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# **POLS 202: AMERICAN GOVERNMENT**

## **On-Line Winter 2012**

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**“Liberty cannot be preserved without general knowledge among the people.”**

**~John Adams**

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This is an introductory course that is designed for students who are new to the study of American Government. By the end of the quarter, you should understand the structure of American government and have an increased ability to critically reflect on American politics. Specific topics of study include: the American Revolution, the Constitution, Congress, the Presidency, the Supreme Court, Civil Liberties, Civil Rights, Public Opinion, The Media, Campaigns and Elections, Interest Groups, and much more. This is not a current events course, but we will spend time on the discussion board each week addressing topics that come up in the news related to the course content.

### **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. To develop a critical understanding of American government and politics.
2. To become more informed and discriminating consumers of political information.
3. To develop the ability to distinguish between fact and opinion and to draw informed conclusions based on reliable and valid evidence.
4. To foster self-reflection about the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

### **COURSE POLICIES**

This is a college-level course, which means *you are responsible for your own learning*. I will do my best to facilitate our interactions on-line in a fun and interesting way, and to assess your learning fairly. I expect you to do your best to complete assignments in a timely and appropriate fashion, to log in to the course website each day prepared for the day's work, and to actively participate in on-line discussions and activities. *If you do not understand something you need to take the initiative to find out the answer*—post a question on the discussion board, email me, etc. I cannot read minds so it is up to you to try to seek clarity when it is lacking.

### **RULES OF ENGAGEMENT FOR CLASS DISCUSSIONS**

This course involves the discussion of controversial political issues. Remember that reasonable people often disagree. Your challenge and responsibility is to maintain civil discourse. We will achieve this by being respectful of each other and avoiding inflammatory, derogatory and insulting words, phrases and labels. Please use your

common sense to avoid any other conduct that might distract or offend me or your classmates. Thank you!

### **A NOTE ABOUT IDEOLOGY**

I have no intention of trying to convert you to my belief system. The issues we will be exploring are often contentious and sometimes there will be no right or wrong answers. That being said, I believe there are good and bad arguments. Good arguments will be entertained in class (i.e. those that are logically sound and supported by the available evidence); bad arguments will be discouraged.

### **LATE ASSIGNMENTS AND MISSED EXAMS**

All major due dates are indicated on the calendar on our course website. Because I believe that one of the major lessons that students learn in college is the importance of meeting deadlines, I will not accept any late work unless it has been approved by me BEFORE the date it is due or you can document some sort of emergency. *All assignments turned in late will receive a grade of 0.0.* Likewise, *missed quizzes and exams will receive a grade of 0.0.* Make-up exams will not be administered unless you receive prior permission from me or you can document some sort of catastrophe (such as being medically unable to take the exam).

### **DISABILITY RESOURCES**

If you are a student who has a disability or a learning challenge and you feel you may need accommodations in order to be successful in college, please contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) as soon as possible. The DRC office is located in B132. The phone number is 425-564-2498, and the website is: <http://www.bellevuecollege.edu/drc>. If DRC provides you with documentation indicating that you have a disability that requires academic accommodation, please present that documentation to me at the beginning of the quarter so that we can begin working together as soon as possible to accommodate your needs in this class. The longer you wait to seek accommodation, the more difficult it will be for me to provide that accommodation.

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Cheating and plagiarism (using the ideas or words of another as one's own without crediting the source) are violations of the Student Code of Conduct at Bellevue College ([http://bellevuecollege.edu/policies/2/2050P\\_Student\\_Code\\_%28Procedures%29.asp](http://bellevuecollege.edu/policies/2/2050P_Student_Code_%28Procedures%29.asp)).

Such behavior will result in a grade of 0.0 for the assignment/exam in question. Please note that these are serious offences, which can result in possible probation or suspension from Bellevue College and go on your permanent record. If you have questions about academic integrity, please familiarize yourself with BC's Student Code of Conduct and/or come talk to me during my office hours.

### **COURSE MATERIALS**

The primary text for the course is Canon, Coleman, and Mayer's *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics* (6<sup>th</sup> Edition). We will also be reading Robert Dahl's book, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* Both texts are available at the bookstore. One copy of each will also be made available for short-

term check out in the library. Supplemental texts will be made available on our course website. To access the supplemental readings click on the week you are interested in and then “Supplemental Materials.” Please note that you are responsible for downloading (and reading and/or watching) all supplemental readings as they are assigned. For those of you who do not have a printer at home you can print for free in the student computer lab in the N-Building or you can just read the materials on-line. Any material covered by an assigned reading may be included in examination questions, regardless of whether it is specifically discussed on the discussion board or addressed in a power point lecture. If adjustments are made to the reading schedule, you will be informed via the announcement board on our class website. The assigned readings are an important part of this class—if you don’t do the reading you are going to find it hard to succeed.

