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POLS 151-01-02, United States Politics, Fall 2006

Item Type	Syllabus
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Publisher	Memphis, Tenn. : Rhodes College
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Rhodes College
Department of Political Science

Political Science 151
U.S. Politics
Fall 2006

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Buckman 303
Office Hours: MWF 12-2:30

Required Texts:

The Logic of American Politics, Kernell and Jacobson
Readings in American Government, Mary Nichols and David Nichols eds.
The Bill, Steven Waldman
A Pocket Style Manual, Hacker

* * *

Nothing requires greater nicety, in our enquiries concerning human affairs, than to distinguish exactly what is owing to chance, and what proceeds from causes; nor is there any subject, in which an author is more liable to deceive himself by false subtilties and refinements. To say, that any event is derived from chance, cuts short all farther enquiry concerning it, and leaves the writer in the same state of ignorance with the rest of mankind. But when the event is supposed to proceed from certain and stable causes, he may then display his ingenuity, in assigning these causes; and as a man of any subtilty can never be at a loss in this particular, he has thereby an opportunity of swelling his volumes, and discovering his profound knowledge, in observing what escapes the vulgar and ignorant. David Hume

When we pass from the works of nature, in which all the delineations are perfectly accurate and appear to be otherwise only from the imperfection of the eye which surveys them, to the institutions of man, in which the obscurity arises as well from the object itself as from the organ by which it is contemplated, we must perceive the necessity of moderating still further our expectations and hopes from the efforts of human sagacity. James Madison

American government is, strictly speaking, an arrangement of institutions for enacting and enforcing laws. As with machines, if we study only the motions of these institutions, we will see but a small part of what they were doing and almost nothing of *why* they were doing it in this or that way. The arrangement of these mechanisms of government reflect an understanding of the purposes of government and of the characteristics of those who will be, directly and indirectly, running the government.

A study of American government will, therefore, involve careful thinking about philosophical and psychological questions. What ought to be the ends of government, and how can human beings secure those ends? We should not assume, however, that desirable goals and human behavior are readily compatible. We will look at the mechanisms, the institutions, of government as indispensable means for reconciling our goals and our motives. Our study will, therefore, be about securing as much good, or as little harm, as is possible under the circumstances. That is the essence of politics. That is what makes political thinking so demanding and satisfying.

Consequently, you should expect the study of politics in the United States to be very difficult. Our work will relate to what you see in the world, but only gradually. You should bring your immediate interests and opinions to the readings and to class, but be prepared to see their deficiencies. We cannot decide intelligently (as opposed to what most journalists do) whether George W. Bush has been a good president, or whether this Congress has been successful, without a thorough understanding of the context: what are *reasonable* expectations?

A course of study should change your life, how you think about and address the world around you. It should not trade old prejudices for new ones, but rather turn prejudice into reasoned opinion. This requires three disciplines: you must be willing to expose your opinions and examine them, to argue with the readings, with your classmates, myself included; and you must doubt the sufficiency and soundness of your prejudices and opinions, and as better evidence and reasoning is presented, you must be willing to modify or abandon them.

The third discipline is *careful reading*. Many of the readings are densely reasoned and strange. Some might be offensive. Altogether they will be difficult. React to what you read, but also attend carefully to the argument. Defects in an argument are to be found not in its conclusions but in the evidence and logic that lead to the conclusions. Allow your distaste for a conclusion to drive you to find flaws in what supports it. The more carefully you read, the more accurately you will think, and the more accurately you think, the better you will write, and the better you write...you get the picture.

What, therefore, will our classes be like? We are here not to swallow knowledge stones but to learn how to digest, how to integrate ideas and information into our thinking about the world and our lives. Class should engage all of us, therefore, in learning *as an activity*. I will say much. You should say much more. You may interrupt me. You may begin the class with a question, a statement, an observation. I will proceed, more or less, according to the syllabus,

but my aim is not simply to plow through it. If you are not satisfied with your grasp of the materials and problems, you should say so. *If you are not satisfied or are confused, you are far from alone.*

Finally, learning is a continuous activity which should unite all of the individual aspects of your life here and beyond. More narrowly, you should not treat class time and office hours as wholly distinct things. *Some of the best and most enjoyable learning occurs one-on-one.* If you have a question, something you want to discuss, whatever, come for a visit. You will be welcomed.

The graded requirements are: three papers (60%), daily questions (20%), attendance and participation (10%), and a final exam (10%). *Late papers will be penalized 1/3 of a letter grade per day. If you do not complete and submit **all** written work, you **will** fail the course.*

N.B. You must, at the end of all of your written work, **affirm your adherence to the principles and terms of the College's honor code.** You are responsible for reading and understanding that code. In particular, you must become very familiar with the various forms of plagiarism. Plagiarism is a cardinal academic sin, and *ignorance will not be accepted as an excuse.* If you are ever unsure about its meaning and any particular application, ask me or a writing center tutor.

