Course Introduction and Objectives:

This is a survey course covering the American Government and politics. Because this is a survey course we will cover a broad range of topics – some in depth and others we will just touch on. There will be a significant amount of reading. This course will provide you with a thorough understanding of how and why the United States government came to be and how it has developed over time. Starting with the Declaration of Independence and the drafting of the Constitution we will explore the early history of our political institutions and learn how they have evolved. We will examine present day politics with an eye towards this foundational history. This course examines the structure, context, functions and problems of American national government.

Political Science Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this semester, students should be able to: (1) Identify and explain the central principles, institutions, procedures, and decision making processes of the American political system; (2) Evaluate the basic strengths and weaknesses of the American political system through the application of political concepts and ideas; (3) Relate historical events and/or developments to contemporary political issues, debates and outcomes in the United States; and (4) Develop an analytical, social scientific disposition toward American politics.

This course is required for all Political Science majors and minors. And must be completed within the first 15 hours of political science courses.

This course also fulfills a General Education Social Science requirement. Students completing this course successfully will earn a social science general education credit. The College of Charleston has established a General Education learning outcome for students that specify that upon completion of the course, students can apply social science concepts, models or theories to explain human behavior, social interactions or social institutions. Students will be evaluated in a short essay question to identify, explain and apply a concept on the first scheduled in-class test.

In addition to the textbook (We the People, Ginsberg, Lowi, Weir, Tolbert & Campbell, 12th Edition) some outside reading will be assigned. You will be required
to attend at least two sessions of General Sessions court to observe guilty pleas in downtown Charleston, on your own time, during the 9-5 work week.

You will be expected to have read the assigned material for the lectures and the tests. We will have several short films and videos during class. Additionally, you will be required (weekly) to read a national newspaper, find and be prepared to share briefly with the class a topical political issue. You will be expected to tie this topic into what we are learning from the textbook and the lectures. Short written assignments should be expected throughout the semester. Regular and on-time attendance is mandatory. Unexcused absences will negatively impact your final grade. If you miss a class it will be your responsibility to obtain the notes from another class member. I do not post my lecture notes on OAKS. I want and expect you to attend every class, take good notes and actively participate in class discussions. Taking accurate and thorough hand-written notes is a great way to retain and learn new lecture information.

In other classes students have asked me if buying a textbook is really necessary? It has been my experience that students who have a textbook do better in class. Students who did best in class reported to me that they would review a chapter in advance of a lecture, then after the lecture would re-read the chapter more closely while referring to their lecture notes. I offer this as a method that has been successful for other students. I recognize that this method takes time, but doing well in class takes time!

The Center for Student Learning (CSL) offers academic support services for assistance in study strategies and a host of other areas. This is free help for students – so take advantage of what they have to offer. Their website is http://csl.cofc.edu and their phone number is (843) 953-5635. Their office is located on the 1st floor of the Addlestone Library.

Academic Integrity: As is true with all College of Charleston classes, you are obligated to do your own work and abide by the Student Honor Code. Don't cheat, don't plagiarize and you will be fine.

Final grades will be based on class attendance and participation,(15%), your weekly written political topic culled from a national newspaper (15%), as well as written assignments and observation of at least two guilty plea court sessions (10%), and three in class tests (20% each test). There are no scheduled make up tests. If you are aware of a conflict or have an excused absence at the time of a scheduled test – then it is your responsibility to notify me well in advance of the test to determine if alternative arrangements can be made. Similarly, if you are aware of an attendance issue for a lecture or guilty pleas, then I expect you to communicate that issue to me in advance of your absence. Finally, if there are any special circumstances that will hinder your ability to complete the course work, tests or other requirements, or any issues that will limit your potential to succeed in the class – then please let me know.
Grading Summary:
Class attendance and participation 15%
Topical newspaper write ups 15%
Court observation write ups 10%
3 tests – each worth 20% for a total 60%

If you are a SNAP student, then please present me with your SNAP letter as soon as practicable so we can make whatever accommodations are necessary to help you succeed in this course.

Grading Policy:
A 94-100 A- 90-93 B+ 87-89 B 83-86 B- 80-82 C+ 77-79
C 73-76 C- 70-72 D+ 67-69 D 63-66 D- 60-62 F below 60

Tues. 8/20 Introduction. Assignments for 8/22.
Thurs. 8/22 Meet at Library for lecture – Room 122.
Tues. 8/27 Chapter 1, Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.
Thurs. 8/29 Chapter 1.
Tues. 9/3 Chapter 2 and the Constitution***** Attend Guilty Plea Court this week 100 Broad Street, 4D. (4th Floor, Courtroom D). Monday, September 2 is Labor Day – a Holiday for the courts – so guilty pleas will start Tuesday. The last plea for this week will be held Thursday afternoon.
Thurs. 9/5 Chapter 2.
Tues. 9/10 Chapter 3. Guilty Plea Observation #1 paper due at start of class. (Typed, your name one each page. No more than 2 pages. Stapled. Not allowed to submit it to me by email).
Thurs. 9/12 Chapter 3.
Tues. 9/17 Chapter 4.
Thurs. 9/19 Chapter 4.
Tues. 9/24 Chapter 5.
Thurs. 9/26 Chapter 5.
Tues. 10/1 Test #1 – Chapters (1-5) then start "Slavery By Another Name"
Thurs. 10/3 Finish “Slavery By Another Name”
Tues. 10/8 Chapter 12.
Thurs. 10/10 Chapter 12.
Tues.  10/15  Ridiculously short FALL BREAK – Don’t get arrested!
Thurs.  10/17   TBA
Tues.  10/22  Chapter 13.
Thurs.  10/24  Chapter 13.
Tues.  10/29  Chapter 14.
Thurs.  10/31  Chapter 14.
Tues.  11/5  Test #2 -- Chapters (12-14), then Chapter 6.
Thurs.  11/7  Chapter 7.
Tues.  11/12  Chapter 8*****Attend Guilty Plea Court this week 100 Broad Street, 4D.
Thurs.  11/14  Chapter 10.
Tues.  11/19  Test #3. Guilty Plea Observation #2 Paper due at start of class. (same requirements as #1 Observation Paper). See above: Tues. 9/10.
Thurs.  11/21  TBA
Tues.  11/26  TBA
Thurs.  11/28  THANKSGIVING

*Attend Guilty Plea Court at 100 and Broad Street, Courtroom 4D (4th Floor, Courtroom D) Observe and take hand-written notes for no less than 1 hour.

On the weeks listed above - Guilty Pleas are typically held:
Monday afternoons;
Tuesday through Thursday mornings and afternoons;
Friday mornings;
Mornings start around 9:30AM and go to about noon.
Afternoons start around 1:45PM and end about 4:30 or 5PM.

Predicting exactly when Plea Court will start and end is like trying to predict the weather! All I can tell you – it’s best to go early in the week and early in the day so you have a chance to regroup and try again if for some reason court is not held.