COURSE OUTLINE AND REQUIREMENTS

POSC109, The US Political System, is an introduction to the US political system, with a focus on national governing institutions, constitutional constraints, and the impacts of mass participation and electoral democracy. The course focuses on the political and economic development and national construction of the United States. In so doing, this course considers fundamental national values such as liberty, equality, racism, and democracy, in terms of the impact of these values upon the construction of the nation and of their negotiation in practice across two centuries.

The course is divided into three major sections. The first focuses on civil society and the state, the mechanisms of national government elaborated in the Constitution and their relationship to the economic system, and constitutional citizen rights and liberties. In the second section of the course, we examine the relationship between state and citizen, and the ways in which political power achieves expression in a democratic state. We will consider public opinion, the role of the media, the formation of interest groups and political parties, and the means by which citizens organize to have an influence on governing officials. The third section of the course is devoted to an investigation of the three major branches of national government: the Congress, the Presidency, and the federal court system. The course concludes with a consideration of governance and democracy in contemporary U.S. politics.

Evaluation of student performance in this course will be based on the following criteria. First, students will complete two in-class examinations, the first of which accounts for 20 percent and the second of which accounts for 25 percent of the final course grade. Second, students will complete a final examination, which accounts for 30 percent of the course grade.

Third, students will complete a critical analysis paper, worth 15 percent of the final course grade. This paper requires students to read a scholarly political science article and to analyze it, using political science tools and insights concerning US national politics.

Finally, each student is expected to attend class and to be prepared for each class meeting by having read, in advance, the materials assigned for that day. Students should be prepared to discuss the material in detail in class every day. In addition, all students are expected to participate and to present themselves in class in a professional manner. Professionalism refers to adherence to standards of behavior and performance expected from political scientists. This includes, but is not limited to, courteous behavior in
class; attention to and respect for other speakers; engagement with the work at hand; and, of course, adherence to university standards of academic integrity. Informed class participation and professionalism are requirements of the course, and account for the remaining 10 percent of the final course grade.

Due dates for examinations and the short critical paper are indicated in the schedule, below. Please note that students are required to attend all classes and to complete all course assignments. Note as well that students are expected to be present in class for all scheduled exams, including the final examination.

**Two book are required for this course**, listed below, and are available for purchase in the University Bookstore (and elsewhere):

Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry R. Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*

**Additional readings** support the required books; these are extensive and provide a deeper understanding and analysis of facets of the US national political system. Additional readings are identified in the Schedule of Readings and Assignments, below, and are available through electronic journals on the Kelvin Smith Library website ([http://library.case.edu/ksl/](http://library.case.edu/ksl/)), or on the course Blackboard site.

Students are encouraged to read a daily national newspaper (e.g. the *Financial Times*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*).

There are also several excellent political science blogs that include a focus on US politics, such as *Mischiefs of Faction* ([http://mischiefsoffaction.blogspot.com/](http://mischiefsoffaction.blogspot.com/)), as well as the *Scholars’ Strategy Network* ([http://www.scholarsstrategynetwork.org/](http://www.scholarsstrategynetwork.org/)). Students may wish to read some of these blogs from time to time, for timely political science analysis and news related to US national politics.

**Standards of professionalism and academic integrity** are integral components of this course. Students are reminded that they are obliged to understand, to uphold, and to comply with the Academic Integrity Policy of the University. A copy of the Code may be found online at [http://students.case.edu/groups/aiboard/policy.html](http://students.case.edu/groups/aiboard/policy.html).

Students who do not understand the Academic Integrity Policy after having read it should make an appointment to see me to discuss it; indeed, I welcome this discussion and encourage students to see me in advance of any assignment about which they have doubts or questions. It is a course requirement that students read the University’s Academic Integrity Policy.
SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

January 13  Introduction to the Course

READ: Lowi et al., American Government, Chapter 1


January 20  Civil Society and the State

READ: Lowi et al., American Government, Chapter 3

January 22  Liberty, Equality, and the Political Construction of State Institutions


REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States

January 27  READ: Lowi et al., American Government, Chapters 4 and 5

January 29  Federalism and the Fragmentation of Political Powers


REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States

February 3  Politics and the National Economy


February 5  DISCUSSION

February 10  FIRST EXAMINATION

February 12  Democracy and Political Participation: Public Opinion, Social Movements, and Interest Groups


DISCUSSION: Are Madison’s concerns about the mischiefs of faction relevant in contemporary US politics?

February 17  READ: Schlozman, Verba and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, Chapters 5 and 9

February 19  Structures of Participation and Representation: Interest Groups and Political Movements

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 13


RECOMMENDED: Schlozman, Verba and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, Chapter 11
February 26  Structures of Participation and Representation: Political Parties and Elections

READ: Lowi et al., American Government, Chapters 11 and 12

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March 5  DISCUSSION

SHORT CRITICAL PAPERS DUE IN CLASS

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March 9-13  SPRING BREAK

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March 17  Congress: Legislating, Representing, Deliberating

READ: Lowi et al., American Government, Chapter 6

REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States


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March 24  Congressional Legislation, Congressional Gridlock

DISCUSSION: Should the filibuster be abolished?

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March 31

SECOND EXAMINATION

April 2

Presidential Elections: Campaign Finance and Media


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April 7

The Presidency and Executive Powers

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 7

REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States

April 9

Executive Power and Executive Orders


DISCUSSION: Do executive orders exceed presidential authority?

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April 14  The Supreme Court and the Federal Court System: “Equal Justice Under Law”

READ: Lowi et al., American Government, Chapter 9

REVIEW: Lowi et al., American Government, Chapters 4 and 5

April 16  The Supreme Court: Home to America’s Highest Court (http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/297213-1) [PROFESSOR ATTENDING MIDWEST POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION MEETINGS]


DISCUSSION: Should Supreme Court Justices be term-limited?

April 23  Conclusion to the Course: How Democratic Is the US Political System?

READ: Robert Dahl, How Democratic Is the American Constitution?, Chapters 1, 2, and 3 [available on Blackboard].


DISCUSSION: Does the US need a new constitutional convention?

FINAL EXAMINATION: MONDAY, MAY 4, 12:30PM - 3:30PM