COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a survey of the concepts, theories, and functions of the American political system. The basic principles of the United States Constitution and the government of California will be examined. Emphasis will be placed on the formal and informal influences of federalism on national and state governments.

COURSE OVERVIEW

One of the greatest attributes of our democracy is our ability to hold different views and opinions about our political system, in particular our government. In many ways we can see conflicts (conflict being a symbol of freedom) in our political system stemming from our different visions of important societal values, such as equality, freedom, liberty, and societal order. As students of politics, we must make an effort to understand and analyze the conflict about such values that continually test American Democracy. How we use our political system to define and apply these values will be part of our focus for this course. Helping us enhance our level of citizenship and gaining a more thorough understanding of our nation’s political process will be a goal as well. While this is an introductory survey course, nonetheless we will cover a large amount of information including; the development of American political institutions, the constitutional foundations and bedrock principles that continue to govern us today, American political traditions, and the functioning of contemporary political processes. Be ready to discuss, think, critically analyze, and write on these topics.

I encourage you to keep up with current events. You can easily prepare for this by reading the major newspapers, i.e., Los Angeles Times, New York Times, Washington Post, or by watching the major news channels, CNN, MSNBC, Fox Network, PBS, etc. This is of utmost importance given the divisiveness in the results of the past midterm elections and the fact that we have divided government now. We will see in the upcoming last year of President Obama’s second term whether his agenda will continue to be
implemented, including issues of gun control, immigration, the debt ceiling, etc, just as well how his administration will handle the many challenges we are facing abroad, among them: the Middle East, North Korea, ISIS, Iran, troop withdrawals from Afghanistan and Iraq, etc. As you can see, these are exciting times to be learning about politics.

After completing this course you will be able to describe the concepts, theories and functions of the American political system and have a deeper understanding of the political processes and institutions within our government. You will have gained knowledge about our constitution, our three branches of government and how they interact with one another, operating under a system of checks and balances. You will also have gained knowledge about political campaigns and elections, especially those in the last few decades of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st. Finally, you will gain knowledge and become more aware of one’s civic duties and rights as citizens living in this society. More specifically students should meet the following objectives:

1. Identify the theoretical foundations and the applications of the American political system.
2. Analyze major political institutions: the presidency, bureaucracy, Congress, Judiciary, elections, political parties, and interest groups.
3. Examine and assess the implementation of democracy, including the different perspectives of elitism, pluralism, and majoritarianism.
4. Evaluate the role of the mass media in the political process.
5. Identify and discuss political culture and the function of political socialization.
6. Compare and contrast the relationship of federal and state governmental systems and processes with emphasis on California.
7. Evaluate and analyze the interdependence of economics and politics.
8. Distinguish between civil rights and civil liberties and their evolution in American society.
9. Assess the federal and state judicial systems and their impact on public policy.
10. Examine and discuss the process of public policy making in relation to international and domestic policy issues.
11. Assess the concept and implementation of citizenship.
12. Analyze issues of race, ethnicity, class, age, and gender as they relate to the distribution of power in the political process.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLO’s)

-In a multiple choice exam, students will demonstrate knowledge of the basic principles of the United States Constitution including it Articles and Amendments, as well as those for the government of California.
- In a multiple choice or written essay test, students will demonstrate an understanding of how political parties and interest groups serve as channels for popular participation, and compare/contrast the techniques they use to do so.”

- In a written essay or multiple choice exam, students will demonstrate an understanding of the various roles played by the President and California Governor, the political resources available to them to meet the expectations associated with those roles, and how those resources are limited.”

**TEXTS**

The following textbook is required for the course:


**Assessment instruments / Quizzes and Exams**

- **5 scantrons** (conveniently sold at the bookstore in a packet of 5 -**FORM NO. 882-E**)
- **2 Blue Books** (can be large or small- for the written portion of the Midterm and Final Exams)

**OUTLINE**

I. **Introduction**
   Bardes, Shelley & Schmidt, Chapter 1: The Democratic Republic
   *Readings* “Democracy: Overrated or Undervalued? and “Civil Society: Does America Face a Crisis of Civic Engagement?”

