Politics 105
1st Sem. 2014-15
Meeting Room: King 106
Meeting Days & Time: Tu&Th 8:00-9:50 am
Email: Paul.Dawson@oberlin.edu

Mr. Dawson
Office: Rice 230
Office Hours:
Meeting Days & Time: Tu&Th 8:00-9:50 am

SYLLABUS

POLT 105 (CRN 11856) Amer Govt: Election 2012 (4 credits)
[On Blackboard\(^1\): 201409 Amer Govt: Congrssional Elect 1]

“Politicians and journalists make a living by keeping people muddle-headed and angry.”

- From: The Death of a Black Haired Girl

While neither condoning nor condemning the American political system, and this course focuses primarily on improving your ability to analyze the interplay of historical, cultural, constitutional, legal, and political and private market forces in making/frustrating public policies. A Socratic method of teaching challenges presumptions, and avoids advocacy, postmodern jargon, posturing and pandering. An empirical research project requires the analysis of a 2014 congressional election contest, and an optional plan with which you might win a congressional office of your choice.

Requirement: A willingness to forego ad hominem arguments
Dawson TR 8:00 am to 9:50 am

Topics (Covered in the following order)\(^2\)
1. Course introduction
   a. The congressional elections of 2014
   b. The broader context of American government and politics
2. What can government do?
3. Analyzing what government might do
4. The Constitution
5. Federalism

---

\(^1\) See and make good use of the course’s Blackboard (Bb) site.
\(^2\) Since some topics will take more than one day, specific dates are typically not included in the syllabus; to know where we are in the schedule, attend class.
6. Civil liberties and civil rights
7. Political culture
8. Political parties and interest groups
9. Media, elections, political participation
10. Policy making processes
11. Congress
12. The presidency
13. What it takes to bring about transformative change

Course Requirements/Evaluative weight³

Class participation/30%
Research Projects:
   1. Election prediction/10%
   2. Election analysis/30%
   3. (Optional) Personal campaign plan/10%
Midterm exam/10%
Final Exam/20%

Notes on course requirements:
• **Class participation**: Very few people feel good about their ability to participate orally in class. Through this course, you will become better, and more confident. To create an environment where this can happen, passing this course requires you to forego *ad hominem* arguments; i.e., any attempt to counter another’s argument by attacking the character of the person who made it.⁴
• **Research Projects**: There are two required, and one optional, research projects.
   o Election prediction: For a congressional election contest of your choosing, what will be the results? [Two pages, maximum]
   o Election analysis: Evaluate your predictions, explain why you were wrong, and state what you have learned from this research project. [Ten pages, maximum]
   o (Optional) A personal campaign plan. [Ten pages, maximum]

³ The weights sum to 110%; the optional campaign plan may be used to offset a lower score on some other requirement.
⁴ Examples of *ad hominem* arguments: “You’re only saying that … because of your sexual orientation … because you’re privileged … because you’re young (old, stupid, short [?]).
• **Exams:** There is one question for the midterm and final exams; namely:
  o “In some particular case (to be distributed at the exam), how would you go about analyzing what government might do?”
• This question has three sub questions:
  i. When made aware of (the case distributed at the exam), what factors/considerations would you think/worry about before -- and, perhaps, after -- acting? (To answer this question, you may assume the role of anyone you choose: yourself, an advocate, a policy analyst, a policy maker, etc.)
  ii. Describe the process by which “you” (the role you assumed in the preceding sub question) might get involved – or avoid involvement.
  iii. From this particular case, make inductive leaps; i.e. generalize about the operation of the political system as a whole. (That is, if your answers to i and ii, above, were always true -- in every case -- what would that imply or suggest about the political system as a whole: its politics, its public policies, and the process by which polices are made, or frustrated?)

**Course Supports**

To help you be successful in -- and beyond -- this course, a number of support persons are available. These will be introduced in class; they include:

  i. Teaching Assistants and Study Groups
  ii. Librarian staff assistance with research sources
  iii. Other academic staff supports
  iv. OC Alumnae

**Dates/Deadlines**

Tuesday, Sept. 2: Introduction of support personnel and formation of study groups
Thursday, Sept. 18: Poy Winichakul (OC ‘11), Co-Founder, LaunchProgress

---

Thursday, Oct. 16: Midterm exam (in class)
Oct. 18-27: Fall Recess
Tuesday, Nov. 4: Election prediction paper due in class
Tuesday, Nov. 25: Election analysis paper due in class
Thanksgiving Break: Nov. 27-Dec.1
Tuesday, Dec. 2: (Optional) Personal campaign plan due
Final exam: Wednesday, Dec. 17, 7-9 pm

Required and Suggested Readings

Required:

- Occasional articles from The New York Times and other sources.