You are, in this course, allowed to discuss the paper and exam topics *with other members of this class.* But such discussions must be limited to the substance of the question and the relevant readings. *They must not extend into the outlining, writing, and rewriting of the essays.*

Assignments:

- Aug. 23 I. Introduction: Roasting Old Chestnuts Over a Burning Flag
- Aug. 25 II. Politics and politics in the United States
- Aug. 28 A. Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 1, pp. 2-10
- Aug. 28 B. Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 1, pp. 10-31
- Aug. 30 C. Public opinion:
Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 10, pp. 380-411
- Sept. 1 Hacker, 133-115, 184-185, 206. **Assignment due (4 PM):** *Outline an analytical essay on your political beliefs and their origins (one page) and then write an introductory paragraph for that essay.*
- Sept. 6 D. Mass media and public opinion:
Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 14, pp. 538-561

Sept 8 E. Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 4, pp. 118-122
Lincoln-Douglas debates (Acad_Dept_Pgm)

III. Human Nature, Natural Rights, and Political Order

Sept. 11 A. The Meaning of Equality and Liberty:
Vonnegut: "Harrison Bergeron" (Nichols: #83)
Jefferson: "Natural Aristocracy" (Nichols: #84)

Sept. 13 B. Human nature and the purposes of government:
Kernell and Jacobson, pp. 36-44
The Declaration of Independence (Nichols: #1)
Lincoln: "The Meaning of the Declaration" (Nichols: #2)

Sept. 15 C. The Declaration of Independence (Nichols: #1)
(Hacker, 63-86 + quiz)

D. Human nature and political order: "To secure these rights..."

Sept. 18 1. Political science and complex government
a) Early constitutions and the constitutional convention:
Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 2, pp. 36-61

Sept. 20 b) The Constitution:
Kernell and Jacobson, Appendix 3, pp. 594-599

Sept. 22 2. Securing our rights: Is a bill of rights enough?
a) Publius, *Federalist* #84 (Acad_Dept_Pgm)
American Government, first 10 amendments and pp. 100-101

Sept. 25 **Writing:** Hacker, pp. 1-62

Sept. 27 b) Speech, petition, assembly:
Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 5, pp. 165-173
Texas v. Johnson (handout)

Sept. 29 c) Religion:
Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 5, pp. 176-183
Engel v. Vitale and *Stone v. Graham* (handout)

Oct. 2 d) Due process and the 14th Amendment:
Kernell and Jacobson, pp. 599-601, pp. 160-164

IV. Liberty, rights, and constitutional Government

A. Tyranny of the majority and a large, commercial republic

- 1) Republican remedy?
 - Oct. 4 a) Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 2, pp. 64-67
Federalist #10 (Nichols: #8)
 - Oct. 6 b) *Federalist* #10
Federalist #51 (Nichols: #9, pp. 53-54)
 - Oct. 9 2) Faction, interests, and political participation
Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 13
 - 3) Liberty, markets, and welfare
 - Oct. 11 a) Markets and the welfare state:
 - 1) Friedman (Nichols: #61)
 - Oct. 13 2) Franklin Roosevelt (Nichols: #62)
 - Oct. 16 3) Economic reasoning (handout: opportunity costs)

Oct. 18 **Writing:** Hacker, pp, 183-208.

- 4) Dilemmas in liberty and equality:
 - Oct. 20 a) deTocqueville (Nichols: ## 14, 64)
 - Oct. 23 b) deTocqueville (Nichols: #18)

B. Federalism and divided government

- 1) Basis:
 - Oct. 25 Constitution: Article I, sections 8, 10
Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 3, pp. 76-86
McCulloch v. Maryland (Nichols: #17)
 - Oct. 27 2) Development:
Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 3, pp. 87-109

V. Liberty and citizenship: the limits of constitutional government:

A. Liberty, citizenship, and civil rights:

- Oct. 30 1) Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 4, pp. 122-126
Plessy v. Ferguson (Nichols: #81)
Brown v. Board of Ed. (Nichols: #80)
- Nov. 1 2) Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 4, pp. 126-149

VI. The Government: Institutions and Functions

A. Constitution and the rule of courts; judicial review:

- Nov. 3 1) Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 9, pp. 344-349
Marbury v. Madison (Nichols: #51)
- Nov. 6 2) "Brutus XV" (Nichols: #48)
Jefferson, Against Judicial Review (Nichols: #49)
Lincoln, Authority of the Supreme Court (Nichols: #50)
- Nov. 8 3) Brennan (Nichols: ##55)
Roe v. Wade (Nichols: #77)

B. Structure

- Nov. 10 1) Political parties:
Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 12, pp. 460-471, 492-501
- Nov. 13 2) Party government and separated powers:
Lloyd Cutler: "To Form a Government" (Nichols: #30)
Federalist #51 (Nichols: #9)
- Nov. 15 3) Presidential government?
- Nov. 17 a) The constitutional presidency
Constitution: Article II, Sections 2-3
Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 7, pp. 260-273
- Nov. 17 b) The democratic presidency:
Ceaser, et. al., "...Rhetorical Presidency" (Nichols: #37)
The Bill, chapter 1

- Nov. 20 c) The legislative presidency:
Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 7, pp. 280-290
The Bill, chapters 2-3
- Nov. 27 5) President, Congress, and how a bill becomes a law:
a) Congress:
Kernel and Jacobson, chapter 6, pp. 204-209, 224-227
- Nov. 29 b) The politics of interests: *The Bill*, chapters 4-8
- Dec. 1 c) *The Bill*, Chapters 9-10
Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 6, pp. 227-230, 235-243
- Dec. 4 c) Kernell and Jacobson, chapter 6, pp. 244-254
The Bill, chapters 11-15
- Dec. 6 Conclusion: Justice, virtue, and liberty
Abraham Lincoln, "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions"
(Nichols, #40)

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