

## Syllabus for POLSC10: *U.S. Government & Politics*

### **Course Information**

Semester & Year: Spring 2024

Course ID & Section #: POLSC10 (D7079)

Instructor's Name: Rusty Hicks

Location: Pelican Bay State Prison, B YARD

Day/Time of Meetings: Monday 5:00PM to 8:10PM

Course Units: 3:00

### **Instructor Contact Information**

Office Location: Pelican Bay State Prison

Office Hours: Monday 5:00PM to 8:10PM

Phone Number: 707-465-2326 (office)

### **Catalog Description**

This course addresses both the philosophic roots and the contemporary operation of American national, state and local government. Specific topics include constitutional development, federal-state relations, and the rights and obligations of citizens under the federal and California constitutions.

### **Course Student Learning Outcomes (*from course outline of record*)**

1. Explain the history and philosophy of the Constitution, politics and government in the U.S.
2. Identify the major provisions of the California and U.S. Constitutions.
3. Compare the three branches of California and U.S. government and related political institutions.
4. Outline the relationship between the states and national governments.
5. Analyze contemporary issues facing California and the US system of government.

### **Accessibility**

College of the Redwoods is committed to making reasonable accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. If you have a disability or believe you might benefit from disability-related services and accommodations, please contact your instructor or [Disability Services and Programs for Students](#) (DSPS). Students may make requests for alternative media by contacting DSPS based on their campus location:

- Eureka: 707-476-4280, student services building, 1<sup>st</sup> floor
- Del Norte: 707-465-2324, main building near library
- Klamath-Trinity: 530-625-4821 Ext 103

If you are taking online classes DSPS will email approved accommodations for distance education classes to your instructor. In the case of face-to-face instruction, please present your written accommodation request to your instructor at least one week before the needed accommodation so that necessary arrangements can be made. Last minute arrangements or post-test adjustments usually cannot be accommodated.

The above language is required content this syllabus. However, if you have a disability or believe you might benefit from disability-related services and accommodations, please contact me or Ms. Eagles to see how we can best support you.

## **Academic Dishonesty**

In the academic community, the high value placed on truth implies a corresponding intolerance of scholastic dishonesty. In cases involving academic dishonesty, determination of the grade and of the student's status in the course is left primarily to the discretion of the faculty member. In such cases, where the instructor determines that a student has demonstrated academic dishonesty, the student may receive a failing grade for the assignment and/or exam and may be reported to the Chief Student Services Officer or designee. The Student Code of Conduct and the College Catalog may be requested via mail.

I realize that you don't have this catalog, nor do you have access to the internet, so below is a particular section that applies here: Do not plagiarize. Plagiarism includes, but isn't limited to:

1. Using, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full, clear, and accurate acknowledgment.
2. The unacknowledged use of another writer's ideas without proper citation. Borrowing all or part of another individual's work or using someone else's outline to write your own work.
3. Copying another individual's computer printout and/or computer files and using it as one's own. In our case, copying another individual's paper or document and using it as one's own.
4. Using an agency or Internet website engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

## **Disruptive Behavior**

Student behavior or speech that disrupts the instructional setting will not be tolerated. Disruptive conduct may include, but is not limited to: unwarranted interruptions; failure to adhere to instructor's directions; vulgar or obscene language; slurs or other forms of intimidation; and physically or verbally abusive behavior. In such cases where the instructor determines that a student has disrupted the educational process, a disruptive student may be temporarily removed from class. In addition, the student may be reported to the Chief Student Services Officer or designee. The Student Code of Conduct and the College Catalog may be requested via mail.

## **Inclusivity in the Classroom**

College of the Redwoods aspires to create a learning environment in which all people feel comfortable in contributing their perspectives to classroom discussions. It therefore encourages instructors and students to use language that is inclusive and respectful.

Given the nature of politics, some of the subjects covered in the course will be controversial. I recognize some of these topics will be challenging to discuss. However, you must respect the viewpoints of others - fellow students and the instructor - and strive to engage in a productive manner at all times.

## Student Support

For academic counseling and advising, transcript requests, and material requests, send a formal request Ms. Eagles via a letter or Ask CR Sheet. Mail this to the Education Department (Attn: CR Scholars).

## Course Introduction

Welcome to U.S. Government and Politics! My hope is that by the end of the course you will have a general knowledge of the founding principles of American government, the key institutions that carry out the duties and responsibilities of government and the various interests that transform and shape the public policy landscape in the United States. Beyond the basics, I hope you will gain an understanding of why engaging in American democracy is vital to its survival and how you and others are a part of its story - whether you like it or not.

A considerable amount of reading & reflection will be required in preparation for each class. Complete the readings as assigned and attend class prepared to engage with the material with your fellow classmates. In the event a class is cancelled, please continue to complete the reading assignments. We will review the material when we reconvene.

