

Syllabus, Spring 2007
American Politics: PLSI 200.11
San Francisco State University

Instructor: Francis Neely
Office: HSS 128
Office hours: Mon. 2:00 – 3:30; Wed. 10:00 – 11:00
Phone: 415/338-1522

Wednesday 4:10 – 6:55
Burk Hall 28
Email : fneely@sfsu.edu
Web page: <http://bss.sfsu.edu/fneely>

Course Description: This course provides an overview of the U.S. government, its institutions, and political processes. It is organized into three main sections. In the first we will critically review the constitution and examine the degree to which it provides structures that are fair and democratic. In the second portion we will turn to the functions of the three branches of the federal government. Finally, we will examine politics from the people's perspective, addressing questions of how citizens interact with government.

Throughout, we will consider the structures in place that influence political outcomes. How do we make decisions as a group, as a society? What is the best way to combine our many and varied preferences? What are the processes we employ and how do those processes affect the nature of the outcomes? In other words, how do the decision structures in place influence who gets what, when, and how?

Goals:

1. Gain an understanding of American government, its philosophical origins, institutions, and political processes.
2. Become familiar with the topics studied by political scientists in the field of American Politics.
3. Appreciate the influence of existing structures on political outcomes.
3. Develop critical thinking, research, and writing skills.

Course Requirements:

Attendance and participation: You are expected to attend class and to arrive on time. The readings listed below should be completed before class. I expect you to join in class discussions; participation will help your grade in borderline cases. I will take attendance either at the beginning or the end of each meeting. You can miss two classes without penalty. Beginning with the third absence, you will lose two of the ten attendance/participation points for each absence.

Paper: You will write a short research paper of five to seven pages on one of several assigned topics. The paper should include evidence of critical thinking and make use of scholarly references. Refer to the link on the course web page for details. A hard copy of the paper is due by 6:55 p.m. on April 25th. If you cannot hand it to me in class, then please slide it under my office door or place it in my mailbox in HSS 263. You may not submit your paper via email. Late papers will be marked down one grade step (e.g., from a B to a B-). If you'd like me to review a draft of your paper and offer comments, please get it to me by April 4th, and I will return to you on the 18th. Read the statement on plagiarism at the end of this syllabus; if you have any questions, ask.

Midterm and final exams: The exams will cover material from the texts, lectures, and class discussions. The first midterm covers the topics in Dahl's book on the constitution. The second midterm is on the three branches of government. The bulk of the final exam will be on topics covered in the third portion of the course. However, some questions on larger themes and topics that run throughout the semester will also be included. All three exams will be a combination of multiple choice, true/false, and short answer questions.

Please bring a picture ID to the exams. In addition, bring a Zeus scantron sheet, available in the bookstore, and a pencil. Note that the exam dates are February 28th, April 4th, and May 23rd. Makeup exams will be given only in cases of true emergencies. If you are planning to travel during the semester, then please plan accordingly. A conflict with your travel schedule is not a valid excuse for missing the exam.

Grading: Grades for the course will be calculated with no curve; one student's grade will not influence another student's chances. The grades are based on:

Attendance/Participation	10%
Paper	25%
Midterm exam #1	20%
Midterm exam #2	20%
Final exam	25%

Course grades are assigned in the following way:

94 – 100 = A	83 – 86 = B	73 – 76 = C	63 – 66 = D
90 – 93 = A-	80 – 82 = B-	70 – 72 = C-	60 – 62 = D-
87 – 89 = B+	77 – 79 = C+	67 – 69 = D+	0 – 59 = F

Required Reading:

Wasserman, Gary. 2006. *The Basics of American Politics*, 12th ed. New York: Longman. ISBN 0321317955

Dahl, Robert. 2003. *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?*, 2nd ed. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. ISBN 0300095244

A newspaper: Regularly read a newspaper of your choice from the following: *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, or *Los Angeles Times*.

Optional Reading

Burns, James MacGregor, et al. 2005. *Government by the People*, 20th ed. Upper Saddle River NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall. (at the reserve desk)

Other Considerations: I encourage you to see me during office hours to talk about the course, politics, your career plans, or any questions you have regarding your studies at SFSU. If you cannot make it during my scheduled hours, we can set an appointment. If you run into difficulty of any kind during this course, please contact me. It is much easier to address problems during the course than after the course is completed.

Please review the 2005 – 2006 *San Francisco State University Bulletin's* "General Policies and Procedures" section (pp. 83 - 92) for university policy regarding drops, withdrawals, incompletes, etc. If you have a physical, psychological, medical, or learning disability that may impact on your ability to carry out assigned course work, I urge you to speak with me and to contact the staff in the Disability Resource Center, Student Services Building, Room 110 (415/338-2472 Voice/TDD). They will review your concerns and determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. Information and documentation of a disability are confidential.

