

# American Government and Politics

## Political Science 101, Spring 2007

*Distance Education/Web-Based Independent Study*

**Instructor: Michael R. Hicks**

Office Hours: Thursday 6 – 8 p.m. & by appointment, Steward Hall, Second Floor

Phone: (502) 741-6143

e-mail: [mhicks@simmonscollegeky.edu](mailto:mhicks@simmonscollegeky.edu)

Important Notice: It is essential for the purposes of this course that you check your SCKY e-mail account regularly or email the IT department of SGMI to request a forward to the account that you regularly use.

**Course Description:** The course will deepen your understanding of the theory and practice of American politics. Our text and online activities will expose you to a variety of viewpoints on some of the most important aspects of political theory, political institutions, political actors and political processes in the United States.

Welcome to *POL101: American Government and Politics*. This course is designed for students who are taking the course to meet one of the social sciences general education requirements. While no prior knowledge of Political Science is assumed and no specific disciplinary background is required, under our existing general education requirements, these are the key goals of the course:

- To communicate an understanding of how social science knowledge is established and how and why it changes over time;
- To evaluate evidence and apply it to solving problems through social science methods;
- To communicate and understanding of a body of social science knowledge from a particular disciplinary perspective - Political Science.

The course structure follows that of our main text book, *American Government: Your Voice, Your Future, Second Edition* by Matthew Kerbel. Kerbel begins with an introductory section (“Why Should We Care About Democracy?”) that includes chapters on democracy, the Constitution, and federalism. This is followed by Part 2, “Citizenship and Democracy,” with chapters on public opinion and political culture. Part 3 deals with “Connections Between Citizens and Government,” with chapters on the media, political parties, campaigns and elections, and interest groups. Part 4, “Institutions of Democracy,” includes chapters on Congress, the presidency, the federal bureaucracy and the judiciary. Finally, Part 5, “What Government Does and How Well it Works,” deals with civil rights, civil liberties, and domestic and foreign policy. The text is specifically designed as an online book, with interactive features, personal highlighting and marginal notes available. You can order the book at <http://www.atomicdog.com/1719451207010>.

Your grade for the class will be based on the following (more details on each below):

- Chapter Quizzes – 16 quizzes at 2 points each, with the top 15 counted, for a total of 30% of your course grade. You will take these quizzes through the Simmons Online page (<https://online.simmonscollegeky.edu>).
- Interactive Activity Quizzes – 15 at 1 point each. The online version of the book has a variety of interactive features for each chapter, which you will access through the “atomicdog” web site. (These will be graded on a credit/no credit basis after passing post-interactive-activity assessment quizzes.)
- A midterm (25%) and final (30%) examination, taken at the Library on the lower floor of Steward Hall if you are in or near Louisville, or at an approved, proctored location outside of Louisville (discuss with instructor).

### Technological Requirements

In order to use the online textbook, access course materials, do the interactive exercises, and complete the assignments on the Simmons Online website, **you will need regular access to a fairly competent computer with web access**, with at least 56K dial-up (although faster connections will obviously be better). Computers are

available both in the Main Lab on the second floor, and the lower level Library in Steward Hall, and additional terminals in Parrish Hall. *Lack of such access is not an excuse to request alternative assignments or extensions on deadlines – it is a reason not to take this class.*

### **Course Policies:**

A key mission of this college is to prepare students for their eventual workplace and lifelong experiences. Whatever career a Simmons student pursues, s/he will be evaluated, in part, on “professionalism,” which means to demonstrate professional status, methods, character, or standards while engaging in a source of livelihood or career.

**I believe that all students can learn.** Because of this strong belief, I am committed to holding the highest standards of excellence in preparing and helping students to see themselves as (future) professionals in their chosen fields. In order to be exemplary members of any profession, students must possess the basic dispositions and behaviors expected. Additionally, students must actively seek to acquire a set of professional competencies and abilities in their disciplines through courses and field experiences throughout their college career. Thus, it is incumbent upon students to know the expectations, policies and privileges for this class and at Simmons College of Kentucky.

Students with physical impairments or previously diagnosed learning disabilities that may make it difficult to carry out the course work as outlined and/or require special accommodations, please contact the Dean of Students, Rev. Ken Jobst and the instructor. **Arrangements must be made in the first two weeks of the semester.**

**Ground Rules for Class Discussion:** (Adapted from a University of Louisville Diversity Workshop Handout)

- We know that racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism and other institutionalized forms of oppression exist.
- We know that one of the mechanisms of institutionalized racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, among others is that we are **all** systematically taught misinformation about our own group **and** about members of other groups. This is true for members of privileged and stigmatized groups.

### ***With these conditions in mind:***

- We agree not to blame ourselves or others for the misinformation we have learned about the past, but accept responsibility for not repeating misinformation after we have learned the facts.
- We agree not to project blame on members of other groups for the conditions of their lives.
- We assume that people – both the groups we study and the members of the class – always do the best they can.
- We will actively pursue new and accurate information about our own groups and those of other groups.
- We will share information about ourselves and groups with members of the class, and never demean or devalue ourselves and/or other people for their experiences. **All personal comments will be confidential and kept inside the classroom.**
- We agree to actively combat the myths and stereotypes about our own groups and other groups so that we can break down the walls which prohibit group cooperation and progressive action.
- OUR ULTIMATE GOAL is to create a SAFE ATMOSPHERE for OPEN DISCUSSION.

### **Purchasing Textbooks**

Visit the Atomic Dog Publishing website at <http://www.atomicdog.com> and follow the “students” link. A direct link to the text is here: <http://www.atomicdogpublishing.com/BookDetails.asp?BookEditionID=188>.

