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## POLS 151-03, United States Politics, Fall 2008

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**POLS 151**  
**United States Politics**  
**Fall 2008**  
**M/W/F: 10:00-10:50**

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**Course Description**

This course is an introduction to the theories, institutions and processes that define the workings of the government of the United States. It is divided into three sections. In the first section we examine the roots of American government including the ideas and interests that framed debates over the Constitution, and the outcomes of those debates in key clauses and amendments to the Constitution. For the second section, we examine the processes and institutions that organize and link public interests to the formal institutions of government including political parties, elections, and interest groups. In the third section of the course, we review the three formal branches of government—the Congress, the Presidency, and the Supreme Court. Throughout the course we will use key concepts to analyze contemporary issues in American politics. As such, students should be prepared to keep up with current events.

**Course Objectives**

As an introductory American politics class, this course should help you learn:

- Factual knowledge about the political institutions, actors, rules and processes of the United States
- Fundamental principles, generalizations and theories that help explain how these political institutions, actors, rules and processes interact
- Key tensions within the U.S. over individualism and civil society, race and inequality, representation
- How the course materials (e.g. the facts and theories) apply to real world events
- To analyze and critically evaluate major debates and issues in politics citizens struggle with (and political scientists try to inform)

## **Required Materials:**

Karen O'Connor and Larry Sabato (O&S), *American Government: Continuity and Change (2007 Edition-Election Update)*.

Ann G. Serow and Everett C. Ladd (Editors), *The Lanahan Readings in the American Polity* (Fourth Edition).

Tony Robinson, *The 2008 Presidential Campaign Workbook*.

Several of the readings will be marked (ACAD). These readings are in the Goldberg/Public folder at the Academic Departments Program. To get to [Acad Dept Pgm](#) you can select Start, Run and enter [\\fileserv1\Acad\\_Dept\\_Pgm](#) in the Run window. You may want to create a shortcut (With the [Acad\\_Dept\\_Pgm](#) volume window open, drag the folder icon in the Address bar to your desktop. It will automatically create a shortcut on your desktop.).

To access a reading:

Go to Acad\_Dept\_Pgm

Open: Poli\_Sci

Open: Goldberg\_Arielle

Open: Public

Open: 151

Open the desired document and print it, without alternation.

In addition, each student needs access to the web, regular use of an email account and should regularly read a national newspaper (*The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* can be found on-line for no charge) and a local newspaper. Current events are a big part of the class discussions and students will be expected to know about important political issues.

## **Course Requirements:**

### Participation and Weekly Quizzes: 25% (Participation=15%; Quizzes=10%)

Students are expected to attend class, be on time, and be prepared to discuss the readings. Note that participation is a function not only of attendance, but also the quality of contributions. Even on days that I do not take formal attendance, I do take note of who attends and who does not, as well as who is participating and who is not. The assignments from the *Presidential Campaign Workbook* will also be included in your participation grade. In addition, there will be a **weekly quiz** that covers the basic concepts from the textbook and, occasionally, the Lanahan readings. There will be a total of 12 quizzes; each student must take at least 10 quizzes. If you take all of the quizzes, the two lowest scores will be dropped. The quizzes will be available electronically through Moodle.

### Response papers: 15%

Each student must turn in a total of seven response papers that analyze a theory/argument, made by a Lanahan author, by applying it to a current news item. For each submission, you should

choose a contemporary newspaper article that relates to the reading for that day. Please choose an article from a major newspaper, such as the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*. These assignments must be turned in at the beginning of class. Each response paper must be typed, single-spaced, and approximately one page. Your submission should indicate that you have read and reflected upon the assigned readings. **One of the seven papers should be based on your debate topic** (see below). You may want to choose articles that will help you to develop your final research paper.

Debate Presentation: 10%

Case Study Debate: On the first day of class, students will rank order the list of case studies attached to the syllabus. I will assign 4-5 students for each issue. Once assigned to a group, you will then decide which side of the debate you want to be on and how the work is to be divided. **You do not need to personally agree with the position you support for presentation.** Be sure to apply key concepts that we have discussed in class. You should start with the chapters in *You Decide!* but move beyond them with additional research.

Two Papers: 40% (Analytical essay: 20; Research paper on a policy issue being proposed by one of the presidential candidates: 20)

Final Exam: 10%

**Any unexcused absence on an exam means you forfeit all points.** Absences are considered excused **only with appropriate documentation** by College personnel or a personal physician. It is **your responsibility** to contact me **prior** missing a class or exam.

