

POLS 165
Government and Politics Today
Fall 2009
Tuesday and Thursday 9:40-10:55
Macmillan 313

Instructor: Professor Susan Tabrizi

Office: Macmillan Hall 107-A

Office Hours: Tuesday 2-4 & by appt.

Email: stabrizi@wells.edu

Web: <http://aurora.wells.edu/~stabrizi/>

Course Description

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the study of politics by looking at the concepts, relationships, terminology and methodology used by political scientists. In addition, we will be turning an eye to current events in order to put our analytic skills to contemporary use. This is not a class about stuffy, abstract ideas, even if it may seem that way sometimes. Instead, it is a course designed to expose you to the tools political scientists use to observe, assess, categorize and explain social and political events. We will take an active approach to this task, applying what we are learning to what is going on around us. The goal is to give you intellectual and practical skills for understanding politics.

Course Objectives

This course offers several learning objectives for acquired academic skills including:

- Development of familiarity and competence in the use of basic political science concepts
- Development of the ability to recognize and craft basic research questions
- Development of the habit of attending to current events
- Ability to engage in application of concepts and research questions to analysis of current events
- Development of abstract and relational thinking by applying political science concepts to books, movies and popular culture
- Exposure to multiple learning methodologies (writing, reading, discussing, testing, thinking, creative applications, etc.)
- Development of critical reasoning skills
- Development of reading skills
- Development of writing skills including citation methods in political science and avoidance of plagiarism
- Development of public speaking skills
- Enhancement of confidence in class debates

Materials

The required books for this course are listed below. Each book has been ordered through the campus bookstore for your convenience but you should feel free to purchase them wherever you wish.

A Novel Approach to Politics: Introducing Political Science Through Books, Movies and Popular Culture

Authors: Van Belle and Mash

Publisher: CQ Press

Copyright: 2007

ISBN-10: 1-56802-829-6

ISBN-13: 978-1-56802-829-3

Animal Farm

Author: Orwell

Publisher: First World Library

Date: 2004

ISBN 10: 1-59540-429-5

In addition to these books, we will be using media sources as information for our course. You should get in the habit of attending to a major daily news source on a regular basis (print, radio, television, online). One note of caution: you should do your best to restrict the sources you use for this course to legitimate news outlets. There is a lot of pseudo-news out there: entertainment, opinion, blogs by some guy in the cellar in his underwear; you get the point. If you are unsure (it isn't always easy to tell), don't hesitate to ask and we'll try to sort this out together.

Methods of Evaluation

This course is designed to offer you multiple and diverse methods by which you can earn your grade. Don't worry if you struggle with some of them; one goal of the course is to expose you to different styles of reporting and assessing knowledge and the process of working through each task is as much a part of the reward as the grade in the end (seriously). Our overarching goal is to understand politics so, to that end, we will engage in activities designed to try to answer the following questions: what, why, and who cares?

- Quizzes 20%
- Current Events Journal (CEJ) 20%
- Paper 1: *An Inconvenient Truth* (Politics is Everywhere) 15%
- Paper 2: Research Question 25%
- Paper 3: *Animal Farm* (Institutions) 20%
- Participation (see below)

Topic Quizzes 20% A reading quiz on each topic will ask you basic information to be sure you understand foundational concepts. Quizzes will be short (approximately 10 questions including multiple choice and short answer) and will be given at the beginning of class on Tuesdays unless otherwise noted. Please note: don't be late on quiz day. Once the first quiz

is completed, no more will be issued. Make-up quizzes will NOT be offered (you will have the opportunity to earn extra credit toward your quiz grade over the course of the semester). Quizzes are worth 10 points each. The quiz component of your grade reflects performance on all the quizzes as follows:

130-108 = A 107-96= B 95-84= C 83-72=D Less than 72 points = F

Current Events Journal (20%) Each week, you will be asked to apply 2-3 key terms from the chapter reading (listed at the end of the chapter) to an issue in the week's news in a one (1) paragraph *maximum* journal entry that you will email to me before class (see writing guide for email formatting issues). Your task is to discuss the relevance of the terms and ideas in the reading to what is going on in the real world. For example, if there is a story about roadblocks in a congressional committee working on healthcare reform and key terms include "politics", "power" and "realism" you might elaborate upon the extent to which the shape of healthcare reform is being debated in the context of partisan politics and how the theory of realism may aptly describe the fact that those with power will ultimately determine the outcome. The purposes of this assignment are: to keep you connected to current events; to reinforce your mastery of key terms; to give you practice in applying these concepts to real situations; and to give you practice presenting your analysis in writing. Ultimately, we will use the ideas that the class generates to craft research questions suitable for the research paper assignment (more later). Grading for the CEJ is pass/fail, done or not done, 0 or 1. Writing issues or incomplete/lame connections between the key terms and the issue you choose will result in a failing grade. You will have one week to re-submit an entry in an attempt to change a 0 to a 1 (not a guarantee). CEJ entries are due to me as an email attachment before class on Tuesdays. No late CEJ entries will be accepted.

