Who will win the presidential election of 2012? In what manner? What, if any, difference will it make? The exploration of these questions is framed by a consideration of what has been and remains the fundamental issue of American political life: What should government do? (And not do?) Two required research projects: (1) Predict the outcome in a state of your choosing, and (2) Explain the actual election outcome in that state and the significance of the national election.

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands, but in seeing with new eyes." - Marcel Proust

Overview

I. Course Objectives/Topics
II. The Approach of the Course
III. Course Theme
IV. Required and Recommended Reading
V. Course Requirements and Deadlines
VI. Semester Schedule
VII. Attachments

Each of the above sections of the Syllabus is described, in detail, below.

I. a. Course Objective

The primary course objective is to increase your understanding of American government, by teaching you to think analytically about the dynamics that drive the political system.

I. a. Course Topics

Notes:
- The following topics will be dealt with in order.
- Depending on class discussion, some topics might take more than one class day; therefore, specific dates are not provided.
- To know where we are in the sequence of topics, come to class every day.

**Topics**

1. The presidential election of 2012: The fundamental issue of American political life resurfaces
2. What can government do?
3. The proper role of government: What should government do?
4. The Constitution
5. Federalism
6. The required research projects
7. Civil liberties and civil rights
8. Political culture
9. Political parties and interest groups
10. Media, elections, political participation
11. Policy making processes
12. Congress
13. The presidency
14. What it takes to bring about transformative change

**II. The Approach of the Course**

This course places a premium on the integration and synthesis of material; this will come about by relating:

- The coverage of current events in The New York Times;
- Your research on the presidential election;
- Classroom analysis of other current events and issues;
- Other case studies, presented and analyzed in class¹;
- Classroom simulations; and
- Classroom discussion of other assigned readings (Available on Electronic Reserve, Blackboard (BB), or to be distributed in class)²

This course’s pedagogical approach relies on a Socratic method; i.e., through our study of specific cases and through our interaction in class, we will inductively arrive at, test, and apply fundamental principles about the nature and operation of the American political system. (As Sam Goldwyn said: “For your information, let me ask you a few questions.”) In other words, you will have to "think on your feet." This is a learnable skill and, even if you don't think you'll be good at it, you can learn to be.) [In the fight business, they say you have to "let go of your hands."]

1 Some of these case studies will be of what you read in the New York Times and discuss in your Study Group; other case studies I will present.
2 To access assigned readings on electronic reserve (ERes), go to: http://eres.cc.oberlin.edu/coursepage.asp?cid=106 and enter the password “polt105”, no quotes.
III. Course Theme
A recurring theme in this course is the nature of constraints on the capacity of government to realize the public good and the ways in which politics might be used to overcome (or exacerbate) these constraints.

Understanding these constraints (and figuring out what to do about them) will require learning to think in a manner that is politically astute and strategically wise. (To learn to think this way, you may first need to recognize the ways in which old habits of thought limit your political effectiveness and doom people less privileged than you.)

IV. Required and Recommended Reading
The required reading for this course consists of:
- **The New York Times**: Monday-Friday only, beginning with today’s paper, Tuesday, Sept. 5: available, at a reduced rate for the semester, at Gibson’s Bakery and elsewhere. (Yes, you will need a hard copy.) **USE THE FORM HANDED OUT IN CLASS TO GET THE RATE OF $37.20.**

The recommended reading includes:
- Paul A. Dawson, *American Government: Institutions, Policies, and Politics*. This textbook is available, for free, on OC Library’s Electronic Reserve; and
- Selected articles. To be distributed in class or made available through Electronic Reserve or on Blackboard (Bb).

V. Course Requirements (evaluative weight of the assignment, as a percentage of your final grade) [and Deadlines] (They’re called “requirements” because each of them must be competed to pass the course and “deadlines” for what happens to you if you miss the announced due date.) [and Grading.]

A. Regular Attendance. Since this course relies on the Socratic method, your regular attendance is required.

B. The Personal Cost of Negative Externalities. A course requirement is your agreement to compensate the class for any “public bads” you might create by arrive late.

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3 It will be essential to have a hard copy, not just online access.
4 For more detail on the various requirements, see Attachment A: Notes on Requirements.
5 The College, for reasons I cannot imagine, makes it easy for you to over indulge in beer, usually on Wednesday evening. This seems to suppress student turnout the following Thursday, especially in classes that meet at 8 am. Since there are fewer students on class on these Thursdays, the class participation of each student is relatively more valuable and I therefore tend to give extra credit to those who do participate (and extra demerits to those who are absent when I call on them.)
- If arrive late (as defined by my watch), you must agree to pay, in a non-disruptive manner, **a late fee of $1** before you take your seat.
  
  **NOTES:**
  - To pay the late fee, place $1 on the desk at the front of the room before you take your seat. (Do not do anything else disruptive, such as explaining why you're late, borrowing a dollar, etc.)
  - This is a course requirement; i.e., if you do not pay, in the manner described above, you will fail the course.
  - This "tardy policy" also will serve as a case study.

- In addition, you are required to agree to pay, gracially, $1 whenever your cell phone rings in class (or any other electronic gadget makes a noise).

C. Class Participation

Regular and effective participation in classroom discussion is, at least, 20% of your final grade. In practice, your presence and participation in class is essential to passing the course, let alone doing well. Without regular attendance and participation, previous students have tended to write exam answers that they could have written in August, thereby relying on previously held intuitive and often unrealistic, highly romanticized ideas, rather than on concepts and analysis techniques that were introduced in class.

For the most part, I will call on you. Consider yourself forewarned that we play by law school rules; i.e., you are at risk at all times. Additional occasions for class discussion will come about when I ask a Study Group to present their analysis of a story in the Times or individual class members to present their research.

Credit for participation is based on:
- Quality, not quantity;
- The expression of your own ideas, not your restatement of what a peer just said;
- Thoughtful comments, not mere opinion;

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6 If you’re still in the class after ADD/DROP, I will take your continued enrollment to be an indication of your agreement with these fines.

8 If I call on you when you’re absent, this will detract heavily from your participation grade. I also will keep track of the number of these occasions in case you subsequently suggest that I was insufficiently impressed by the wonderfulness of your exams and research papers.

9 That is, at risk of being called upon to think out loud.
• Expressions that show the internalization of course concepts, not mere parroting;
• The ability to engage your peers, by asking them questions and by responding thoughtfully (and critically, if that’s appropriate). This and the resulting interactive exchanges will be especially heavily rewarded.
  o Note: The ability to participate well in class (or any group) discussion is highly prized and difficult to develop: I will help.

In addition, a portion of your participation grade will be based on your participation in a session your Study Group is required to have with me. This session can be scheduled by your Study Group Tutor.\(^{10}\)

D. Midterm Examination\(^{11}\) (20%) [Midterm Exam Date and Time: Thursday, Oct. 18, in class.
E. Research Project (30%) The Project is to be reported in two parts/papers.
First Paper Due 7 pm, Tuesday, Nov. 6, at the Election Party; Second (Final) Paper Due Dec. 4, in class.
F. Final Examination (30%) Final Exam Date: Tuesday, Dec. 18\(^{th}\), 7-9 pm
  • NOTE: It will not be possible to reschedule this exam to accommodate conflicting travel arrangements.

G. Another course requirement … A (recognizable) photo of you, taped to the back of a 3x5 card (pick up at the door, on the way out after class today,) with your email name\(^{12}\) printed on the front [the side without the photo]. [Due Date: Thursday, Sept. 8, 8 am: Please deposit on the front table, before the start of class.]

