PLSC 1000
Introduction to American Politics

Professor: Joshua C. Wilson
Term: Fall 2014
Class Meeting: T/Th 2-3:50
Location: 454 Sturm Hall

Course Description:
The purpose of this class is to teach you about the institutions, practices, and history of politics and government in the United States. As an introductory survey course we will cover a great deal of ground as we will discuss the Constitution, the three branches of the federal government, interest groups, public opinion, participation, voting, and current events. My hope is that you will become more informed and engaged as both observers and participants in politics.

Learning Objectives:
Students will:
1) identify and understand the basic principles of American government;
2) identify and understand basic institutional arrangements and actors, as well as their potentials and limitations;
3) see how the basic structure of American government has developed, and how it effects current politics;
4) further develop and employ written and oral communication skills to express critical evaluations of, and informed opinions about American government.

Required Texts & Materials:
1) Ginsberg et al, We the People, W.W. Norton (9th edition) ISBN# 978-0-393-91308-8 or 978-0-393-12436-1

2) Slate’s Political Gabfest Podcast. This is free and accessible via http://www.slate.com/articles/podcasts.html and iTunes.

3) Remaining texts are available via the Canvas modules:

4) I will be employing TopHat Monocle in this course. This is a service that allows us to interact electronically in class. This is similar to using “clickers,” but it allows you to respond through your laptop, tablet, or phone. Student accounts cost $20. You have been sent a link for registering, or you can search for the class on the TopHat page. The TopHat course number is 849626, and the URL is tophat.com/e/849626.
Assessment & Assignments:

This class includes the following assignments:

- Participation (10%)
- Quizzes (5%)
- Paper Assignments (30%)
  - Political Beliefs (15%)
  - Campaigns & Elections Compare & Contrast (7%)
  - Constitutional Convention Policy Brief (8%)
- Constitutional Convention Participation (5%)
- Exam 1 (30%)
- Exam 2 (20%)

***All written assignments must be typed in 12 point Times New Roman font, double spacing, with 1 inch margins.***

Participation & Quizzes include coming to class, being up-to-date and engaged with the material, asking and answering questions in the classroom, regularly participating in group discussions, passing occasional pop quizzes, and completing related work on TopHat. Everyone will begin with 0 points in this area. You must attend class and generally demonstrate your preparedness in order to improve from this starting point. Your participation is crucial to your success in (and enjoyment of) this class.

The two exams are intended to ensure that you both understand and can apply the concepts introduced in the class. As a result, the exams will focus on your application, and not necessarily your memorization and recall, of course concepts.

You will have three papers in this class, all of which are due via Canvas and will be checked for plagiarism through TurnItIn.com.

- The first focuses on the development of the student’s political beliefs. Each student will conduct a brief interview with two older individuals about their political views and the sources of their political information. These two individual must be people who influenced the student during his or her childhood or adolescence (i.e. parents, a grandparent/aunt/uncle, pastor, coach, teacher, youth group leader, etc.). The interviews should be built around testing hypotheses generated from the textbook’s discussion of political belief development. Students will then write a 3 to 4 page discussion of their interviewees’ views and political sources, the student’s own political views and political sources, the possible confluences and divergences between the student and the interviewees, and a discussion of explanations for these connections and differences rooted in course materials.

- The second paper, on campaigns & elections, is a brief 1-1.5 page compare-and-contrast piece that will be used to spark discussion in class. In short, you will need to consider two themes or arguments concerning campaigns and elections as discussed in your book and relate them to the two documentaries that you will watch (one in class, the other on your own via Course Media). You should consider how the two documentaries—separately or together—support, contradict, or otherwise complicate what is discussed in your book. You will then use this brief paper as a conversation starter in class.

