POS 2041H

Honors American Politics

Fall 2015

Instructor: Jonathan Knuckey

Course Overview

Welcome to Honors American Politics!

This is a course about the major forces in American politics. We will look at the constitutional foundations of the national government, and how the rules of the game figure so prominently in the current American political setting. We will think about the nature of public opinion in American politics, how we acquire our political views and what role public opinion plays in influencing policy making. We will reflect on debates about the nature of our civil liberties and civil rights - and why they are often the cause of controversy in contemporary American politics. We will look at the presidency - its symbolic power as an agenda-setter and why our expectations of those who hold the office are often not realized. We will look at Congress - the setting of the institution, and how electoral incentives affect policy making and representation. We will look at the Supreme Court and its unique role as the arbiter of our individual rights and liberties. We examine the role of the mass media and how they influence political campaigns and what we know about politics. We will look at political parties and their role as linkage institutions in the political system. And as we enter the 2016 presidential campaign season, we will look at the electoral process and how this process shapes our choices and influences political winners and losers, as well as understanding why people vote the way they do. Throughout the course we will also make comparisons between American politics and other countries to see how similar or different the American political system is from those of other nations.

As this is an honors section, we will organize it somewhat differently than a normal American National Government class. To begin, since this is a small and select class, I will run it using both lectures and class discussions. This means that I expect all students to attend class regularly and contribute frequently to class deliberations. Second, in accordance with Honors College standards, there will be significantly more writing required in this class than in a normal section of American politics. Most of this writing will take the form of several critical thinking and analytical-style assignments corresponding to various topics of the course.

While most people don't normally devote much thought to their government and to politics more generally, I hope that by the end of this course you will be different - that you will use ideas learned in this course to think critically about politics and most importantly the choices you face as a citizen, especially as we approach an election year.

I look forward to the class and hope you find it enjoyable and informative. I look forward to learning a lot from <u>you</u>!

How to Contact Me.

Office: Political Science department, Phillips Hall 302L

Second office: Lou Frey Institute, Orlando Tech Center, 12443 Research Parkway, 400 Building Suite, Suite 406. Easy parking and no parking permit needed! To get to the Lou Frey Institute from the main campus take the #9 UCF Shuttle and get off at Stop #2.

Office hours: TBA

Email: Use email in Webcourses

Skype: I am happy to talk via Skype. My Skype name is jonathan.knuckey70

Course Policies

Attendance

This is fairly straightforward. Attend class, arrive on time and stay for the duration of the class.

I will take attendance each day by circulating a class roll. Some quick points on attendance:

- The rule is that if you don't sign the roll when it comes around, you're absent from that day's class (no "late" notations). I will usually pass the roll around a few minutes after our start time;

- Do not sign the roll for any other student - ever. It is academic dishonesty to do so, and I have been in the unfortunate position of having to prosecute a few unfortunate souls in the past who apparently thought this rule did not apply to them. They were wrong (as were the absent students who solicited the dishonesty from friends);

- Leaving class on one or two occasions throughout the semester, if you need to…. no big deal. *Constantly* coming and going during classes throughout the semester.... quite a big deal. I reserve the right to mark students retroactively absent and/or take additional disciplinary action if needs be.

You are adults so I am not going to come chasing after you if you don't attend class. However, It should go without saying that you will not be getting the most out of the class -- nor your education in general -- by frequently being absent from class. Moreover, your performance on exams will start to suffer once you start missing lots of classes. For information purposes, when I have taught this course in the past, students with 4-plus absences generally have their overall grade turn out to be something just south of a train wreck.

Note: If you have no more than a single absence throughout the semester you will be eligible for 3 points added to your overall grade total at the end of the semester. This will likely make a difference between overall letter grades if you are on the borderline between grades.

In keeping with the **UCF policy of respecting students' religious commitments** all attempts will be made to accommodate conflicts arising out of religious observances. If you plan on missing scheduled class meetings due to religious holidays, you must notify me within the first two weeks of the semester.

Other General Policies

- Silence cell phones. If your phone does go off in class the rule is I get to answer it.....
- You can bring food and drink. Take any trash out with you after class is over.
- Laptops, ipads, tablets should not be out during class. It is just distracting to sit behind someone who spends the entire class time emailing, instant-messaging, tweeting, updating Facebook profiles, etc., etc. Take notes in class the old-fashioned way, and you will actually find you take better notes because of this.

