

POLSC 110
Spring 2010
Sections 014 and 056
HW 706
Email: williamadler@gmail.com

Prof. William D. Adler
Office: HW 1718A
Hours: Monday 2:30-4:00 pm,
and by appointment
<http://adlers.home.att.net/william/>

American Government: A Historical Introduction

This course explores the development of the American political system, how it works, and its impact upon us. We will set the stage with an in-depth examination of our political culture, the Constitution, and the ongoing debate it sparked about the proper role of our government. Following this we will discuss political development and the peculiar American form of federalism. Next we will examine the fundamental institutions of our government, including Congress, the presidency, and the courts. Looking at lawmaking will naturally lead into a discussion of domestic policymaking and the growth of the bureaucracy. Finally, we will examine political parties, elections, and popular participation. Classes will be a blend of lectures and discussions, in which I expect all students to actively participate.

Required Books

There are two required texts for this course, one book and a course pack. They are available at Shakespeare Bookstore:

- Marc Landy and Sidney M. Milkis, *American Government: Balancing Democracy and Rights* (Second Edition) (Cambridge, 2008), ISBN 978-0-521-68128-5.
- Course Pack for POLSC 110, produced by Campus Course Paks (www.ccpaks.com).

Course Learning Objectives

Besides imparting substantive material regarding American politics and history, this course aims to assist students in developing skills useful in other courses and in their future lives. By the end of the semester, students should be able to identify political arguments and make substantive arguments of their own on critical policy questions; explain key concepts about American politics and government; learn how to clearly and effectively communicate ideas in writing; and be able to critically examine claims made by different authors on political topics.

Course Requirements

- 1) Complete all readings on schedule. If you miss a class, email me for the next reading assignment, as the schedule may change.
- 2) Attend on time and actively participate in class discussions. Those who arrive more than 3 minutes late, or who leave in the middle of class, will be marked absent. Each student is allowed only **two** unexcused absences. Your participation grade will be reduced by one-third of a letter for each unexcused absence over two. Not being active during class discussions will also result

in a lowering of your participation grade. Use of electronic devices such as phones, blackberries, or music players during class **is prohibited**.

3) Keep up with the news! We will frequently discuss current events as they relate to the concepts we are discussing in class. This way, we will try to connect what can be vague ideas to real-world outcomes. Read a newspaper, visit cnn.com, or do anything that helps makes you an informed citizen.

4) I will occasionally conduct quizzes in short answer format. I do this to ensure that everyone is completing the assigned reading and participating in discussions.

5) Take the midterm and final exams. Both will consist of essay questions and will be given in-class. I will likely give you sample questions ahead of the test. Make-up exams will only be given in the event of an emergency, verified with proper documentation.

6) Write **four** short papers on controversial topics in American politics. Each paper will focus on one particular issue that we will also be discussing in class. Relevant readings and due dates are noted on the schedule below. **No late papers will be accepted.** However, if you turn the paper in on time, I will give you the option of revising it, if you wish. I reserve the right to reject your submission if it does not meet the assignment criteria. All revisions are due within one week of when I return the paper to you. Plan ahead to make sure you have time to write all four!

I **do not** want you to simply tell me your opinion on the subject; rather, consider both sides of the argument carefully before stating your own view. Provide evidence for your views, whether it is in the form of statistics, logical reasoning, or quotations from others. You **must** use outside sources besides those on the syllabus - **at least 3** for each paper. (Please do not use the same sources repeatedly!) Each paper must be **at least 3 pages**.

All written assignments must be typed in a 12 point font, double spaced, with one-inch margins, and have page numbers. Papers not meeting these criteria will be penalized. All papers must also be submitted to www.turnitin.com (note that I **will not** accept papers not submitted to turnitin.com):

Class ID - 3021222
password - government

Grading

Work conducted towards the end of the semester will be more heavily weighted in my mind when dispensing final grades; in other words, *improvement counts*.