- The third and final paper is a Constitutional Convention Brief. Instead of a full essay, this 1-1.5 page brief will serve three specific ends. First, you will need to identify an aspect of
American political structure and institutional design that you think should be reformed. The topic you select must be one directly related to an institutional feature &/or political reality that we have read about &/or discussed in class. Second, you will need to briefly describe the source and nature of the identified problem. Third, you will need to briefly describe and explain your proposed reform solution in order to argue it at our constitutional convention. Note that this does not mean that you are limited to discussing something that is already in the Constitution. Rather, you are proposing a solution to something that you think is so important that it should be specified in the Constitution. Also note that as a brief this paper does not have to adhere to the traditional essay format. You are in fact encouraged to employ something akin to a three bullet point memo where each bullet point, or paragraph meets one of the ends specified above.

The penultimate day of class will consist of an in-class Constitutional Convention. In short, the class will be broken into small groups (delegations, committees...call them what you will) where each person will make a brief presentation regarding their reform proposal. The groups will then vote on which reform to present to the class as a whole and defend during open debate. The class will then vote for which proposal to adopt. Groups will be graded as a collective unit (i.e. everyone in the group will receive the same grade).

Course Policies on Attendance, Etiquette, and Participation:

All assignment due dates are noted on the planned “Course Calendar” distributed in class and available on the course Canvas page. The date that something is listed is also that reading, paper, etc’s due date. Any updates to the calendar or syllabus will be noted on the course Canvas page.

I will use Canvas and you linked emails for communicating with the class. Please make sure to check both regularly.

Late assignments will be penalized one grade for every calendar day (not class day) that they are late, and will not be accepted more than 3 calendar days/72 hours after they are officially due.

All students are expected to abide by the University of Denver Honor Code. These expectations include the application of academic integrity and honesty in your class participation and assignments. The Honor Code can be viewed in its entirety at this link: http://www.du.edu/studentlife/ccs/index.html.

Plagiarism & cheating of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. I assume that all work that you turn in is yours. Such work must be original and properly cited. The inability to meet these standards will result in a failing grade in this course and possible disciplinary action at the College level. If you have any questions about plagiarism and/or cheating, please feel free to ask me for guidance. Further information on academic misconduct is available at: http://www.du.edu/studentlife/studentconduct/policies.html.

You will be allowed 2 absences, late arrivals, &/or early departures from class. After 2 your grade will be negatively affected. Sleeping or being otherwise occupied in class counts as an absence – while your body may be present, it is you conscious participation that counts.
You are expected to extend the same degree of courtesy and respect to your peers in course discussions as you expect in return. This does NOT mean that you have to, or should, agree with everything anyone says. This DOES mean that you should think critically about what we discuss, and challenge or question what you disagree with in a civil manner.

We will be using laptops, tablets, &/or phones in class for surveys and quizzes administered via TopHat, and laptops for in-class exams. While you should bring at least one internet-capable device to class incase of a pop quiz, I ask you to store all laptops, tablets, & phones in your bag under your desk and to NOT use this technology outside of the aforementioned instances. When you laptop is open, or your phone or tablet are accessible, it is almost impossible not to check email or briefly surf the Internet. While you might think that you can “multitask,” but studies indicate that this kind of multitasking impairs learning. Beyond this, a study published in 2013 found that not only do multitasking students in a classroom do worse on a postclass test on the material, so did the peers who could see the computer. In other words, the off-task laptop use distracted not just the laptop user but also the group of students behind the laptop user. Furthermore, a study that came out in June 2014 suggests that taking notes by hand rather than typing them on a laptop improves comprehension of the material. Finally, it is good to take breaks from our collective addictions to Facebook, texting, compulsively checking email, etc. All of this said, if you have a compelling reason that you must use your laptop or other device, please see me and we can come to an arrangement.

Arrive on time and be prepared to participate (e.g. do the reading before class). Everyone’s enjoyment of the class will be greatly enhanced by these simple steps.

Please visit me in office hours to discuss the course, readings, assignments, policies, real world political developments, DU & Cal sports, etc. I greatly prefer talking in-person to emailing, so please take note of when and where my office hours are.