II. **The Constitution**
    Bardes, Shelley & Schmidt, Chapter 2: *The Constitution*
    Appendix A (The Declaration of Independence)
    Appendix B, (Federalist Paper #51)
    (The Constitution)
III. Federalism
   Bardes, Shelley & Schmidt, Chapter 3: Federalism
   *Reading* “The New Federalism: Does It Create Laboratories of Democracy or a Race to the Bottom?

IV. Civil Liberties
   Bardes, Shelley & Schmidt, Chapter 4: Civil Liberties
   *Reading* “Civil Liberties and War: Debating the USA Patriot Act”

V. Civil Rights
   Bardes, Shelley & Schmidt, Chapter 5: Civil Rights
   *Reading* “Civil Rights: How Far Have We Progressed?”

VI. Political Socialization and Public Opinion
   Bardes, Shelley & Schmidt, Chapter 6: Public Opinion and Political Socialization

VII. Political Parties
   Bardes, Shelley & Schmidt, Chapter 8: Political Parties

VIII. Campaigns and Elections
   Bardes, Shelley & Schmidt, Chapter 9: Campaigns and Elections,

IX. The Media
   Bardes, Shelley & Schmidt, Chapter 10: The Media

IX. Interest Groups
   Bardes, Shelley & Schmidt, Chapter 7: Interest Groups
   Appendix B (Federalist #10)

X. Congress
   Bardes, Shelley & Schmidt, Chapter 11: Congress
   Appendix D (Party Control of Congress since 1900)
XI. The Presidency
   Bardes, Shelley & Schmidt, Chapter 12: The President
   Appendix E (The Presidents of the United States)

XII. The Bureaucracy
   Bardes, Shelley & Schmidt, Chapter 13: The Bureaucracy

XIII. The Judiciary
   Bardes, Shelley & Schmidt, Chapter 14: The Courts
   Appendix C (Justices of The Supreme Court since 1900)

The above outline can be subject to modification at the instructor’s discretion.
Students will be notified of such changes in advance during our class meetings.

GRADING POLICY

- Class participation and attendance (10%)
- Quizzes 2 of 3 (lowest score will be dropped) (10%)
- Midterm Examination (30%)
- Term Paper (20%)
- Final Examination (30%)

Quizzes

There will be 3 quizzes given throughout the term. You will have advanced notification of at least a couple of days prior to the quiz. Each quiz will consist of 25-30 questions which may include; multiple choice, definitions, true-false, etc., type of questions. Throughout the semester, I will try to give you hints and examples of possible questions. The quiz with the lowest score will be dropped. There will be NO MAKE-UP for the quizzes. If you happen to miss class on the day that a quiz is given, that quiz will be the one dropped from your grade. You will need a scantron for each of the quizzes.

Midterm Exam

The midterm will consist of two parts; a multiple choice, matching, true-false section which might comprise anywhere from 60-75 questions based on both the readings and lectures. And a second part which will be asking you to either write a couple of essays, here again, incorporating material from both the readings and lectures. You will need to bring both a scantron and a blue book for the midterm and the final. Note here that only
under extreme circumstances and having them discussed with the instructor prior to the midterm will you be given the opportunity to have a make-up exam.

Term Paper

The term paper, more like a critical writing exercise will be on an assigned topic given in the first couple of weeks during the semester. The paper must be typed, double-spaced, spell-checked, typical font (Times or Times New Roman), size 12, and with all the normal headings, margins, etc. You are probably familiar with the style from your English writing courses. If you need help with this please don’t hesitate to let me know, I will be happy to help. Note that late papers will automatically be lowered by 1 letter grade.

Final Exam

The final is not cumulative, although on the multiple choice section, there will be some questions drawn from the first part of the course. It will have the same format as the midterm examination. For both, the midterm and the final, I will give you a study-guide to help you prepare. Here again, remember to bring a scantron and a blue book.

NOTE- - El Camino College is committed to providing educational accommodations for students with disabilities upon the timely request by the student to the instructor. Students with disabilities who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Special Resource Center on campus as soon as possible to better ensure such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. Please contact me privately as well to discuss your specific needs and I will be more than happy to help.

NOTE- Whenever emailing me, write down your name within the body of your email as well as the section number in which you are enrolled. That will speed up the process of replying to you. Give me at least 24 hours to email you back.

NOTE- It is your responsibility to drop yourself from this course if you need to, you should become aware of the deadline to drop with a “W”. DO NOT assume the instructor will drop you if you stop attending class.