

U.S. National Government and Politics

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Quigley Hall, RM 113, 332-3344

PS 110-00

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Course Overview:

This is an introductory course in American Government. It is designed to acquaint the student with the basics of our political system. We will confront the interplay of theoretical models and practice, as well as the subtleties of democratic governance. For the student with limited knowledge of our political system, this class provides the basics for understanding of the mix of culture, law, institutions, and politics.

The goal of the course is to encourage the critical examination of the American political process. There is no One Truth in the study of American politics; rather, nearly every topic we will address this semester is shrouded in controversy and debate. The challenge is to move beyond preconceptions to an open consideration of different viewpoints and ways of thinking about American government. For some (such as myself), this is precisely why the study of politics can be so exciting and challenging. Perhaps you will find the search for "truth" worth the effort.

Course Structure: The Pathways Approach

The semester will be centered around an exciting framework. The traditional way of teaching this course is to examine the pieces of our system, often as separate entities. We would examine the courts, the presidency, Congress, political parties, and so on. This approach, however, minimizes the dynamic, contentious nature of politics. Instead, we will use what I have dubbed the "pathways of politics" model. Simply stated, those anxious to play a role in the political process are confronted with choices. There are many ways to achieve political goals, so decisions must be made. The activist must select a certain pathway, so to speak, and depending on the path that is selected a different set of constraints and actors comes into play.

A great deal more will be said about the pathway approach in the weeks ahead. For now, it is enough to note that the semester will be divided into sections that correspond to different pathways (legalistic, elite mobilization, election-centered, grassroots activism, and cultural change). The overarching goal of this approach is help the student appreciate the process of American politics. We will learn about

the structure, forces, and actors in our system, and we will get a taste for this fascinating process by undertaking numerous activities. It promises to be an exhilarating semester!

Course Requirements and Grading:

Grades will be calculated on the following basis:

Class Participation/Quizzes	10%
Readings Quizzes	10%
1st Research Paper	20%
Midterm Examination	20%
2 nd Research Paper	20%
Final Examination	20%
Total	100%

Class Participation - Student participation is an important part of this class. You should come prepared to discuss all assigned reading material and to interact with your colleagues and the instructor. At the end of the semester a grade will be assigned based upon your input. Make no mistake, this participation grade is very "real" and could have an impact on your final grade.

Obviously, a key element of your participation grade will be attendance. How can you contribute to our discussion if you do not attend class? Attendance is mandatory and will be taken at the beginning of class. As you miss more than one unexcused class, your participation grade will go down.

Please also note that if the student is absent in a class in which a reading is assigned, he or she is still responsible for completing this material by the noted date. The same applies for any assignment. It is, therefore, incumbent upon the student to check with his/her colleagues or with the instructor after any absence to make sure they are up-to-date on all assignments/readings.

Readings Quizzes -- Keeping up with the readings will be an important part of the class. To make sure that the student does not fall behind, a few quizzes will be held during the course of the semester (likely between 3 and 5). The instructor may or may not announce these quizzes ahead of time. Combined, these tests will make up 10 percent of the final. Make-up quizzes will be only be given for students with written medical excuses or notes from the Dean of Student=s Office.

Midterm Examination: A midterm exam will be conducted on **March 9th**. Roughly one-half of the questions on the test will come from readings and Web material, and the other half from class lecture. The format of the exams will be discussed one week in advance. The midterm is worth 20 percent of the final grade.

Research Papers –Two papers are required for the course. The first will be due February 24th and the final paper will be due on the last day of class – April 27th. Both papers must be grounded in library research, and include a bibliography and footnotes. Evaluation of the papers will be based on the organization and clarity of the material presented, as well as content. In other words, poor organization and grammatical errors are unacceptable and will be calculated as part of the grade. Well-written papers without research are unacceptable, as are well-researched papers that are poorly written. Quality papers contain three elements: 1. a cogent, disputable argument or thesis; 2. significant scholarly research; 3. quality writing.

Writing papers is a difficult, time-consuming process. Students are encouraged to discuss their progress with the instructor and/or present outlines and lists of references early in the process. I am anxious to help you learn this critically important skill, but it takes hard work and long hours on your part. Starting papers early will help ensure a quality product, as well as help guard against any last-minute snags, such as computer meltdowns or printer malfunctions.