Grading for the CEJ is as follows: A=13-11 B=10-9 C=7-8 F= <7

Papers 15-25% Writing assignments are designed to give you practice in using the concepts that we have been studying in an analysis of classic and contemporary issues. In other words, they are a chance apply your knowledge in a complex and sophisticated way, bringing ideas together to analyze abstract concepts. They are also intended to sharpen your writing skills. All papers should conform to the minimum standards set out in the writing guide. Papers are graded on the extent to which the content addresses the questions posed (all of which will be elaborated upon before the paper is due) as well as your general writing style (see the writing guide for specifics).

Please note:

- *All paper assignments are to be handed in via email attachment in Microsoft Word **prior to class** on the day they are due. Filenames should follow the following format: lastname POLS 165 Paper1.doc Papers handed in after the scheduled due date and time are considered late and will be penalized by one letter grade (i.e. cannot receive higher than a B). Papers handed in more than 24 hours late will not be accepted and will receive a failing grade. Paper extensions are granted rarely and only in the case of unavoidable and extreme circumstances. Extension requests must be made before the paper is due and may require consultation with the Dean's office.*
- *Current Events Journal entries are due by email before class on Tuesday mornings unless otherwise noted. Late Journal entries are not accepted. Your CEJ should be*

saved in a Word document with a filename in the following format: lastname POLS 165 CEJ1.doc

- *Paper copies are accepted only in extreme circumstances. If you have questions about how to send your paper, please ask.*

Paper Assignments and Schedule:

- **September 4** *Paper 1: An Inconvenient Truth* (15%) Using your observations of the film, write a 2-3 page essay that answers the following questions: What is politics? Why is global warming a political issue? Send as an email attachment named: lastname POLS 165 Paper1.doc
- **Open Choice** *Paper 2: Research Question (4-5 pages)* 25% Choose one research question generated over the term of the course (your choice) and use research from news reports to provide an analysis and an answer. Papers should clearly delineate the topic of interest and the specific research question to be addressed. You should synthesize a minimum of 5 news sources (accounts from magazines, newspapers, websites, radio, television, etc.) to offer an analysis (what are the important components of this issue and how do they interact) and an answer to your research question. Feel free to incorporate your textbook, class discussions as well as class movies in your paper. Be sure to properly cite sources within the text of your paper as well as in a final reference list. You can choose any research question to address in this paper but the paper must be turned in by 5pm one (1) week after the topic has been discussed in class. You must complete this assignment prior to December 8 (note the Media and International Relations topics offer only 5 days to complete the assignment). Do not wait until the last minute to complete this assignment and feel free to see me to discuss your paper *before* you write it. Send as an email attachment named: lastname POLS 165 Paper2.doc
- **October 30** *Paper 3: Animal Farm* 20%: The topic of this paper is how institutions and ideologies can be used by the powerful to suit their own ends. Write a 4-5 page paper that applies your assessment of the most important lesson about power to be learned from *Animal Farm* to either the case of the New York State Senate Summer Stalemate 2009 or the Iranian Presidential Elections of 2009 (minimum 5 sources). Your paper should include the following: a brief summary of *Animal Farm* and the significance of the lesson you will be focusing on, a summary of the case you choose and an analysis of that case that applies the lesson. In other words, what is the point of *Animal Farm* and how does it play out, or fail to play out in the real world case? Why is it important? Be sure to properly cite sources within the text of your paper as well as in a final reference list. Send as an email attachment named: lastname POLS 165 Paper3.doc

Participation Regular attendance and thoughtful class participation are expected. To participate fully in class you will need to have completed the assigned reading before the class meeting and you will also need to keep up with the news. The class participation component of your grade is not a “gift”; you will lose points from your overall grade if your level of participation falls below expectations. Please note the following general guidelines for participation grades:

- **Full Credit:** regularly attends class (no more than 3 absences) and participates thoughtfully on a regular basis.

- Minus ¼ grade point: regularly attends class (no more than 3 absences) but participates rarely
- Minus ½ grade point: multiple absences (+3) regardless of participation level

It is your responsibility to keep track of your absences. If you are concerned about your participation grade do not wait until the end of the semester to see me.

Extra-credit Opportunities You may earn extra credit toward your quiz grade by attending political events on campus over the course of the semester. A listing of these events will be posted on my webpage. To earn extra credit, you must attend an event and write a 2-page assessment of some aspect of that event and how it relates to issues we have discussed in class. You need not consult outside sources. These papers should be a thoughtful reflection on what you saw, heard and thought about – you will not get credit for simple accounts of what happened or poorly constructed and superficial assessments. Each paper that you write has the potential to earn 2 points to be applied toward your quiz grade. You cannot earn more than 130 points total for the quiz grade, regardless of how many extra-credit assignments you do. Likewise, you are not required to do any of the extra-credit assignments.

