UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

The purpose of this course is to provide students with a basic introduction to American government so they can better understand the nation's political system and the problems it faces. The course is divided into two parts. The first part explores the historical and constitutional foundation of the political system, while providing an overview of some of the fundamental themes in American democracy. The second part examines the role and structure of the different levels and branches of government.

Grading

Grades will be based on a mid-term (50%) and a final exam (50%). The exams are a combination of essay and short answer.

*How to do well on the exams*: You should attend class regularly. Some of the questions will be drawn directly from class lectures. You should also complete the reading assignments. There will be some questions that are drawn solely from the readings. To help you with the readings, I distribute a group of study questions each week, which I draw from in putting together exam questions. These study questions focus only on the readings. To help in class lecture, I try to write key terms on the board and emphasize key points as I talk. You should pay particular attention to these points and terms in studying for the exams. If I talk in class and the key points seem unclear or I have neglected to write anything on the board, feel free to ask questions. Finally, I would encourage everyone to study with others in the class.

Required Texts


In addition to this textbook, there are several articles I want you to read that are available through Academic Search Premiere (ASP) or Lexis-Nexis, which are two of the library databases. You should be able to access both databases wherever you have internet access, as long as you have an Odin account. To find both databases, go to the database page for the university library and click the link where it says: “View databases by: Title A-Z”. If you have trouble reaching that page, here is the URL: [http://www.lib.pdx.edu/systems/eresources/resourcesByAlpha.php](http://www.lib.pdx.edu/systems/eresources/resourcesByAlpha.php).

Do read these articles because there will be questions about some of them on the exams!
Learning Objectives

• To familiarize students with basic principles in American politics and to provide a general overview of the structure and workings of the U.S. government

• To encourage students to think more critically about government and politics

• To introduce students to major concepts associated with the scholarly study of American government

PART ONE: POLITICAL FOUNDATION

I. Introduction (March 31)

II. The Road to Philadelphia and the Constitutional Convention (April 2-4)

Read: Squire, chapters 1 and 2

III. Fundamental Principles of American Democracy (April 7-11)

Read: Squire, Appendix C (Federalist No. 10)
Squire, Appendix D (Federalist No. 51)

IV. The Living Constitution (April 14-23)


V. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties (April 25-30)

Read: Squire, chapters 4 and 5
Greenhouse, Linda, “Do you have a right to "bear arms"?” New York Times 14 January 2008. (You will have to search through Lexis-Nexis to find this article; when Lexis-Nexis open, click the “Power Search” tab, then type in the article’s
title, click the “Natural Language” button, and click “Magazine Stories, Combined” where it says “select sources.” Then run search.)

** ** ** MIDTERM EXAM – MAY 2 ** ** **

**PART TWO: GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS**

VI. Congress (May 5-12)

Read: Squire, chapter 11

VII. The Executive Branch (May 14-21)

Read: Squire, chapters 12 and 13
Carl M. Cannon, “Veto This!” *The National Journal*, October 13, 2007. (Use Lexis-Nexis, following instructions above. You might also limit search to past six months.)

VIII. The Judiciary (May 23-28)

Read: Squire, chapter 14

IX: State and Local Governments (May 30-June 6)

Read: Squire, chapter 15

** ** ** FINAL EXAM – JUNE 11, 10:15 A.M. ** ** **

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