H. Participation in a Study Group. You are required to join and participate in a Study Group. Each Group will have a Study Group Leader/Tutor, a former student who will meet with you and, in general, help you with all course-related matters. These students will be in class on Thursday, Sept. 13 to introduce themselves and announce the meeting time and place of their group. You must be in class this day to sign up to join one of these groups.

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\(^{10}\) Your tutor can schedule the required session with the Instructor only after the well-attended Group has meet for at least three times. Tutors cannot grade your participation in the Study Group; they, however, may provide me with insight on your contributions to the success of the group.

\(^{11}\) For assistance see Attachment C. Things to do/Mistakes to avoid on exams. See also previous exams posted in the ERes site.

\(^{12}\) Please provide non-funky email names: namely, Official OC First Name.Official OC Last Name. Also, use this format on the required record of study group members (see below) and whenever you email me.
NOTE: An Overview of Important/Required/Optional Events – and DUE DATES is provided as Attachment F.
VI. Semester Topics

TOPICS 1 & 2:

1. The presidential election of 2012: The fundamental issue of American political life resurfaces
2. What can government do?

Lecture/concepts: Issues (and non-issues), underlying values, rhetoric, economics, politics, likely results, policy implications

- Issues: The looming fiscal crisis, the economy, jobs, health care, etc.
- Non-issues: Race, foreign policy, capitalism, ethanol subsidies, mortgage subsidies, international human rights, gender equality, nutrition, pollution, global warming, etc.

Discussion: Who’s going to win, why, and so what?

Overview of the course:

- It matters what we do here: The Preamble to the Constitution
- The institutional context of the election
- The fundamental issue of American political life: What should government do? (And not do?)
  - The logically prior question: What can government do?
  - Class Simulation: “Welcome to the Island of Despair!”
- A conceptual framework for American government: The Island revisited
  - Mandatory Resource Allocation Decisions (MRADS)
  - Alternative Resource Allocation Mechanisms (RAMS)
  - Values and value conflict
  - Politics
  - Public Policy

Required Reading (for the next class):

- The New York Times. Beginning with today's paper, you are responsible for the Times, M-F.

Next class:

For the upcoming election, some are concerned with guarding against fraudulent voting, while others worry about efforts to suppress, unfairly, the voting participation of ethnic minorities and the poor.

Design and be prepared to present, orally and in writing, a mechanism or arrangement for making sure that no eligible voter is turned away at the voting booth, while, at the same time, there no
one votes who is not legally qualified to do so. Think about what sort of government might be required to put your voting arrangement into practice.

HEADS UP: To do well in class tomorrow – and in all class tomorrows -- you will have to look ahead, to the assignments of the next class day, and prepare for the promised discussion(s). (Notes: You “prepare” by doing the assigned reading, spending some time thinking about the upcoming discussion topics, and, normally, having a preliminary discussion within your Study Group.)

TOPIC 3: The Proper Role of Government: What should government do?  
Lecture: What should government do – and not do?  
• The on-going debate  
• The preferred mechanism for “resolving” the debate  

Cases for class discussion:  
• What did you learn last class?  
• The Voting Procedure Exercise: To put into practice your preferred voting arrangement, what sort of governmental intervention would be necessary? What values would be advanced by such an intervention? What values would be diminished?  
• Why charge someone for being late to class?  
• Course syllabus: What questions do you have of it?  

Discussion: On this and on all other class days, you may be called on to participate in any of the following kinds of discussions\textsuperscript{13}:  
• Election Research  
  o How is the election shaping up in your state? Events? Your analysis of?  
• NYT-based discussions  
  o In what ways does a particular recent story in the Times illustrate course concerns and concepts? NOTE: Every day, look for and think about relevant news stories.  
• Case discussions  
  o Sometimes I may introduce a particular case of government in action (or not acting), and then I’ll ask you to analyze the case, using course concepts. I’ll also ask others to comment on your analysis. (Ideally, others will just jump in, asking you questions, etc.)  
• Review discussions  
  o Once in a while, I may ask you to sum up what you’ve learned so far, and to comment on what others have to say when they sum up. (Ideally, others will just jump in, asking you questions, etc.)

\textsuperscript{13} For more detail on these kinds of discussions, see Attachment A.
Required Reading:
NOTE: All reading assignments are to be completed before the class for which they are listed.
- This Syllabus (Study it!)
- New York Times. Tuesday’s and yesterday’s (In all future class sessions, I will assume that you have read and are prepared to be questioned about all previous issues of the New York Times, M-F.)

Recommended Reading:

Preview of the next class:
- What were the Federalist Papers?

HEADS UP: To do well in class tomorrow … (See above) [Note: Remember the advice … It applies to ever upcoming class session.]

EXTRA CREDIT

Sept. 13: An Evening with Obie Journalists Covering the 2012 Election
Thu, September 13 2012 07:30 PM - 08:30 PM Finney Chapel
http://new.oberlin.edu/calendar/index.dot?id=4262338
Extra Credit: If, at the end of their presentations this evening, you manage to ask a “good” question of (one of) the journalists, and, the next day, report to the class on your assessment of their answer(s), you will receive extra (double) participation credit for that day.14

TOPIC 4: The Constitution

Lecture topics/Concepts:
- Popular sovereignty
- Judicial review
- The misunderstood concept of separation of powers
- Separatism

Cases:
- The Founders as problem solvers: What was the problem?
- The Constitution as the solution: Why was it?
- Madison's insight and remedy
- The inevitability of political conflict; or, “No, Rodney King, we can’t just ‘all get along.’”

Discussion Topics:

14 Note: A “good” question is one that appears to make the respondent think; it is not a rambling speech, designed to impress.
• What is Madison’s argument? NOTE: By drawing explicitly on Federalist # 10, be prepared to reconstruct, orally, and in a manner that is correct and complete, Madison’s argument.
• What are the political and policy implications of Madison’s argument?
  o Discussion
  o Intra-party conflict
    ▪ Democrats and the federal deficit
    ▪ Republicans and immigration

Required Reading:
• James Madison, Federalist Papers, Nos. 10 and 51. Available at http://loc.gov/const/fed/fedpapers.html

Recommended Reading:
• Dawson, Chapter 2, Pp. 47-79.

HEADS UP: To do well in class tomorrow … [Note: Assume this is repeated below, before every class session.]

TOPIC 5 Federalism

Cases:
• Take me to your leader!
• Wild burros: What, if anything, should government do?
• What should be done with the class treasury?

Lecture topics:
• Federalism
• Pluralism: Cumulative and cross-cutting cleavages
• Hyperpluralism
• Conflict (and change) suppression

Simulation:
• What are the consequences of resource allocations mechanisms in which power is limited and fragmented?: Peanut Butter & Jelly I

Discussion Topics:
• Is there a “separation of powers” in American government?
  o So …?

Recommended Reading:
• Dawson, Chapter 3, Pp. 81-115.
• What the Anti-Federalists were for … see Forrest McDonald, “The Anti-Federalists, 1781-1789” The Wisconsin Magazine of History, Vol. 46, No. 3 (Spring, 1963), pp. 206-214 @ http://www.jstor.org/stable/4633851

NEW HEADS UPS:
• In class on Tuesday, Sept. 18, seats will be assigned. If, for whatever reason, you prefer a seat towards the front, email me no later than tomorrow (Friday, Sept. 14).

• Also in class on Tuesday, Sept. 18, I will assign you to a particular state (for your research projects). If you prefer a particular state, email your state preference to me no later than tomorrow (Friday, Sept. 14).

