

## PLS 280 Introduction to U.S. Political System

Spring 2010 M, W 10:30-11:45

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### Course Objectives

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- 1) Discuss the roles of key institutions and actors within the U.S. political system and their relationships with each other.
- 2) Discuss how the roles and relationships above have evolved over time.
- 3) Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the political process in the U.S.
- 4) Understand the ideas of liberty and equality in the context of the U.S. political system.

### Course Description:

The U.S. has marketed itself to the world as a leader of democracy. How does a democratic political system function? What are its successes and shortcomings? This course introduces the student to the roles of various political institutions and actors in the U.S. political system and considers their influence on democracy. We will look at both the formal institutions of government (Congress, President, and the Court), and other major actors that influence policy-making (political parties, interest groups, and mass media). Comparisons with the Japanese political system will be made as necessary to deepen the understanding of the characteristics of the U.S. political system.

### Classroom Activities:

**Course format:** Lectures by the instructor, small group discussion and other active learning methods. Audio-visual material will be utilized to facilitate learning. **Assignments:** You are to submit a response paper based on reading questions on the first day of class each week. There will also be a group presentation assignment. Details will be announced in class. **Policies:** Attendance is mandatory. Exceptions may be made only with approval by the instructor for legitimate reasons. **Feedback:** You are encouraged to ask questions during class. Your feedback is always welcome. Please feel free to e-mail me or visit my office.

### Prerequisites

None

## Evaluation

Mid-term examination	30 points
Final examination	40 points
Response papers	10 points
Presentation	10 points
Participation	10 points

The score above will be your *base score*. From the base score, points will be deducted for absences.

## Course Materials

~~Required: Milton C. Cummings, Jr. & David Wise, *Democracy Under Pressure: An Introduction to the American Political System*~~

THE TEXTBOOK IS PLANNED TO BE CHANGED this semester. Details will be finalized and announced by the time of registration. The schedule below is subject to some adjustments but the broad topics and outlines remain the same.

## **Major References:**

Peter Woll, *American Government: Reading and Cases*

Samuel Kernell & Gary C. Jacobson, *The Logic of American Politics*

Lowi, Ginsberg, Shepsle, eds., *American Government: Power and Purpose*

Hamilton, Madison, Jay, eds., *The Federalist Papers*

Video clips from *C-SPAN Classroom*

Additional readings will be distributed in class or placed on reserve at the library.

## Class Schedule

*This schedule is tentative and subject to changes and adjustments.*

Reading questions for each week will be uploaded on AIMS.

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## **Part I. The form of government and the rights of the people**

**Week 1 (Apr. 12, 14)      Government and People in a Democracy**

*Textbook*

Introduction (course objectives, policies, overview)

The role of government and the significance of democratic government

**Week 2 (Apr. 19, 21)      Constitutional Framework**

*Federalist Papers, #47, 51 (Woll, 41-45)*

Ratification of the U.S. Constitution, plans and compromises

Separation of powers, checks and balances

**Week 3 (Apr. 26, 28)      Federalism**

James Bryce, The Merits of the Federal System (*Woll, 72-74*)

History and significance of the federal system of government

Federalist / Anti-federalist debate

**Week 4 (May 7)              Courts**

*Federalist Papers, #78 (Woll, 386-390)*

The Supreme Court and Judicial Review

The Warren Court and after

**Week 5 (May 10, 12)      Civil Liberties**

*Textbook*

Bill of Rights (especially the First Amendment)

Freedom of speech

Freedom of religion

Criminal procedure

**Week 6 (May 17, 19)      Civil Rights (Equality)**

*Textbook*

Slavery and the Fourteenth Amendment

African Americans and civil rights in contemporary America

**Week 7 (May 24, 26)      Review and Mid-term examination**

**Part II. The political process**

**Week 8 (May 31, Jun. 2)      Congress**

*Textbook*

Bicameralism (House and Senate) and its values  
The legislative process and distinctiveness of rules of debate

**Week 9 (Jun. 7, 9)                      President**

*Textbook*

The shape and role of the executive branch  
The expanding roles of the President and conflicts with Congress

**Week 10 (Jun. 14, 16)                      Political Parties**

*Textbook*

Role of political parties and the merits of a two-party system  
Democrats and Republicans: policies and voter base

**Week 11 (Jun. 21, 23)                      Interest Groups**

*Textbook*

The role of interest groups in the political process  
Debate over the influence of interest groups: democracy or corruption?

**Week 12 (Jun. 28, 30)                      Presentations**

Policy issues, actors, and positions  
Debate on proposed “bills”

**Week 13 (Jul. 5, 7)                      Media and Politics**

*Textbook*

Government and freedom of the press  
Challenges for the press: privacy, libel, and press privileges

**Week 14 (Jul. 12, 14)                      Voting Behavior and Elections**

*Textbook*

The Electoral system (Congress, President)  
Voting rights and voting behavior

**Week 15 (Jul. 21)                      *Review***

**Week 16 (Jul. 26)                      *Final examination***