I encourage all students to ask questions in class, via email, or by speaking with me directly. I am willing to help any student who seeks it. However, **if you are struggling, do not wait to contact me about getting help!**

Grading Scale

		93-100 =	A	90-92 =	A-
88-89 =	B+	83-87 =	B	80-82 =	B-
78-79 =	C+	73-77 =	C	70-72 =	C-
68-69 =	D+	60-67 =	D	0-59 =	F

Special Circumstances:

If you have any kind of special circumstances, such as a disability or illness, or if you are involved with a university activity that requires you to miss class, let me know as soon as possible. This information is confidential. All students attending Rhodes College with documented disabilities are eligible and encouraged to apply for services with the Office of Student Disability Services (<http://www.rhodes.edu/disability>). Please see me for information, or contact Melissa Butler McCowen at 843-3994. Please provide me with a copy of the accommodation granted by the Office as early as possible.

Rhodes also has a variety of academic support services including:

- Peer tutors
- A Writing Center (315 Palmer Hall and on line at: <http://www.rhodes.edu/writingcenter>)
- Workshops in study skills assistance (contact the Office of Student Academic Support at 843-3433 for more information)

I strongly encourage you to take advantage of these services, and to take advantage of each other as study partners for this course. If you find yourself desiring or needing any of these forms of academic support, contact me at any time and I will do what I can to help.

### **Academic Dishonesty:**

Quite simply, any type of academic dishonesty (cheating, plagiarism, etc.) is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. You are responsible for knowing the **Rhodes College Honor Code**, and its rules and regulations concerning these matters. Please read them carefully in the Rhodes College Honor Council Constitution at:

<http://www.rhodes.edu/Rhodes/CampusCommunity/PoliciesandProcedures/Student-Handbook.cfm>. In any case, **ignorance of the law is not an excuse**. Cases of suspected academic dishonesty will be referred immediately to the Honor Council.

### **Other Classroom Rules**

1. Turn cell phones off before you come to class.
2. Make every effort to be on time for class and to stay until class is over, without getting up to leave unless there is an emergency.
3. Other than mathematical errors or clarifying questions, if you have questions about your performance on an assignment, address these to me **privately**, not in class.
4. All assignments are due at the beginning of class. I do not accept e-mailed papers, except under special circumstances. **Late papers are penalized one letter grade per day and a half letter grade if turned in after the beginning of class.** Be aware that delays due to traffic, parking difficulty, or computer or printer problems are to be anticipated and are not considered a valid excuse for late papers.

**Syllabus subject to change!**

## Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

### Week 1

#### August 27: Introductions and Syllabus overview

- **Assignment:** Watch the Democratic National Convention (August 25-28)

#### August 29: No Class-Away at American Political Science Conference

## I. Foundations of Government

### Week 2: Declaration and the Articles of Confederation

#### September 1: No Class-Labor Day

- **Assignment:** Watch the Republican National Convention (September 1-4)

#### September 3: The Political Landscape

- Benjamin Barber, from *Jihad vs. McWorld* (Lanahan)
- Alexis De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Lanahan)

#### September 5: The Political Landscape

- O&S, Chapter 1 (entire)

### Week 3: From the Declaration of Independence to the Constitution

#### September 8: From the Declaration to the Articles of Confederation

- O&S, chapter 2, from beginning of chapter up to section on “The U.S. Constitution” and the *Declaration of Independence* (614-615)

#### September 10: Basic Principles of the U.S. Constitution

- O&S, chapter 2, the remainder

#### September 12: Debates over Ratifying the Constitution

- James Madison, *The Federalist 10* (Lanahan)
- Anti-Federalist readings (ACAD)

**Week 4:**

**September 15: Debates over Ratifying the Constitution**

- James Madison, *51* (Lanahan)
- Anti-Federalist readings (ACAD)

**September 17: Federalism**

- O&S, chapter 3 (entire)

**September 19: Federalism**

- Daniel Elazar, *American Federalism* (Lanahan)
- David Osborne, *Laboratories of Democracy* (Lanahan)

**II. Political Behavior and Political Processes**

**Week 5: Public Opinion and Political Participation**

**September 22: Debate 1**

- Guns, Safety, and the Constitution's Meaning: Individual Right or Subject to Regulation

**September 24: Political Socialization and Public Opinion**

- O&S, chapter 11 (entire)

**September 26: Shaping Public Opinion**

- Lawrence Jacobs/Robert Shapiro, *Politicians Don't Pander* (Lanahan)
- Robinson, "Public Opinion: What Do the People Want?" (Issue Three)
- Robinson, "Evaluating the Media: Out of Order?" (Issue Nine)