TOPIC 6 The Required Research Project

Discussion Topics:
• How to carry out the research project
• “Describe the 2008 presidential election campaign and election outcome in ‘your’ state.” (Yes, 2008; See below.)

Your major link to research material:
• Subject Guides: Elections 2012 @ http://www.oberlin-college-library.org/sp/subjects/guide.php?subject=ELECT
  o This compilation of web-based data sets and other sources of election data, in addition to various news sources (especially the New York Times) will serve as the basic jumping off point for the required research project.

In class workshop (9/18):
• Making good use of the Subject Guide: A presentation by Megan Mitchell, Reference & Instruction Librarian, Mudd Library
  o Note: To successfully research and write the required papers, you must be in class on Tuesday, Sept. 18. (If you subsequently mess up, I would like to know if it’s because you missed this class; therefore, attendance will be taken this day.)

In class follow-up workshop (9/20):
• Ms. Mitchell returns to help with your use of the Subject Guide.
  o After Ms. Mitchell’s presentation on the 18th, check out some of the Subject Guides’ sources of information and come to class on the Sept. 20 prepared to:
    1. Hand in a one page listing, with your name, of the sources you checked out; and
    2. Describe, orally only, the 2008 (Yes, 2008) presidential election campaign and election outcome in “your” state.
    3. Also come with any problems you encountered; Ms. Mitchell will help.

TOPIC 6 Civil Liberties and Civil Rights
Lecture topics/concepts:
- Civil liberties
- Civil rights
- Types of error
- Due process of law

Cases:
- Would you rather set free a guilty person or lock up an innocent one?
- Should government ban dwarf tossing?
- What, if anything, can you do when the U.S. government decides you’re a terrorist and “renders” you to Syria, even though you haven’t lived there for 15 years?

Recommended Reading:
- Chronicle-Telegram, "Despite controversy, 12 line up to toss dwarf" [Handout, hereafter HO]
- Glenn Greenwald, “Personalizing civil liberties abuses,” Salon (April 16, 2012) @ http://www.salon.com/2012/04/16/personalizing_civil_liberties_abuses/
- Dawson, Chapter 4, Pp. 117-150.

Next Class: Who will bring a musical instrument?

TOPIC 7 Political Culture

Lecture topics/concepts:
- Political culture
- Classical liberalism
- Political polarization: Elite and mass
- Class consciousness

Discussion Topic: How is the election shaping up in your state?
- Notes: For this recurring discussion topic, I – and any member of the class – will feel free to call on you, especially for your assessment of recent relevant news stories in the New York Times. (We also will feel free to (1) challenge your assessments and (2) ask you “So what?” (That is, so what does your assessment suggest about American government – its institutions, its politics, its public policies and the way they are made.)

Cases:
• If a student -- new to Oberlin College -- wanted to make sure they didn’t fit in, what would they do?
• Political polarization: Really?
• Why don’t you know the words to "Solidarity Forever?"
• Who wants to buy a dollar bill?
• Who are your heroes?
• Why don’t all students get good grades?

Recommended Reading:
  • Dawson, Chapter 5, Pp. 151- 185.

TOPIC 8  Political Parties and Interest Groups

Discussion Topic: How is the election shaping up in your state? [Remember: This discussion topic reoccurs; it is on the agenda for every class session.]

Cases:
• Will you join me in a campaign to get the federal government to develop a program to stop “Killer Asteroids” before they extinguish all life on Earth?
• Why do the environmentally conscious litter?
• Why are Burger King and McDonald's side by side?: A spatial model of party competition.
• Political polarization revisited
• The real differences between Democrats and Republicans!

Simulations:
• The stag and the hare
• The calculus of inaction

Recommended Reading:
  • Dawson, Chapter 6, Pp. 187-229.
  • Elinor Ostrom, “Revisiting the Commons: Local Lessons, Global Challenges” @ http://www.sciencemag.org/content/284/5412/278.full

TOPIC 9  The Media, Elections, and Political Participation
Discussion Topic: How is the election shaping up in your state?

Cases:

- The looming fiscal crash
- The disappearing middle
- Is there a “Roe effect”?
- What's wrong with elections?
- The election between Mr. Goodbar and Ms. Krackle
- The Pogo Problem
- Former U. S. Senator Eugene McCarthy (D, MN) said: “Members of the press are like vultures; they view the battle from afar and then come down to shoot the survivors.”

Comment.

Recommended Reading:


TOPIC 10 Policy Making Processes

Lecture topics/concepts:

- Policy making tactics and strategies
- Disjointed incrementalism

Discussion Topic: How is ... Cases:

- The Long Island Sound Problem

Recommended Reading:

- Schattschneider, Selection from The Semisovereign People [ERes]

Th:10/18 MIDTERM EXAMINATION

FALL BREAK: Oct. 20 - Oct. 28

THE POST-BREAK TOPIC: The Presidential Election

a. Nov. 1: In-class predictions (Orally only; I’ll call you, by state.)
b. Nov. 6: No class. Instead, Election Party, 284 Forest Street, 7-11 pm. BYOAB
   - The price of admission: A hard copy of your first research paper. Paper is due at 7 pm, my house.

c. Nov. 8: In-class post-mortem
   - What did you get wrong – and why?
   - Explanations of the outcome
   - Speculation about the significance of the election outcomes

Recommended Reading:
- Ryan Lizza, “What would Obama do if reelected?”, *The New Yorker*, June 18, 2012 @
  [http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/06/18/120618fa_fact_lizza?currentPage=all](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/06/18/120618fa_fact_lizza?currentPage=all)

**TOPIC 12**  
**Congress and the Bureaucracy**

*Cases:*
- Serial vs. iterative policy cycles

*Simulation:*
- Peanut Butter & Jelly Sandwich II

*Discussion Topics:*
- Why don't policies “work?”
- Is it “a whole new world” only in Disney movies?
- How do bureaucracies fight back?

Recommended Reading:
- Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American political system collided with the new politics of extremism*, Basic Books (2012), Pp. 3-30. [ERes and Bb]
- Dawson, Chapters 12 and 13, Pp. 413-491.

**TOPIC 13**  
**Presidency**

*Lecture Topics:*
- The president, the presidency, the government

*Cases:*
- The instability of the plebiscitary presidency
- The post 9/11 presidency

*Simulation:*
- The Taste Test: Pepsi vs. Coke vs. RC

Recommended Reading:

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15 Note: This extra-long class session is in lieu of class on Nov. 20.
- Dawson, Chapter 11, Pp. 367-411. [ERes]

Thanksgiving Week: November 19-26: No classes this week.

**TOPIC 14**  What it takes to bring about transformative change

Note: During the class sessions devoted to this topic, there are no assigned Freadings. During this period, you should be working on your final research paper.

*Case:*
- Lyndon Johnson and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957

**TOPIC 15**  Election Research Projects

Final Paper Due: Dec. 4, in class
Note: During these final class sessions …
- Dec. 4, 6, 11, 13: In-class presentations and discussion of selected research projects

**TOPIC 16**  Course Synthesis: The On-going Search for Government's Proper Role (Dec. 13)

*Discussion Topics:*
- What have you learned?
- Is it relevant?
- Is it significant?