Final Examination – Our final exam will be comprehensive; that is, it will cover material from the entire semester and will include readings, lecture notes. This exam is worth 20 percent of your final grade. The examination will be **May 3, at 9:00 AM.**

Withdrawal Policy - Students should familiarize themselves with the withdrawal procedures of the College. If it becomes necessary for a student to withdraw from the course, he or she should do so at the earliest possible time. Please keep in mind that the final date to drop this course is at the end of the fifth week of the semester. Any student enrolled in the course who does not meet necessary requirements and who neglects to withdraw in the manner provided by the College will receive a failing grade.

Late Assignments, Papers, and Make-Up Exams - All assigned materials are due at the beginning of class. Late assignments and papers will not be accepted without a penalty unless there is a written, medical excuse or note from the Dean of Students. Likewise, make-up exams will only be given if the student has a written, medical excuse or note from the Dean. Otherwise, they will receive a zero.

Regarding late papers, the following schedule of penalties applies: Material submitted after the start of class and within two hours after class will be docked two-thirds a letter a letter grade. In other words, an A paper will become a B+. Assignments submitted from two hours after class to 24 after the start of class in which the papers are due will be penalized one letter grade. From that point on the penalty will be one letter grade per 24-hour period that the assignment is late. Obviously, the best approach is to finish your assignments early and to not get caught-up in any last-minute glitches.

Office Hours - Students are encouraged to see me during office hours or by appointment. Hours will be held on **Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, 9:00 to 11:00.** Appointments can be

made to accommodate the student's schedule. Please note that office visits are an important part of this class. Feel free to stop by to discuss lecture topics, assigned reading material, research papers, or to simply chat about politics

Academic Honesty - Academic dishonesty will be taken very seriously in this class. Students bear the responsibility of knowing what constitutes proper citation, plagiarism and cheating. As you know, there is also a strict honor code at Allegheny College. Students are strongly encouraged to read through the College Catalog and are also encouraged to see the instructor to review this information or any other matter dealing with citation style and academic honesty. Plagiarism is a very serious matter.

Required Books:

1. Larry Berman and Bruce Allen Murphy, *Approaching Democracy, 4th Edition*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003.
2. Joseph Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation*, New York: Knoph, 2000.
3. Walter Mears, *Deadlines Past: 40 Years of Presidential Campaigns*

Outline of the Semester

Please note that the material below is a rough outline and that we may veer from it here and there. You are, however, responsible for reading the material by the assigned date unless otherwise directed by the instructor.

January 15

Course Preliminaries
Review of Syllabus

Section I: Fundamentals

January 20

Introduction to the Pathways of American Government

- * What is Politics?
- * Politics, Power, and Authority
- * Types of Political Systems
- * What is Democracy?
- * The Role of Elites in a Democratic System
- * Opportunities for Political Action in American Politics

- * The Pathways of Politics
 - The Five Routes
 - The Difference Between Structure and Process, Actors and Tactics
 - How Different Actors Have Different Resources
 - The Interplay Between Pathways

Readings: Berman, chapter 1; Ellis chapter 1.

January 22, 27, 29

The Framework of American Politics

- * Pre-Revolutionary Governing Systems
- * British Restrictions and the Colonial Response
- * The Push for Independence
- * The Articles of Confederation
- * The Motivations of the Framers: The Traditional Perspective
- * Drafting the Constitution: The Art of Compromise
- * The Final Document
 - Checks, Balances, and the Sharing of Powers
 - Federalism: Layers of the Governing System
 - National Supremacy
- * The Strengths and Weakness of our Constitutional Framework

The Roots of Political Action in America

- * Political Action During the Colonial Experience
- * Patriot Leagues and other Pre-Revolutionary Organizations
- * The Declaration of Independence and the Concept of Limited Government
- * Shay's Rebellion: An Unruly Mob or Political Protest?
- * The Motivations of the Framers: An Alternative Perspective
- * The Debate over Ratification
- * The Federalists versus the Anti-Federalists
- * The Bill of Rights and Social Action
- * Other Constitutional Adjustments (a quick review of several other amendments)
- * Summary: The Limits and Opportunities for Political Action in America

Readings: Berman, ch. 2, 3; Federalist Papers, #10 and #51; Ellis, chapter 3

Section II. The Pathways of American Politics

February 3 and 5

The Court-Centered Pathway: Theory and Structure

- * Introduction: The Role of Courts
- * The Common Law Tradition
- * Jurisprudence in Colonial America
- * Article III of the Constitution
- * Sources of American Law
- * Layers of the Court System
- * The Federal Court System
 - U. S. District Courts
 - U. S. Court of Appeals
 - The Supreme Court
 - The Appointment Process, Confirmation, Tenure (nuts and bolts here)
 - The Court's Workload
- * The State/Municipal Court System
 - Criminal Law
 - Civil Law
- * Summary: How the court structure offers opportunity for change given certain conditions.

