American politics in a global perspective: the struggle for equality

The assertion that "all men are created equal" was of no practical use in effecting our separation from Great Britain; and it was placed in the Declaration, nor for that, but for future use. Its authors ... knew the proneness of prosperity to breed tyrants, and they meant when such should re-appear in this fair land and commence their vocation they should find left for them at least one hard nut to crack.

Abraham Lincoln

Course Description:

The course is an introduction to American politics with particular emphasis on the historical and contemporary significance of equality. As an ideal and principle, equality is ingrained in the fabric of the country from its revolutionary beginning, and is emblazoned in all its founding documents. At the same time, equality has proven to be the touchstone for enormous struggles and crises and remains to this day an unfulfilled aspiration.

We will begin by considering the philosophical foundations for equality, from the first experiments in political equality in ancient Greece, to social contract and liberal ideas and beyond. We will then trace the struggle for equality historically by examining some of the country’s crucial experiences, including the American Revolution and the ratification of the Constitution; the destruction of the slaveocracy in the Civil War and the failure of Reconstruction; the rise of monopoly capitalism in the Gilded Age and the advent of a new middle class after World War II. In doing so we will pay particular attention to the relation between racial and social equality in the evolution of American politics, as well as the nature of the two major parties that have dominated political life in this country for most of its existence. This historical analysis will lead us to our present situation, when unprecedented levels of social inequality have given rise to a new period of instability and upheaval. We will turn in particular to two contemporary issues, examining their connections to the problem of equality, as well as their explosive political implications: the crisis of the American economy and the crisis of American education.

The main goal of the course is to provide you with an understanding of many important substantive issues regarding American politics. However, the course is also designed to encourage and stimulate an active interest in politics. The politics you will encounter in this course for the most part will not be of the kind that afflicts us every few years: the ritual of choosing, in the sad and cramped space of a voting booth, between neatly packaged and often indistinguishable professional politicians from the two major parties. If you find that particular kind of politics boring and dubious you are certainly not the one to blame. Politics, however, can be understood as something more than that – more interesting, more dangerous, and more important to your lives. Most of the events and experiences we will study in the course reflect the latter kind of politics. As we enter a new period of uncertainty and struggle, this
course will be an opportunity to reflect not only on the mainsprings of American politics, but also on the necessity for your involvement in it.

**Course Material:**

Please purchase the correct edition of the following books, which are available on campus at KB Books (5187 College Avenue; Phone # 287-2665):

- Paul Pierson and Jacob Hacker, *Winner-Take-All Politics* (Simon & Schuster)

In addition to these books, other assigned readings are available free of cost in electronic format through the course Blackboard page. For those who prefer a printed version, the assigned readings are collected in a course reader available for purchase on campus at Cal Copy (5187 College Avenue; Phone # 582-9949). The cost is $27 if you pay by cash or check.

The readings will average about 50 pages per week. In some instances the lectures will closely examine the assigned readings. In other instances the readings will provide a vivid, specific illustration of a broader historical period or political argument that will be discussed in the lectures. In all cases, the readings are required in the ordinary sense of the word: if you wish to pass the class, let alone do well in it, you will have to read diligently every assigned text. More than that, a mere perfunctory scanning of the readings will not take you very far. You should read actively and alertly – taking notes for yourself as to what the main points appear to be; drawing connections with course material from previous readings and lecture material; writing down questions for clarification which you will be in a position to ask in the breakout sections and during office hours.

**Blackboard:**

The Blackboard online system ([https://blackboard.sdsu.edu/](https://blackboard.sdsu.edu/)) is an important part of the course. Be sure you are registered with SDSU’s Blackboard system and are able to access it. If you need assistance, you should contact the Student Computing Center (See [http://library.sdsu.edu/scc](http://library.sdsu.edu/scc)). Because this class is divided into a common lecture hall for all students and several breakout sections of 30 students each, you will have access to two separate Blackboard pages. The first is a common one for all sections (POL_S101-CX-Spring2013). This is where I will post course documents – including the questions that could appear in the exams – and send announcements. The second page is an individual one for your specific breakout section. Your teaching assistant will post information relevant to your specific section on this page. Be sure to check both Blackboard pages regularly.

Except for the two assigned books listed above, all the required readings for the course are available in electronic form on the common Blackboard page for all sections under “Course Documents”.