*Lecture:* “The rewards and risks of trying do good, while getting politically stronger”

*Cases:*
- The permanent campaign revisited
- The tenuous connection between electioneering and governing
- Is the answer to the problems of politics more or less politics?
- A new President’s honeymoon: A short stay in the Heartbreak Motel?
- Do you get a government no better than you deserve?
- Walking the thin line between a taxpayer’s revolt and a poor people’s riot
- “Changes in degree lead to changes in kind.” - Karl Marx
What will you do wrong on the final exam?: Habitual responses to exam anxiety.
Mark Twain’s cowpoke

Recommended Reading:
- Patterson, “Doing well and doing good” [ERes]
- Peter Dreier, “A political allegory of failed American populist movement” [ERes]
- Dawson, Epilogue, Pp. 593-602.

FINAL EXAMINATION: Tuesday, Dec. 18th, 7-9 pm
NOTE: It will not be possible to reschedule this exam to accommodate conflicting travel arrangements. In other words … Do not let others schedule your travel arrangements.
VII. Attachments A-E

ATTACHMENT A: Notes on selected requirements

1. Class participation
2. Exams
3. Study Groups
4. The Research Project

1. Class Participation (Discussion)

Classroom discussion plays a very large role in this course, both as a component of your final grade and as a way of learning the material (and, hopefully, learning it in a way that has some enduring value for you). You, therefore, need to know something about (a) my approach to discussion and (b) the kinds of discussions we will have.

My Approach

I do not assume that anyone has any prior skill in classroom discussion. I also do not assume you are particularly comfortable in group discussion. I, however, from experience, know that you can become both skilled and relaxed. It's like swimming. And I'm the coach; just be willing to work with me. Or, it's like surfing … catch the wave … or …

You can limit your own effectiveness in discussion, mostly by assuming that everyone else in the room has been reading the newspaper since the third grade, has memorized the U.S. Constitution, often debated politics at the dinner table, etc. These assumptions are usually too generous. You also might be reluctant to participate in class discussion if you haven’t spent many of your formative years inside the United States. Again, it’s very easy to over-estimate the knowledge that native-born U.S. nationals have of their government.

My use of the Socratic method means I will call on you to answer questions. When I do so, you always have at least three options: (1) answer the question, assuming the answer pops quickly to mind, (2) think a moment before you answer the question, or (3) pass. If you choose to think for a moment, others will respectfully wait, without raising their hands. If you choose to pass, just say “Pass” and the question will go to the person on your right. [In making this “Pass” option always available to you, I hope to make sure you always can avoid any embarrassment that you might associate with not knowing, or freezing, or whatever. I, however, will wait respectfully if you appear to be thinking. If you’re not thinking, however, but, in fact, have frozen, there is no way for me to know that and, therefore, I might wait longer than you would want me to. In this event, it would be useful if you could give me some non-verbal clue.]

2. Exams
The format for both the midterm and the final exam is the same. There is one main question, with three parts; namely (a) "What, if anything, should government do about X, (b) why should it do that?, and (c) so what? -- or, more precisely, what does your answer in parts (a) and (b) suggest or imply about the nature of American government, politics, and policy making?"

Notes:

- "X" is some case drawn from a newspaper.
- "What" refers both to a policy towards X and to a process for making the policy.
- "Why" calls for an explanation that is based on course material.
- "So what?" calls for you to draw out the significance of your answer (to the "what" and "why" parts of the question) by making more general inferences about American governmental institutions, politics, and policy making. Note: These inferences must not simply restate what you have already said about the case. Rather, they are generalizations about the political system that are based on the case and your analysis of it. As an aid for “launching” your inferential thinking, ask yourself: “If everything I have written thus far is true, and if it were always true, for every case, what sort of a political system would that be? More specifically, what might my answer (thus far) suggest about the nature of politics, governmental institutions, public polices and the way they are made?"

These are closed-book, no notes exams. In both, the emphasis and the reward is on well-supported answers that draw, systematically, on course material. This means that you are expected to use course concepts to construct your answer. (It follows that any answer that you could have written in August will be graded “F”.)

For advice on what to do (and mistakes to avoid) on exams, see Attachment C.

3. Study Groups

For our classroom discussion – and for the exams! -- you will need to prepare in advance. To prepare, form study groups of 7-8 people, divide up specific reading assignments for the daily New York Times, meet 2-3 times a week to discuss significant stories (over dinner, perhaps). In these discussions, review what you have learned thus far and apply it to current cases. [As is

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16 This is the most difficult of the three exam questions. To do it well, save time (at least 20 minutes) and, especially in your Study Groups, practice. This part of the exam also is the most important; a great “So what?” answer is usually the difference between an “A” and a “B”.

POLT 105
indicated above, to be registered for this course, you must join a Study Group on Thursday, Sept. 13.]

Membership in an effective study group is very important to success in this course.

In addition to meeting regularly, an effective study group is one in which:

- Everyone participates actively;
- Group time is used to analyze one or two stories;
- Group meetings are conducted as though they were practice sessions for the exams;
- No one person is allowed to dominate the air space;
- You engage in more than mere advocacy. Rather you move beyond advocacy to analysis. To do so ...
  - People interact and challenge each other -- simply by asking “why” after another group member has made a statement and by insisting that their answer to this “why” question draw on course concepts; and
  - Most of the group session is spent on the “So what” question, to draw out the implications of the group’s analysis.

For more, and reinforcing, comments about Study Groups, see Attachment E: The key to success in this course.

4. The Research Project

A. The Specific Assignment

1. The required (individual) research project is to analyze the presidential election in a particular state.

2. Your results are to be reported in two separate research papers.
   a. In the First Research Paper (due Nov. 6), predict the results (see the required format below) and justify your predictions (i.e., explain why you think you’re correct). [EVALUATIVE WEIGHT = 10% of your final grade]
   b. In the second and Final Research paper (due Dec. 4) [EVALUATIVE WEIGHT = 20% of your final grade]
      i. Account for any discrepancy between your predictions and the actual results;
      ii. Explain the actual results;
      iii. Speculate about the likely impact of your (and other) results on:
         1. The role of government and the direction of the country;
         2. The making and implementation of public policies; and
3. The kind of politics we have and the way politics is practiced in this country.

B. Advice on carrying out the research

1. Start with a realization that research assignment has both …
   a. Products: i.e., the two papers; and
   b. A process: i.e., everything that you do that leads up to writing the papers.
2. Add to this realization an awareness, as you will be learning in class, that the quality of the process determines the quality of the product.
3. This means that you have more to think about than you might have realized.
   a. You do have to think about all the things you normally think about when you sit down to write a paper.
   b. In addition, you also have to think about what you’re doing as you gather facts to put in your paper. This means that you have to think about the process of doing the research that adds up to the research paper.
   c. It is very important that you remember this and that you realize that the second activity is more important than the first; a good research process may produce a good paper but a bad research process surely will produce a bad paper.
   d. The nature of a good research process is described below.

C. A good research process

To have a good research process you need to think about what you’re doing, before and as you do it; that is, you need to conceptualize the election as a dynamic, unfolding event.

“Conceptualizing” the election simply means:

1. **Identify** things that can influence the election. Let’s call these “determinates,” even though that probably overstates their influence.
2. **Visualize** the ways these “determinates” combine (or interact) to have the influence (you think) they do.

When you identify “determinates” and are able to see, in your mind’s eye, the way they come together to impact the election, you are building a conceptual model of the election.

A conceptual model, simply, consists of pieces (or elements) and the way they fit together. Let’s examine these “pieces” and the “way they fit together” in more detail …

In a physical model, say a model of an airplane, the pieces are things like engines, propellers, and wheels – and the way they fit together is that some things are joined directly to some other things but not to other things (wheels shouldn’t have propellers, for example).

