POSC109 THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM
Fall Semester 2006
TTh 10:00-11:15am
Kent Hale Smith 119

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Office Hours: Wednesday 2-4:00pm, or by appointment

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 the political economy on US politics and 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, capitalism, 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 inside and outside of the 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 ends 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 35 percent of the final course grade. Third, students will write a short position paper, which accounts for 10 percent of the final course grade. Details of this assignment are available in a separate course handout. 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, and all students are expected to participate. Informed participation in class discussion accounts for the remaining 5 percent of the final grade. Due dates for examinations and assignments are indicated in the reading schedule, below.

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

- Robert Dahl, *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?*
- David M. O’Brien, *Storm Center: The Supreme Court in American Politics*
Additional readings are available through electronic journals or JSTOR, through the Kelvin Smith Library website. 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.

Students are encouraged to subscribe to and to read the New York Times; information concerning subscriptions will be provided.

Standards of academic integrity are an integral component 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

www.case.edu/provost/ugstudies/handbook2006

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

August 29 Introduction to the Course: Civil Society and the State

August 31 Liberty, Equality, and the Political Construction of State Institutions

READ: Lowi, Ginsberg and Shepsle, American Government, Chapters 1 and 2, and the Constitution of the United States

NOTE: NO CLASS MEETING TODAY; PROFESSOR BECKWITH WILL BE ATTENDING THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION MEETINGS.

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September 5 READ: Lowi, Ginsberg and Shepsle, American Government, Chapter 3

September 7 READ: Lowi, Ginsberg and Shepsle, American Government, Chapter 4

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September 12 READ: George Sabine, “The Two Democratic Traditions,” The Philosophical Review, 61, October 1952: 451-474 [available online at JSTOR]

September 14 READ: James Madison, Federalist Paper #10, in Lowi, Ginsberg and Shepsle, American Government

REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States

ATTEND: Constitution Day Lecture by Louis Fisher, Ph.D., Special Assistant to the Law Librarian, The Library of Congress
4:30 – 6:00 p.m., Ford Auditorium, Allen Memorial Library (corner of Adelbert Road and Euclid Avenue)

September 19  Capitalism, Democracy, and the Political Economy of the State

READ: Walter Dean Burnham, "The Constitution, Capitalism, and the Need for Rationalized Regulation,” in Goldwin and Schambra, eds., How Capitalistic Is the Constitution?

September 21  READ: Edward Greenberg, “Class Rule under the Constitution,” in Goldwin and Schambra, eds., How Capitalistic Is the Constitution?


September 28  FIRST EXAMINATION

October 3  Political Economy and Political Participation

READ: John Gaventa, Power and Powerlessness, Preface and Chapter 1 [course handout]


REVIEW: James Madison, Federalist Paper #10, in Lowi, Ginsberg and Shepsle, American Government

October 10  READ: Lowi, Ginsberg and Shepsle, American Government, Chapter 9

October 12  READ: Lowi, Ginsberg and Shepsle, American Government, Chapter 12

October 17  Political Parties, the Media, and Elections

READ: Lowi, Ginsberg and Shepsle, American Government, Chapter 11

October 19  READ: Lowi, Ginsberg and Shepsle, American Government, Chapter 13
October 24 FALL BREAK

October 26 READ: Lowi, Ginsberg and Shepsle, *American Government*, Chapter 10

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October 31 SECOND EXAMINATION

November 2 Congress: Legislatng, Representing, Deliberating


REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States

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November 7 The Presidency and the Executive Branch


REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States

November 9 READ: Lowi, Ginsberg and Shepsle, *American Government*, Chapter 7

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November 16 The Federal Court System

READ: Lowi, Ginsberg and Shepsle, *American Government*, Chapter 8

REVIEW: Lowi, Ginsberg and Shepsle, *American Government*, Chapter 4, and the Constitution of the United States

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November 21 READ: O’Brien, *Storm Center*, Chapters 4 through 6

November 23 THANKSGIVING BREAK

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November 28 How Democratic Is the US Political System?
READ: Dahl, *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?*, Chapters 1 through 3

November 30  READ: Dahl, *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?*, Chapters 4 and 5

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December 5  READ: Dahl, *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?*, Chapters 6 and 7, and Appendices A and B

December 7  DISCUSSION; POSITION PAPER DUE IN CLASS

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FINAL EXAMINATION TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 12:30-3:30PM