In addition, the PowerPoint files for the main lectures will be made available in advance in the “Course Documents” section of the course’s main Blackboard page. Note that these files are for your personal use in this class only, and should not be disseminated or circulated anywhere else.

**Classroom etiquette:**

You are expected to abide by the following rules concerning classroom behavior:
- Attend lectures and breakout sections regularly and on time. A steady trickle or sudden surge of latecomers into a classroom is distracting and disruptive.
- Do not chat with your classmates, read the newspaper, text, play Diablo III, or engage in other behavior inappropriate in a university classroom.
- Turn off and put away your cellphones. Do not use laptop computers, tablets, or any other electronic device of this sort. Laptop computers in particular are not allowed in class as they often become a distraction not just for the user but also for the people around him. Take notes the old fashioned way.
- Do not record lectures or breakout sections using video or audio recording devices. Do not take pictures of the slides on the projector screen.

Attendance and Participation:

Attendance in the big lecture class will not be tracked. However, it is to your advantage to attend regularly and take notes, as the lecture material does not simply review the readings, but often proceeds on a parallel track, and you will be tested on both.

While the PowerPoint files for the lectures will be made available to you in advance, this is not intended as a substitute to actually attending class, paying attention, and taking good notes. You should consider printing out the PowerPoint files and bringing them to class in such a way as to be able to take notes alongside the slides. However, merely looking at or even studying the PowerPoint slides alone without attending the lectures will not put you in a position to pass the class.

Attendance in the breakout sections is mandatory and will be tracked as part of your final grade. Although you are expected to come to every class, over the course of a semester unforeseen events will prevent some, if not most of you from having a perfect attendance record. For this reason, missing one of your breakout section classes will not affect your grade. Missing more than one class will, however, result in grade penalties. Depending on the number of absences these penalties will be as drastic as receiving no credit whatsoever for attendance and participation, or failing the course altogether. Please note that based on this policy in general there are no “excused” or “unexcused” absences. If, however, an emergency situation arises during the semester that will make it impossible for you to attend the course for a substantial amount of time (several weeks), please contact the instructor.

Because of the size of the class, student participation in the lecture classes might be limited. The breakout sections, however, are intended primarily to facilitate your active participation. It is there that you will be able and expected to ask questions to clarify lecture and reading material, and participate in the discussions led by a teaching assistant. Attendance alone, even with a perfect record, will not be sufficient to secure full credit for this portion of your final grade. In total, fifteen percent of your final grade will depend on your regular attendance and participation in the breakout sections, as determined by your teaching assistant.

Pop Quizzes:

Over the course of the semester, an undetermined number of pop quizzes will be administered by the teaching assistants at the beginning of the breakout sections. The quizzes will consist of a basic question on the assigned reading material, which is intended to ascertain whether or not you have read it, and done so with sufficient care and attention.
For the purpose of the pop quizzes, regardless of what day of the week you attend the breakout section, you are responsible for the most current assigned set of readings, and the one prior to it. If your breakout section takes place at any time on Tuesdays, on any given meeting of your breakout section you are responsible for the readings assigned for that Tuesday and the Thursday of the week before. If your breakout section takes place at any time on Wednesdays or Thursdays, you are responsible for the readings assigned for that Thursday and the Tuesday of the same week (see the Course Outline below).

Pop quizzes will be graded as a “check,” “check minus,” or “no check,” in the following manner: Check: the answer indicates the student has read the assigned material.
Check minus: while the student might have read some of the assigned material, he or she did so carelessly, as the answer is incomplete or flawed.
No check: the answer indicates the student has not read the assigned material.

There will be no make-up pop-quizzes. Your lowest score for the semester, be it a “no check” or the result of an absence, will automatically be dropped from your record.

Exams: general format

There will be two midterm exams and one final exam held in the main lecture hall (see the Course Outline below). The exams will cover all lecture, reading, and video material presented in the course. In the midterm exams you will have to answer five identification questions and one essay question, based on the material covered up to that point. The final exam will be structured in the same way, but will also include one additional comprehensive essay question that will ask you to demonstrate your understanding of material from the entire course.

Each midterm exam accounts for 20% of your grade for the course. Of the 20 available points, each of the five ID questions will account for 2 points, while your essay will account for 10 points.

The final exam accounts for 35% of your grade for the course. Of the 35 available points, each of the five ID questions will account for 2 points. The first essay will account for 10 points, while the comprehensive essay will account for 15 points.

