

## SYLLABUS

Pols 001: American Government  
Ken Nuger  
Fall, 2016  
3 p.m., MW and 6 p.m., M  
HGH 116

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### Course Introduction

Political Science 001, Introduction to American Government examines both the pursuit and exercise of political authority in the United States. The course examines several themes that affect how our democratic system works. First, we shall examine the philosophical foundations that frame American democracy. This unit includes an examination of the U.S. Constitution and the federal system in the United States. The course then examines how people politically organize and how they participate in American democracy. In so doing, we shall explore how people learn core American values, how they organize and use political parties and how the electoral process works. The course also examines how the three branches of government exercise their constitutional duties. Finally, the course examines selected public policies, with an emphasis on civil liberties and civil rights to see how government policy affects different groups of people in the United States.

### Books

Please purchase the following: Schmidt, Shelley and Bardes, American Government and Politics Today, 2016-2017 Ed. (Brief Edition)

### Grading

There are two exams; one midterm worth 100 points and one final worth 100 points. You must also write a research paper approximately 7-8 pages. The research paper is worth 40 points and shall be due on Monday, November 21<sup>st</sup> for full comments and a grade. If you wish to forego full comments and received a grade with only minimal comments, you may turn in your paper Monday, November 28<sup>th</sup> with no late penalty. If the paper is turned in after November 28<sup>th</sup>, it is late and shall receive an eight point penalty. Please refer to the research paper guidelines for more detailed information and requirements. Please note that the absolute last moment to turn in any work for any credit is the end of the last regularly scheduled day of this class, which for our class is Monday, December 12<sup>th</sup>.

### Student Learning Objectives

The university requires Pols 001 syllabi to include part of the department's learning objectives for the course. The following complies with this requirement. For the record, it is my view that this requirement is redundant and unnecessary but I didn't get a vote so here are the current SLO's.

SLO 2: Students will be able to explain how political decisions are made, their consequences for individuals and society, and how individuals and groups may affect the decision-making process. As students analyze the meaning and content of the democratic process as it has evolved in the United States and California, at a minimum, they should be able to describe:

- a) the foundations of the political system, including the evolution of the philosophies of the U.S. and California constitutions, political culture, separation of powers, bureaucracy, federalism, and relations

- among various levels of government. Students should also analyze the evolving institutions of government, including a study of the powers of the President, Congress, and the Judiciary;
- b) the links between the people and government, including participation and voting, political parties, interest/lobbying groups, and public opinion and socialization. Students should also analyze the rights and obligations of citizens, the tension between various freedoms of expression, including issues related to censorship and freedom of speech, due process and the maintenance of order, the efforts to end racial, gender and other forms of discriminatory practices in both the public and private sectors of society; and
  - c) the operations of California government, including the similarities and differences between the California and U.S. Constitutions, the relationship between state and local government in California, the basic issues of California politics, and a careful assessment of the impact of demographic changes on the history and politics of the state and the nation.

SLO 3: Students should also be able to:

- a) identify the tools of political action and collective decision-making at the local, state, national, and global level; and
- b) articulate the values and assumptions that inform their civic engagement.

### Attendance, Tardiness and Make up policy

Attendance will be recorded each day but you get five class days of paid vacation for the MW section and 3 class days paid vacation for the Monday evening section. For the MW section, each day of class you miss after five absences, you will lose two points per missed class. For the Monday evening section, each class you miss after 3 absences, you will lose 3 points per missed class. For the MW section, if you use less than five absences in the semester, you will receive two extra points toward your final grade up to a total of ten extra points. For example, if you miss five days of class, you neither gain nor lose points. If you miss six classes, you lose two points, seven classes, four points, etc. If you miss only four classes, you earn two points; three class, four points and perfect attendance earns you ten extra points. For the Monday evening section, if you miss 3 classes, you neither gain nor lose points. If you miss 4 classes, you lose 3 points, 5 classes, 6 points, etc. If you miss only 2 classes, you earn 3 points, if you miss 1 class, you earn 6 points and you earn 9 points for perfect attendance. Not only is this a good way to encourage you to attend the greatest show on earth and earn points, but just being in class regularly will help you better master the material.

### Academic Integrity

Any student caught cheating on any assignment will automatically fail the course and will have an academic dishonesty report submitted to the office of Judicial Affairs. Please refer to the university policy on academic dishonesty. I hate to bring this point up but the sad reality is that some students engage in various types of dishonest behavior and while many may not be caught, please be advised that if I catch any student violating university policy on academic dishonesty, you will fail the course and be sanctioned by the Office of Judicial Affairs. Per SJSU mandate, I am required to restate the policy on this syllabus and it reads as follows:

Academic integrity is essential to the mission of San José State University. As such, students are expected to perform their own work (except when collaboration is expressly permitted by the course instructor) without the use of any outside resources. Students are not permitted to use old tests, quizzes when preparing for exams, nor may they consult with students who have already taken the exam. When practiced, academic integrity ensures that all students are fairly graded. Violations to the Academic Integrity Policy undermine the educational process and will not be tolerated. It also demonstrates a lack of respect for oneself, fellow students and the course instructor and can ruin the university's reputation and the value of the degrees it offers.

We all share the obligation to maintain an environment which practices academic integrity. Violators of the Academic Integrity Policy will be subject to failing this course and being reported to the Office of Student Conduct & Ethical Development for disciplinary action which could result in suspension or expulsion from San José State University.

