POLS 533: DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA
Fall 2015

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Class Day: Monday
Class Time: 4:00 – 6:40 p.m.
Class Location: PSFA 318
Schedule Number: 22797

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 12:30 – 1:30 p.m. and by appointment
Office Hours Location: 118 Nasatir Hall

COURSE DESCRIPTION
More than a half-century ago, Robert Dahl asked the critical question: Who Governs America? It is probably the most important question for both scholars and citizens concerned with the quality and quantity of democracy in the U.S. There is a range of potential answers found in the literature – the people rule, organized interests rule, a tiny social and economic elite rules – and there remains considerable debate, both empirically and normatively.

The newest development affecting the debate has been the enormous rise in income inequality in the U.S. There has even been a report by the American Political Science Association expressing concern that rising economic inequality has resulted in greater political inequality, presenting a threat to American democratic ideals. During the semester, we will participate in the debate regarding Who Governs, formulating different potential answers and examining some of the most recent findings.

POLS 533 satisfies the capstone requirement for advanced Political Science majors and also can be taken by graduate students in the Department. It differs considerably from conventional courses in the field. Class sessions will be conducted as seminars, with considerable student input and participation. The main assignment will be a substantial research paper. The object is for the members of the course to actively engage in the ongoing debate regarding power in American democracy, and that they develop their own research findings as a means of contributing to that debate.

GENERAL COURSE OBJECTIVES:
-- To think, read, and write critically about the topic of power and American democracy as it relates to good citizenship and the challenges confronting American society.
-- To become more insightful on the topics of inequality, power, and democracy.
--- To develop better skills in close reading of texts, note-taking, verbal and written communication, the organization of ideas, and problem-solving.
--- To demonstrate the ability to write examination essays that impart information, frame and support an argument, use critical thinking, and display college-level use of language, grammar, and rhetorical structure.
--- To formulate, conduct, and complete a research project in which students collect original data and interpret them, developing and presenting findings sustained by evidence.

**FUNDAMENTAL COURSE PRINCIPLES**

Students in this course should remember:
1. They are expected to come to every class session, and to have read, understood, and thought about the assigned readings for that class session. This preparation is necessary in order to get maximum value from my presentations and to participate fully in seminar discussions.
2. The take-home examinations will cover the course materials presented in lectures, assigned readings, class discussions, and handouts.
3. The research paper will require a considerable investment of time and energy. Please do not leave it to the last minute.
4. Excused absences for missed classes or late assignments will be granted for extreme situations only. Do not anticipate leniency.
5. Students who come late or leave early can be disruptive to others in the class. Please come on time, and plan to be in class the entire session. If necessary, use the rest rooms before the class session begins. Interruptions are often rude.
6. Turn off your cell phones, pagers, text-messagers, laptop web-browsers, etc.
7. The classroom is a formal and polite setting. Please reserve individual discussions for before or after class. Please treat other students with respect and courtesy, even when you disagree with them.

**Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

**Academic Honesty**

The University adheres to a strict policy regarding cheating and plagiarism. These activities will not be tolerated in this class. Become familiar with the policy (http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/conduct1.html). Any cheating or plagiarism will result in failing this class and a disciplinary review by Student Affairs.

Examples of Plagiarism include but are not limited to:
- Using sources verbatim or paraphrasing without giving proper attribution (this can include phrases, sentences, paragraphs and/or pages of work)
• Copying and pasting work from an online or offline source directly and calling it your own
• Using information you find from an online or offline source without giving the author credit
• Simply replacing words or phrases from another source and inserting your own words or phrases
• Submitting a piece of work you did for one class to another class

If you have questions on what is plagiarism, please consult the policy (http://www.sa.sdsu.edu/srr/conduct1.html) and this helpful guide from the Library: (http://infodome.sdsu.edu/infolit/exploratorium/Standard_5/plagiarism.pdf)

**COURSE GRADING FORMULA**
Grades will be computed based on the following weighting:
- Take-Home Examination #1: 25%
- Take-Home Examination #2: 25%
- Research Paper and Oral Report: 40%
- Class Participation: 10%

**ASSIGNED READINGS:**
Assigned readings include both books for purchase and supplementary articles found on Blackboard. Some of the assigned readings are technical but necessary to establish a common database regarding a subject prone to considerable popular misunderstanding. Other readings are more argumentative and are intended to be thought-provoking.

The following two books have been ordered from the campus bookstore and should be purchased:


All additional readings are found on Blackboard or on the Web, and can be downloaded.

**PRELIMINARY AGENDA OF CLASS SESSIONS/ASSIGNMENTS**

1) August 24 — Introduction to the Semester

2) August 31 — What is a Democracy? How Democratic is the U.S.?

