a SNAP student eligible for accommodations, you must provide me with a copy of the notification letter you have been given by the SNAP office well before the need for any accommodation arises. If you are a student athlete who will miss class time due to away events, you must follow the procedures set out by the College in order to expect due consideration. In both cases, I will not guarantee granting your requests if I have not been given sufficient notice.

Office Hours

I have two sets of office hours scheduled that are for your use. Do not be afraid to come by my office at these times, **especially if you have questions that are left unanswered from class or if you are experiencing any difficulties in the course**. If these hours conflict with your schedule, we can work out a mutually convenient time to meet. I'm around a lot--don't hesitate to come by and talk.

Courtesy and Tolerance

As this course progresses, you will doubtlessly find that your ideas about politics and various issues do not always match the views of your fellow students, the authors of your texts, or your instructor. This is the stuff of politics. However, if this course is to prove rewarding for everyone (as it should), it is absolutely essential for each participant to **respect and tolerate the ideas and opinions of others** in the class. It is equally important for everyone to **discuss issues on the basis of information and analysis rather than emotion and volume**. By adopting such a posture, you will hopefully find the class to be a challenging and enlightening experience where you will have many opportunities to rethink what you know or believe to be true about America and the world.

As part of our early class sessions, we will devise guidelines that will govern our class discussions. One provision I will insist on is that all cell phones and other personal electronic devices **be turned OFF** before class and remain OFF throughout the class session.

Electronic Submissions

NO work may be submitted to me electronically for credit under any circumstances. You must have legible printed copies of work for me to collect when assignments are due.

Method of Evaluation

Final course evaluations will be based on class attendance, class participation, periodic homework assignments and quizzes, and work on your OP-ED and letter writing assignments. Grades will awarded on the following basis:

1. **Attendance and Participation (10%):** Class participation is a vital component of this course and your active participation is therefore required. Such participation includes listening carefully and critically to the views expressed by classmates, as well as the expression of personal views. Students should always be prepared, during each class session, to discuss the assigned materials and current political events as they relate to the subject of the course. The minimum level of class participation is class attendance. Due to the structure of the course, a student should not expect to do well without **regular** class attendance. **A general guideline is that any absence rate greater than fifteen percent (excused and unexcused – I make no distinction between these categories) is excessive and will lower your grade for attendance and participation.** If you do miss a class, you are still responsible for all material covered.

Twice over the course of the semester, you will be asked to reflect upon and evaluate your own class participation through a participation analysis exercise. Successful completion of these evaluations will be factored into your own participation totals.

As part of your participation (and as one of your cultural homework assignments – described below), you will be required to attend the POLS convocation event on Thursday, February 22 from 7:00-8:30 p.m. in the Physician's Auditorium. This event will feature a talk by urban planning advocate James H. Kunstler on Re-inventing Urban Space (the challenges of urban America is a theme of the department for the academic year and a topic of discussion in this course). If you have a specific and unavoidable conflict associated with attending this event, you must let me know well in advance so that alternative arrangements for you can be made.

2. **Exploratories (10%):** Periodically throughout the semester, I will give you a general question based on the news to address. You will respond to me, via email, with a one-page, single spaced discussion of the issue prompted by the question posed. These will be due to me prior to the class session where we will discuss the issue. You will be evaluated for the care and thought you put into these discussions, as well as your capacity to work in aspects of class readings and substance into your responses.

The Contemporary Issues Portfolio: Over the course of the semester, you will be completing a number of other assignments (listed below) that will all fit into your Contemporary Issues Portfolio. Due dates for the various assignments are noted in the course schedule below and there is also a summary sheet of all due dates at the very end of the syllabus. You will complete these assignments and place them in your portfolio (simply a folder with pockets) which you will have with you for every session of class. A few portfolios will be collected randomly at the start of each class session and returned to you at the start of the next class, when another group will be taken up – my expectation is that you will have all assigned materials in the portfolio at the time I request yours in class (missing material will be penalized). If you miss a class when your portfolio is among those slated for collection, you will have only one other opportunity to pass your portfolio in without forgoing credit for that entire portion of class. Everyone’s portfolio will be collected at least four times – and often it is more than four times -- throughout the semester (therefore everyone will get multiple sets of feedback on your work over the course of the semester). So the clear strategy here is to make sure you come to class each day with work in your portfolio up to date and you will be fine.

