POLSC 110: Historical Introduction to American Government
Course Syllabus

Course Description
This course explores the development of the American political system over time. We begin with the foundations of American politics, placing special emphasis on the United States Constitution and the shifting meaning Americans have attached to fundamental rights and liberties. Next we examine the principal institutions of American Government, especially Congress, the Presidency, and the judicial branch. We then examine the various ways in which people have participated in politics, including parties, elections, interest groups, and social movements. Lectures explore each topic from an historical and theoretical perspective, tracing the development of institutions and practices from the founding era to the present and examining their diverse meanings for citizenship today. Class discussion will investigate in greater depth topics introduced in the lectures through the analysis of primary source documents and secondary readings by political scientists, historians, and sociologists. Through engagement with different forms of political media and news, class discussion, and written assignments, this course also seeks to bring our historical and analytical approach to bear on contemporary political events.

Learning Objectives
In addition to covering substantive material, we seek to develop certain analytical and critical thinking skills as well as communication abilities across different forms. These will prove valuable both in our course, the rest of your academic career, and beyond.

- The written assignment and exams are designed to improve different writing skills, including your ability to summarize the main points of an argument succinctly, use language precisely, demonstrate command of some political science terminology, conduct research on a current political issue, and make an argument in which you state a thesis (take a position) and support it through the use of evidence.
- The online discussion board asks students to critically engage with primary and secondary sources and with each other as they analyze course material, political media, and current events.
- In the classroom, students will be pressed to “interrogate” whether evidence is conclusive or indeterminate, to reconcile conflicting evidence that seems to support different theories (or no theory), and to consider why particular authors select certain evidence and omit other material.

Course Requirements
- Complete all reading assignments before class.
- Attend class regularly and on-time. In class, students are expected to be respectful of their colleagues, engaged with the material, instructor, and one another, and participate in class discussions. Attendance and participation will figure in your course grade. No more than 2 unexcused absences are permitted. If you exceed this limit, your attendance and participation grade will drop by one letter grade for each subsequent absence.
- I reserve the right to choose to give the class a brief quiz from time to time upon the assigned readings. I will exercise this option if it seems that students are not preparing adequately for class. These quizzes will factor into the participation and attendance grade.
- Participate in the online discussion board on Blackboard. We will be utilizing Blackboard to a significant extent in this course. Each student is required to submit **one** short posting (1-2 paragraphs) **per week** (usually every Thursday unless otherwise noted) that discusses **at least two readings from that week**; this can be a response to the reading and discussion questions provided by the instructor, an application of the week’s material to current events, a re-evaluation of previously discussed material and question in light of new information, analysis of news media, etc. In addition, students are required to submit **one discussion question** to the Blackboard discussion site for the class. This can take a variety of forms – something that is unclear in the readings, a question relating the week’s material to current events, critical questions of the texts, questions the text raises to discuss with the entire class, etc. Your posts are due by **7:00 am on the days noted in the syllabus**
- Complete **two take-home essay exams**. You will have at least one week between receiving the exam and the due date.
- Complete **one 4-5 page research/policy paper**. You will write (but not necessarily mail) a detailed, research-based letter to a public official on a national public policy issue, which will be drawn from an assignment sheet that will be distributed at least a month before the due date. A grade penalty will be imposed upon late papers without a documented valid reason for lateness.

**Grading**
Your grade will consist of the following components:

*Online Discussion Board participation: 15%*

*Attendance and in-class participation: 15%*

*Exam 1: 25%*

*Exam 2: 25%*

*Research Paper: 20%*

**Class Policies**
- In addition to the readings listed below, you will be expected to follow contemporary debates and issues in American politics.
- **Classroom Conduct:** Some of the issues covered in this course may be closely intertwined with deep-seated political and/or ethical beliefs. I enjoy and encourage a lively classroom discussion, but it must always be conducted in a respectful manner, free of invective, and conscious of what may be profound differences of opinion. Our discussions will allow all views a hearing, but I will not allow any one student to monopolize class time.
- **Speaking:** This course is speaking intensive. While regular attendance in class is required, bodily presence in the classroom is not an end in itself. Students should be in class not only to benefit from lectures, but to interact with their fellow students in a community of learning. Though this is a writing intensive class, we will not be privileging writing at the expense of other skills. We will strive to engage all students in each class session.
- **Office Hours:** I strongly encourage everyone to meet with me during my office hours. Experience shows that students who meet with their professors do much better than those who don’t take advantage of the opportunity. If you’re having difficulty with the class; if you
don’t understand the concepts and need help; if you want to clarify my expectations for an assignment or an exam; if you want to discuss the results of an assignment or an exam; if you want to express a concern of any kind; if you want to talk politics or just talk about life, meet with me!

- **Email and Blackboard:** I will be sending out updates and information via email and Blackboard. You are expected to regularly check the email address associated with your Blackboard. Furthermore, you are responsible for all information and material on the course Blackboard site.

- We will be using TurnItIn.com for both exams and the research paper. You will receive instructions on accessing our course TurnItIn page. *Note that for both exams and for the research paper, you must turn in BOTH a paper copy in class and an electronic copy to TurnItIn.*

- You may provide documentation to excuse an absence. In all other cases, absences will be unexcused and negatively affect your grade.