Conceptual models differ from physical models.
In a conceptual model, the elements (or pieces) are concepts and the way they fit together are relationships (among concepts). For example …

Imagine that you (a city kid) have a conceptual model of the growth of corn. In your mind you see the elements of your corn-growing model: let’s say they are rain, sun, soil, and seeds. You also can visualize the way these elements fit together: Once the seed is in the soil, some rain and sun will cause it to begin to grow but too much rain will cause it to rot and too little rain will cause it to, well, just sit there.

Even such a simple model has a powerful effect on the research process; it causes you to look for certain “facts” and certain relationships. Thus, if you were to do research on corn growing in Northern Ohio, you would gather information on amounts of rain, the height of the corn, etc.

Models, in general, structure inquiry; they focus your attention on some things and not on other things. In the corn example, you focus on weather, not on the behavior of the stock market.

Since conceptual models have a powerful influence on what information you gather and on how you think it fits together, it is important that you:

1. Recognize that you will be forming a conceptual model of the election;
2. Be very explicit about the nature of your model; that is, be able to state its elements and their relationships;
3. Be very aware of the way your model cause you to pick up certain information – and to be blind to other information; and
4. Think about the possible need to revise your model and be willing to revise it, so you start gathering information on new elements and additional relationships (and maybe stop gathering other information).

All of this blurs the normal distinction between thinking and doing. All of the above presumes that thinking is doing – and that thinking about what you’re doing is better than just doing it. But …

… you’re still wondering: “What do I have to do?”

I’ll tell you, as long as you promise to keep in mind all the above stuff about conceptualizing the research process …

What do you do? Take all the following steps:

Step a. Make a list of all the things that might influence the election outcome in your state: this is your list of “Possible Determinants”. [To help, I’ve compiled a list of “‘Things to Look For: Possible Influences.’ This list appears as Attachment C, (forthcoming as a Web page)]
Step b. Begin gathering information on these possible influences. Possible sources of information are provided in the Study Guide that was introduced in class on Sept. 18 by Megan Mitchell.

NOTE Keep track of your sources; you will need to provide complete and accurate citations in your paper for everything that you get from a source.

Step c. Begin describing the effects of different determinants on the way the election campaign is going. Write these down; be as specific as you can.

Step d. Revisit your own list of “Possible Determinants” and decide whether or not to revise it, adding some, dropping others, ranking some as more important than you might have initially thought they were.

Step e. Compare your list of “Possible Determinants” with my suggested list of “Possible Influences” and, again, consider revising your list.

Step f. Gather more information on all your determinants, old and new.

Step g. Decide whether you need to change the sources you use; compare your list of the sources you’ve used so far with the suggested sources in the Study Guide. Also consider other sources you have come upon on your own.

Step h. Check all sources on a regular basis, looking for information on possible determinants and for insights on relationships among determinates and for speculations on the ways these things are impacting the upcoming election.

Step i. Compare your ideas about what’s happening with the data you’ve been gathering. That is, state your ideas, look at these explicit statements, and compare what they say with the facts you have. Do the facts support the ideas? Do you need more supporting facts? Do the facts suggest that you’ve got it wrong and your ideas need to be revised?

Step j. Keep doing all the above.

Step k. Write the paper in a thoughtful manner; i.e., use the occasion of writing the paper to develop and explore ideas about what matters. NOTE: There is a different required format for the First and the Final Paper; these are given below.

\[17\] Note that the steps are not numbered. This is purposeful; it suggests that these steps are not taken in consecutive order. Rather, you hop back and forth among the steps, often repeating a step in a different way, with a different result. (It’s more like the free skate portion of a skating competition than it is like the compulsory figures portion of the competition.)
The Required Paper Formats

**Your First Paper has a restrictive format; it should look like this:**

Your Name: ______________________ (on every page, along with a page number)
Your State (the state you’re focusing on): ______________________

1. **Your Predictions:**
   - Winner’s Name and Party: ________________
   - Winner’s Plurality: ________ (% of the total vote in the state)
   - Winner’s Number of Votes: ________________
   - Loser’s Name and Party: ________________
   - Loser’s Number of Votes: ________________
   - Total Votes: ________________
   - The day and time CNN calls your state: __________

2. **Your Explanations:**

   The Explanation has the following parts:

   a. **Your Conceptual Model**
      
      1. **Determinants.** What are they? List and describe those things that you believe influenced the election in your state.\(^\text{19}\)
      2. **Statements of Relationships.** State what you believe to be the driving relationships; that is, the ways the various determinants combined to produce the effect you predict.
   
   b. **Supporting Evidence.** Describe the factual evidence you have that supports your prediction and what you have asserted to be the determinants and their relationships.\(^\text{20}\)
   
   c. **Caveats.** Describe the evidence (and suspicions) you have that are not supportive.

3. **Your Speculations (“So what?”):**

   Speculate about the likely impact of your predicted result on:
   
   1. The role of government and the direction of the country;
   2. The making and implementation of public policies; and

---

\(^{18}\) The second-highest vote getter.

\(^{19}\) Some of these, of course, can be “national” factors, ones that influence the electoral process in many states.

\(^{20}\) Include citations. For the correct form of the citation, see any of the guides that are available online, off the OC library’s Style Manuals link: http://www.oberlin.edu/~library/ref_sources/sources.html#Styles
3. The kind of politics we have and the way it is practiced.

To carry out this speculative exercise, just assume that what you have observed (and asserted above) for your election contest also was true for every other state. If that were true … then the likely impacts …

4. Your Conclusions:

Answer this question: What does this research experience and everything you have written above suggest to you about the nature of: (any or all of the following) politics, the election process, candidates, voters, the media, interest groups, the process of making public policy, policy outcomes, the process of governing, and the nature of governmental institutions, especially the presidency.

NOTES ON “WRITING THE PAPER”

- Writing also is a process; if it’s rushed, at the last minute, that will show.
- For guidance, see Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style*, especially their treatment of commonly misused words.\(^{21}\)
- To write a great Section 3, “Speculations”, you really have to finish Sections 1 and 2 and then let the paper sit a day or two, while your mind mulls it over. Then go back to it, re-read what you have written, especially in Section 2, and then try to answer the “So what?” question.
- Similarly, after writing Section 3, let it sit again, at least overnight. Then re-read what you have written for Sections 2 and 3 before you try to draw out the inferences you will need for Section 4.
- Finally, re-read the paper, checking to see if what’s in your mind when you read a paragraph is really in the paragraph; usually it’s not and you have to add something to communicate fully your meaning.

Also …

- Papers must be word-processed in dark ink, paginated, not right-justified, not double-sided, and stapled (or otherwise bound together) securely.
- *Proof* and *edit* your writing.
- Secure the paper in a manner that will keep all pages together. That is, somehow *bind* it together in a manner that keeps pages from being lost -- or, even better, simply stick it in a large manila envelope.