Office Hours

Students are encouraged to take advantage of office hours (these are posted under instructor contact on the course front page). Don't just view office hours as the time you come and talk to me when you have done indifferently on an exam. They are an opportunity to discuss issues relating to the course as well as to help you to prepare for exams, to talk about politics, or English football (soccer)!

Textbook

The textbook we will use is:

- Thomas R. Dye and Ronald Keith Gaddie, *Politics in America* (10th Edition)

The book is available from the UCF bookstore, although you might be able to get it considerably cheaper elsewhere. Please make sure you buy the edition shown above, as prior editions are now somewhat dated in terms of content!

You will most definitely need to buy and read this book to do well in the class. Exam questions and assignments will partly be based on material from this textbook. I may assign other short readings that will relate to specific assignments.

Assignments

There will be a number of assignments given throughout the semester that emphasizes analytical and critical thinking skills. Specific details for each assignment will be posted under "Modules" in Canvas. You will also have in-class assignments during the semester, some of which involves group work. Details of these assignments will be given in class.

Exams

Three exams will be given during the semester, scheduled as follows:

- First midterm exam, **Tuesday, September 22nd**
- Second midterm exam, **Tuesday, October 20th**
- Final exam, **Thursday, December 10th (10.00am-12.50pm)**

Midterm Exams Format

20 multiple-choice questions with 4 choices per question (2 points per question = 40 points)

10 true/false questions (2 points per question = 20 points)

10 fill-in-the-blank questions (1 points per question = 10 points)

1 Short-essay question consisting of three parts (30 points). All the short-essay topics/questions will be posted in Webcourses a couple of weeks prior to each exam. On the day of the exam I will randomly choose the topic/question from this list on which you will write.

Final Exam Format

Same as the midterm exams, except there will be two short-essay questions to answer, rather than one.

Exam Policies

- Midterm and final exam questions will come from the required readings and lectures; in other words, just about anything we discuss or read is fair game for testing. The exams are not cumulative.
- Exams should be written in black or blue ink. I will be providing an answer booklet for you to write your answers on, so you don't need to buy a blue-book or scantron;
- All exams are closed-book;
- Please be on time for each exam. You must take each exam in order to receive a passing grade in this class.

Refer to "Guidelines and Tips for Exams" under "Modules" in Webcourses.

Academic Honesty

UCF faculty support the UCF creed. Integrity – practicing and defending academic and personal honesty – is the first tenet of the UCF Creed. This is in part a reflection of the second tenet, Scholarship: "I will cherish and honor learning as a fundamental purpose of membership in the UCF community." Course assignments and tests are designed to have educational value; the process of preparing for and completing these exercises will help improve your skills and knowledge. Material presented to satisfy course requirements is therefore expected to be the result of your own original scholarly efforts.

Violations of student academic behavior standards are outlined in **The Golden Rule Student Handbook.**

Academic Dishonesty is defined as follows:

1. Cheating, whereby non-permissible written, visual or oral assistance including that obtained from another student is utilized on examinations, course assignments or projects, is prohibited. The unauthorized possession or use of examination or course related material shall also constitute cheating.

2. Plagiarism, whereby another's work is deliberately used or appropriated without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student's own, is prohibited. Any student failing to properly credit ideas or materials taken from another has plagiarized.

Please note that any student who has assisted another in any of the aforementioned breach of standards shall be considered equally culpable.

Students who attempt to obtain unearned academic credentials that do not reflect their skills and knowledge can also undermine the value of the UCF degrees earned by their more honest peers. Any form of academic dishonesty will result in you automatically failing the class and referred to the University authorities. Also, please remember that those caught cheating will have a notation made in their University records that they have been found guilty of academic misconduct. This can and will keep you out of law school so do not be tempted to cheat in any way

Grades

My philosophy of grading is decidedly against what is generally known as "competitive grading" or "grading on the curve." You are not competing against fellow students for grades in this class. You are competing against yourself at all times, hopefully pushing yourself to excel against my objective standards of what students should reasonably get out of this class.