- 3. Response Papers (15%):** You are required to hand in three 2-3 page response papers over the course of the semester and complete an introductory exercise early in the term. Due dates for each of the three response papers and the introductory assignment are listed in the course schedule. To complete this assignment, you will take an Op-Ed article from a newspaper and briefly 1) summarize the main point of the article in one or two complete sentences; 2) identify the key evidence used to support the main point; 3) evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Op-Ed piece; and 4) suggest how another argument using other evidence could be constructed in response. For the first and second response papers, you will be able to write a single assignment up to three times to obtain a higher grade, so there is an added incentive to complete these assignments on time. More guidelines will be distributed with the introductory exercise assignment.

Assignment	Introductory Exercise	Response Paper One	Response Paper Two	Response Paper Three
Grade				

- 4. Homework and Cultural Assignments (20%):** Periodically throughout the semester, you will be asked to complete a number of discreet assignments that are related to critical thinking skills and learning to be politically effective; some are also designed to prepare you for your more extensive writing. Many (though not all) of these assignments are listed in the course outline. You are expected to complete all of these assignments during the term; penalties for late work will apply in all cases.

In addition, four times during the term at your choosing (twice before midterm and twice afterwards), you will also be expected to complete cultural homework assignments. You can meet this requirement in many ways: by attending community meetings, plays, lectures, talks on campus, museum exhibits, done in a day service projects, working for a campaign – just about anything other than watching TV or going to the movies can qualify. In each of your homework entries, you are to first summarize what happened or what you did, what you heard or saw or experienced; then, you are to react to these events and relate your ideas to something relevant to a class in contemporary political issues. These reports should each be at least 250 words (the equivalent of one double-spaced typed page) and must include date, title, and place of whatever you attended.

You must complete and hand in for credit at least two of these assignments before Friday, March 2 in order to have an opportunity to receive full credit for this component of the homework portion of class. One of these first two opportunities is ready made for you through the POLS convocation event.

Assignment	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Grade										

- 5. Reading and Current Events Quizzes (20%):** Periodically throughout the semester, you will be given quizzes to check your reading comprehension and currency. Quizzes will come in two forms. You will regularly take a

current events quiz via WebCT on-line with guidelines for these quizzes provided in class. You will also periodically be given in-class quizzes that will help you master reading for main ideas and that will reinforce some of the critical thinking skills you are learning.

Quiz	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Grade											

- 6. OP-ED assignment (20%):** Over the course of the semester, you will be writing an OP-ED article which will form one of the final components of your classwork. You will receive grades for your drafts and bibliography, as well as your final piece. More details on this assignment are provided in the class outline and these will be expanded upon in class.
- 7. Letter Writing Assignment (5%):** As part of your work, you will also be composing a letter to the editor or your political representative on an issue of your choosing. More information on this assignment is provided in the class outline and will be expanded upon in class.

Note: I reserve the right to quiz the class more extensively if I sense that preparation is insufficient. Added quizzes will be factored into your overall quiz totals and more low quiz grades will be dropped.

Opportunities for "extra credit" will not be available.

The College is implementing a new grade scale regime this academic year that included both + and – grades. A numerical and literal guide to the translation of grades as they are assigned in this course is as follows:

A – Superior (100-92)	A minus – Excellent (91-89)	B+ -- Very Good (88-86)
B – Good (85-82)	B minus – Promising (81-79)	C+ -- Fair (78-76)
C – Average (75-72)	C minus – Acceptable (71-69)	D+ -- Barely Acceptable (68-66)
D – Merely Passing (65-62)	D minus – Barely passing (61-59)	F – Failure (58-0)

In addition, you will often receive grades of check plus, check, check minus or check minus minus on your homework assignments. These symbols roughly correspond to A (exceeding expectations), B (meeting expectations) C (falling short of expectations) and D (falling far short of expectations) grades on homework.

Readings and Texts:

Specific reading assignments and the dates we will discuss them are listed in the course outline. Students are responsible for completing the reading **prior to the class period for which it is assigned.**

Assignments will be given in the following books:

Kenneth Hoover, Ideology and Political Life, 3rd edition (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt College Publishers, 2001).

Anthony Weston, A Rulebook for Arguments, 3rd edition, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000).