**Your second and Final Paper has a similar format; it should look like this:**

Your Name: ______________________ (on every page, along with a page number)

“Your” State: ______________________

1. Your Predictions, followed by the Actual Results:

\(^{21}\) Available, for free, online at: http://www.bartleby.com/141/index.html
a. Winner’s Name and Party. Predicted: _____; Actual: _______

b. Predicted Winner’s:
   Plurality: _______ (% of the total vote in your state)
   This person’s Actual Plurality: _______

c. Predicted Winner’s:
   Number of Votes: _________________
   This person’s Actual Votes: __________

d. Predicted Loser’s:
   Plurality: _______ (% of the total vote in the state)
   This person’s Actual Plurality: _______

e. Predicted Loser’s:
   Number of Votes: _________________
   This person’s Actual Votes: __________

2. Your Explanations:

The Explanation has the following parts:

a. Your Conceptual Model
   1. Determinants. What are they? List and describe those things that you believe influenced the election in your state.  
   2. Statements of Relationships. State what you believe to be the driving relationships; that is, the ways the various determinants combined to produce the effect you predict.

b. Supporting Evidence. Describe the factual evidence you have that supports your prediction and what you have asserted to be the determinants and their relationships.

c. Caveats. Describe the evidence (and suspicions) you have that are not supportive.

d. Anomalies. Answer this question: How do you account for the differences between what you predicted and what actually happened?

3. Your Speculations (“So what?”): Speculate about the likely impact of the actual result on:

22 Some of these, of course, can be “national” factors, ones that influence the electoral process in many states.
23 Include citations. For the correct form of the citation, see any of the guides that are available online, off the OC library’s Style Manuals link:
   http://www.oberlin.edu/~library/ref_sources/sources.html#Styles
a. The role of government and the direction of the country;
b. The making and implementation of public policies; and
c. The kind of politics we have and the way it is practiced.

4. Your Conclusions:

Answer this question: What does this research experience and everything you have written above suggest to you about the nature of: (any or all of the following) politics, the election process, candidates, voters, the media, interest groups, the process of making public policy, policy outcomes, the process of governing, and the nature of governmental institutions, especially the U.S. presidency.
ATTACHMENT B. Key course concepts*

A listing of major course concepts follows. You are expected to use\textsuperscript{24} the course concepts to analyze the cases we encounter, in class discussion, in your term paper, and on both the midterm and the final exam. You might find it helpful to, as a concept is introduced in class, check it off (or make some note of it), write down its definition, and record an illustration of the concept.

agenda building (as a pre-condition for effective policy making)
ambition
  discrete
  static
  progressive
anticipatory feedback
approval voting
blocking (or negative or veto) power
calculus of inaction
civic education
civil liberties
civil rights
classical liberalism
cleavages
  cross-cutting
  cumulative
collectivism
compensatory mechanisms
conflict
  types of
    zero sum
    non-zero (positive) sum
    mixed motive (see Prisoner’s Dilemma)
  among alternative choices
  among values
conflict resolving mechanisms
  force (bullets)
  politics (ballots)
constraints on policy making
constructive (or positive) power

\textsuperscript{24} “Use” of a course concept, ideally, means that (1) you have internalized the idea behind the concept and (2) your personal understanding of the idea influences the way you answer the exam question and, hopefully, make sense of and engage your political world. In other words, making good use of concepts is a lot different from and a lot more meaningful than parroting or regurgitating them.
costs
  opportunity
  enforcement
  legitimacy or responsibility
  transaction
cover
  political
  air
damage control
decentralization (of power)
decisions
  first order
  second order
democratic imperative
dissensus
distributional principles
  need
  contribution
  Rawlsian (least well-off)
  fairness
    horizontal equity (or fairness)
    vertical equity
due process (of law)
economic conditions affecting policy success
  Crowding in/crowding out
  Rational expectations
  Governmental credibility
  Multiple equilibria
  Personal investment decisions
efficiency (economic)
electioneering
electoral imperative
entitlements
equity (fairness)
  horizontal
  intergenerational
  vertical
expectations
externalities
  negative
  positive
factions
federalism
feedback
force
fragmented governmental authority
free-rider problem
freedom vs. control
frontloading (in policy making)
globalization (of market forces)
    social checks on
Goldilocks' Condition
governing
governmental institutions
government’s proper role
image (appearances)
implementation
incremental decision making (incrementalism)
individual responsibility
individualism
institutions, governmental
interest articulation
interest aggregation
intermediary institutions
    (and mediation functions)
issues
    carrier
    positional
    triangulating
    valence
    wedge
iterative policy processes (contrast with serial policy making processes)
leadership
    transactional
    transformative
legitimacy
libertarianism
liberty
    individual
    negative
    positive
limited governmental authority
loss aversion
Madison’s remedy (to the evils of factions)
market failure
    pre-conditions for
    absence of information
    lack of competition
    non-production of public goods
    non-production of other social values
maximizing (contrast with satisficing)
media
post-merger media
mixed motive coalitions
muddling through (contrast with incrementalism)
moral hazard
negative campaigning
negotiation
  positional
  principled
non-market (governmental) failure
non-profit RAMs
opportunity costs (see costs)
permanent campaigning
personal values
personal preferences
plebiscitary leadership
pluralism (as a descriptive term, e.g. pluralistic society) and hyperpluralism
Pogo problem
policy entrepreneur
policy making processes
  incrementalism
  maximizing
  mixed scanning
  muddling through
  satisficing
policy inducements (carrots)
policy outcomes
policy sanctions (sticks)
political capital
  as flow
  management of
political culture
political interest groups
political parties
political strategy (contrast with political tactics)
political tactics (contrast with political strategy)
politics
popular sovereignty
  jury nullification
possible role of government (contrast with proper role of government)
power
  blocking
  pivotal
  positive
Prisoner’s Dilemma
privacy rights
private market
private market forces
globalization of
social checks on
private bads
private goods
privatization
problem definition, or issue definition (as a political act)
public bads
public goods
pure, and less than
non-excludability
exclusion technologies
exclusion principles
jointness of supply
public policy
types of
distributive
redistributive
regulatory
command and control
tail pipe
iconographic
public market failure (policy failure)
RADs (Resource Allocation Decisions)
RAMs (Resource Allocation Mechanisms)
private market forces
government
private (voluntary) non-profits
rational (comprehensive) decision making (contrast with incremental)
reactive campaigning
reinventing government
resources
responsibility
reward structures (incentive systems)
roll-out (as an aspect of policy adoption)
satisficing (suboptimizing or submaximizing)
scarcity
self-interest
sequential (or serial) policy processes
serial box
spatial model of electoral competition
spin (negative, positive, inoculation)
stages of the policy process
statism (contrast with libertarianism)
strategic public management
Thatcherism
time preferences
tragedy of the commons
transaction costs (see costs)
transactional leadership
transformative leadership
triangulation
trust
values, personal and social
waste

* Note that some concepts, or their qualification, are listed more than once.
ATTACHMENT C: Things to do\Mistakes to avoid on exams

Ideally, the exams in this course are experiences that confirm your sense of your ability to make sense out of your political world. To make these experiences more likely, it’s helpful to keep in mind the following things to do, and not do.

1. **THINGS TO DO (Initial Suggestions)**

   - Before deciding on a particular course of (governmental) action, *think* about the possible consequences.
   - In particular, *think* about the possible consequences of alternative courses of action. (In actuality, you will tend to focus on your (intuitively) preferred course of action; that is, the one you’re already leaning towards, even though you haven’t thought it through.
   - Then make yourself *think* critically about the possible political reactions to and consequences of this possible course of action.
   - Then *think* about alternative courses of action.
   - To help alert you to the risks of possible actions, *ask*, of each possible action, the “Questions About”, below.
   - Finally, in light of the answers to the following questions, *design* a course of action. Note: The “course of action” is a political process that leads to the development, adoption, and successful implementation of a public policy; it is not just the policy itself.\(^{25}\)
   - Above all else, remember that thinking is doing. So, when the exam asks “What should government do …” a large part of any good answer is reporting what a political astute policy maker would think about before they took (mere) action.