Exams must be taken on the scheduled date. Should a serious emergency occur that would prevent you from taking an exam, it is your responsibility to contact the instructor before the time when the exam is scheduled to start. No make-up exams will be given without evidence and official documentation explaining the nature of the emergency.

Exams: how to prepare

At the end of every week I will post on Blackboard a list of identification questions that could potentially appear in the next exam, based on the material covered on that week. In the actual exam you will find eight identification questions chosen from the lists that were posted weekly since the last exam, and will be able to choose which five you want to answer. At the end of the week before the exam I will also post two essay questions on Blackboard. Only one of the two will appear on the exam. With the exception of the comprehensive question in the final, which will not be given in advance, there will be no surprises in the exam. If you diligently prepare the identification and essay questions provided on Blackboard you will be ready for the exam.
The most important thing you can do for prepare the midterm exams is to study and memorize your answer to most, if not all of the ID questions. Once you have done this, you will already have at your disposal many facts and details you can use in order to write a good essay. Rather than improvising an answer on the day of the exam, however, you should also have prepared and memorized the rough outline of how you intend to answer the essay question.

The final exam’s additional comprehensive essay question will be framed in a reasonably broad manner, allowing you to demonstrate your understanding of the subject as a whole by drawing on a vast range of material of your choosing. Rather than simply reproduce various facts and arguments presented in class, part of the question will also require you to provide your own considered and informed opinion concerning the main theme of the course. Since you will not get the question in advance, there is no set formula or easy shortcut to prepare for it. Keep in mind, however, that if you have paid attention to the main overarching themes examined throughout the course, the question will not come as a surprise. In reviewing the earlier material, you might find it particularly helpful to go back to the four possible essay questions that were given to you in advance of the midterm exams.

It is in your interest to take advantage of the office hours held by the main instructor and your teaching assistant. Feel free to come and ask for help, direction, and clarifications.

It may also be useful to form study groups, so you can more easily check if you have the necessary and correct information for each ID question, and if your general approach to the essay questions is sound.

**Exams: what to do on day of the test**

Bring one blue-book, preferably large in size. They are available for sale at the campus bookstores. Also bring couple of pens that actually work. Please write as legibly as you can.

Make sure to write your full name on the blue-book cover, along with the name of your teaching assistant and the day and time of your breakout section.

Since we will check your blue-book before you enter the lecture hall, make sure to come to class well ahead of time so the exam can start promptly. Also, you must stop writing and turn in your exam at the end of the allotted time. We need to clear the large lecture room in a timely manner for the next class, so we will not be able to wait and give students a few more minutes to finish.

You will have 50 minutes to write your midterm exams. As a general guideline, you should spend 25 minutes for the ID questions, and 25 minutes for the essay. That gives you five minutes for each of the five ID questions. You should answer each ID question with a single, reasonably long paragraph intended to demonstrate (1) that you know the meaning of the term (who or what it is); and (2) that you know the significance of the term in the context of this course (how and why was it discussed in the lectures and/or readings). The answer should not be comprehensive – you are not expected to reproduce everything that was said in class and/or found in the readings about each ID question. The point is rather to find an efficient way to assure the grader that you have, in fact, done the readings, attended the lectures, and prepared for the exam.

As for the essay, you should attempt to demonstrate that you haven’t just memorized a list of ID’s, but are able to write intelligently about some of the main issues and arguments examined in the course. Keep in mind that the essay is your best opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of the substantial material covered in the course up to that point. It is not in your interest to stop writing
before the end of the allotted time. You will want to include in the essay as much detail as possible from the course material, not only from the lectures, but from the readings as well. While writing a long essay is no guarantee of its quality or of a good grade, writing a short essay will result in a poor grade.

You will have two hours for the final exam. Since you will not get the comprehensive essay question in advance, it is particularly important that you read it carefully, that you address all its parts, and that you take some time to organize and structure your thoughts (possibly in the form of an outline) before you start writing your answer.

Exams: policies on cheating

Cheating in an exam will result in automatic failure for the course and will be reported to the university.

Be advised that we will check the blue-books before the start of the exam, and will walk around the classroom to ensure fair play. If you leave the room for whatever reason during the exam, you will have to turn in the exam and will not be able to resume writing if you come back – i.e. make sure you use the restroom before the start of the exam, particularly in the longer final.