Finally, ***bring your syllabus to every class.*** The syllabus will orient you to the day's activities and allow you to fill in new assignments, due dates and/or make outline changes. You should plan to take notes during class and I will strive to provide a basic outline of the day's material at the end of each class.

## Required Texts

- (1) American Government: Power & Purpose by Lowi, Ginsberg, Shepsle, & Ansolabehere, 13th Edition
- (2) Governing California by Anagnoson, Bonetto, Buck, Deleon, Emry, Kelleher & Koch, 5th Edition
- (3) Other readings as assigned.

## Graded Assignments

Class Participation & Homework	250 points
Quiz 1	50 points
Quiz 2	50 points
Midterm Exam	150 points
Class Presentation/Paper	250 points
Final Exam	<u>250 points</u>
Total Possible Semester Points	1000 points

## Grading Scale

A	=	930 -1000 points
A-	=	900 - 929 points
B+	=	866 - 899 points
B	=	830 - 865 points
B-	=	800 - 829 points
C+	=	750 - 799 points
C	=	700 - 749 points
D	=	600 - 699 points
F	=	0 - 599 points

## Additional Assignment & Grading Information

### Class Attendance & Participation (250 points)

The success of this class depends on both your attendance and participation. Full participation requires reading the assigned material, reflecting on how it has impacted or does impact your own life and the lives of others and completing any homework assignments. I will likely provide additional specific areas of particular focus for your reading in the prior class. Please strive to keep a general awareness of current events both in the United States and abroad as it will help add context to classroom discussions.

### Quizzes (100 points)

You will complete two quizzes during the semester. Each quiz will be a short review of the material reviewed in the classes directly preceding the quiz.

### Midterm Exam (150 points)

You will complete a midterm during the semester. The midterm will be a review of the material reviewed in the classes preceding the midterm and a review will be completed in the class prior to the midterm.

### Research Paper (250 points)

An important component of this course is an understanding and application of key principles to our daily lives. Therefore, you will complete a written essay on a subject you select from a list of topics I provide. We will discuss the general topics in class prior to your decision to make a presentation in class or complete a written essay. In addition, you will be required to submit a summary or outline on your proposed topic that will serve as a guide for completing the assignment. If needed, I will provide you with some feedback on your summary or outline to guide your completion of the assignment. See additional details included in the subsequent pages of this syllabus.

### Final Exam (250 points)

You will complete a final exam during the semester. The final exam will be a review of all of the material reviewed in the classes and a review will be completed in the class prior to the final exam.

## Course Outline & Reading Schedule

### January 15 - Martin Luther King Jr Day - No Class

#### Week 1

**January 22**

Introduction

#### Week 2

**January 29**

*The Founding & the Constitution*

Reading: American Government: Power & Purpose Chapter 2

Reading: Governing California Chapter 2

#### Week 3

**February 5**

*Federalism & Separation of Powers*

Reading: American Government: Power & Purpose Chapter 3

**Week 4**            **February 12**  
Quiz # 1  
*Civil Liberties & Civil Rights*  
Reading: American Government: Power & Purpose Chapter 4

## **February 19 - President's Day - No Class**

**Week 5**            **February 26**  
*Three Branches of Government - Legislative, Executive, Judicial*  
Reading: American Government: Power & Purpose Chapter 5, 6, & 8  
Reading: Governing California Chapter 6

Midterm Course Review

**Week 6**            **March 4**  
Midterm

Paper: Discussion

## **March 11 - Spring Break - No Class**

**Week 7**            **March 18**  
*Public Opinion*  
Reading: American Government: Power & Purpose Chapter 9  
Reading: Governing California Chapter 3  
Paper: Topics Selected

**Week 8**            **March 25**  
*Elections & Campaigns*  
Reading: American Government: Power & Purpose Chapter 10  
Reading: Governing California Chapter 4

**Week 9**            **April 1**  
*Political Parties*  
Reading: American Government: Power & Purpose Chapter 11  
Paper: Summary/Outline Due

**Week 10**          **April 8**  
Quiz #2  
*Interest Groups*  
Reading: American Government: Power & Purpose Chapter 12

**Week 11**          **April 15**  
*Domestic Policy*  
Reading: American Government: Power & Purpose Chapters 13  
Reading: Governing California Chapter 10

**Week 12**

**April 22**

*Foreign Policy*

Reading: American Government: Power & Purpose Chapters 14

Reading: Governing California Chapter 10

**Week 13**

**April 29**

*Outstanding Topics*

Paper: Due & Discussed

Final Exam Course Review

**Week 14**

**May 6**

Final Exam

## End of Semester Paper or Presentation Instructions & Topics

### Instructions

As cited in the syllabus provided at the beginning of the course, you will complete either a paper or an in-class presentation for a total of 250 possible points - or 25% of the course's total possible points - towards your final grade. The grading breakdown is outlined below.