Average mastery of those standards is the baseline for earning an "average" grade of C. Do above-average work, you earn a B. Do excellent work, you earn an A…. and so on. In any case, please understand that the points you earn toward a final grade will not be jerked around up or down to fit some predetermined grade curve. If everyone deserves an A, they'll get it. If everyone flunks, they'll all get an F and then, in all likelihood, I will leave the jurisdiction quickly under cover of night in heavy disguise and an assumed name!

Your final grade will be weighted as follows:

- Assignments 25%
- First Exam 20%
- Second Exam 20%
- Final Exam 35%

As there are ample grading opportunities in this course there will be no extra credit given. If you know you need a certain grade in December, you know you needed it August -- go to work to earn it! Under no circumstances can or will a course grade be awarded on any basis other than those stated in the syllabus.

Grade boundaries are as follows:

A, 93%+

A-, 90-92.9%

B+, 87-89.9%

B, 83-86.9%

B-, 80-82.9%

C+, 77-79.9%

C, 73-76.9%

C-, 70-72.9%

D+, 67-69.9%

D, 63-66.9%

D-, 60-62.9%

F, 59.9% and below.

Students typically obsess about grades too late, often at the end of the semester. There is little that can be done at that point. So, if you think you are struggling in this class please come and talk to me as often as you like - never think you are being a pest! I cannot recall ever failing a student who early sought this kind of help. However, students who are struggling and delay assistance do fail.

You will be able to access your grades in Canvas. Please make sure that grades entered here are correct. While every effort is made to ensure grades are correct, from time-to-time errors can occur (incorrectly add/subtract, miss points, and even fail to understand what a student wrote).

A time limit of 1 week is imposed on all change of grade requests after the grade has posted. This is sufficient time to identify any errors. After that prior grades will not be reviewed. This is to bring the course grade to completion and to minimize "end of semester" opportunism.

Grade grievance policies are outlined under the UCF Golden Rule.

Make-up Policy and Incompletes

The time and dates for all assignments and the exam are fixed in krypton-coated granite, which is further encased in a hydrogen bomb-proof vault! In other words, an extension on an assignment, or a make-up exam will only be given in the most exceptional circumstances that are beyond the control of a student.

At the top of the list of unacceptable excuses for late-work are those related to computer problems. I will generally not accept "My hard-drive crashed.... I accidentally deleted the file.... My internet connection is down....Etc...." These are the "dog ate my homework" excuses of the "Technology Age" and will not fly! It is your responsibility to secure ample time at a computer, make backups of your work, and generally plan ahead—do whatever it takes!

I do not consider vacations or other trips out of town (other than when the student is away from campus representing at an official university function) to be exceptional circumstances.

Any student missing an assignments, exam or any other work because of observance of religious holidays shall be given an opportunity during that semester to make up missed work. The make-up will apply to the religious holiday absence only. It shall be the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor no later than the end of the first week of class of his or her intention to participate in religious holidays which do not fall on state holidays or periods of class recess. This policy shall not apply in the event that administering the test or examination at an alternate time would impose an unavoidable hardship on the instructor or the university.

An incomplete standing will only be granted if requested in writing to me (an email or phone call is not acceptable). You must explain why you are requesting an incomplete standing and include, where appropriate, documentation that must be original and verifiable. Such documentation must be on a letterhead, and contain a contact name and telephone number. An incomplete will only be granted if you have a passing grade in the class.

Remember an incomplete grade is only reserved for when you have missed an assignment or exam for a legitimate reason but are otherwise passing the class. Incompletes are not given because you have achieved a low grade.

Disability Statement

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities. This syllabus is available in alternate formats upon request. Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Disability Services before requesting accommodations from the professor.

Disclaimer

I reserve the right to change, add or modify any part of the syllabus. Of course, advance notice will be given of any such changes.

Course Schedule

Details and of required reading and of all assignments will be provided in Webcourses

August 25th to September 17th

- Democracy and American Political Culture, chs. 1 and 2
- The Constitution, ch.3
- Federalism, ch.4
- Public Opinion and Political Participation, ch.5

First Exam, September 22nd

September 24th to October 15th

- The Mass Media, ch. 6
- Political Parties, ch. 7
- Campaigns and Elections, ch.8

Second Exam, October 20th

October 22nd to December 3rd

- The Presidency, ch.11
- Congress, ch.10
- The Supreme Court, ch.13
- Civil Lliberties, ch.14
- Civil Rights, ch.15

Final Exam, December 10th (10.00am-12.50pm)