Syllabus, POLS 200, American Political System

Introduction & Course Description
This course introduces students to the United States Political System including political institutions and political behavior of individuals in the U.S. We examine the philosophical principles informing the U.S. constitution, federalism, major governmental institutions, the links between citizens and government, and civil rights and civil liberties and also cover California state and local government as well. Given that this is a presidential election year, our studies heavily focus on the links between electioneering and governing in US politics.

This course satisfies code requirements in the United States Constitution and California state & local government. The course also satisfies GE Category D4, US Constitution and State and Local Government, SSU General Education.

Learning Objectives
1. Understand the major tenets of the United States Constitution, including civil rights and civil liberties
2. Understand the major institutions of the U.S. government;
3. Understand the links between citizens and their government;
4. Understand federalism and the interaction between national and state governments;
5. Develop oral and written communication skills
6. Develop information competency through use of a variety of sources to access course material.

Dropping and Adding
Students are responsible for understanding the policies and procedures about add/drops, academic renewal, etc. Information on add/drops is available at: http://www.sonoma.edu/AR/registration/addclasses.shtml. Students should be aware of the current deadlines and penalties for adding and dropping classes.

Academic Integrity
Students should know that the University’s Cheating and Plagiarism policy is available at: http://www.sonoma.edu/UAffairs/policies/cheating_plagiarism.htm. Your own commitment to learning, as evidenced by your enrollment at Sonoma State University and the University’s policy, require you to be honest in all your academic course work.

Instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Cheating on exams or plagiarism (presenting the work of another as your own, or the use of another person’s ideas without giving proper credit) will result in a failing grade and sanctions by the University. For this class, all assignments are to be completed by the individual student unless otherwise specified.

Campus Policy on Disability Access for Students
If you are a student with a disability and you think you may require accommodations, please register with the campus office of Disability Services for Students (DSS), located in Salazar Hall - Room 1049, Phone: (707) 664-2677, TTY/TDD: (707) 664-2958. DSS will provide you with written confirmation of your verified disability and authorize recommended accommodations. This
authorization must be presented to the Instructor before any accommodations can be made. The policy can be found at: http://www.sonoma.edu/uaffairs/policies/disabilitypolicy.htm.

**Emergency Evacuation**

If you are a student with a disability and think you may require assistance evacuating a building in the event of a disaster, you should inform your instructor about the type of assistance you required. We should discuss your specific needs and the type of precautions that should be made in advance of such an event (i.e. assigning a buddy to guide you down the stairway). You are encouraged to take advantage of these preventative measures as soon as possible and contact the Disability Services for Students office if other classroom accommodations are needed.

**SSU Writing Center**

The SSU Writing Center is located in Schulz 1103. The Writing Center helps SSU students, faculty, and staff members (as well as members of the wider community) become better writers and produce better written documents. The Writing Center website is located at: http://www.sonoma.edu/programs/writingcenter/default.html.

**Required Reading**


*Additional readings will be indicated in the course schedule or when appropriate given external events and conditions.

The electronic version of the Geer, et al. text as well as Gerston texts will be used. Books are ordered through the SSU Bookstore for this course. If you want additional purchasing options, check North Light Bookstore or try online through websites such as www.directtextbook.com.

**Course Requirements**

Students will complete TWO short papers from the *It Matters! Vote!* Series held at the SSU Library on Wednesday afternoons from noon to 1 pm throughout the semester (find more information here: http://library.sonoma.edu/itmatters.html or here: http://library.sonoma.edu/about/lectures.php). Criteria for these papers will be discussed in class. The Midterm and Final Exams consist of multiple choice, identification questions, fill-in-the-blank questions, and essay questions. The Final Exam is cumulative.

The short papers are due WITHIN ONE CLASS session of your attendance at a given event. For example, if you attend a discussion at noon, 03 October, your short paper is due by the start of class on Friday, 12 October. **The Midterm is scheduled for Friday, 12 October.** The Final Exam will be held per the SSU University Class Schedule on **Wednesday, 12 December, 11 am-12:50pm.**

Dates for these evaluations (Midterm and Final) will not change. Attendance will be taken randomly during the semester. Students will receive one (1) point toward the attendance grade for each of those days they are present, up to ten (10) points. There is no extra credit.
Assignments & Weight of Requirements

Attendance: 10%
Participation: 5%
Two It Matters! Vote! Papers: 20% (10% each)
Midterm Exam: 30%
Final Exam: 35%
Total: 100%

Course Policies
Written assignments in this course are to be typed, double-spaced, with the pages numbered and stapled together. Margins should be 1" on the top, bottom, and left-hand side of the page, and 1 ½” on the right-hand side. A 12-point font should be used (this syllabus is typed with a 12-point font). Where appropriate, documentation of sources is required. Please note that the Political Science Department requires the use of the Chicago (also called Turabian) citation format. This is the style presented in Kate Turabian’s, A Manual for Writers, 7th Edition. It is strongly recommended that you purchase and retain a copy of this manual especially if you are a Political Science major.