50 points	Choosing a topic from the list below
50 points	Completion of a one-page outline or summary of a future paper or presentation
50 points	Submission of a paper or completion of a presentation
50 points	Clarity in the topic thesis
<u>50 points</u>	Adequate support for the topic thesis
250 points	Total possible points for completed assignment

All papers must be at least 1000 words or 8-10 handwritten pages. Papers must include the student's last name and the corresponding page number on each page. Papers must be neatly written and double-spaced.

All in-class presentations must be 5-7 minutes long. Upon the completion of each presentation, the class will have the opportunity to ask up to two questions related to the topic presented. If the class does not ask any questions, I will ask the presenter two questions about their presentation.

Below is a summary of the deadlines related to this assignment.

March 4	Instructions & topics released to students and discussed in class
March 18	Students select (1) paper or in-class presentation and (2) one topic
April 1	Additional research materials provided
April 15	One-page assignment outline due
April 22	Instructor available to discuss the selected topic with student (if needed)
April 29	Papers due or students present to class

\*Schedule subject to change, but student's will be notified of any changes as appropriate.

Below are the topic options from which students may choose for a paper or in-class presentation.

### Topic 1 - Appointing and Confirming a Supreme Court Justice

At age 87, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died from complications of pancreatic cancer on September 18, 2020 - just six weeks before the presidential election. Despite having argued in 2016 that Justice Antonin Scalia's seat should be held open for approximately 11 months, the Republican Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell vowed to see President Trump's nominee confirmed. On September 26, 2020, Trump nominated Amy Coney Barrett to succeed Ruth Bader Ginsburg on the U.S. Supreme Court and she was swiftly confirmed before the November 2020 elections. Putting aside the question of hypocrisy on both sides of the partisan aisle, do you agree or disagree with the argument that in an election year an open seat should be kept open until after the election & the next officials are seated? Why?

## **Topic 2 - The Power of the President**

Since the 1800s, the president's power has grown at the expense of Congress. Has the executive branch become too strong? How might Congress reign in the power of the President? Congress could author laws that are more specific and limit discretion when they delegate powers by statute thus enhancing their authority in relation to the president. However, what rational goals or concerns of members of Congress might prevent them from passing more specific and detailed legislation? Are there any constitutional reforms one might propose, such as limiting the president to one term in office or creating more independent agencies that are separate from the presidency?

## **Topic 3 - How do Members of Congress Decide**

Imagine that you are a member of Congress deciding how to vote on a bill you know very little about. Which factors are the most important to determine how you vote? Who would you be most concerned about keeping happy, and why? Would it depend on the issue and, if so, how?

## **Topic 4 - The Good and Bad of Term Limits**

Some watchers of government express concern about high reelection rates for incumbent members of Congress and have advocated for term limits as a way to formally remove longtime members of Congress. What is behind the concerns of those who advocate for term limits? When might a longtime, experienced member of Congress be beneficial? What do recent election cycles say about whether we need term limits? Are there practical ways to reform the system so that challengers are placed on more equal footing with incumbents?

## **Topic 5 - Affirmative Action in America**

Affirmative action remains a controversial topic in American politics. One argument against affirmative action is that it disrupts a system of merit so that less-qualified applicants who represent specific communities are selected. Is this a fair criticism of affirmative action? Is a merit-based system possible, given the legacy of discrimination, the accumulation and transfer of wealth via inheritance, and our nation's history?

## **Topic 6 - The Framers and American Government Today**

If the framers could see our government as it operates today, what changes to the Constitution do you think they would propose, assuming they wish it to adhere to the original principles they held at the time of the Constitutional Convention?

## **Topic 7 - Public Policy and Public Opinion**

Should public policy always respond to public opinion? Under what conditions might elected officials be better off not responding to public opinion? What are some characteristics of public opinion that make it difficult for politicians to be perfectly responsive?

## **Topic 8 - Do Presidential Campaigns Matter**

Some research suggests that presidential election campaigns do not matter as much as people think they do, since measurements of fundamental items, such as the state of the economy and the approval rating of a president, often predict the eventual winner. Other work suggests that campaigns are highly successful at priming voters and that getting out the vote, or targeting swing voters in battleground states, can affect a race's outcome. Which perspective seems more accurate to you? Do campaigns matter? If so, do they matter at certain times or in certain contexts more than others?

**Topic 9 - The Framers' Warning Against Political Parties**

The framers of the Constitution generally warned against the formation of political parties. Then they promptly formed them after the ratification of the Constitution. Even so, the framers were worried about factions engaging in majority tyranny over the minority. Have their fears come to fruition in the modern political system? Does the majority party tyrannize the minority party and other political minorities?

**Topic 10 - Special Interests & Public Interests**

People tend to view their own interests as closely related to the overall public interest, while often deeming the interests of other individuals and groups as “special interests” that work to the detriment of the common good. Why is this the case? How do we differentiate between special interests & the common good? Is such objectivity possible? If so, is it necessarily desirable?