A Note to Students with Disabilities: If you have a disability that could limit your ability to complete the requirements for this class, you are encouraged to contact the Coordinator of Learning Support Services, Chris Richardson (telephone ext. 3432, email crichardson@wells.edu) to discuss accommodations that will help you succeed. Your conversations with him are confidential.

Classroom Guidelines:

I disagree with what you have to say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.
-Voltaire

Politics is a subject that often involves disagreement. In this class you are free to disagree with me and with one another; but if we are to have productive discussions about politics in class, we must limit ourselves to respectful disagreement. At no time is it acceptable to engage in mean-spirited or personal attacks. Each member of the class must be treated with respect at all times no matter how strongly you may disagree with their political perspective.

General Course Plan This course is oriented around the use of movies, books and popular culture to illustrate important concepts in political science. The general structure of the course is to begin each Tuesday with a quiz on the chapter reading and then view a video clip (we will likely never finish an entire film). Thursdays will be devoted to a short lecture, a discussion of how key concepts are reflected in the movie and a discussion of the CEJ for the week. From our conversations, we will craft research questions that can be investigated in the semester papers. All of this requires your presence and your active participation in class (see above).

Course Schedule*

*subject to change at the discretion of the instructor

August 27 Week 1

- Politics and Political Science: An Introduction

September 1&3 Week 2

- Chapter 1: Politics and Political Science
- Quiz One
- CEJ 1 send as *lastname POLS 165 CEJ1.doc*

Film: *An Inconvenient Truth*

An Inconvenient Truth Paper due by 9am September 4

September 8&10 Week 3

- Chapter 2: Utopia, Theory and Ideology (or not)
- Quiz Two
- CEJ 2 send as *lastname POLS 165 CEJ2.doc*

Film: *Metropolis*

Paper due by 5:00 pm September 17

September 15&17 Week 4

- Chapter 3: Why Government?
- Quiz Three
- CEJ 3 send as *lastname POLS 165 CEJ3.doc*

Film: *A Bug's Life*

Paper due by Paper due by 5:00 pm September 24

September 22&24 Week 5

- Chapter 4: Leadership and Legitimacy
- Quiz 4
- CEJ 4 send as *lastname POLS 165 CEJ4.doc*

Film: *Nineteen Eighty-four*

Paper due by Paper due by 5:00 pm October 1

September 29 & October 1 Week 6

- Chapter 5: Government and the Economy
- Quiz 5
- CEJ 5 send as *lastname POLS 165 CEJ5.doc*

Film: *IOUSA: Byte-Sized: The 30 Minute Version*

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_TjBNjc9Bo)

Paper due by Paper due by 5:00 pm October 8

October 6&8 Week 7

- Chapters 6-8: Institutions
- Quiz 6
- CEJ 6 send as *lastname POLS 165 CEJ6.doc*

October 15 Week 8

- Chapters 6-8: Institutions (again)
- Quiz 7
- CEJ 7 send as *lastname POLS 165 CEJ7.doc*

October 20&22 Week 9

- Chapter 6-8: Institutions (yes, there's more)
- Quiz 8
- CEJ 8 send as *lastname POLS 165 CEJ8.doc*

October 27&29 Week10

- *Animal Farm*
- Quiz 9*
- CEJ 9 send as *lastname POLS 165 CEJ9.doc*
- *Animal Farm* paper due OCTOBER 30 BY 9AM

*note that from here on out, quiz numbers do not match chapter numbers

November 3&5 Week 11

- Chapter 9 Courts and the Law
- Quiz 10
- CEJ 10 send as *lastname POLS 165 CEJ10.doc*

Film: *To Kill a Mockingbird*

Paper due by Paper due by 5:00 pm November 12

November 10&12 Week 12

- Chapter 10 The Democratic Ideal
- Quiz 11
- CEJ 11 send as *lastname POLS 165 CEJ11.doc*

Film: *Persepolis*

Paper due by Paper due by 5:00 pm November 19

November 17&19 Week 13

- Chapter 11 The Media
- Quiz 12
- CEJ 12 send as *lastname POLS 165 CEJ12.doc*

Film: *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*

Paper due by Paper due by 5:00 pm November 24*

*Please note short week

November 24 Week 14
Film: *The Matrix*

THANKSGIVING BREAK

December 1&3 Week 15

- Chapter 12 International Politics
- Quiz 13
- CEJ 13 send as *lastname POLS 165 CEJ13.doc*

Film: *Thirteen Days*

Paper due by Paper due by 5:00 pm December 8*

*Please note short week

December 8 Week 16

- Chapter 13 Political Culture
- No Quiz, no CEJ, no film, last day of class – don't skip because there will be a surprise.