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for class, and remain in the classroom while class is in session. We will take a few breaks during our long Friday sessions as well. Cell phones, pagers, computers and other electronic devices should be turned off during class unless otherwise indicated by the instructor. No recording of class sessions is allowed. Students who are texting, emailing, or engaged in other such activities will receive one warning. A second or subsequent warning will result in a 5% penalty on the final grade. Just come to class prepared and ready to participate and learn.

Excuses Policy (Extensions, Make-up exams, etc.)
Extensions and make-up exams will be allowed on a case-by-case basis. You must have a documented reason (i.e. medical reason, extenuating personal circumstances, etc.) for not being able to take an exam or turn in a graded assignment at the scheduled time. You will need to bring in supporting documentation to be granted a make-up, extension, etc. After you provide this information and evidence, a decision will be made regarding a make-up, extension, etc. Let me repeat - late assignments and exam makeups are only allowed in rare, documented cases of illness or personal emergency and discussed in advance with the Instructor. We all know that unforeseen circumstances and tragedies arise, but I am not interested in dogs that eat assignments, long lost aunts that tragically pass, or other events that occur as you come into the University.

Finally, a course of this nature in a university setting is designed to encourage the frank and open exchange of ideas. Understanding differing opinions is at the core of learning to think in a critical manner. The best approach is one where you are intellectually curious and we will foster an environment in which this process can flourish where students are expected to treat colleagues and their opinions with respect.

Tentative Course Schedule

Week 1
Friday, 24 August
First Day of Class; Course Introduction & Overview; Syllabus Discussion
Week 2
Friday, 31 August
Theories of Government & Democratic Representation; “Models” of Politics
Intro to Constitutional & Republican Gov’t Principles
Reading: Geer, Chapters 1 & 2; Federalist 10, 51 (Appendix C)

Week 3
Friday, 07 September
The Constitution Redux; Brief Federalism intro; Civil Liberties; the Federal Judiciary
Reading: Geer, Chapters 4 & 15; skim Chapter 3

Week 4
Friday, 14 September
Civil Rights; Federal Judiciary & the Courts / Judicial Decision-making
Reading: Geer, Chapters 5 & 15; skim Chapter 3

Week 5
Friday, 21 September
Federalism; The Presidency
Reading: Geer, Chapters 3 & 13

Week 6
Friday, 28 September
Public Opinion; Political Socialization; The News Media and the Internet
Reading: Geer, Chapters 6 & 7

Week 7
Friday, 05 October
Interest Groups; Political Parties; Midterm Review
Reading: Geer, Chapters 8 & 9

Week 8
Friday, 12 October: Midterm

Week 9 - NO CLASS INSTRUCTOR AWAY AT A CONFERENCE
Friday, 19 October

Week 10
Friday, 26 October
Elections & Campaigns; Voting & Political Participation
Reading: Geer, Chapters 10 & 11

Week 11
Friday, 02 November
Elections & Campaigns; Voting & Political Participation, cont’d
Reading: Geer, Chapters 10 & 11, redux

Week 12
Friday, 09 November
Creation, Implementation, & Evaluation of Public Policy; Budgetary Politics; Coalition-Building; Restraints; Reform; & Incrementalism
Reading: Geer, Chapters 14 & 16
Week 13  
Friday, 16 November  
Congress & Legislative Politics  
Reading: Geer, Chapter 12

Week 14 – NO CLASS, Thanksgiving Week  
Friday, 23 November

Week 15  
Friday, 30 November  
Politics in the Golden State?; The Politics of Fiscal Governance & DD: The Case of CA  
Reading: Gerston, ALL Chapters

Week 16  
Friday, 07 December  
Course Wrap-Up of Materials, Including CA Politics & Governance  
Class Evaluations & Final Exam Review  
Reading: Geer, Chapter 17, Judging the Democratic Experiment

Week 17  
WEDNESDAY, 12 DECEMBER  
Final Exam Per the University Schedule, Wednesday, 12 December, 11 am-12:50pm

*OPTIONAL FINAL EXAM REVIEW SESSION SCHEDULED WITH THE CLASS TA WILL BE HELD ON MONDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2012, AT 6 PM. ROOM TBA.