Godfrey Hodgson, More Equal Than Others: America from Nixon to the New Century. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

Peter Peterson, Running on Empty (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004)

David T. Z. Mindich, Tuned Out: Why Americans Under 40 Don't Follow the News. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

The Primary Reading throughout the semester will come from *The New York Times* and I am requiring that you subscribe to the print edition that you will receive Monday-Friday of each week during the term. A

discount subscription form allowing you to purchase the paper on weekdays for a significant savings over the other offers is available through this class; **I urge you to make use of this.**

The additional resources listed below are also helpful in keeping up with the pressing issues and debates in national and international politics. You will be exposed to many of these during the term and several may become useful tools for you as you complete the required work for this course.

Newspapers and News Magazines

The New York Times
The Christian Science Monitor
The Washington Post
The Wall Street Journal
The Economist

Opinion Journals

The Nation
Commentary
National Review
The Progressive
Dissent
Monthly Review
The New York Review of Books
The American Prospect
The American Conservative
The Weekly Standard
The New Republic

TV/Radio

Nightly News (ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX, CNN)
Nightline (ABC)
The Newshour with Jim Lehrer (PBS)
This Week (ABC)
Face the Nation (CBS)
Meet the Press (NBC)
Frontline (PBS – Tues. evenings, times vary)
Washington Week in Review (PBS -- Fri, 8:00 p.m.)
Morning Edition (NPR -- M-F, 5-8 a.m.)
All Things Considered (NPR -- M-F, 4-6 p.m.)
Weekend Edition (NPR -- Sat, Sun 8-10 a.m.)
The World (PRI/NPR -- M-F, 3-4 p.m.)
NOW (PBS – Fri evenings)

Class Outline and Assignments

I. Class Introduction – Styles of Learning (January 8-10)

Reading: None

Assignment: Due **Wednesday, January 10 in class**

Take Survey of Learning Styles at <http://www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html>

Print out TWO copies of the results and bring BOTH with you to class. You will leave one copy with me at the end of Thursday's class session. In addition, print out the learning styles and strategies information provided by Richard Felder and Barbara Solomon at the conclusion of the web survey.

Monday, January 15 – Martin Luther King Holiday (no class)
(consider engaging in service)

II. Political Participation in Today's America (January 17-22)

Begin reading The New York Times daily

Reading: Due **Wednesday, January 17** (found on College Library's reserve system)

(*) Robert Putnam, "The Strange Disappearance of Civic America" The American Prospect (Winter 1996), pp. 34-48;

(*) Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman and Henry E. Brady, "The Big Tilt: Participatory Inequality in America," The American Prospect (May-June 1997), pp. 74-80.

Assignment: Due by **Wednesday, January 17 in class**

Complete the information survey handed out in class and bring it with you.

Reading: Due **Monday, January 22** (found on College Library's ereserve system)

(*) Michael Nelson, "Why Americans Hate Politics and Politicians" in The Enduring Debate, ed. David Canon et al. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), pp. 291-295;

(*) Christopher Kush, "Learn How Grassroots Advocacy Works" in The One Hour Activist, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), pp. 3-16.

Assignment #1: Due **Monday, January 22 in class**

Bring to class a one sentence summary of the main idea communicated in Nelson's article. This will be handed in at the end of class.

III. Engaging the News -- What's Going on in the World (January 24-29)

Reading: The New York Times daily

Reading: Due **Wednesday, January 24**

Mindich, Chapter 1

Assignment: Due **Friday, January 26 by the end of the day (6:00 p.m.)**

Take the practice quiz (what you know about contemporary issues coming in) found on Web CT for this course. The Web CT system will be demonstrated for you as part of class on Monday, January 22.

Reading: Due **Monday, January 29**

Hodgson, Chapter 1

Assignment #2: Due **Monday, January 29 in class**

Pick an issue that interests you and that you can imagine yourself being politically active around (something you have already been reading about or something you have not yet encountered in your reading); identify your initial angle on this issue by filling out the advocacy inventory handed out in class. This is due on Monday, January 29.

IV. Starting to Make Comparative Sense of Issues (January 31-February 7)

Keep reading The New York Times daily

While we continue to discuss ongoing events, in this particular part of the course we are also going to begin looking at issues *critically* by examining the language of reasoning, recognizing different patterns of reasoning, and identifying some of the initial assumptions behind reasons in arguments. In addition, we are going to start investigating different political ideologies and the ways they make sense of the world.

Reading: Due **Wednesday, January 31**

Hoover, pp. 3-12; start Hoover, pp. 13-37;
Weston, pp. 1-9.

