

American Politics and Government

Cours en ligne pour le Semestre 1 de 3^{ème} année

Course Title

American Politics and Government

Type de cours : Cours en ligne

Language of instruction : English

Professor

BROOKS Stephen

Visiting Professor

Contact : brooks3@uwindsor.ca

Course description – Targets

This is an online course on the main features of politics and government in the United States. Although no background in American history or any aspect of American society, culture or economics is required, some exposure to these subjects would be useful. Of course we all acquire this background these days through American films, television programs, music and foreign news coverage of public affairs in the United States. Don't we? Why then is it so difficult to answer such questions as the following:

- How did Donald Trump, a person with no previous political experience and who virtually all pollsters and respected analysts of American politics predicted would lose, win the 2016 election and become president of the United States?
- California, with about 38 million citizens, and Alaska, with about 600 thousand, and all the other states with populations in between, each have two senators. Why? And why do people in California, New York and Texas not complain about this?
- It is unconstitutional to require prayer in public schools, but each day's business in Congress starts with a prayer and the motto, "In God We Trust," is on the currency. How do you explain this apparent contradiction?
- Noam Chomsky and Michael Moore are Americans. President Trump and Rush Limbaugh are equally American. And yet Chomsky and Moore seem to have nothing in common with Trump and Limbaugh. Do they?
- Presidents are chosen through an institution called the Electoral College. Can you explain how it works and why it continues to exist?
- There are only two political parties that matter in the United States. And yet the range of diversity in America is easily as great or greater than in most European societies, where multi-party systems are the norm. Can the plurality of interests and values in America be adequately represented by a two-party system?

- The socio-economic circumstances of the average black family today, in both absolute terms and relative to white families, are much better than in the 1960s. But residential and school segregation of the races continue to be about as great as during the decade of civil rights marches and groups like the NAACP and the Urban League often suggest that little if any real progress has been made toward racial equality. What's the real story?

If none of these questions cause you the least hesitation then I recommend that you look for another course. I will have nothing to teach you! But if you are left wondering about the answers to some of them, well, you've come to the right place.

Online teaching method

There will be nine 2-hour lectures, all of which will be synchronous.

Assessment

Your grade will be based on a final exam. It will consist of six essay questions. You will be required to answer four of them. Each answer will count for one-third of your course grade. One of the questions will be required. You may choose which 3 of the remaining 5 you wish to answer. I will provide information on the appropriate length for answers when the final is sent to you. You will submit your examination to me as an email attachment in Word or PDF.

Course outline

Session 1 Introduction: American Exceptionalism?, ch.1

Political Culture, ch.2.

Session 2 Religion and Politics, ch.4

Session 3 The Constitution, ch.5.

Congress, ch.6.

Session 4 The Presidency, ch.7.

The Judiciary, ch.8.

Session 5 Equality in America, chs.10 and 11

Session 6 Parties and Elections, ch.12

Who Rules America?, ch.13

Bibliography

Roughly 80-90 percent of what you will be required to read comes from my book, co-authored with Doug Koopman and J. Matthew Wilson, *Understanding American Politics*, 2nd edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

The book may be purchased online from the publisher at www.utppublishing.com or through Amazon. You should not use the 1st edition of this book. There are three new chapters in the 2nd edition and all of the original ones have been updated and revised, in some cases quite radically.

We may occasionally use materials that are available online, including some that is posted at the book's website.

We will also view video and website material. All of this will be relevant to the weekly class topics and main readings and will be testable material.