The College of Charleston
Spring 2014

POLS 101.04 – American Government
Tuesdays-Thursdays - 10:50 A.M.-12:05 P.M.
Maybank Hall 307

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 have many examples of the role of government in our lives. For example, laws made by our federal government determine who gets searched at airports when we travel, who can or cannot serve in our military, what drugs are controlled substances, how much federal taxes we will pay, what routes airlines will fly, etc. State governments decide whether same-sex couples should be allowed to marry, what occupations must be licensed, how crimes are defined and punished, whether citizens can carry a concealed weapon, who can perform marriages, etc. Local governments decide who should pay for public schools, what routes city buses will travel, where street lights will be placed, who is responsible for trash and garbage disposal, where citizens can and cannot smoke, etc. All of these activities are directed by official laws and policies passed by our elected officials and implemented by public service employees.

Our national government has undergone major changes in the last decade:

- In early 2010 the United States Congress – with only one Republican vote- passed the largest piece of social legislation since the mid-1960s – The Patient Protection and Affordable Health Care Act (ACA) to address the problem of 47 million Americans without any health insurance. Responding to challenges to the law the U.S. Supreme Court, on a 5-4 vote in June 2012 upheld the constitutionality of the law.
- In the Mid-term elections of November 2010 the public voted in a major change in party control in the House of Representatives - from Democrats to Republicans- and the term “Tea Party” came to define the American electorate’s anger and frustration with their government.
- On November 6, 2012 the nation re-elected its first bi-racial President by a significant margin and for the first time the rapidly changing diversity of the American electorate was revealed.
- Major advances in technology , including the internet, Facebook, twitter, YouTube and a 24 hour news cycle, have brought the operations of our national government up close and personal as citizens now are bombarded daily with the debates in Washington about how the country should be governed and who should control these decisions.
- Some citizens are charging that the federal government is interfering too much in the lives of citizens while others argue that government is not doing enough.
Thanks to the internet, America is now a neighbor in the “global village”- some countries view us as a model of democracy to be emulated while others see us as a nation deeply mired in internal problems around access, freedom and equality.

All of these issues are being debated in a highly divided federal government where many of the conflicts are anchored in the basic question of how government should carry out the fundamental goals of its seminal document, the United States Constitution.

This course will explore these issues as we examine the historic foundations, the constitutional principles and the institutions and processes that shape and direct 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?

General Education Student Learning Outcomes

Students apply social science concepts, models or theories to explain human behavior, social interactions or social institutions.

1. Students identify and explain the central principles, institutions, procedures and decision-making processes of the American political system;
2. Students evaluate the basic strengths and weaknesses of the American political system through the application of political concepts and ideas;
3. Students relate historical events and/or developments to contemporary political issues, debates and outcomes in the United States, and;
4. Students develop an analytical, social scientific disposition toward American politics.

These outcomes will be assessed in the following required assignments:

- Outcome # 1 will be assessed in paper Research Paper, Part Three
- Outcome # 2 will be assessed in Research Paper, Part One
- Outcome # 3 will be assessed in Research Paper, Part Two
- Outcome # 4 will be assessed in Research Paper, Part Four

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 only be excused if they are officially validated.
B. Expectations for class participation include reading the assignments prior to class, joining in class discussions, respecting the opinion of others and turning in assignments on time. Late assignments will incur severe grade penalties.
C. The use of cellphones, I pads, tablets or other electronic devices is not permitted during class. Personal computers are permitted during class for the purpose of note-taking only 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. Students may also communicate by e-mail or by telephone.
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 schedule personal trips before the end of the semester (ex. Scheduling early travel facing Spring Break or the end of the semester) will not receive excused absences.
G. Each student will select a current political issue for research and study during the semester—several options will be presented. At the end of the semester students studying the same topic will be required to make a group presentation on the issue.

Grades

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A.</td>
<td>Research Paper, Part I</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>B.</td>
<td>Research Paper, Part II</td>
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<td>C.</td>
<td>Research Paper, Part III</td>
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<tr>
<td>D.</td>
<td>Research Paper, Part IV</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>E.</td>
<td>Midterm Examination</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>F.</td>
<td>Final Examination</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>G.</td>
<td>Class participation (includes participation in group presentation)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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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. The New York Times, The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal provide good coverage of national and international political affairs and are available online (www.nytimes.com, www.washingtonpost.com, wsj.com). Local and state political news is reported in the Post and Courier that is also available online (www.charleston.net).

