Introduction to American Government

Contemporary politics is an amalgamation of institutional directives and traditions, cultural preferences, and the quest for power by various interest groups. We will examine how these forces shape our democracy, and why the struggle for democracy continues. Ideology, public opinion, the politics of protest, framing and media influences are exciting elements of this triad, and we will pay special attention to them in this course. I design our class sessions to elicit your active participation in both the course material and the real-world politics, therefore we will apply the course material to current political issues as frequently as possible. In order to facilitate this, you need to keep abreast of contemporary issues through the reading of *The New York Times* and other news sources. Our goals are:

- To explore political institutions and processes in the United States
- To help hone your critical thinking and writing skills
- To inspire you to commit yourself to participate in politics at all levels

Course Requirements

Attendance

Students are required to attend every class, since participation is a significant part of assessing your performance in the class. However, I will excuse students in cases of illness or family emergencies. In order for me to grant an excuse, it is important that students contact me in advance of the class meeting. I will report excessive unexcused absences to the appropriate dean’s office.

Honor Code

Students must adhere to the University of Richmond Honor Code. This means that on both the midterm and final exam, students must write the following, “I pledge that I have neither given nor received assistance during the completion of this work.” You should provide your signature after the pledge.

Students are encouraged to seek help in writing papers. However, it is a violation of the honor code to plagiarize content from any source. Plagiarism is the act of using someone else’s words without proper attribution. Paraphrasing does not exempt students from the need to cite sources. Please refer to the University of Richmond websites at [http://www.richmond.edu/about/features/honorcode.htm](http://www.richmond.edu/about/features/honorcode.htm) and [http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb/source.html](http://writing2.richmond.edu/writing/wweb/source.html) for additional guidance.

Paper
Each student is required to write a paper in which he or she takes a position supporting, or disputing, elements contained in prominent opinion editorial article in the New York Times. The steps for completing this assignment are as follows:

1. During the first three weeks of class, comb the NYT for op-ed pieces that you find intriguing.

2. Decide the position you will take relative to the author, and began research both sides of the issue.

3. Begin work on an outline for the paper.

4. Compose a 10-12 page paper in which you present your argument, and the evidence. Every paper must have a copy of the op-ed piece referenced attached.

In the syllabus schedule, I designate the due dates for each stage of this process. As you complete each stage, it will help me assist you in completing this assignment.

These papers are formal writing assignments. Writing style and grammar are important. Misspelled words are simply not acceptable. If you quote or use ideas from the text, you must cite your source and include a bibliography. You may write in the first person (using “I”). I will base your grade on the creativity and clarity of comments, and the quality and volume of your supporting documents. I will not accept late, faxed, or emailed papers.

Exams

Midterm: Essay and Short Answer, Thursday, October 13, both sections
Final: Essay Only, Tuesday, December 13, 9-Noon for 11:15 Section
        Friday, December 16, 2-5 pm for 3:45 Section

Grading

Papers (25%)
Midterm exam (30%)
Final Exam (45%)

Reserved Electronic Texts

There are several articles on electronic reserve at Boatwright Memorial Library. You may access the reading from the main menu on the library’s homepage.
**Required Readings and Texts**


Four electronically reserved articles accessible from the Boatwright Memorial Library website. The titles are in the syllabus schedule.


All texts will be on 24-hour reserve at Boatwright library.

**Course Schedule**

**Tuesday, August 30**

Review of Syllabus; Overview of Class Discussion of “New Generation, New Politics”

**PART I: Introduction: Why Must We Struggle for Democracy?**

**Thursday, September 1**

NO CLASS. PROFESSOR SIMPSON WILL ATTEND APSA NATIONAL CONFERENCE.

*Rights, Rules, and Responsibilities: Forging a Nation and Contemporary Challenges to Constitutional Rights*

**Tuesday, September 6**

Readings: Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4, *Struggle*

Discussion Questions: Does political culture change over time? Are labels such as liberal, conservative or radical useful today? How does our individualist philosophy mesh with the acquisition and use of political power? How is the Constitution a “living” Constitution? Whose rights were the framers trying to protect? What are the current controversies regarding federalism?

**PART II: United States Institutions: Challenges to Democracy**

Governing the People
Thursday, September 8  
Readings: Chapters 11, *Struggle*

Discussion Questions: Why do you think it is so difficult to pass legislation in Congress? How dangerous is stalemate in times of economic and crisis and global conflict? What do you think of your own congressional representatives?