**If you wish, you may view the complete policy on Academic Integrity by typing in the following URL:**

[http://sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial\\_affairs/Academic\\_Integrity\\_Policy\\_S07-2.pdf](http://sa.sjsu.edu/download/judicial_affairs/Academic_Integrity_Policy_S07-2.pdf)

#### Computer use policy

Any student caught using a computer for amusement will earn a permanent membership to my shit list. If quantified, membership to my shit list gives you the privilege of losing at least 10 points from the total semester points you earned. Browsing, im'ing, emailing or any type of computer use for self amusement is rude to those sitting around and beside you. Serious students complain that those around them who use their computer for self amusement break their concentration. I'm really sorry to take such drastic and unpleasant action but the amount of rude computer users in class has really become a problem. WTF is up with that?

#### Misc. Grahdoos

All written work must be legible. If I cannot read an exam, you will have to read it to me in my office as part of an oral exam. This is not as easy as it may seem so please write legibly. Tardiness tends to be a distraction to the entire class and while an occasional tardiness cannot always be helped, excessive tardiness (more than a couple of times) will be duly noted. Finally, please turn off your electronic communication devices as they also pose a distraction to the class. For those who work with the Disability Resource Center, I will respect the accommodations the Center the three of us agree upon.

#### Readings

Unit One – Philosophical and Constitutional Dimensions of American Democracy

Chs. 1, 2, 3

Unit Two – Political Culture and Socialization, Political Parties, Elections and the Political Process

Chs. 6, 7, 8

Unit Three – Powers and Functions of the National Government

Chs. 9, 10, 11, 12

Unit Four – Introduction to Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Chs. 4 and 5

Final Examination schedule:

MW section final is Monday, December 19<sup>th</sup> at 12:15 p.m.

M evening section final is Monday, December 19<sup>th</sup> at 5:15 p.m.

## Research Paper Guidelines Fall, 2016

For this 2016 presidential election year, you have four options for the research paper. For option one, you must compare and analyze the positions of the democratic and republican parties in a particular policy area and then assess which position you feel is better for the United States. Second, you may choose three issues and examine what the two parties' positions are on these issues and then more briefly, examine which party has the stronger positions. For either of the first two options, you may include the positions of one 3<sup>rd</sup> party, including the tea party if you wish. Third, you may analyze what you believe to be President Obama's successes and/or failures during his presidency. For all of these three options, be sure you integrate your views on the policy issues you address in your paper.

Each option requires you to carefully develop your position on the issue(s) and offer some support for your position. Do others agree with you? Who? Is there empirical evidence to support your position?

Fourth, as an alternative, you may write a more esoteric paper on any one of the topics listed below, or if you can make the case to me, about a topic that interests you that is not on the list. The one requirement for any of the topics below is that you substantially tie the paper's theme to government and politics in the United States.

Regardless, the paper must be carefully written, free of typographical errors, consist of properly developed paragraphs and appropriate attribution, including both notation in the body of your work as well as a complete bibliography at the end of your paper. Be very careful to cite all of your sources. The paper is due no later than Monday, November 21<sup>st</sup> for a grade with comments or Monday, November 28<sup>th</sup> for a grade and only minimal comments. The paper is worth 40 points. If it is turned in after November 28<sup>th</sup>, it will be late and receive an 8 point penalty. The last moment you can turn your paper in late for partial credit is the last regularly scheduled day of our class, which is Monday, December 12<sup>th</sup>. If you plagiarize and are caught, you will fail the course. While this is a harsh penalty, it should serve as incentive to do the easy and honorable thing; merely give credit to the good folks who provided you with the information you will use to write your paper. It's not too much to ask and they would appreciate your thoughtfulness.

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### Alternative topics

1. Choose some song that you feel accurately reflects what is wrong with the United States and carefully analyze the lyrics and how they relate to the problem your paper is addressing.
2. Should the United States let unionization whither away? What will happen to the United States and its workforce if there are no more unions? What will happen to companies if there are no unions?
4. Just what is it about the United States that the terrorists hate so much? Do they have a point?

5. Why are the youth of America so turned off on politics.
6. Is a multicultural society beneficial or detrimental to society?
7. Analyze this statement: An ignorant voting public makes it possible for politicians to ignore real issues and focus on style over substance by using destructive and negative campaigning techniques.
8. Is capitalism and the quest to maximize profit ruining America?
9. How is freedom and privacy being affected since 9/11? Is this a good or bad thing?
10. Choose an issue and examine whether the media is informing us or brainwashing us?
11. How might you justify the following statement: "The most important and enduring thing a president does is fill United States Supreme Court vacancies."
12. If the U.S. was not busy spending over a trillion dollars in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, how would you spend the money? What problems would you try to solve with the dough you've saved on the war? Why is the problem you are focusing on so important and would 300 billion be enough?
13. Is social security really broken? How would you fix it if you thought it needed fixing?
14. Does America primarily use regressive or progressive taxing systems to pay for government? What evidence do you have to support your assertion? What system would be fairer to all of America? Why?
15. Should the U.S. replace raced based affirmative action programs with class based a.a. programs?
16. Compare red states and blue state policies? Examine things like criminal statistics, divorce, who pays/receives taxes, education levels, income levels, religious views, etc., and see whether blue thinking or red thinking creates a better society.
17. Should corporations be able to give unlimited sums of money to support activities associated with particular political candidates? (See Citizens United v. FEC)
18. What should we do about America's gun culture? Is it harmful to the broad public interest?
19. Is America's religious right beneficial or detrimental to the U.S.?
20. Examine the rise of Donald Trump as a Presidential candidate.
21. Do you have any other ideas? Come ask me about another topic you feel would be relevant to an American government class.

