The College of Charleston

Fall 2013

POLI 101.01 – American Government

Tuesday-Thursday 8 A.M. – 9:15 A.M.

Maybank Hall 207

Instructor: Marguerite Archie-Hudson, Ph.D.

Office Hours: Wednesdays 10:00 A.M. – 3:00 P.M. and by appointment

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Course Description and Objectives

As Americans we are constantly reminded of the benefits, challenges and conflicts of citizenship in our constitutional form of government. The legislative enactments, judicial rulings and executive decisions made by officials that we elect or appoint have broad consequences for how we conduct our daily lives. Major shifts and changes in the political, social and demographic landscapes of America force us to engage in some thorny questions: Who are we as “Americans”- how do we define ourselves? What are our beliefs and core values? What are the major issues and forces that will define our nation during this century? How do we compete in the global economy – and co-exist peacefully in the international neighborhood? What is the role of our government- federal, state and local – in providing direction and leadership to these issues? What is our primary responsibility as citizens to engage these issues?

This course will explore these issues as we examine the historic foundations, constitutional principles and the institutions and processes that shape our American system of government. We will examine the major current debates in the Congress, the Executive Branch and the electorate that are centered on the question: what is the appropriate role of government in the lives of the American people?

At the end of the semester students should be able to (a) apply social science concepts, models or theories to explain human behavior, social interactions or social institutions; (b) identify and explain the central principles, institutions, procedures and decision-making processes of the American political system; (c) evaluate the basic strengths and weaknesses of the American political system through the application of political concepts and ideas; (d) relate historical events and/or developments to
contemporary political issues, debates and outcomes in the United States and (e) develop an analytical, social scientific disposition toward American politics.

Course Requirements

A. Regular class attendance is expected of all students and will constitute 10% of your final grade. Attendance will be recorded via a daily sign-in sheet. Absences will be excused only if they are officially validated.

B. Expectations for class participation include reading assignments prior to class, joining in class discussions, respecting the opinions of others and turning in assignments on time. Late assignments will incur severe grade penalties.

C. The use of cellphones, I pads, tablets or any other electronic device during class is not permitted. Personal computers may be permitted for the exclusive purpose of taking notes and verification may be required at any time. Failure to observe this policy will result in severe grade penalties and may result in expulsion from the class.

D. Students are strongly encouraged to utilize office hours and/or schedule appointments to discuss assignments and readings.

E. Students who are receiving services through the Center for Disability Services, are scheduled to travel with an athletic team or will participate in a student-government related or other official off-campus activity during the semester must present a letter of verification signed by the appropriate college official.

F. Students who plan personal (i.e., non-emergency) off-campus trips prior to a scheduled exam (ex. Midterm or Final) will not receive excused absences or opportunity to make-up the exam.

G. Each student is required to select a current political issue for research and study during the semester from a list provided by the instructor. At the end of the semester students studying the same topic will be required to make a group presentation to the class.

Grading

Grades will be based on a Midterm Examination, a three-part Research paper that examines a current political issue of great public interest, a Final examination and class participation as follows:

A. Research paper, Part I 15%
B. Research paper, part II 15%
C. Research paper, part III 15%
D. Midterm Examination 20%
E. Final Examination 25%
F. Class attendance/participation 10%

Required Textbook

You are encouraged to keep abreast of contemporary political and social issues, many of which may be the subject of class discussions. You are also encouraged to share relevant articles, reports, etc. with the class. Several national newspapers, including the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal* are available on-line at no charge. Local and state political news is reported in the *Post and Courier* and *The State*.

Students are encouraged to utilize the **Center for Student Learning** (CSL) academic support services for assistance in study strategies and course content. The Center offers tutoring, supplemental instruction, study skills appointments and workshops. These services are available to you at no extra costs. You may visit the CSL website at [http://csl.cofc.edu](http://csl.cofc.edu) or call (843) 953-5635.

**Course Outline and Reading Assignments**

**AUGUST 2013**

TU 20\(^{th}\) Introductions and class overview

TH 22 Class overview and semester assignments

TU 27 Lecture and discussion – Who are “We, The People”??