September 7 – No Class (Labor Day)
3) September 14  
On Power – Definitions and Controversies
Readings:  

4) September 21  
On Inequality – Economic and Political
Readings:  
Inequality Data Tables (on Blackboard)  

5) September 28  
On Political Participation
Readings:  

6) October 5  
On Majority Rule
Readings:  

7) October 12  
On Organized Interests Rule
Readings:  
Kay Scholzman, Sidney Verba, and Henry Brady, *The Unheavenly

8) October 19
On Elite Rule

9) October 26
Classroom Guest: Professor James Morone, John Hazen White Professor of Public Policy, Brown University. (tentative)
Readings: To be scheduled at a later date.

10) November 2
Who Rules America? The Great Debate
G. William Domhoff, Clifford Staples, and Adam Schneider, “Interlocks and Interactions Among the Power Elite,” 2013. (on Blackboard)

11) November 9
Classroom Guest: Professor Joe Soss, Cowles Professor for the Study of Public Service, University of Minnesota.
Readings: To be scheduled at a later date.

Take-Home Examination #1 – Due November 9, at the start of class

12) November 16
On Power Structure Research

13) November 23
Social Mobility and the Two Americas
Robert Putnam, Our Kids, Chapters 1-3, pp. 1-134.
Research Proposal Due – November 23, at the start of class

14) November 30  Schools and Community  
Reading: Robert Putnam, *Our Kids*, Chapters 4-6, pp. 135-261.

15) December 7  The Future of American Democracy  
Preliminary Discussion of Research Findings

Take-Home Examination # 2 – Due December 7, at the start of class

Final Version of Research Paper –  
Due Monday, December 14  
By 3:00 p.m.  
Delivered to the Political Science Department Office  
Nasatir Hall, Room 126
TAKE-HOME EXAMINATIONS

Examination #1 (Due Monday, November 9, at the start of class)

An alien from Mars comes to the United States and issues the conventional request: “take me to your leader.” You need for formulate a response. In class we considered three contrasting theories, that the mass of citizens ultimately rule, that organized interests have the greatest influence, and that social and/or economic elites dominate the political process. Based on our class materials and discussions, (a) you are to present the three positions and evaluate the evidence for and against each. (b) Next, you should express and defend your own reasoned opinion on the issue. (c) In the conclusion, you are to discuss the implications of your position for American democracy.

Examination #2 (Due Monday, December 7, at the start of class)

An alien from Mars comes to the United States and asks, “is this the land of which we have read, in which the government responds to the voice of average citizens and anyone can grow up to be anything s/he wants? I responded, “That is the American Dream but of course, in real life, things are always a bit more complicated.” The alien continued, “Things are never perfect, in any society, but it is our obligation to pursue reforms in order to come as close as we can to the ideal. What reforms should Americans be pursuing?” Your task is to answer the alien’s question. To what extent should the U.S. be pursuing reforms to further the American ideal of mass democratic voice and individual socio-economic opportunity? If reforms are needed, what in your opinion should they be? Do you think that such reforms will be adopted over the next decade or so? Based on our class materials and discussions, you should express and defend your own considered thoughts on the topic. In the conclusion, you are to discuss the implications of your position for the present and future of American society.

Examination Instructions:

You are to write for approximately 90 minutes. Before taking the exam, feel free to consult your notes, discuss the topic with others, attempt draft answers, etc. However, all books and papers must be put away before you begin taking the exam. You should work un-interrupted (as much as possible) for the entire exam period, which can begin whenever you choose. After the 90 minutes are over, you do have permission to re-type or re-format your response for clarity of reading, and to edit it for grammatical and spelling mistakes.

Citations: You are expected to cite all sources, using a standard format. Be aware of the definition of plagiarism and the penalty for plagiarism.

Editing: The essays are to be typed and edited, with normal fonts and margins. There will be penalties for excessive grammatical errors and for late submission.
STUDENT RESEARCH PAPER
(more details to come later in the semester)

-- Brief Research Proposal: November 23
-- Oral Discussion of Preliminary Findings: December 7
-- Final Paper Due: December 14

You are to conduct a Power Structure study.
Select two different prominent organizations in U.S. society (corporate, civic, political, foundations, educational). It is usually best to select two organizations within the same general field.
Compile a complete list of the members of their Boards of Directors
Research the biographies of each member of the Boards (family status, education, occupation, other Board memberships, etc.)

You are to present the data collected and then comment meaningfully about them. What do the data teach us about the characteristics of those holding pre-eminent positions in U.S. society? Are there important differences between the two organizations studied? Are the members of these Boards similar or different from ‘ordinary’ Americans? What implications do you draw for the understanding of U.S. democratic ideals and practices?

The paper should be at least 15 pages, typed and edited, with normal fonts and margins.

The research will require considerable effort on your behalf, although most of the information is available on the web. The writing will most likely require at least two drafts. Please plan accordingly.

This is a capstone project for advanced Political Science Department majors. It entails the formulation and completion of an independent research project, with findings relevant for the understanding of politics. As a capstone project, it will be evaluated by relatively high standards.