POSC109 THE US POLITICAL SYSTEM  
Fall Semester 2017  
Clark Hall 302  
MWF 10:35-11:25am

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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 this section, we consider how the US political system was constructed and the ways in which US national politics developed over time. The second 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. In the third 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 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 30 percent of the final course grade. Second, students will complete a final examination, which accounts for 40 percent of the course grade.

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 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. The final exam in this course is scheduled for Monday, December 18, from 9:00-11:00am.

Three books are required for this course, listed below, and are available for purchase in the University Bookstore (and elsewhere):

Robert Dahl, *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?* (2nd ed.)
Kay Lehman Schlozman, Sidney Verba, and Henry E. Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus: Unequal Political Voice and the Broken Promise of American Democracy*

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/), or on the course Canvas site.

Students are encouraged to read a daily national newspaper (e.g. the *Financial Times*, the *New York Times*, or the *Washington Post*; see http://researchguides.case.edu/az.php?t=9256 and https://global.factiva.com/n/defa ult.aspx?NAPC=P).

There are also several excellent political science blogs that include a focus on US politics, such as *Mischief of Faction* (https://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction) and *The Monkey Cage* (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/?utm_term=.2a99da715b55), as well as *The Conversation* (https://theconversation.com/us/politics) and the Scholars’ Strategy Network (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.

It is a requirement of this course that students use their CWRU email account for correspondence with the professor.

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.

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

August 28
Introduction to the Course

August 30-September 1
Civil Society and the State
READ: Lowi et al., American Government, Chapter 1 and 2, the Constitution of the United States and the Declaration of Independence (in Appendices).

September 4
LABOR DAY: NO CLASS

September 6-September 8
Liberty, Equality, and the Democratic Tradition in the US
READ: Schlozman, Verba and Brady, The Unheavenly Chorus, Chapters 1 and 2
REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States

September 11-September 13
Federalism, the Fragmentation of Political Powers, and the Political Construction of State Institutions
READ: Lowi et al., American Government, Chapter 3, and James Madison, Federalist Paper #10; Dahl, How Democratic Is the American Constitution?, Chapters 1, 2, and 3
REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States

September 15
DISCUSSION
September 18-September 20 Politics and the National Economy


September 22 DISCUSSION

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September 25-September 27 Federalism, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 4

September 29 FIRST EXAMINATION

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October 2-October 4 Congress: Legislating, Representing, Deliberating

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 5

REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States


October 6


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October 9-October 11 Congressional Legislation, Congressional Gridlock

October 13     DISCUSSION

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October 16-18    The Presidency and Executive Powers

“The presidency isn’t a bull, and this country isn’t a china shop.”  Sen. Ben Sasse (R-NE)

READ: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapters 6 and 7

REVIEW: The Constitution of the United States

October 20    Executive Power and Executive Orders


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October 23-24    FALL BREAK


October 27    SECOND EXAMINATION

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October 30-November 1    The Supreme Court and the Federal Court System: “Equal Justice Under Law”

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

REVIEW: Lowi et al., *American Government*, Chapter 4
November 3

November 6-10  Democracy and Political Participation: Public Opinion, Interest Groups, and Political Movements
READ: Lowi et al., American Government, Chapters 9 and 12, Schlozman, Verba and Brady, The Unheavenly Chorus, Chapters 5 and 9


REVIEW: James Madison, Federalist Paper #10, in Lowi et al., American Government

November 17


November 20-22  Structures of Participation and Representation: Political Parties and Elections


November 23-24 THANKSGIVING BREAK

November 27 Presidential Elections: Structure, Media, and Campaign Finance


November 29 READ: Schlozman, Verba and Brady, *The Unheavenly Chorus*, Chapters 16


December 4 Conclusion to the Course: How Democratic Is the US Political System?


December 8 DISCUSSION

FINAL EXAMINATION: MONDAY, DECEMBER 18, 9:00AM – 11:00AM