TH 29 Lecture and discussion: Philosophical views of government and its role in society

**SEPTEMBER 2013**

TU 3 Discussion: Government vs. Politics

Ginsberg, Chapter One

TH 5 Evolution of our constitutional form of government: Handout and discussion

TU 10 Lecture and discussion: Road to the United States Constitution

Ginsberg, Chapter Two

TH 12 Lecture : The U.S. Constitution: Compromise and adoption

TU 17 Lecture: Federalism in the U.S. Constitution

Chapter Three

TH 19 Discussion: Federalism – Changing relationships between federal and state governments

**Assignment One due**

TU 24 Discussion: Civil Liberties: The Bill of Rights
Chapter Four

TH 26 Discussion: Civil Liberties: The Bill of Rights

OCTOBER 2013

TU 1 Lecture: Civil Rights – History and Legal developments

Chapter Five

TH 3 MIDTERM EXAMINATION

TU 8 Lecture and discussion: Civil Rights – legal developments and social movements

TH 10 Discussion: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties – current conflicts and issues

TU 15 FALL BREAK – NO CLASS

TH 17 Lecture: The Institutions of the Federal government

Chapter Twelve and Fourteen

TU 22 Lecture: The Legislative branch- constitutional powers and obligations

Chapter Twelve

Assignment Two due

TH 24 Lecture: The United States Congress : U.S. House of Representatives

TU 29 Discussion: The U.S. Congress: U.S. House of Representatives

TH 31 Lecture: The U.S. Senate

NOVEMBER 2013

TU 5 Discussion: The U.S. Senate

TH 7 Lecture: The Executive Branch of Government

Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen

TU 12 Lecture: The Presidency – constitutional powers and obligations

TH 14 Discussion: The Presidency

Assignment Three due

TU 19 Class Presentation- Group One

TH 21 Class Presentation – Group Two
REQUIRED ASSIGNMENTS

The required assignment provides the opportunity to study a topic that is currently the subject of debate in the public, the Congress and/or state legislatures regarding the role of government in its solution. Three such topics are presented below. You are to select one for your semester research.

1. **Gun control laws** - Should the United States Congress renew the Federal Assault Weapons Ban that expired in 2004?
2. **Federal immigration reform** – Should Congress pass the “DREAM ACT” to cover all undocumented college students and provide them priority status in acquiring U.S. citizenship?
3. **Personhood Amendment** - Should Congress pass a ‘personhood amendment’ to outlaw abortions and all contraceptive procedures performed by licensed physicians?

Each of the above topics is designed to achieve the following goals:

   a. Increase your understanding of how federal and state lawmakers make decisions regarding major public issues;
   b. Provide an opportunity to understand the political, policy and social environments in which legislative decisions are made by federal and state governments;
   c. Examine the policy options available and the factors that influence those selected as solutions;
   d. Draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the solution adopted, if any.
   e. Make a recommendation regarding what solution you believe is the most effective in addressing the problem.

The assignment will be written in three components as follows:

1. **Paper One - Statement of the problem** – This section will include (a) a description of the problem being debated: Why is this a problem for government? What is the evidence (magnitude, public opinion, statistics, etc.) that a government solution is needed? What is the projected negative impact if government does not address the problem? (b) Name 4 groups and/or organizations that are pressing government to act? **Maximum length : 3 single-spaced pages.**
2. **Paper Two - Proposed solutions** – Is there a current federal law, judicial ruling and/or Executive Order on this issue? If so, what is it? Do states have laws on this issue? If so, do they support or conflict with federal law? Is this issue being addressed in the 113th Congress? If so, what solutions are on the table?  

   Maximum length: 4 single spaced pages

3. **Paper Three - Analysis of impact and effectiveness of government action** – This concluding section summarizes the findings in sections one and two and makes concluding comments about the effectiveness of the proposed solution in solving the stated problem. **Maximum length: 5 single spaced pages, excluding charts, graphs and/or appendices.**

Citations are required for each source or authority cited. The MLA citation format is recommended for creating your work cited list.

A specific template will be provided for writing each section of your paper.

**Please note:**

- Several members of the class will be researching the same topic as you. Together you will make a presentation to the class at the end of the semester in which you (a) explain the problem, (b) present the findings and (c) make a group recommendation regarding whether the solution selected is the most effective one in alleviating the problem.

- Your individual research paper should present your findings and conclusions on the topic. The group presentation will present the combined findings and the consensus on the most effective solution.

- In preparation for the group presentation you are expected to participate in at least one meeting with other members of your research group. Discuss the pros and cons of each option, offer your recommendations and seek a group consensus on the most effective solution to the problem. This is an exercise in listening, dialogue, friendly debate, information sharing consensus building around a significant public problem.

- Your group will prepare a 1-2 page summary of the problem, issues and solutions that will be distributed to the class during your presentation.