Quiz: Current Events quiz #1 Wednesday, January 31

Reading: Due **Monday, February 5**

Hoover, pp. 13-51.

Reading: Due **Wednesday, February 7**

Mindich, Chapter 2;
Hodgson, Chapter 2.

Quiz: Current Events quiz #2 Wednesday, February 7

Assignment #3: Due **Wednesday, February 7 at the start of class**

Take the issue you picked and identified your angle on (assignment of January 29) and do the following: (1) identify your representatives in government (local, state and federal) based on where you are registered to vote and see if they have had any evident experience with this issue (sponsored legislation, given speeches, advocated on behalf of or against your concern); (2) identify interest groups that work in this issue area locally or nationally (regardless of whether they advocate for or against your particular angle) and what kinds of initiatives they appear to sponsor, what kinds of information and resources they make available to the public. Describe what you find in a short paper (1-2 pages in length) that includes the names of all your representatives and any evident connections they have with your issue and the names, descriptions of interest groups working in your issue area and the ways you have found them (web addresses, publications where you found them listed and their pertinent information – enough address information so someone else could find them with what you have provided). Bring this information to class on Wednesday, February 7.

V. ***Beginning to Think Expansively – The New Political Economy (February 12-19)***

Here we are going to initiate a substantive investigation of the ways technology is fuelling change in the U.S. political economy. We are also ready to delve into the processes connected with clarifying ideas, a key component of critical thinking and success in political action.

Keep reading The New York Times daily

Reading: Due **Monday, February 12**

Hodgson, Chapter 3.

Critical Response Assignment #1: Due **Monday, February 12**

Hand in the introductory critical response assignment you were given on Monday, February 5.

Reading: Due **Wednesday, February 14**

Hodgson, Chapter 4;
Mindich, Chapter 3;
Weston, pp. 24-31.

Quiz: Current Events quiz #3 Wednesday, February 14

Reading: Due **Monday, February 19**

Mindich, Chapter 4;
Hoover, pp. 85-110.

VI. Making More Comparative Sense (February 21-26)

We will continue examining aspects of critical thinking through this component of the course and also focus substantively on immigration reform and efforts by segments of the public to stem the flow of illegal immigrants outside the authority of government.

Keep reading The New York Times daily

Reading: Due **Wednesday, February 21**

Hodgson, Chapter 5
Hoover, pp. 65-84;
Weston, pp. 10-18.

Quiz: Current Events quiz #4 Wednesday, February 21

Assignment #4: Due **Thursday, February 22**

You are to attend the POLS convocation event on Re-inventing urban space featuring urban planning advocate James H. Kunstler in the Physician's Auditorium from 7-8:30 p.m. You will write this event up as one of your cultural homework assignments and will put this in your portfolio by the start of class on **Monday, February 26**.

Reading: Due **Monday, February 26**

Hoover, pp. 53-64;
Weston, pp. 19-23.

Wednesday, February 28 – no class session

Quiz: Current Events quiz #5, Wednesday, February 28

Assignment #5: Due **Wednesday, February 28**

Using Weston's first chapter as a guide, draft an initial argument on your issue, including a clear thesis and reasons in support of your claim. This initial argument draft should be at least three double-spaced typed pages in length and should represent a serious first attempt to come to terms with and persuade others of your view – it should therefore be a draft you feel comfortable having other classmates read and hope they would find persuasive. This assignment is due at my office on Wednesday, February 28 by 4:00 p.m.

You must have turned in at least two Cultural homeworks by Friday, March 2

March 5-7 – Spring Break

VII. Deprogramming Events -- the Role of Women (March 12)

In this portion of the course, we are continuing to examine reasoning as part of critical thinking by evaluating assumptions more explicitly, looking at the context of arguments and learning how to use thinking maps as a vehicle for understanding and beginning to evaluate reasoning. We will be getting into ambiguity, omission and the use of fallacies in argument. As we do this, we will be paying particular attention to written and visual claims that assert concern for the status of women in American society.

Keep reading The New York Times daily

Reading: Due **Monday, March 12**

Hodgson, Chapter 6;
Hoover, pp. 155-164.

Critical Response Assignment #2: Due **Monday, March 12**

You must have completed your first critical response paper by this date.

VIII. Analyzing Legislation – What Does a Bill Entail? (March 14)

This little course detour allows us to apply the critical thinking skills we have worked on up to now to a task that is central to political activism and to the substantive concerns surrounding Voting Rights in America today – recognizing the characteristics of legislation and analyzing the contents of a bill. This section also concludes our examination of descriptive critical thinking skills.

