

Political Science 110
American Political Systems
Fall 2009

John Reynolds
Comenius 113
Phone: 861-1408
E-mail: mejvr01@moravian.edu

Office Hours: T – 1:00-2:00, W 10:00-11:00, Th 1:00-2:00 and by appointment

INTRODUCTION

This course is an introduction to the institutions, processes and policies of the American political system. This introduction strives for three basic goals. First, the course attempts to develop the students' basic understanding of the fundamental characteristics of American political institutions and the forces that influence the decisions of elites who direct those institutions. Second, the course tries to introduce students to a critical evaluation of the performance of those institutions and elites and to encourage the student to examine the achievements of the political system in comparison to the ideals of democracy. Third, the course aims to offset the cynicism and privatism prevalent in the American political system and to help students recognize the positive and necessary role that politics play in the health of any democratic political system. It is assumed that each of these goals represents a necessary condition for participation in a democratic polity.

ATTENDANCE

Students are required to attend all classes. Attendance will be part of the instructor evaluation grade. Students missing class for legitimate reasons will be excused but the instructor reserves the right to judge the legitimacy of the excuse. Common courtesy also requires that students inform the instructor as soon as when absences will be unavoidable.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

All students should be aware of their obligations under the Academic Honesty Policy published in the Student Handbook.

BOOKS

William E. Hudson, **American Democracy in Peril**, 6th edition, (Congressional Quarterly Press, 2010)

William Julius Wilson, **More Than Just Race**, (W.W. Norton, 2009)

Robert Kaiser, **So Damn Much Money**, (Alfred A. Knopf, 2009)

Washington Post National Weekly Edition (available by subscription at Moravian College Bookstore)

EVALUATION OF THE STUDENTS' WORK

The student's final grade will be based on a 400 point system.

Take home essays (2)	100 points
Final exam	100 points
Washington Post quizzes	100 points
Book review	60 points
Instructor evaluation	40 points

Out of Class Essays

Students will complete two out of class essays. Each essay will be worth 50 points. Each essay will focus on material covered in one of the first two sections of the course as listed in the course outline. Each essay will be typewritten, 3 to 5 pages in length, show evidence that the student incorporated course reading material into the essay and have proper citations for textual materials. The essay will be distributed in class a week before the due date. The first essay will be **10/5** and the second will be due on **10/26**.

Final Exam

For the final exam, students will be provided possible essays in advance of the exam that will focus student preparation for the exam.

Quizzes

Students will be given 10 quizzes - 1 per week for 10 weeks - based on materials from the **Washington Post National Weekly Edition**, which is available, by subscription through the Moravian College Book Store. The quiz schedule is as follows:

9/16	Quiz 1 and discussion
9/23	Quiz 2
9/30	Quiz 3 and discussion
10/7	Quiz 4
10/14	Quiz 5 and discussion
10/21	Quiz 6
10/28	Quiz 7 and discussion
11/4	Quiz 8
11/11	Quiz 9 and discussion
11/18	Quiz 10

More Than Just Race

Students will submit a book review of **More Than Just Race** by William Julius Wilson. This paper should be four to six pages typewritten and should include information that addresses the items listed below in a well organized, integrated essay. I.E., students should not approach the book review as if answering a set of take home essay questions. Rather, the materials to be included should be organized in whatever manner allows the student both to demonstrate understanding of the reading and to express thoughtful critical judgments about the nature and quality of the evidence presented by the author. This book review is **due 9/28**.

- What is the principal thesis of the book? What conclusion is reached by the author?
- Citing examples, data or illustrations, what evidence does the author cite to support his conclusions?
- What are the books strengths and weaknesses? What elements of the book did you find most compelling? What elements did you find least compelling? Why?

Instructor Evaluation

The instructor will evaluate each student for his or her participation, involvement in and contributions to the course. This portion of the grade will reflect all activities in the course that are not otherwise specified in the syllabus including attendance and participation in class discussion.