Week-by-week Schedule		
PART I: The Constitution		
Introduction	<i>January 24</i>	Introduction to course, preview of topics American Politics, Political Science, decision rules, election systems Paper topics
Week 1	<i>January 31</i>	The constitution, structure of government Why government?, collective dilemmas Read Wasserman, Chaps. 1 and 2
Week 2	<i>February 7</i>	The constitution in historical and comparative context Undemocratic elements, the structure of congressional elections Single-member district plurality v. proportional representation Read Dahl, Chapters 1 – 3
Week 3	<i>February 14</i>	Problems with the structure of presidential elections Realizable versus theoretical democratic process Read Dahl, Chapters 4 – 6
Week 4	<i>February 21</i>	Prospects for change in the constitution and structure of government Review for the first midterm exam Read Dahl, Chapters 7 – 8
Week 5	<i>February 28</i>	Midterm exam #1
PART II: The Institutions		
Week 6	<i>March 7</i>	The executive branch Read Wasserman, Chapter 3
Week 7	<i>March 14</i>	The representative branch Read Wasserman, Chapter 4
Week 8	<i>March 21</i>	Presidential and congressional elections
Week 9	<i>March 28</i>	The judicial branch Review for the second midterm exam Read Wasserman, Chapter 5
Week 10	<i>April 4</i>	Midterm exam #2
Week 11	<i>April 11</i>	SPRING BREAK
PART III: The People		
Week 12	<i>April 18</i>	Voting turnout and vote choice Read chapter 7

<i>Week 13</i>	<i>April 25</i>	The 2003 California Recall Election Local electoral reform: Ranked-Choice Voting in San Francisco PAPERS DUE TODAY AT 6:55 P.M.
<i>Week 14</i>	<i>May 2</i>	Public opinion Polarization: myth or fact?
<i>Week 15</i>	<i>May 9</i>	Organized interests, media, and money Read Wasserman, Chapter 8
<i>Week 16</i>	<i>May 16</i>	Pluralist democracy, other approaches Review for final exam Read Wasserman, Chapter 9
<i>Final Exam</i>	<i>May 23</i>	Final exam in Burk Hall 28 from 4:10 to 6:55

A Statement on Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the most common form of academic dishonesty. The following passage, taken from Richard M. Eastman's book entitled *Style*, provides a cogent definition of plagiarism:

(P)lagiarism is the offering of someone else's words, pictures, data, ideas, and even conceptions as if they were one's own. Writers are indeed encouraged to draw upon the information and wisdom of others, but in the spirit of intellectual inquiry they are expected to state such indebtedness so that (a) their own creativity can be justly appreciated and (b) their use of sources, like a scientist's experiment, can be verified by others. Plagiarism differs from this productive use of sources in that the similarity of the original to the borrowing is very close; it is acknowledged imperfectly or not at all; and it shows little or no creative application by the borrower.

Plagiarism is a prime intellectual offense in that the borrower is faking discovery process. No community of writers and readers can thrive if its members counterfeit their achievements, deceive their critics, and take unfair competitive advantage of others. (Pages 270-1 of *Style* by Richard M. Eastman. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

Plagiarism comes in many forms which include (but are not necessarily limited to) the following:

1. Copying verbatim another person's written words without proper acknowledgment. In the case of a direct quote, "proper acknowledgment" entails placing quotation marks around the passage or (in the case of an extended passage) indenting the quotation.
2. Paraphrasing another person's written words without proper acknowledgment. Rephrasing the words does not remove the writer's obligation to indicate clearly that the material belongs to someone else.
3. Quoting or paraphrasing words that were found in a secondary source as if they were found in a primary source. Suppose, for example, that another author uses a quotation from Alfred Marshall that you would like to use in your paper. You may not present the quotation in a manner that will lead readers to believe that you found it by reading Marshall. Instead, you should say, "As so-and-so (19xx) observed, Alfred Marshall made the following statement about this issue:..."

Note: The points made in items 1-3 apply to the use of diagrams, tables, and statistics as well as words.

4. Failing to acknowledge editorial assistance that substantially improves the style and/or quality of your writing. If someone merely points out errors in grammar or punctuation in your writing, or awkward passages, or gives comments about the overall structure of the paper, which you then rewrite, it is not necessary to acknowledge their assistance, although courtesy should lead you to acknowledge substantial helpful editorial comments by colleagues. However, if your writing has been edited or rewritten by someone else in such a way that the style and quality no longer reflect your writing ability, you must acknowledge that editorial assistance was received.
5. Presenting an idea, model, derivation, proof, etc. that other researchers have developed or with which you received substantial assistance without proper acknowledgment. Plagiarism is not limited to the use of other people's words, but it includes the improper use of ideas and methodologies as well. If you choose to present someone else's model in your written work (for example), you must indicate that the model did not originate with you. If an important idea, proof, etc. was given to you by someone else, you must acknowledge the help that you received.

An exception to this point occurs when the model is so widely used and so well-known that it could not possibly be mistaken by the reader as your own (e.g., basic supply and demand models, or the use of ordinary least squares).

6. "Double submission" of papers. Students may not submit the same paper for credit in more than one course without the explicit permission of all instructors who will be evaluating the work.

Note that these rules apply to all written work that you circulate. Also, even starting with the first drafts given to your thesis advisor, you should work at making the appropriate acknowledgments and discuss any uncertain points with your advisor.

(This description of plagiarism is from the Statement on Academic Honesty, found on the SUNY Stony Brook Economics Department's web pages: <http://ws.cc.stonybrook.edu/economics/instruct/grad/honesty.html>. Another explanation of plagiarism can be found at the following SFSU site: <http://online.sfsu.edu/~rone/StudentHelp/Plagiarism.html>).