Readings: Berman, ch. 6

February 10, 12

The Court-Centered Pathway: Actors and Tactics

- *The Adversary System
- * The Role of Judges: Theory and Practice
- * Judicial Review
- * Judicial Activism and Judicial Restraint
- * Judicial Policy Making
- * Restrictions on the Courts
 - Executive Checks
 - Legislative Checks
 - The Power of Public Opinion
- * The Politics of Judicial Nomination and Confirmation
- * Bringing a Case Before the Courts
- * The Role of Interest Groups in the Court Process
- * The Drive to Protect **Civil Liberties**
- * The Struggle for **Civil Rights**
 - The Rights of Non-whites in America
 - The Struggle for Gender Equality
- * Modes of Legal Activism at the State and Municipal Levels

*Summary: Why the court-centered pathway has been an important route for minority causes; the limits of court-based political action; and merging issues in the court process.

Readings: Berman, ch. 13, 14

February 17 - 19

Elite Mobilization Pathway: Theory and Structure

- * Democracy as a Republic
- * The Theory of Competing Interests
- * The Role of Elites in the Early American Experience
- * Elite Resurgence and the Constitution
- * The Foundation of Congress
 - Framers= Intent
 - Article I of the Constitution
 - The Powers of Congress
 - The Functions of Congress and State Legislatures
 - House and Senate Differences
 - The Committee System
 - How a Bill Becomes a Law: The Official Version
- * Nuances in the State Legislatures
- * The Foundations of the Presidency
 - Framers Intent
 - Article II of the Constitution
 - Who Can Become a President?
 - The Many Roles of the President
 - Formal Executive Powers
 - Formal Limits on Presidential Power
 - The Organization of the Executive Office of the President
 - The Role of the Vice President
 - Abuses of Presidential Power and Impeachment
- * Nuances in State Executives (Governors)
- * The Federal Bureaucracy
 - Organizational Components
 - Sources of Bureaucratic Power
 - Restraints on the Bureaucracy

Readings: Berman, chapters 4, 5; Ellis, chapter 4

February 24 – 27

**** First Paper Due: Feb. 24th ****

Elite Mobilization Pathway: Actors and Tactics

- * How a Bill Becomes a Law: A Revised Look
- * Iron Triangles and Others Models of Policy Action
- * Congress in Action
 - The Role of Leadership in the Legislative Process
 - The Role of Parties and Partisanship in the Legislative Process
 - Committees: The Workhorses of Congress
 - The Electoral Connection
- * Presidents as Policy Makers
 - From Whig to Stewardship Model of Executive Action
 - The Various Powers of Persuasion
 - Budgetary Powers
 - Logrolling and Bargaining
 - Going Public
 - Party-Based Resources
 - The Personal Dimension
- * Lobbying and the Special Role of Interest Groups
 - Theory and Practice of a Pluralist Democracy
 - Direct Lobbying Techniques
 - Indirect Lobbying Techniques
 - Harry and Louise: New directions in Interest Group Pressure

Readings: Berman, chapter 7

March 2 and 4

Grass-Roots Activism Pathway: Theory and Structure

- * The Theory of Mass Mobilization and Protest
- * Protest in Colonial and Revolutionary America
- * The Framers' Fear of Faction
- * The Bill of Rights
 - Freedom of Religion
 - Freedom of Speech
 - Protections of Symbolic Speech
 - The Right to Assemble
 - Freedom of the Press
- * Application of the Bill of Rights
 - Theory versus Practice
 - State Limits and the Gradual Process of Incorporation
- * State and Federal Restrictions on Mobilization

- During Times of War (the Espionage Act of 1919, for example)
- The Red Scare
- The McCarthy Era
- * Modes of Grass Roots Activism
- * Summary: The Legal Limits and Opportunities for Grassroots Movements