- Even if you are absent on the days that a written assignment is due, you are still responsible for turning in the assignment on-time.

- It is your right to expect that your work be thoughtfully and fairly graded. I am happy to answer questions regarding grading and discuss your work with you.

- Texting is distracting and will negatively impact your participation grade.

- **Credit/No-Credit Grading:** College rules specify that to be eligible for credit/no credit, students must complete all course requirements. In this course, students who wish to be graded on the credit/no credit system

- **Transfer Equivalencies and Hunter College requirements:** If you have received transfer credit or AP credit for an Introduction to American Government course you will not be able to receive credit for POLSC 110. To fulfill the GER 1C requirement, you will need to take HIST 151 or HIST 152. If you have any questions, please see one of the Political Science Department advisors. You can find their office hours on the Department website at http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/polsci/contact/advising.

**Office of AccessABILITY**
In compliance with the ADA and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational access and accommodations for all its registered students. Hunter College’s students with disabilities and medical conditions are encouraged to register with the Office of AccessABILITY for assistance and accommodation. For information and appointment contact the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room E1214 or call (212) 772-4857 or TTY (212) 650-3230

If needed, please be sure to make any necessary academic arrangements in advance of due dates so that I can best assist you.

**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**
Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.
If an online submission, exam, or the paper is found to have been plagiarized, disciplinary action will result. A grade of F for the assignment and/or course will be given, and, if necessary, the case will be submitted for further action at the level of the Department Chair and/or the Dean of Students.

For the take-home essay exams, in-text citations (Author, Page number) can be used to reference class texts. For the research paper, you are required to use Chicago-style citations; I will circulate information and guidelines with the paper assignment.

For a guide to what constitutes plagiarism, please consult http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/plagiarismtutorial.php; of course, discuss with me any questions you may have.

**Required Readings**

ALL class readings can be accessed through the course E-Reserve page (instructions on access to be provided) through the Library. This will include the links listed below and/or PDFs of the readings.

It is suggested but not required that you print out readings and bring them to class.

**Course Schedule**

*Please note that I reserve the right to make adjustments to the course schedule during the semester. Any changes will be announced in-class and on Blackboard.*

***indicates a response is due on this day

**Introduction; Foundations of American Government**

January 29: Welcome and introduction
January 31
  - Declaration of Independence

2/5 – 2/14: The Constitution and American Political Culture

February 5
  - Articles of Confederation:
  - Constitution:

February 7***

February 12: No class (Lincoln’s Birthday)

February 14***

2/19 - 2/21: Federalists and Anti-Federalists, Liberty and Equality

February 19
- Federalist No. 10
- Federalist No. 39
- Federalist No. 51

February 21
- Brutus No. 2:
- Brutus No. 5

2/26 – 2/28: Federalism

February 26

February 28
- Thomas Jefferson, “The Kentucky Resolutions:”

3/5 – 3/7: Civil Rights

March 5

March 7
- Martin Luther King Jr., *Letter From A Birmingham Jail*, April 16, 1963:

3/12 – 3/14: Civil Liberties

March 12
- Bill of Rights: [http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/billofrights](http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/billofrights)

March 14
- Justice Harry A. Blackmun, U.S. Supreme Court, Decision: *Roe et.al. v. Wade, District Attorney of Dallas County* 410 U.S. 113. Online:
http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/historics/USSC_CR_0410_0113_ZO.html (Read Part I and skim Part II, then read IX thru XII)


3/19 – 3/21: Capitalism and American Democracy
March 19***

March 21
  - **EXAM 1 DUE**

SPRING BREAK

4/4: Congress***
- Case study on Congress from “Chapter 8: Intersectionality” in Mary Hawkesworth, Feminist Inquiry (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006)

4/9 – 4/11: Presidency
April 9
- George Washington’s Farewell Address (1796): http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp
- Franklin D. Roosevelt, “First Inaugural Address” (1933)
- IN CLASS: Barack Obama’s Second Inaugural Address (2013)

April 11***

4/16 – 4/18: Judiciary
April 16
- Federalist No. 78: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/fed78.asp
- John Marshall, from “Marbury v. Madison (1803)” (excerpts)

April 18***
- Additional reading on current Supreme Court TBA

April 23
- Alexis de Tocqueville: Parties in the United States:”
  http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/1_ch10.htm

**April 25***
- Andrew J. Polsky, “Partisan Regimes in American Politics,” working draft, June 2011, excerpts

**4/30 – 5/14: Interest Groups, Participation, and Social Movements**

**April 30**
- **POLICY PAPER DUE**

**May 2***

**May 7**
- Alexis de Tocqueville, “On The Use which the Americans Make of Associations in Civil Life:”

**May 9***

**May 14***
- Anonymous Queers, “Queers Read This,” New York, NY, 1990:
- “The Seneca Falls Declaration and Resolutions:” [http://ecssba.rutgers.edu/docs/seneca.html](http://ecssba.rutgers.edu/docs/seneca.html)
- Sojourner Truth, “Ain’t I A Woman:” [http://www.sojournertruth.org/Library/Speeches/AintIAWoman.htm](http://www.sojournertruth.org/Library/Speeches/AintIAWoman.htm)

**5/16: Conclusion and Major Themes**

**FINAL EXAM DUE DATE TBA**