POSC109 THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM
Spring Semester 2012
TTh 10:00-11:15am
Clark Hall 302

Karen Beckwith, Professor

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Office Hours: Wednesday 2:00-4:00pm, or by appointment
Course Website: http://politicalscience.case.edu/faculty-listings/political-science-109-professor-beckwith/

COURSE OUTLINE AND REQUIREMENTS

POSC109, The American 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. 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, each of which accounts for 25 percent of the final grade. Second, students will complete a final examination, which accounts for 40 percent of the final course grade.

In addition, 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. 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 other speakers; engagement with the work at hand; and, of course, adherence to university standards of academic integrity. Students are expected, and obliged, to comport themselves, in class, in a professional manner. 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 are indicated in the reading schedule, below. Please note that students are expected to be present in class for all scheduled exams, including the final examination.

**Books required for this course**, listed below, are available for purchase in the University Bookstore:

Robert Dahl, *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?*

**Additional readings** are available through electronic journals or JSTOR, through the Kelvin Smith Library website, or on the course webpage at [http://politicalscience.case.edu/faculty-listings/political-science-109-professor-beckwith/](http://politicalscience.case.edu/faculty-listings/political-science-109-professor-beckwith/)

Each student should print a hardcopy of every additional assigned reading for his or her own research purposes. Please note that this is a requirement of the course.

**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://www.case.edu/provost/ugstudies/acintegrity.htm](http://www.case.edu/provost/ugstudies/acintegrity.htm)

Students who do not understand this 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 17**  
**Introduction to the Course**

**January 19**  
**Civil Society and the State**


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**January 24**  
**Liberty, Equality, and the Political Construction of State Institutions**


REVIEW: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 2

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REVIEW:  *The Constitution of the United States*  

February 2  **Democracy and Political Participation**


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February 9  **Structures of Participation and Representation: Public Opinion, Social Movements, and Interest Groups**

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

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February 16  **DISCUSSION**

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February 21  **FIRST EXAMINATION**

February 23  NO CLASS MEETING; Professor at research seminar at Texas A&M University.
February 28  **Structures of Participation and Representation: Political Parties and Elections**

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 11

March 1


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March 6  READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 10


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March 13-15  SPRING BREAK

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March 22  SECOND EXAMINATION

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March 27  Congress:  Legislat ing, Representing, Deliberating


REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States


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April 3  READ: Bartels, Unequal Democracy, Chapters 1 and 7 [available on the course website at http://politicalscience.case.edu/faculty-listings/political-science-109-professorbeckwith/]

April 5  The Presidency and Executive Powers

READ: Lowi et al., American Government, Chapter 6; Dahl, How Democratic Is the American Constitution?, Chapter 4

REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States

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April 12  NO CLASS MEETING; Professor attending the Midwest Political Science Association meetings.

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April 17  The Supreme Court and the Federal Court System

READ: Lowi et al., American Government, Chapter 8

REVIEW: Lowi et al., American Government, Chapters 4 and 5; The Constitution of the United States


April 24  Conclusion to the Course: How Democratic Is the US Political System?

READ: Dahl, How Democratic Is the American Constitution?, Chapters 5, 6, and 7


April 26  DISCUSSION

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FINAL EXAMINATION: WEDNESDAY, MAY 9, 12:30PM - 3:30PM