It is particularly important that you refrain from using cellphones, headsets, or any electronic device at any point during the exam. Since it is not possible for us to determine exactly what the actual purpose of any such activity might be – for example, a quick glance at your smartphone, or using headsets while you write – the use of any electronic device, however fleeting and for whatever real or alleged purpose will constitute cheating and result in automatic failure for the course.

Grading:

Your final grade for the course will be determined in the following way:

- 15% breakout section attendance and participation
- 10% pop quizzes
- 20% midterm exam 1
- 20% midterm exam 2
- 35% final exam

Course Outline:

**Thursday January 17**

Welcome and Introduction

**Tuesday January 22**

A world in crisis: inequality and instability

- Brooks, “The Inequality Map”
- Krugman, “Oligarchy, American Style”
- Stiglitz, “Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%”
Thursday January 24

The historical roots of equality: the Greeks

• Plato, *Republic*, selections from books II and VIII

Tuesday January 29

The historical roots of equality: liberalism and beyond

• Hobbes: *Leviathan*, chapter XIII
• Locke: *Second Treatise of Government*, selections from chapter XIX
• Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, selections
• Marx, *Capital, Vol. I*, selections

Thursday January 31

The American Revolution, Part I

• Jefferson, “Declaration of Independence”
• Goldfield, chapter 2

Tuesday February 5

The American Revolution, Part II

• Paine, *Common Sense*

Thursday February 7

The U.S. Constitution, Part I

• Jefferson, Letter to William S. Smith, November 1787
• Publius, *Federalist Papers* number 10

Tuesday February 12

The U.S. Constitution, Part II

• Review Publius, *Federalist Papers* number 10
• Publius, *Federalist Papers* number 1, 6, 9

Thursday February 14

Race in Early American History

• Goldfield, chapter 1
Tuesday February 19
The White Republic
  • Goldfield chapter 3

Thursday February 21
MIDTERM EXAM #1

Tuesday February 26
The Coming Storm
  • Douglass, “What to the slave is the Fourth of July?”
  • Garrison, “The American Union”

Thursday February 28
The Second American Revolution
  • McPherson, “Who Freed the Slaves?”

Tuesday March 5
Reconstruction and the Gilded Age
  • Goldfield, chapter 5, selections: pp. 137-146; 153-173

Thursday March 7
Class struggle in America, Part I
  • Sumner, What Social Classes Owe Each Other, selections

Tuesday March 12
Class struggle in America, Part II
  • Jorgenson, “75th anniversary of the Minneapolis truck drivers’ strike”

Thursday March 14
The New Deal and the post-war boom, Part I
  • Roosevelt, “Address at the Democratic State Convention, Syracuse, N.Y.” September 29, 1936

Tuesday March 19
The New Deal and the post-war boom, Part II

- Goldfield, chapter 7, selections: pp. 231-249

Thursday March 21

MIDTERM EXAM #2

Tuesday March 26

The New Gilded Age: social inequality today, Part I

- Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics*, Introduction, chapter 1

Thursday March 28

The New Gilded Age: social inequality today, Part II

- Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics*, Introduction, chapter 1

April 2, 4 *** Spring Break. No Class ***

Tuesday April 9

Inequality in Crisis, Part I

- Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics*, chapter 2, 3

Video: “Inside Job” (Part 1)

Thursday April 11

Inequality in Crisis, Part II

- Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics*, chapter 2, 3

Video: “Inside Job” (Part 2)

Tuesday April 16

Inequality in Crisis, Part III

- Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics*, chapter 4, 6

Thursday April 18

Inequality in Crisis, Part IV

- Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics*, chapter 4, 6
Tuesday April 23

Inequality in Crisis, Part V

- Hacker and Pierson, *Winner-Take-All Politics*, chapter 8, 9

Thursday April 25

Equality and education, Part I

- Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, chapter 7

Tuesday April 30

Equality and Education, Part II

- Students for a Democratic Society, “The Port Huron Statement”

Thursday May 2

Equality and Education, Part III

- Donoghue, *The Last Professors*. Selections from chapter 4
- Collinge, *The Student Loan Scam*, chapter 1

Tuesday May 7

Final Exam Review

Tuesday May 14

10:30 to 12:30 *** please note that the final exam will start before the regular class time ***

Exercise & Nutritional Sciences 280

FINAL EXAM