**Week 6: Public Participation and Political Parties**

**September 29: Public Participation**

- Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, *Why Americans Still Don't Vote* (Lanahan)
- William Eggers, *Government 2.0* (Lanahan)

**October 1: Evolution and Roles of Political Parties**

- O&S, chapter 12 (entire)

**October 3: Parties Today**

- Earl Black/Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Lanahan)
- Robinson, “Defining the Democrats” and “Defining the Republicans” (Issues One and Two)

**Week 7 Interest Groups**

**October 6: Interest Groups**

- O&S, chapter 16

**October 8: Interest Groups**

- William Greider, from *Who Will Tell the People* (Lanahan)
- Jeffrey Birnbaum, *The Lobbyists*
- Film on Moodle: *Thank You for Smoking*

**October 10: Voting and Elections**

- O&S, chapter 13

**Week 8:**

**October 13:**

- Lani Guinier, *The Tyranny of the Majority* (Lanahan)
- Robinson, “The Electoral College Battleground” (Issue Five)

**October 15: The Campaign Process**

- O&S, chapter 14

**October 17: The Campaign Process**

- Robinson, “Investigating Campaign Ads: The 30 Second Air War” (Issue Four)
- Current ads from 2008 Presidential Election: TBD

**Analytical Essay Due!**

**Week 9**

**October 20: No Class-Fall Recess**

**October 22: No Class-Fall Recess**

### III. Institutions of American Government

#### **October 24: The Challenges of Policymaking**

- *The Bill* (ACAD)

#### **Week 10 The Congress**

#### **October 27: Overview**

- O&S, chapter 7

#### **October 29: Competing Influences on the Congress and Its Members**

- David Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (Lanahan)
- Sarah Binder, *Stalemate* (Lanahan)

#### **October 31: Representation and the Congress**

- Michele Swers, *The Difference Women Make* (Lanahan)
- Katherine Tate, *Black Faces in the Mirror* (Lanahan)

#### **Week 11 The Presidency**

#### **November 3: Debate 2**

- The Electoral College: Abolish or Preserve

#### **November 5: The Outcome of the 2008 Presidential Election: What Does It Mean?**

- Robinson, “Was There a Mandate?” and “Electoral Geography: Red, Blue or Purple America” (Issue Twelve)

#### **November 7: Presidential Powers**

- O&S, chapter 8

#### **Week 12 The Presidency**

#### **November 10: Presidential Powers: Real and Perceived**

- Arthur Schlesinger, *The Imperial Presidency* (Lanahan)
- Craig Rimmerman, *The Rise of the Plebiscitary President* (Lanahan)

#### **November 12: The Judiciary**

- O&S, chapter 10

**November 14: The Judiciary**

- David O'Brien, *Storm Center* (Lanahan)
- Rosen, "The Dissenter": <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/23/magazine/23stevens-t.html>

**Week 13:**

**November 17: Debate 3**

- Evaluating the "Right to an Abortion"

**November 19: Civil Liberties**

- O&S, chapter 5, sections on Incorporation Doctrine and Freedom of Religion

**November 21: Civil Liberties**

- O&S, chapter 5, sections on Rights of Criminal Defendants (especially enemy combatants) & the Right to Privacy

**Week 14**

**November 24: Debate 4**

- Torturing Terrorists: Sometimes Justified or Always Abhorrent? (ACAD)

**November 26: No Class-Thanksgiving**

**November 28: No Class-Thanksgiving**

**Week 15**

**December 1: Civil Rights and the Abolition of Slavery**

- O&S, chapter 6 (entire)

**December 3: *When the Levees Broke* (Film)**

- Research Paper due!

**December 5: Civil Rights Today**

- TBA

**Week 16**

**December 8: Debate 5**

- Achieving Gender Pay Equality: Tougher Laws Needed or Current Law Satisfactory?

**December 10: Last Day of Class**

## **PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES FOR SELECTION**

Rank order the following choices for the group work/debate project. Once assigned to an issue, you will work with your group to decide how to split up the work.

\_\_\_\_\_ Guns, Safety, the Constitution's Meaning: Individual Right or Subject to Regulation, 9/22

\_\_\_\_\_ The Electoral College: Abolish or Preserve, 11/3

\_\_\_\_\_ Evaluating the "Right to an Abortion", 11/17

\_\_\_\_\_ Torturing Terrorists: Sometimes Justified or Always Abhorrent, 11/24

\_\_\_\_\_ Achieving Gender Pay Equality: Tougher Laws or Current Law Satisfactory? 12/8