Course Outline and Reading Assignments

January 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading and Discussion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Th 9</td>
<td>Introductions and Class overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu 14</td>
<td>Introductions and Class overview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Th 16</td>
<td>“We, the People” – a profile</td>
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<td>Tu 21</td>
<td>The American political culture – Chapters One and Two</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading and Discussion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Th 23</td>
<td>150+ years of self government (handout)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tu 28</td>
<td>Challenges from Britain</td>
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<td>Th 30</td>
<td>The United States Constitution- Chapter Three</td>
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February 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Reading and Discussion</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tu 4</td>
<td>The United States Constitution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Th 6</td>
<td>No class - Library Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tu 11</td>
<td>Federalism – Chapter Four</td>
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Research Assignment, Part One Due

Th 13    Civil Liberties - Chapter Five
Tu 18    Civil Liberties
Th 20    Civil Rights – Chapter Six
Tu 25    Civil Rights

Research assignment, Part Two Due

Th 27    Midterm Examination

March 2014

Tu 4     Spring Break – No Class
Th 6     Spring Break – No Class

The Institutions of the Federal Government

Tu 11    The Legislative Branch- Constitutional powers – Chapter 12
Th 13    Congress- The U.S. House of Representatives
Tu 18    Congress - The U.S. Senate
Th 20    The Executive Branch – Constitutional powers – Chapter Thirteen
Tu 25    The Office of the President

Research Assignment, Part Three Due

Th 27    The Cabinet and Executive Agencies

April 2014

Tu 1      The Federal Bureaucracy – Chapter Fourteen
Th 3      The Judicial Branch- Constitutional powers - Chapter 15
Tu 8      The Judicial Branch
Th 10     Class Research Presentation- Group One
Tu 15     Class Research Presentation – Group Two
Th 17     Class Research Presentation – Group Three
Tu 22     Class Research Presentation – Group Four

Research Assignment, Part IV Due

Th 24    Reading Day – No Class
Sat 26

Final Examination

8:00 A.M. – 11:00 A.M.

Maybank Hall 307

Required Assignment

The required assignment provides an opportunity to study a specific issue that is currently the subject of heated public debate and the responses of the federal government and the State Legislatures are often in conflict. Four of the currently hotly debated issues are:

1. Should marijuana be removed from the criminal justice system and be regulated in a manner similar to alcohol and tobacco?
2. Should the federal government re-instate the assault weapons ban as federal law?
3. Should the Dream Act become federal law as a key part of immigration reform?
4. Should Congress pass a “Personhood Amendment” giving constitutional rights to the unborn?

You are to select one of the above issues for your four part policy research during the semester. Each topic is designed to achieve the following goals:

1. Increase your understanding of how public problems/issues are defined, expressed and managed by elected officials and by the American public.
2. Review and make an assessment of the current law or policy, if any, that addresses the perceived problem.
3. Provide an opportunity to examine the interactions between key stakeholders and elected officials regarding the most effective response to a perceived public problem.
4. Examine the policy options that lawmakers select to solve a public problem, including the factors that influence which options are selected.
5. Understand the process of achieving legislative consensus and/or public support.
6. Draw a conclusion about the effectiveness of the various policy options proposed—including the one selected—in solving the defined problem.

Your policy research paper will be written in 4 components as follows:

1. **Research Paper #1- Statement of the problem** - This section will describe the principal ideas being expressed in this debate. Who are the principal proponents and opponents on each side of the debate? What do the proponents (those who vote “Yes” to the question) believe will be the positive public effect of this solution? What do the opponents believe will be the major negative public effect of this proposed solution? What supporting data (facts, figures, etc.) are provided by each side to support their position? Provide five sources that support your description of each side of the debate. Maximum length – 4 pages

2. **Research paper #2- The current governmental response** - Is there a current federal law that governs this issue? If so, provide a description of the law, including when it was enacted and the President who signed it into law. Are there current state laws that address this issue? If so, is there conflict between the federal and state laws? If yes, give two examples of the conflict between the existing federal law and the laws enacted in the two states. Maximum length- 3 pages
3. **Legislative decision making** - State whether this is an issue that will be decided by the Executive Branch, the Congress or the Supreme Court. Describe the process by which the decision will be made (i.e., if by Congress describe the process by which the Congress passes laws). Maximum length- four pages.

4. **Analysis of policy impact and recommendations**: This final section of your paper will make an analysis of the facts and issues presented. Based on the evidence presented you will draw a conclusion about whether the proposed solution may be effective in solving the stated problem. Maximum length – 5 pages

You will be provided with a specific template (outline) to assist you in writing each part of your research paper.


**Please note:**

- Several members of the class will be researching each topic. You and the other students who are researching the same topic will make a combined group presentation to the class at the end of the semester. In that presentation the group will present the findings and conclusions of the research and make a joint recommendation on the effectiveness of the current policy or the policy options proposed for reform.
- Your individual research paper should present your conclusions regarding the most effective policy solution.
- Your group’s presentation will present the group’s overall consensus on the most effective policy solution. This may require a majority vote of the members. Each member of the group must participate in the presentation.
- 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 reform proposal to achieve the objectives stated. This is an exercise in listening, dialogue, friendly debate, information sharing and consensus building around a significant problem.