Keep reading The New York Times daily

Reading: Due **Wednesday, March 14**

Hodgson, review pp. 29-34

Quiz: Current Events quiz #6, Wednesday, March 14

Assignment #6: Due **Monday, March 19 in class**

Find a piece of legislation connected to your issue – write a 2-3 page analysis of the bill that includes a discussion of the legislation’s intent and concrete provisions, the reasons offered for the bill, the assumptions made by the language of the legislation (explicit and implicit) and the context in which the bill is being offered. This assignment is due in your portfolio on Monday, March 19.

IX. Starting to Evaluate – What Are We to Think of Issues? (March 19-26)

Here we begin the processes of evaluation in critical thinking by starting to make explicit what sense we are making of political appeals and how we are doing so – principally how do we evaluate the credibility of ideas and sources in order to know what to believe. Given that such questions permeate many debates around the economy, education, the environment and race, we will delve into some budgetary, educational and environmental examples and read about environmentalist ideologies.

Keep reading The New York Times daily

Reading: Due **Monday, March 19**

Mindich, Chapter 5;
Hoover, pp. 183-199;
Weston, pp. 32-39.

Reading: Due **Wednesday, March 21**

Mindich, Chapter 6;
(*) Jonathan Kozol, “Still Separate, Still Unequal: America’s Educational Apartheid.”
Harper’s (September 2005), pp. 41-54;
(*) John Taylor Gatto, “Against School: How Public Education Cripples Our Kids and Why,”
Harper’s (September 2003), pp. 33-38.

Quiz: Current Events quiz #7, Wednesday, March 21

Assignment #7: Due **Wednesday, March 21 in class**

Take the Kozol and Gatto articles and provide written summaries (in complete sentences) of EACH of the author's arguments and reasons (be sure to clearly distinguish between the two in your narrative). Then evaluate the pieces for their ideological assumptions. This assignment is due in your portfolio on Wednesday, March 21.

Reading: Due **Monday, March 26**

Hodgson, Chapter 7;
Hoover, pp. 165-182.

Critical Response Assignment #3: Due **Monday, March 26**

You must have completed your second critical response paper by this date.

X. *What Sense Can We Make of the Social Security Debate? (March 28-April 9)*

In this set of classes, we are going to examine and evaluate a number of arguments made with regard to reforming the Social Security program in America. As we do this, we will be learning more about deductive validity and delving into evaluating causal assumptions.

Keep reading The New York Times daily

Reading: Due **Wednesday, March 28**

Hodgson, Chapter 8;
Peterson, Chapter 1;
Weston, pp. 40-52.

Quiz: Current Events quiz #8 Wednesday, March 28

Assignment #8: Due **Wednesday, March 28 in class**

Research articles that provide information and different perspectives on your issue and compile at least ten of these sources in an annotated bibliography, using the guidelines provided to you in class. Hand this bibliography in along with a 1-2 page written discussion of the reliability and credibility of the sources you have found. This assignment is due in your portfolio on Wednesday, March 28.

Reading: Due **Monday, April 2**

Peterson, Chapters 2-4;
Weston, pp. 53-58.

Reading: Due **Wednesday, April 4**

Peterson, Chapters 5-7.

Quiz: Current Events quiz #9 Wednesday, April 4

Reading: Due **Monday, April 9**

Peterson, Chapters 8-10;
Hoover, pp. 111-134.

Assignment #9: Due **Wednesday, April 11**

After having read and discussed ideas of democratic socialism, write a brief analysis (2-3 pages) that details the key assumptions of democratic socialism and then apply these ideas to discuss how and why a democratic socialist might respond to some of the more prominent ideas for “reforming” America’s Social Security program. This assignment is due in your portfolio on Wednesday, April 11.

XI. *America and the World (April 11-16)*

We will broaden our discussion of evaluating concerns expressed over America’s declining reputation in the world and what it means for the future in this set of classes. We will also be wrapping up our practice on reasoning through causal explanations with a potential substantive focus in issues surrounding the Iraq war.

Keep reading The New York Times daily

Reading: Due **Wednesday, April 11**

Hodgson, Chapter 9;
Weston, pp. 59-63.