Tuesday, September 13  
Readings: Chapters 12 and 14, *Struggle*  
Electronic Reserve: “Progressive and Conservative Constitutionalism as the United States Enters the 21st Century”

Discussion Questions: What qualities do you feel are most important for the President? Are Presidential candidates under too much public scrutiny? What do we need to know about our President? What are the challenges to the democratic ideal presented by the judicial structure? If you could change anything about the structure and the arbitration of constitutional disputes, what would it be?

Thursday, September 15

**PART III: POLITICAL LINKAGES: WHAT IS AMERICA? POWER PLAYERS AND POPULISM**

Tuesday, September 20  
Readings: Chapters 1, 2-Paradise  
Chapter 5, *Struggle*

Thursday, September 22  
Readings: Chapters 3, *Paradise*

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**SELECTED OP-ED PIECE DUE WITH THESIS STATEMENT (PARAGRAPH), THURSDAY, SEPT 22**

Tuesday, September 27  
Readings: Chapters 4, 5, 6, *Paradise*

Thursday, September 29  
Readings: Chapter 6, *Struggle*, Chapter 7, *Paradise*

Tuesday, October 4  
Readings: Chapters 7 and 9, *Paradise*

Thursday, October 6  
Readings: Chapters 1 and 2, *Kansas*

Tuesday, October 11  
Chapters 3-5, *Kansas*, Midterm Review

**Thursday, October 13**  
MID-TERM EXAM-BRING 8.5X11 EXAM BOOKS

**Tuesday, October 18**  
NO CLASS; FALL BREAK
Thursday, October 20

“Outfoxed”-Documentary

Who Gets What, and How Much: Interest Groups and Social Movements

Tuesday, October 25

Readings: Chapters 6-8, Kansas
Chapters 7 and 8, Struggle

Discussion Questions: Think of the positive and negative aspects of interest group politics. Should we curtail interest group activity? What kinds of interests remain unrepresented? Why do we ignore certain interests? Why do media ignore the activities of some social movement activists? What would inspire you to become involved in a social movement?

Thursday, October 27

Remainder of Kansas

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<tr>
<th>OUTLINE FOR FINAL PAPER DUE TODAY, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27</th>
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<tr>
<td>Political Parties and Elections: They Just Aren’t Fun Anymore</td>
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Tuesday, November 1

Readings: Chapters 9 and 10, Struggle

Discussion Questions: Is there any evidence that we have made parties weaker? Why do you think third parties are unsuccessful? If we chose to, how could we restore parties to their former glory? Why don’t more Americans participate in elections? Think about participation at various levels of political systems—local, state, federal. How might participation differ at these levels? Is voting the most important form of participation? If so, why—if not, why not?

Thursday, November 3

Film: Taking on the Kennedys-Documentary

PART IV: “DOING POLITICS”

Introduction to Civil Liberties and Civil Rights Shades of Citizenship: The Struggle for Rights and Equal Treatment under the Law

Tuesday, November 8

Readings: Chapters 15 & 16, Struggle

Discussion Section: What freedoms have the Courts constricted in an effort to guarantee equality? Do you think that communities have the right to institute certain practices, even if it violates the Constitution? Why do the Supreme Court’s interpretations of the Constitution change over time? What influences judicial decisions?
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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, November 10</td>
<td>Film: <em>At the River I Stand</em> Documentary</td>
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**PART V: POLITICS AND POLICY**

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, November 15</td>
<td>Readings, Chapter 17, <em>Struggle</em>,</td>
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<td>Thursday, November 17</td>
<td>Electronic Reading: “Compassion, Religion and Politics”</td>
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<td>Tuesday, November 22</td>
<td>Review</td>
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**FINAL PAPER DUE TODAY, NOVEMBER 22 AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS**
**REMEMBER: NO LATE PAPERS, NO FAXED PAPERS, AND NO EMAILED PAPERS**

**T’GIVING HOLIDAY NOVEMBER 23-26**

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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, November 29</td>
<td>Chapters 1-4, <em>Elephant</em></td>
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<td>Thursday, December 1</td>
<td>Chapters 5-8, <em>Elephant</em></td>
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<td>Tuesday, December 6</td>
<td>Electronic Reading: “Liberalism’s Lost Script”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday, December 8</td>
<td>Exam Review</td>
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**FINAL EXAM**

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13**
9-Noon for 11:15 am Section
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16
2-5 pm for 3:45 Section