Readings: Berman, ch. 11, 12; Mears Chapters TBA

March 9 Midterm Examinations

March 11 B Catch-Up, Review

March 23 and 25

The Election-Centered Pathway: Theory and Structure

- * The Theoretical Role of Elections in a Democratic System
- * Elections in Colonial Times and during the Articles of Confederation
- * Elections and the Intent of the Framers
 - Role of the States
 - Eligibility
 - Length of Terms
 - Indirect Election and Rotation in the Senate
 - The Electoral College
- * Suffrage During the Early Days of Our Republic
- * Expansion of Suffrage
 - Jacksonian Democracy
 - 15th Amendment
 - 19th Amendment (a good deal here)
 - 26th Amendment
- * Changes in the Nomination Process
- * The Unintended Consequences of the Progressive Era
- * Other Historical Restrictions on Voting (Jim Crow laws, etc.)
- * Regulations on Campaign Practices (campaign finance especially)
- * The State of Presidential Elections
 - Primaries and Caucuses
 - The Role of Conventions
 - The Electoral College in the 21st Century
- * Emerging Legal Issue in the Election Process

Readings: Berman, 10; Ellis Chapter 5; Mears Chapters TBA

April 1, 6, 8

The Election-Centered Pathway: Actors and Tactics

- * The Special Place of Political Parties in the Election Process
 - Theoretical Functions
 - Historic Roles
 - The Rise and Decline of Machines
 - Realignment Theory and the Six Party Eras
 - Key=s Notion of the Tripod
 - The Persistence of the Two Party Model
 - State of the Parties: Shea's 'Base-Less' Argument
- * Interest Groups in the Election Process
- * The Emergence of Campaign Professionals
- * Money: The Mothers Milk of Electoral Politics
 - History of Money in Elections and Early Efforts to Regulate It
 - The Reforms of the Early 1970s
 - *Buckley v. Valeo*
 - The Numerous Loopholes in Finance Regulations
 - On-going Reform Suggestions
 - Does Money Corrupt the Election and Policy Process?
- * How Voters Decide
 - Economic Issues
 - Party Identification
- * The Turnout Enigma
 - Trends in Turnout
 - Possible Explanations for the Decline in Turnout
 - Who Doesn't Vote?: Demographic Issues and Nonvoting
 - The Connection Between Turnout and Public Policy
- * How Campaigns are Conducted
 - The Grassroots Model
 - The Professional Model

Readings: Berman, ch. 9; Mears Chapters TBA

April 13 - 15

Cultural Change Pathway: Foundations, Actors, and Tactics

- * American Political Culture
 - Fundamental Values
 - The Stability of Political Culture
 - The Power of Political Culture (with several examples)
- * The Socialization Process

- * Changes in American Political Culture
 - Changing Demographics
 - Changing Modes of Leisure
 - Changing Economic System
- * Ideology
- * Public Opinion
 - How it is measured?
 - What it tells us
 - How it Shifts
- * Local Political Cultures
- * The Politics of Entertainment
 - Does Life Imitate Art? Three Causal Models of Leisure and Politics
 - Connecting Leisure to Politics (examples)
- * The Politics of Fashion

Readings: Berman, ch. 8; Handout “Popular Culture: The Trojan Horse of American Politics?” by Dan Shea; Ellis, Chapter 6

Section III. Implications and Conclusions

April 20, 22, 27

The Future of American Political Institutions

- * The Import of Global Economic Interdependence
- * The Weight of other International Forces (shifting military concerns..)
- * The Imperial Presidency and the Growing Import of the EOP
- * The Weight of Money in Politics
- * The Declining Role of Political Parties
- * Politics in an Era of Divided Government
- * The Politicization of the Court Nomination Process
- * The Rise of MegaMedia (Giant Media Corporations, etc.)

The Future of Political Activism in America

- * Are Americans Still Engaged?
 - Putnam=s Thesis
 - Alternative Arguments
- * New Challenges to Civic Activism
 - The Nationalization of Interest Groups
 - The Decline in Local Party Organizations
 - The Professionalization of Elections
 - The Nationalization of the Media

- Changing Work Patterns
- Changing Socialization Agents
- Growing Cynicism and Distrust
- * Opportunities for Engagement in America
 - The Case of Vermont=s Campaign Finance Efforts: Preserving Amateur Politics
 - A Rebirth of Concerned Citizens
 - New Resources for a New Generation
- * Conclusion: Understanding the Pathways of Politics

Readings: Handout TBA

Final Research Paper - Due on April 27th

Final Examination: May 3, 9:00 AM