**SMC Political Science E00 / CURRENT EVENTS / Fall 2022**

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**Student Learning Outcomes**

Discuss and understand American political institutions from a historical and comparative perspective to afford students better intellectual insights to domestic and international current events.

**Course Description**

An active and interested citizenry is the engine of social progress. The study of politics is thus directly relevant to everyone sitting in this classroom. Politics is, first and foremost, an ongoing process. It is a search for a resolution to the problem of countervailing social preferences that crop up everyday. Put more simply, politics is the study of how we collectively decide who gets what and why. For example, how do we allocate social resources such as welfare, and to whom do these benefits go? What are the merits and demerits of student-loan debt forgiveness, and why? As this course wears on it should become apparent that central to this dilemma are inherent tensions between the rights and liberties accorded to individual citizens, and the necessary collective good of society. Successfully solving the central problem of ‘who gets what and why’ is crucial to keeping society harmonious and productive. Inattention to this question can lead to frustration, violence and even revolution.

Over the 16 week course we will unpack how the American political system works, better understand the key actors, with an eye toward American democracy and civic engagement. We will explicitly touch on the US Constitution, major branches of government, parties, elections, voting behavior, media, and interest groups with short topical lectures, followed by what I hope are lively discussions of current events.

**Required Reading Materials**

There will not be required reading material for this course aside from copious consumption of news from your preferred news outlets. I ask that you try to be intentional about seeking out alternative perspectives of information. GoogleNews offers a nice platform that aggregates news coverage from across the ideological spectrum by topic, allowing readers to be able to see the full coverage of an event from all political angles.

**Assignments and Grading:**

Quizzes / Papers / Exams: There are no quizzes, papers, or exams as the course is non-credit, there will also be no required assignments.

Attendance/Participation: Participation will make this course more interesting and successful. Please come to class with discussion questions ready for current events you are interested in discussing. Participate in small-group and whole-class discussions. The more individuals engaged in discussion, the more interesting and fun this class will be.

**Boilerplate on Decorum and Etiquette:**

In order that we all benefit from the lively discussions that are likely to ensue, we must demonstrate respect to our peers. In this manner, please be active listeners and respect the opinions of others. Be open to changing or rethinking your perspective.

Political discussions at times may be lively or at times even contentions. It is possible that we might feel at times uncomfortable as discuss topics related to race, religion, sexual orientation. Political material involves discussing topics that may be uncomfortable for certain individuals. Issues pertaining to religion, race, gender, age, sexual orientation and other topics covered in the news may be openly explored. Every student will be expected to show the proper respect for fellow students, the instructor and the facilities in which the class is held.

In a virtual environment where we cannot be in the same physical space can make it difficult to gauge social-cues such as body-language. This means that everyone needs to be more intentional about talking to one another with empathy and respect. Zoom is a great tool for facilitating distance learning if utilized properly, please keep yourself on mute until you are ready to join the conversation.

**Proposed Class schedule – 110 minutes**

• 10 - 20 minutes – Topical Lecture

• 30 minutes – Lecture Discussion, with an eye toward current events

• 5 minutes – Break

• 60 minutes – Current Events Discussions

**Class Date (Tentative) Topics**

| Course Date | Optional Lecture Topic |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 8/31/2022 | Intro - Pleasantries - Expectations - What are Politics // Media Bias and News. |  |
| 9/7/2022 | Political Ideologies |  |
| 9/14/2022 | Political Culture / Political Opinion |  |
| 9/28/2022 | Federalism | Guest Speaker |
| 10/5/2022 | Civil Liberties / Civil Rights |  |
| 10/12/2022 | Public Opinion & Media |  |
| 10/19/2022 | Interest Groups & Political Parties | Guest Speaker |
| 10/26/2022 | Media & Elections |  |
| 11/2/2022 | Elections and Electoral Systems | Guest Speaker |
| 11/9/2022 | Midterm Elections Mania |  |
| 11/16/2022 | Political Institutions: Congress |  |
| 11/23/2022 | Political Institutions: Presidency |  |
| 11/30/2022 | Political Institutions: Courts | Guest Speaker |
| 12/7/2022 | Political Institutions: Bureaucracy |  |
| 12/14/2022 | CA State Affairs |  |

I have included a number of useful resources that may be of interest to some. Without ado and in no particular order:

**Useful News Resources:**

1. New York Times

2. National Public Radio - Generally all around solid resources.

3. The New Republic - More policy-opinion oriented.

4. CNN - Network News for the left

5. Fox News - Network News for the right

6. The Washington Post

7. The BBC - Good international coverage

8. AP/Reuters - Both solid International coverage

9. USA Today - More ‘soft’ news   
10. Google News, A news aggregator service, is also good.

11. LA Times - Great source for local politics

12. SacBee - Excellent coverage for California policy

13. California LAO - Great non-partisan analysis of state policy

Some gentle starting points for Comparative and International Politics:

1. U.S. Dept. of State

2. Library of Congress Country Studies Handbook

3. Index of International Government Organizations (IGOs)

4. Election Guide - CEPPS

5. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance

6. United Nations

7. CIA World Factbook

8. Inter-Parliamentary Union - Everything Parliamentary you might want to know.

9. C-SPAN International Resources

10. Stuff on Political Parties

11. Immigration Policy Tank

12. Poverty and Wealth Mapping

13. Constitutions Around the World

14. Amnesty International

15. World Public Opinion Polls

Useful Resources for American Politics:

1. The Congressional Record

2. CSPAN!

3. Core Documents of American Democracy

4. Library of Congress American Memory Project

5. Project Vote Smart

6. US Department and Agencies Websites

7. CBO - Wonkie analysis of Federal policy.