Attendance/Participation: 10%
Quizzes: 10%
Short Papers: 30%
Midterm: 20%
Final: 30%

Incompletes will only be given for valid, documented emergencies. As well, please note that Hunter College rules specify that credit/no credit grading may only be used if a student has completed all the work assigned for the course.

NOTE ON PLAGIARISM: Any student found plagiarizing work will receive a grade of **zero** for that assignment and an **F** for the course. **It is your responsibility to avoid plagiarism; if you are uncertain about what constitutes plagiarism, please ask!** For more information, see this website about “Avoiding Plagiarism:” <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/589/01/>.

Accessibility

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical and/or Learning) consult the Office of AccessABILITY located in Room 1214B to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance please call (212-772-4857)/TTY (212-650-3230).

Schedule of Classes and Exams

February 1st: Introduction

February 3rd, 8th, and 10th: American Political Culture

Landy and Milkis, chapter 2

Declaration of Independence (Landy and Milkis, Appendix 1)

Thomas Jefferson’s unedited version of the Declaration (course pack #1)

Is there a unique American “mission”? (Due on February 10th)

Wilfred M. McClay, “The Founding of Nations,” and Howard Zinn, “The Power and the Glory: Myths of American Exceptionalism” (course pack #2)

February 17th, 18th, and 22nd: The Constitution

(Monday, February 15th: No classes; Thursday, February 18th: Monday schedule)

Landy and Milkis, chapter 3

The Constitution (Landy and Milkis, Appendix 2)

Federalist #10 and #51 (Landy and Milkis, Appendices 3 and 4)

Hon. Mr. Gerry's Objections to the Constitution (course pack #3)

February 24th: Political Development

Landy and Milkis, chapter 4

Is there a “culture war” in American politics? (Due on February 24th)

Liz Marlantes, “Inside Red-and-Blue America,” and Morris P. Fiorina, “*What Culture Wars? Debunking the Myth of a Polarized America*” (course pack #4)

March 1st and 3rd: Federalism

Federalist #46 (course pack #5)

Landy and Milkis, chapter 5

Monday, March 8th: Midterm Exam

March 10th, 15th, and 17th: Congress

Landy and Milkis, chapter 7

Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *The Broken Branch: How Congress Is Failing America and How to Get It Back on Track*, and Lee H. Hamilton, “Public Criticisms of Congress” (course pack #6)

March 22nd, 24th, and April 7th: The Presidency
(March 29th-April 5th: Spring Recess)

Landy and Milkis, chapter 8

Should the president have the power to start a war unilaterally? (Due on April 7th)

John C. Yoo, *Memorandum to the President*, and Michael Cairo, "The 'Imperial Presidency' Triumphant" (course pack #7)

April 12th, 14th, and 19th: The Judiciary

Federalist #78 (course pack #8)

Landy and Milkis, chapter 9

How should the Constitution be interpreted? (Due on April 19th)

Antonin Scalia, "Common-Law Courts in a Civil-Law System: The Role of United States Federal Courts in Interpreting the Constitution and Laws," and Stephen Breyer, "Our Democratic Constitution" (course pack #9)

April 21st, 26th, and 28th: Domestic Policymaking and the Bureaucracy

Landy and Milkis, chapter 6

Landy and Milkis, chapter 10

How many of our needs should the national government be responsible for? (Due April 28th)

Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Call for Responsibility," and Herbert Hoover, "Against the Proposed New Deal" (course pack #10)

Ezra Klein, "The Health of Nations," and John C. Goodman, "Health Care in a Free Society" (course pack #11)

May 3rd and 5th: Political Parties and Elections

Landy and Milkis, chapter 11

Are negative campaigns good or bad? (Due on May 5th)

Campbell Brown, "Commentary: Stop the Negative Campaigning," and William G. Mayer, "In Defense of Negative Campaigning" (course pack #12, #13)

May 10th and 12th: Political Participation

Landy and Milkis, chapter 12

Abraham Lincoln, "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions" (course pack #14)

Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (course pack #15)

Final Exam: Monday, May 17th