Quiz: Current Events quiz #10 Wednesday, April 11

Assignment#10: Due **Friday, April 13**

Taking the original argumentative essay you wrote on your own issue (assignment of February 28), you are to redraft this into a 3-4 page double spaced draft Op-Ed article, taking into consideration all the aspects of argument and critical thinking you have been exposed to so far. This assignment is due to me in my office by Friday, April 13 at 4:30. You will be completing this assignment for credit at the end of the term.

Assignment #11: Due **Monday, April 16**

Take the draft Op-Ed piece you wrote on your issue (assignment of February 28 and April 13) and transform it into a draft letter to the editor or to your political representative, following the guidelines provided for writing effective letters. This assignment is due in your portfolio Monday, April 16.

XII. *Reasonable People Can and Should Differ ... Reasonably (April 18-23)*

These final class sessions will look at rival arguments and the causal relationships they posit. We will use critical thinking capacities to appreciate and evaluate competing claims. We will reiterate why it is important to decide on issues for oneself and consider how fascism as an ideology plays into some of these debates.

Keep reading The New York Times daily

Reading: Due **Wednesday, April 18**

Hodgson, Chapter 10
Mindich, Chapter 7
Weston, pp. 64-70.

Quiz: Current Events quiz #11 Wednesday, April 18

Reading: Due **Monday, April 23**

Hoover, pp. 135-146;

(*) Mark Danner, "What Are You Going to Do with That?" The New York Review of Books
(June 23, 2005), pp. 52-56.

Assignment: Due **Wednesday, April 25 by 4:30 p.m.**

Complete and full portfolios which include final drafts of Op-Ed and Advocacy Letters, last (third) critical response essays plus rewrites of previous two, and last Cultural Homework assignments

POLS 102-002
Spring 2005 TR 10:50 a.m.-12:05 p.m.
Office Hours, MW 1:00-2:30 pm.
TR 9:00-10:00 a.m. and by appointment

John Creed
26 Coming St. (201)
953-8137 (office – voice mail available)
953-5724 (main office -- messages)
Email: creedj@cofc.edu

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Third, because this year marks the start of a new administration and Congress as well as a time of ongoing confrontation with adversaries throughout the world, many of our sessions will be devoted to analyzing selected domestic and international issues and we will scrutinize these from several different ideological perspectives. This will improve our substantive understanding of important challenges we face as a society and hopefully allow us to make more informed political assessments. Just as we explore our own ideas about politics, so too will we investigate where these issues have come from, what different perspectives see as they evaluate these matters, and what we can do about them.

Method of Presentation

Many class meetings will be organized as discussions of either assigned readings or new materials introduced by the instructor and members of the class. These discussions will sometimes take place in small groups. Lectures and top-down instruction will occur periodically, with clarifying questions and discussion encouraged.

POLS 102-001
Fall 2004 TR 9:25-10:40 a.m.
Office Hours, MW noon--1:30 pm.
TR 2:00-3:00 p.m. and by appointment

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953-8137 (office – voice mail available)
953-5724 (main office -- messages)
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Contemporary Political Issues

Course Objectives

This course is designed with three primary sets of goals in mind. First, it is constructed to help us better appreciate the nature and dynamics of contemporary politics (both domestic and international) as well as aid us in understanding and elaborating on our personal ideas while subjecting these to critical analysis and reassessment. We will do this by tracking a host of issues over the span of the semester while simultaneously 1) exploring where we have come from -- how our ideas have been shaped by the social forces of everyday life; 2) discussing what our options are -- how our ideas fit within the context of contemporary political ideologies; and 3) examining what we can do -- what alternatives are available for expressing our ideas through political conversation and participation.

Second, the course is intended to be a vehicle for helping us become stronger critical thinkers and more able to pursue politics actively. Most attempts at instruction in these areas are passive – one is given assignments which, if completed, are presumed to teach the skills adequately without ever helping us learn what is entailed or assessing whether the capacities are actually acquired. This setting seeks to explicitly teach aspects of critical thinking and political action and allow us to judge how much we have attained through our efforts.

Third, because this year marks the climax of the 2004 political campaign season and a time of ongoing confrontation with adversaries throughout the world, many of our sessions will be devoted to analyzing selected domestic and international issues and we will scrutinize these from several different ideological perspectives. This will improve our substantive understanding of important challenges we face as a society and hopefully allow us to make more informed political assessments. Just as we explore our own ideas about politics, so too will we investigate where these issues have come from, what different perspectives see as they evaluate these matters, and what we can do about them.

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