If you qualify for academic accommodations because of a disability please submit a letter to me from Disability Services Program in a timely manner so that your needs may be addressed. Disability Services determines accommodations based on documented disabilities and is located on the 4th floor of Ruffatto Hall, 1999 E. Evans Ave. DSP -- 303.871. 2278 / 7432 / 2455. Information is also available on line at http://www.du.edu/disability/dsp; see the Handbook for Students with Disabilities.

---

Intro to American Politics PLSC 1000, (Fall 2014, v.1)¹:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading Assignment</th>
<th>Other Assignments Due</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/9</td>
<td>Course Introduction &amp; American Pol Culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/11</td>
<td>Founding &amp; Constitution</td>
<td>GLW Chapter 2 (pp 36-68)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/16</td>
<td>Founding &amp;</td>
<td>The US Constitution and its Amendments, GLW pp. A8-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ This calendar is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class and on Canvas.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 9/18 | Constitution | A19  
*The Federalist Papers*, Numbers 37, 48, 51 [Canvas Link]  
Podcast |
| 9/23 | Federalism | GLW Chapter 3 (pp 74-106)  
*The Federalist Papers*, Numbers 45 and 46 [Canvas Link] |
| 9/25 | Public Opinion | GLW Chapter 6 (pp 202-228)  
Jill LePore, “Long Division: Measuring the polarization of American Politics” *The New Yorker* [Canvas]  
Shankar Vedantam, “Political Map: Does Geography Shape Your Ideology?” Morning Edition [In Class]  
Podcast |
| 9/30 | Political Participation and Voting | GLW Chapter 8 (pp 305-332)  
Louis Menand, “The Unpolitical Animal: How Political Science Understands Voters” *The New Yorker* [Canvas]  
NPR All Things Considered, “Do New Voting Laws Suppress Fraud? Or Democrats” [In Class] |
| 10/2 | Political Parties | GLW Chapter 9 (pp 338-372)  
Steve Coll, “Party Crashers” *The New Yorker* [Canvas]  
Podcast |
| 10/7 | Campaigns & Elections | GLW Chapter 10 (pp 379-418)  
Hagedus & Pennebker, “The War Room” [In Class] |
| 10/9 | Groups & Interests | GLW Chapters 10 & 11 (pp 419-424; 432-453; 456-62)  
Peter Overby, “Outside Groups Lay Millions On Florida Special Election” *All Things Considered* March 11, 2014  
Frontline, “Big Sky, Big Money” [In Class]  
Podcast |
| 10/9 | Class Discussion | Curry, “Street Fight” [Course Media/Canvas from Home]  
One page paper comparing your text, “The War Room,” & “Street Fight” |
| 10/14 | Review | Podcast  
Three review questions due on |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading/Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/16</td>
<td><strong>Exam 1</strong></td>
<td>TopHat in the “Discussion” section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/21</td>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>GLW Chapter 12 (469-508)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Federalist No. 51 [Canvas Link]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Podcast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/23</td>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>George Packer, “The Empty Chamber” <em>The New Yorker</em> [Canvas]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frontline, <em>Cliffhanger</em> [In Class]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/28</td>
<td><strong>Presidency</strong></td>
<td>GLW Chapter 13 (515-548)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Podcast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/30</td>
<td>Bureaucracy</td>
<td>GLW Chapter 14 (555-569; 577-594)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/4</td>
<td><strong>The Federal Courts</strong></td>
<td>GLW Chapter 15 (601-634)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Podcast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/6</td>
<td>The Federal Courts</td>
<td>Federalist No. 78 [Canvas]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A. de Tocqueville, <em>Democracy in America</em>, Vol. 1, Pt. 1, Ch. 6, pp 99-104; &amp; Ch. 8, pp 138-41, 163-7 [Canvas]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/11</td>
<td><strong>Constitutional Convention</strong></td>
<td>Convention Briefs Due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/13</td>
<td>Review</td>
<td>Three review questions due on TopHat in the “Discussion” section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/18</td>
<td><strong>Exam 2</strong></td>
<td>TopHat in the “Discussion” section.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>