**Questions to think about before you start writing**

**Waste.** Is there waste? That is, are resources being used in ways that are personally or socially wasteful? Might, therefore, resources be reallocated in ways that are personally and socially beneficial?

**Politically apparent problems.** Objective situations may be distasteful to you; that doesn’t make them a politically apparent or relevant problem. Ask and answer the questions: “Who cares? Why might they care? What might be done, politically, to make them care?”

\(^{25}\) Remember Charlton Heston’s experience in *The Ten Commandments*? See [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Id6oS3L-D9A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Id6oS3L-D9A)
Negative Externalities. Are private benefits being pursued in ways that create negative externalities?

Market Failure. Has the private market failed? Badly enough? Might some people want it to try to fix itself, again, if necessary, before government gets involved? Even if the private market has failed, might government also fail?

Public Goods. Are there desirable public goods that are being under-produced?

Values. What’s at stake? What’s the impact of more or less government on underlying personal and social values? Is liberty threatened? Efficiency? Equity?

Power. Is the government strong enough (to pursue a particular course of action)? And ... (In pursuing a particular course of action) would government become too strong?

Legitimacy. Will more (or less) governmental action be seen by the public as legitimate?

Constraints (Obstacles). That which you see as a problem is still there because not everyone sees it as one. Indeed, what you see as a problem others may see as a solution. In general, you need to remember that the status quo is not an accident; it exists because there are some compelling forces at work that make it, the status quo, happen. Therefore, to realize some alternative future, you have to first identify these forces, i.e. those things that constraint change, these obstacles to your alternative future, and then design a political scenario for navigating around them (or for plowing through them, if you can figure out how to become politically strong enough).

(Note: The above key words may re-appear, to flag a failure to think about these issues, in the margin of your blue book.)

2. MISTAKES TO AVOID

On previous midterms, some students -- no doubt less able than you -- have made the following easily avoidable mistakes. [Key words, in bold, may re-appear as comments in the margin of bluebooks; anticipate and thereby avoid the comment (and the mistake).]

- **Could have been written in August.** To repeat, the premium in this course is the internalization of new ideas and their thoughtful application to contemporary aspects of American politics. Everyone can do this. Sometimes however, because they don’t come to class, or because they panic during the exam, or because they are inflexibly committed to their own world view, a student – or two – might just gush, spewing their own, previously conceived ideas, in a mindless fashion, as though the exam question was: “Tell me what you could have told me if I had asked you in August.” Such answers are easy to recognize; they always get an “F”.

- **Command and control** approaches to policy making. Command and control approaches are full of imperatives: Do this! Don’t do that! “Outlaw this; ban that,”
etc. Such imperatives assume that there is a unitary form of government with unlimited, unfragmented, and unconstrained power. Such answers, typically “pontificating,” reflect a total lack of understanding of course material. To avoid this mistake, do more than mere advocacy; construct a political scenario for making something -- more or less government -- likely to happen.

- **Concepts?** It’s a mistake to not use the course concepts. It’s also a mistake to not really use them, but rather to just stick them in your answer, like gloves in a ham.

- **Constraints or Obstacles?** It’s a mistake to lay out a course of action as though there are no obstacles in the way. Policy making is always constrained, in various ways. The trick is to figure out ways of overcoming, or circumventing obstacles. (Or, even better, turning political obstacles into political resources.) Remember: The problem probably has been around for a while. The status quo is not an accident. It has defenders; those who derive power, profit, and prestige. These people are not prepared to give up these advantages voluntarily. (It’s not “a whole new world,” no matter who was elected.)

- **Elitism. Statism.** It’s a democracy. It is not the case that everyone else died and left you in charge. Elitist answers tend to be preachy, full of imperatives. Elitism, in liberal colleges, is often coupled with statism, the unquestioned belief that governmental intervention is always better than private market remedies and that governmental intervention is always successful. (Remember: That didn’t work for Moses ... or your parents. Why do you suppose it would work for government?)

- **Facile.** A facile answer is very superficial; it just skips along from one glibly made point to another, without pausing to make clear what is being implied or to explain why that might be so.

- **Fanciful.** It’s a mistake to write as though everyone died and left you in charge: “I would have the private market do this ... the newspapers would print this story ... these community groups would help ... etc.” To guard against pretending that you can reprogram everyone else, ask yourself, as you write: “What if?” What if businesses don’t help? The reporters don’t show up? The community groups have their own agenda? What if thinking thereby leads to strategic thinking and planning: If they don’t come, what would I do next? (See Tinkerbell)

- **Federalism?** It’s a mistake to think and write as though ours is a unitary form of government or that government has unlimited power. Rather, it’s a federal form of government; therefore, you have to justify the involvement (or non-involvement) of particular levels of government. And, it’s a limited form of government; therefore, you have to find ways of leveraging limited power, with, for example, personal, cultural and market forces.

- **Format?** Writing without a sense of direction. This mistake occurs when people start writing too soon, before they have thought about the question and considered ways of dealing with it. If this happens, they get 2 or 3 pages into their answer before they realize they don’t know where they’re going. The reader, meanwhile, is equally lost. To avoid this mistake, start with a paragraph that provides a format for your answer. This, the formatting paragraph, tells the reader where you’re going and how you propose to get there. [Hint: If you don’t know, skip the first page and come back once you figure it out.]
“However.” If you don’t mean to, it’s a mistake to misuse the word in a manner that refutes, rather than qualifies, the previous sentence. [“However,” at the beginning of a sentence refutes. See Strunk and White, *The Elements of Style.*]

**Maximizing?** It’s a mistake to take a maximizing approach. Avoid this mistake by remembering and employing the notion of satisficing. [Note: You may be satisficing at a high or low level.]

**Muddling through?** Simply responding to political pressure. Yes, they do it; you are supposed to do better.

**Non Sequitur.** Rhetoric isn’t argument. It’s a mistake to rely on rhetorical devices that appear to present an argument but don’t. For example, rather than actively building an argument, piece by piece, some will tend to rely on rhetorical devices, such as the words or phrases: “Thus,” “Therefore,” “Clearly,” “Obviously,” “In order to ...” “Due to ...” To the aware reader, these words are RED FLAGS that say: “I don’t want to think hard about why this might be true so I’m just going to pretend that I’ve constructed an argument.”

**Opportunity costs?** It’s a mistake to write as though addressing the problem at hand is the only thing that government could be doing. Whenever government does one thing, say X, government isn’t doing “something else”. And the “something else” might be a good thing. The failure to realize this lost or ignored opportunity to do “something else” is a part of the cost of doing X. In particular, it is the opportunity cost of X. For example, while President Clinton was spending eight months denying allegations of sexual wrongdoing, he wasn’t reforming Social Security or fixing Medicare. [Subsequently, President Clinton’s semi-apology had additional power costs: (1) It failed to reassure his friends and (2) it enraged his opponents.]

**Pet prejudices? Preachy.** (A lot like “Could have been written in August.”) The mistake is writing an answer that could have written before the course began. When people make this mistake, they write as though they never heard of the course concepts. Thus, they can pontificate, say what they think should be done, as though they have unlimited power, everyone will do what they say, etc. To avoid this mistake, remember that the discretion of all policy makers is constrained by political realities; recognize the constraints and deal with them.

**Politics?** It’s a mistake to write an apolitical answer, one that, for example, focuses only on the substantive merit of a possible course of action. Such considerations are, of course, important, even necessary to the making of good public policy. Such substantive considerations, however, are not sufficient. Instead, you need to describe the political processes by which others might be brought to the view that a possible course of action is desirable and that government is the proper agent to provide it.