COURSE OUTLINE AND CLASS ASSIGNMENTS

I. Introduction (8/31)

II. American Politics and American Culture (What we believe)

- A. The nature of culture (9/2)
- B. Democratic theory (9/4 and 9/9) **Read:** Hudson, Introduction
- C. The philosophy of the U.S. Constitution (9/11 and 9/14) **Read:** Hudson, Chapter 1 and Federalist 10 and 51
<http://www.foundingfathers.info/federalistpapers/fedi.htm>
http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/fed.asp
- D. Individualism in America (9/18) **Read:** Hudson, Chapter 3
- E. Race in America (9/21-9/23) **Read:** Wilson, **More Than Just Race**, entire

III. American Political Economy (How we allocate power)

- A. American corporate capitalism: why structure matters (9/25-9/28) **Read:** Hudson, Chapter 6 and Charles Lindblom, "The Market as Prison,"
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/2130588.pdf>
- B. Inequality and economic power (10/2-10/5) **Read:** Hudson, Chapter 7

- C. The functions of government in the American capitalist system (10/9, 10/16, 10/19) **Read:** Hudson, Chapter 8

IV. Political Linkages

- A. Interests Groups (10/21, 10/23, 10/26) **Read:** Kaiser, **So Damn Much Money**, entire by **10/21**

1. The role of interest groups in the policy process
2. Organizational costs and methods
3. Incentives and interest group success

- B. Parties and elections (10/30, 11/2, 11/4, 11/6, 11/9) **Read:** Hudson, pp. 135-147 and Chapter 8

1. Party functions and partisanship
2. Voting
3. The nomination process
4. Partisan politics and technology
5. Partisan politics and money

V. American Political Institutions

- A. The Presidency (11/13, 11/16, 11/18, 11/20, 11/23) **Read:** Kenneth Jost, "Presidential Power: Is Bush overstepping his executive authority?" **CQ Researcher**, February 24, 2006, Volume 16, Issue 8 and Kenneth Jost, et. al., "The Obama Presidency: Can Barack Obama deliver the changes he promises?" **CQ Researcher**, January 30, 2009, Volume 19, Issue 4

<http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresrre2006022400>
<http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresrre2009013000>

1. Constraints on presidential leadership
2. The Public Presidency
3. The President and Foreign Policy
4. The President as Chief Executive
5. The Institutionalized Presidency

- B. The Congress (11/30, 12/2, 12/4, 12/7) **Review relevant sections of Kaiser**

1. Congressional functions and organization
2. Committee in Congress
3. Parties in Congress
4. Congressional elections and distributive policy

So Damn Much Money Reading Questions

Interest groups

1. What role do interest groups and lobbyists play in the decisions of government? (19-24, 82-97, 115-121, 162-163)
2. What are the methods used by lobbyists to achieve influence? (6-14, 14-19, 107, 115-120, 183-196, 263-268)
3. What incentives do lobbyists use to be effective? (multiple incentives) (226-249)
4. What are the employment opportunities for public officials as lobbyists? (250-260)

Parties and Elections

1. What is the “New Right” and how is the rise of that movement reflected in the realignment of partisan politics in the U.S.? (pp. 132-141)
2. How have primaries changed the nature of American politics? (307-308)
3. What is the changing role of technology in campaigns and elections? (197-203)
4. What is meant by the emergence of the “new campaign professionals” and what skills do they bring to campaigns and elections? (136-151, 197-203, 261-262, 290-291)
5. What has been the changing role of money on American party and electoral politics? (115-116, 140-151, 290-301)
6. How have these changes impacted the role of lobbyists? (261-273, 291-298)

Congress and the President

1. What changes have occurred in Congress over the past 50 years? (114-123)
2. What is Congress’s legislative function? How has the legislative process changed? (52-63, 69-76, 103-104, 109, 306-311, 315)
3. What is the role of the committee system? What are authorization, appropriations and conference committees? What are policy subsystems? (69-70, 76, 79, 103-104)
4. What is the changing role of partisanship in Congress? (71, 115, 204-214, 263, 268-270, 306-311)
5. What does it mean that American politics is characterized by a permanent campaign? (271-273)
6. What are distributive politics and how do they affect partisanship, re-election and budget deficits? (103, 271)
7. What is earmarking and how does it reflect a change in Congress? (98-113, 311-315)