### **READING PROMPTS**

To help you get the most out of the course materials, you will be provided with a prompt for nearly every reading and video assigned in this course. These prompts will be made available at least two days before the reading is due and they will include a handful of reflection questions as well as a comprehensive list of key concepts. Each week’s prompts can be found in the folder called “Reading/Viewing Prompts” for that week. You are expected to engage with these prompts before, during, and after doing the reading and/or viewing. My primary purpose in creating these prompts is to help you focus on what is important in the assigned materials, to help you get ready for our discussions, and to help you prepare for assignments, quizzes, and exams. You are encouraged to print the reading prompts and write answers to the reflection questions that I have provided on the prompts themselves as well as to define the key concepts that I have listed. These prompts will prove to be a valuable resource on the midterm and final exams.

### **KEEPING UP WITH THE NEWS**

Please keep up with current events related to American government and politics. Our discussions on the discussion board will sometimes touch on current events and it is important that you keep up-to-date on the major political goings-on. Please find a few news sources that work for you (representing different mediums and viewpoints) and make a habit of reading, listening, and/or watching them throughout the quarter. If you have questions about the appropriateness of a particular news source for this class, please ask me sooner rather than later. I suggest that at least one of your sources be a national newspaper such as: the *New York Times* ([www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)), the *Washington Post* ([www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com)), or the *Wall Street Journal* ([www.wsj.com](http://www.wsj.com)). I also encourage international sources such as the *BBC* ([www.bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk)) and *Al Jazeera* (<http://english.aljazeera.net>). If you speak another language I encourage you to follow the news in that language and bring that perspective to class.

### **GRADED WORK**

Citizenship and Geography Quizzes	(10 pts)	2.5%
Weekly Participation (6 pts per week)	(60 pts)	15%
Weekly Journal (5 pts per week)	(50 pts)	12.5%
Homework Assignments (20 pts each)	(80 pts)	12.5%
Midterm Exam	(100 pts)	25%

Final Exam

(100 pts)

25%

**(400 pts)**

**100%**

### GRADEPOINT CONVERSION CHART

Grade	Points	Percentage	Grade	Points	Percentage
A	372-400	93-100%	C	292-311	73-77%
A-	360-371	90-92%	C-	280-291	70-72%
B+	352-359	88-89%	D+	272-279	68-69%
B	332-351	83-87%	D	240-271	60-67%
B-	320-331	80-82%	F	0-239	59% & Below
C+	312-319	78-79%			

### WEEKLY PARTICIPATION

Each week I will post one or more discussion questions to the discussion board, which can be accessed through the “Discussions” link (on the left hand side of the course website). It is your responsibility, as a member of our class, to respond thoughtfully, not only to my questions, but also to your classmates’ comments. You are required to participate thoroughly in each week’s discussion—your grade will be based on the quality of your contributions and the level of your involvement. In order to receive full credit for each week’s discussion, I expect you to post your comments early in the week (i.e., don’t wait until Thursday night to post—if you do, your classmates will not benefit from your insights). I also expect you to read almost all of your classmates’ posts and to make at least 3-5 intellectually meaningful posts throughout the week. I recommend that you check the discussion board at least once a day between Monday and Friday. By checking the discussion board frequently, you will be able to identify more opportunities where you can add something to the conversation (thus improving your grade). Please note the following guidelines when making posts.

- Your posts should be in sentence/paragraph format, and you should avoid “text message” grammar (that means no “u” instead of “you”).
- Please write complete sentences/paragraphs and fully explain and elaborate your points, using examples, evidence, and logic.
- Be precise about what you are saying; don’t be vague or general.
- Respond to the topic, not the author. This does not mean that you should ignore the person who wrote the original post, but it means you need to focus on the ideas in the post and how to further the conversation on the topic, not tell the author what you think of his or her post.
- Minimize prejudices, biases, unfounded beliefs, and emotional reactions.
- Feel free to be personal and interpersonal as this will help us bond as an online community, but be careful not to go too far off onto personal tangents. Please stay focused on the topics that I post for you. If you want to carry on other discussions, please use the “other” forum on the discussion site. The course content forums are reserved for addressing the course content of the week.
- Examples of good discussion posts include: clarifying or expanding the discussion if important points are unclear or missing; looking at the issue from another angle

or perspective; adding pertinent information; and asking a question that forces your classmates to think more in depth about the topic.

I'm looking forward to an engaging and interesting discussion board!