**Process?** Good ideas are absolutely essential in the formulation of good public policy. Good ideas, however, are not sufficient. You, therefore, must describe a political process that will lead people to see something as a “problem” as politically relevant; that is, one that government should do something about and see a proposed course of action as desirable and worth supporting, politically. The mistake, therefore, is describing a course of action...
that focuses on the policy outcome, while ignoring the political process for getting there.

- **Rehash.** It’s a mistake to restate the facts of the case. This only wastes time. Don’t restate the facts; get onto the analysis.

- **Repetitious.** It’s a mistake to say the same thing think over and over (as if I’m stupid and didn’t get it the first time). When you sense that this mistake is about to happen, STOP and think about where you are going, where you want to go, and about how you’re going to get there. (Hint: Use what you come up as the opening or formatting paragraph.)

- **Syntax** (Awk = awkward or sometimes, simply, “Yuck”) Poor syntax usually reveals poor (incomplete, sloppy, evasive) thinking.

- **So what?** It’s a huge mistake to write an answer that has no apparent political significance. This mistake occurs when people don’t leave enough time to ask and answer the “So what?” question. If this happens, it’s unlikely the answer will earn more than a “B.” *To avoid this mistake, save 20 minutes, re-read your answer, and speculate about what your answer implies about the political system: its governmental institutions, its public policies, and its politics. (It’s a mistake to simply summarize; draw out, inductively, some new insight! And then, if there’s time, build on it.)*

- **Unresponsive.** The exam question asks about what should government do. It is therefore unresponsive to say what government could do.

- **Tautological.** To just restate something (e.g., “a limited government is one of limited power”; “it’s in scarce supply because there isn’t very much of it”), is to just use different words to say the same thing. (“If I had more money I would be financially better off.”) Tautological sentences do not lead anywhere; they especially do not lead to the construction of a well-reasoned analysis of why government should, or should not, do something. NOTE: Especially bad when combined with preachiness, as in: “Government should act because it is its duty!”

- **The 800-pound gorilla?** A fundamental hostility to private market forces tends to produce mistaken answers (and ineffective public policies). This is a political system in which most people defer to the private market; that is, they tend to think that the private market does a pretty good job of producing and distributing goods and services. The private market, in other words, is the 800-pound gorilla that usually gets to do what it wants. For this reason, the market is a bit of a conceptual prison that constrains policy options, at least until many conclude the market has “failed.” Moreover, to carry out its policies, government may need to rely on market forces, especially the willingness of businesses to produce what government wants, such as tanks, food, day care, etc. Thus, any policy approach that is based on a fundamental hostility to private market forces is probably doomed. *To avoid this mistake, make sure you create a political scenario that helps lead to the conclusion that the market has failed, or think creatively about ways in which some level of government might form some kind of partnership with a private business concern (or a not-for-profit voluntary organization) and about ways one might be able to create a link, in people’s minds, between their private interests and broader public purposes (e.g. people who*
don’t want to be accosted on the street by mentally ill people might conclude that they are in favor of public mental health programs).

- **Tinkerbell.** In *Peter Pan*, Peter, to keep Tinkerbell from dying, asked you (the audience) to close your eyes, wish real hard, and clap your hands. As you might remember, it worked. In the real world of policy making, however, this approach to policy making is called wishful thinking. (See Fanciful)

- **Vague** answers. To avoid being vague, it helps to avoid the passive voice. It also helps to specify which level or agency of government; to say why a “bad” thing is viewed as a political bad; etc.

- **Who cares?** Public polices require political support, if enforcement costs are to be kept down, if governmental legitimacy is to be maintained, and if politicians are to keep or increase their political power. If no one cares, statist prescriptions will produce negative political reactions that may be adverse to the political health of policy makers. If political support isn’t present, create it, or devise some private market remedy, or become more tolerant of what may be, currently at least, an intractable problem.

- **Why?** The mistake is writing an answer that is full of assertions but mostly devoid of analysis. Assertions are things that you say are true. Analysis is your answer to the question: “Why is something true?” You can’t help but make assertions; that’s fine. But follow every major assertion with an explanation that says why that assertion is true.

- **Wordy.** (As in “wordy and repetitiousness.”) It’s a mistake to repeat yourself. If you don’t know what else to say, stop and think of something new.

- **Hello!??** It’s a mistake to write an answer that makes it appear as though you didn’t pay enough attention to this Attachment (and, instead, write an answer that you could have written before the course began).
Attachment E: The key to success in this course

Active and regular participation in your Study Group is a pre-requisite to success in this course. Beyond that, study groups need to work together to practice preparing for the exams. This means:

- No one member of the study group should be allowed to dominate the discussion.

- Study groups need to move beyond mere advocacy and engage in the sort of political analysis that helps one think through the exam questions.

- To help you do this, each member of the group might come to a session prepared to present a particular case from a recent issue of The New York Times. After deciding on which (single) case to focus on, discuss how you might answer the exam question if you were asked to answer it for that particular case.

- To actually do political analysis, refer to the list of “Key Course Concepts” and, for concepts we’ve encountered thus far, ask: “How does this particular concept apply to the case?”

- By applying concepts to cases, you will begin to see the kinds of considerations you must undertake before you can answer the exam question.

- As a practical matter, your study group should meet at least 2 times a week, typically for about 1 and ½ hours. (Try meeting over dinner.)

- You are encouraged to invite a tutor to come to (some of) your sessions, to help get you on track.

- Each study group also must meet once with me. Schedule this with me whenever you want.

- You also are encouraged to exchange returned midterm exams, to critique each other’s answers, and to discuss how you might have answered the midterm (and what you could do differently on the final exam).
Attachment F

Important/Required/Optional Events – and DUE DATES

OVERVIEW

Sept. 6, 8 am: A (recognizable) photo of yourself, taped to a 3x5 card (pick up at the door, on the way out after class today,) with your OC email name\(^{26}\) printed on OPPOSITE side [the side without the photo]. [Please deposit on the front counter, before the start of class.]

Sept. 13:
- Meet the Tutors. NOTE: Most of the tutors have had this class and many of them have carried out research on elections and/or have participated directly in congressional campaigns.
- Be in class to join a Study Group

Sept. 13: Seats and states to be assigned.

Sept. 18: In class workshop on Research Sources and How to Use Them: Megan Mitchell, Reference and Instruction Librarian

Oct. 18: MIDTERM EXAM

Oct. 20-Oct. 28: FALL BREAK

Nov. 6:
- First Research Paper due by 7 pm at Dawson’s house (284 Forest)
- ELECTION PARTY (7-11 PM): Free food/BYOAB = “Bring your own age appropriate beverage(s)”

Nov. 8: In-class post-mortem
- Compare your predictions with actual results
- Start the task of explaining the results
  - More research
  - Get help from tutors, Mitchell, tutors, Dawson

Nov. 20: No class (because of the extra session on Nov. 6)

\(^{26}\) Please provide non-funky email names: that is, Official OC First Name.Official OC Last Name.@oberlin.edu Also, use this format for the names of the study group members you email me.
Nov. 22: THANKSGIVING

Dec. 4: Final Research Paper due in class.

Dec. 4, 6, 11, 13: In-class discussion of selected final papers.

Dec. 13: Last class

Dec. 18: FINAL EXAM (7-9 pm) Note: It will not be possible to arrange a different exam date/time (do not let anyone make conflicting travel arrangements for you).

(August, 2012)