Suggested:

- If you’re a non-US national, grew up outside the United States, or just feel anxious about your current understanding of American government, you might find it helpful to read (or skim) my textbook: Paul Dawson, American Government. (Available for free on the course’s Blackboard site [Bb])
- In some colleges, and, apparently, especially on social media, there’s a kind of intellectual bullying, in which some people, infatuated with their presumed moral superiority, act in ways that make others feel less worthy. This, of course, should be unacceptable in a college environment. To help resist – fight?? – it, see: PewResearch “Social Media and the ‘Spiral of Silence’”, August 26, 2014 @ http://www.pewinternet.org/2014/08/26/social-media-and-the-spiral-of-silence/

Topics/Assignments

---

6 Location: TBA CAVEAT! Do not make, or let anyone make for you, travel plans that conflict with the final exam; no make-ups will be possible.
7 Free, unlimited access is available if you go through the link off the Library’s main page.
8 This is (a) a full listing of topics that will be covered over the semester, and (b) a detailed description of topics and assignments for the first few sessions of class. Additional detailed assignments – supplements to the syllabus -- beyond the first couple of weeks, will be passed out in class and posted on the course’s Blackboard site.
1. Course introduction
   a. The congressional elections of 2014: What’s at stake?
   b. The broader context of American government and politics
      i. What can, and should, government do?
         (1) The Preamble
         (2) “Welcome to the Island of Despair!”: A role-play that introduces a framework for understanding the role of government
         (3) Politics: A way of dealing with models of allocating societal resources
         (4) Electioneering: The process for gaining governmental power
         (5) Governance: The process for using power to make resource allocation decisions
   c. Introduction of support personnel, and formation of study groups
      (1) Student support staff
         o Shozo Kawaguchi, Associate Dean, Community Life skawaguc@oberlin.edu
         o Chris Donaldson, Special Advisor, Student Services donalds@oberlin.edu
      (2) Library/Research support staff
         o Megan Mitchell, Reference and Instruction Librarian msmtpitche@oberlin.edu
      (3) Teaching Assistants (Separate Handout; also available on the Course Blackboard site)

b. Assignment for the next class: In today’s issue of The New York Times, find a news story that illustrates the course concepts that were introduced on the first day of class. (A list of these concepts appears on the course’s Blackboard site.) In class on Thursday, Sept. 4, be prepared to:
   (1) Identify and briefly describe the news story you chose.

---

9 See below, Item 2: The assignment for the next class (Thursday, Sept. 4)
10 This assignment, in which we seek to draw connections between course ideas and current events, will be repeated from time to time.
11 Recall … Free, unlimited access to The New York Times is available if you go through the link off the Library’s main page.
(2) Define the concepts you see reflected in the news story, and describe what illustrates the concept.

2. Analyzing what government might do
   a. The fight over less or more government
   b. The philosophical and structural framework for the fight
      (1) The Constitution
      (2) Federalism
         o Required Reading/Discussion Assignment
            ▪ James Madison, *The Federalist Papers, Number 10*. Available at:
              http://thomas.loc.gov/home/histdox/fed_10.html
         o In class discussion of *Federalist, No. 10*: Be prepared to reproduce, orally, the steps of Madison’s argument. (Know each major term and its definition, and each of the major ideas.)
         o Lecture: The consequences of federalism
         o Assignment for the next class: In any issue of *The New York Times*\(^{12}\), find a news story that illustrates Madison’s concepts, and their consequences. In class, be prepared to:
            ▪ (1) Identify and briefly describe the news story you chose.
            ▪ (2) Say how the news story illustrates Madison’s concepts, and their consequences.

3. The congressional elections of 2014
   a. In advance of this topic:
      (1) Pick an upcoming congressional election that will be the focus of your research project.
      (2) Required Reading: *Jacobson*, Chapters 1 & 2

4. The Constitution
5. Federalism
6. Civil liberties and civil rights
7. Political culture
8. Political parties and interest groups

---

\(^{12}\) Recall … Free, unlimited access to *The New York Times* is available if you go through the link off the Library’s main page.
9. Media, elections, political participation
10. Research projects
   a. How to develop a personal campaign plan
   b. How to do the research to prepare your election predictions
   c. Election analyses
10. Policy making processes
11. Congress
12. The presidency
13. What it takes to bring about transformative change
14. Personal campaign plans
(August, 2014)