### **Warning:**

**This is an online course. It has no face-to-face meetings. Contrary to what many anticipate, this makes it harder, not easier.** This independent study version of POL101 is designed for *self-motivated* students who wish to proceed through the subject material at their own pace. Keep in mind that independent study is not the best option for every student. The lack of lectures or discussion sections means you have fewer opportunities to learn challenging material. To succeed in this course, you must be motivated and well organized, and your reading, studying, and analytical skills should be strong.

### **Important Note:**

- *No incompletes or extensions can be given for this course due to the closure of the SCKY computer lab at the end of the term. All exams and postings must be completed by the dates listed below.*

### **Student's Implied Consent and Agreement:**

By receiving this syllabus **and** remaining enrolled in this course, you give implied consent and agreement to this contract. You understand and accept the requirements and standards that will be used to evaluate your performance in course work or related field experiences. Further, you understand that failure to complete the requirements and demonstrate the professional behaviors and dispositions as outlined in this syllabus may result in your failure in this class, the loss of college credits, and/or the removal from this course or the college if deemed necessary.

### **Web Sites**

Various elements of this class are accessible through several web sites:

- Distance Education. You can access the examination-related components of the course through the SCKY Distance Education Web page at <http://online.simmonscollegeky.edu>. It has all information necessary for signing up for taking the examinations.
- Text Book Web Site. Once you have purchased the book (see instructions below), you will be able to access the ebook and supplemental materials online by logging in at <http://www.atomicdog.com>. The online version of the book includes special features such as interactive tables and charts, practice quizzes, study materials, and the ability for you to highlight and add marginal notes.
- Moodle – POL 101 Site. Other course materials, including the syllabus, and “lecture” power points, are at the class online site at <https://online.simmonscollegeky.edu/>. This is also where you will take the chapter quizzes (the quizzes on the book web page are for practice) and participate in required discussion board threads. It also hosts grades, announcements, and links to the text web page, which includes outlines, exercises, links and practice tests.

### **E-mail Access**

Important class announcements will periodically be sent out via e-mail to your SCKY account. It is therefore imperative that all students either use their SCKY email account, and check it several times a week, or set it to forward to the account you really use. **Please take steps immediately to make sure that this is taken care of, and also make sure that e-mails I send out to the class via Moodle will make it past your spam filter.** This is your responsibility. All SCKY students are now automatically assigned SCKY e-mail accounts which are automatically used as your e-mail address in all SCKY directories. If you do not know how to access your SCKY email account, email the instructor at [mhicks@simmonscollegeky.edu](mailto:mhicks@simmonscollegeky.edu) to find out. **You may also need to set up a Moodle account.**

### **Online Interaction**

We will also engage in interactive web chats a minimum of six times over the course of the semester, on Thursday evenings from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Final dates will be decided during the semester, depending upon number of students participating and their schedules and needs. Information on how to connect for these chats will be provided by the instructor via the bulletin board for POL 101 at [online.simmonscollegeky.edu](http://online.simmonscollegeky.edu).

### **Texts and Required Materials.**

The required materials for this class are:

- *American Government: Your Voice, Your Future*, by Matthew Kerbel, available in a combination hard copy/e-book format. To buy the book, go to the page specifically set up for ordering our text book, and follow the instructions there: <http://www.atomicdog.com/1719451207010>. You can choose either the e-book only, or the e-book with hard copy. The text is only available for purchase directly online, link: <http://www.atomicdogpublishing.com/BookDetails.asp?BookEditionID=188>.
- *Stealing Democracy: The New Politics of Voter Suppression (Hardcover)*, by Spencer Overton.

### **Chapter Quizzes (30% total; 2 points for each chapter quiz)**

For each of our book's sixteen chapters you will take a short multiple choice quiz through the course Moodle page. Of these chapters, the lowest score will be dropped. These are not to be confused with the practice quizzes available at the atomicdog web site. The practice quizzes do not count toward your grade; these do. These quizzes are not proctored, but they are closed book. In order to take them you will need to promise that you are not looking things up in the book, sharing questions or answers with classmates, printing out the quiz, or using a quiz or quiz answers provided by a classmate. *If you engage in any of these activities even once, your grade for all the quizzes will be a zero*, which will make it essentially impossible to pass the class.

**Interactive Activities (15% total for completion of activities in chapters 1-15, and passing short quizzes on them.)**

A big part of what makes this class truly an interactive experience are the interactive activities available for each chapter in the online version of the text book. You will access these directly through the atomicdog web site. After completing these activities for each chapter, except chapter 16, you will take a brief multiple choice/true-false quiz in Moodle to demonstrate that you did them. You will thus take a total of 15 of these quizzes in addition to the regular chapter quizzes.

Due Dates: Interactive activity quizzes for each chapter are due on the same date and at the same time as the chapter quizzes. A list of due dates is included in the table below. It is recommended that you do the activities and take the quiz for them prior to taking the chapter quiz, and that you do not put them off until right before the deadline and then try to race through them. Grading on the activities is credit/no credit (you just need to pass the quiz), and include questions that should be easy if you read through each part of each activity carefully.

**Exams (55% divided into a midterm (25%) and final (30%) examination)**

You will take two proctored examinations based on the assigned readings in the Text – a midterm and final exam each worth 25% and 30% of your grade respectively. See below for detailed instructions for taking these exams. Exams are made up of multiple choice and/or true/false questions. The midterm will cover Parts 1-3 of the Text (chapters 1-8) and the final will cover Parts 4-5 (chapter 9-16). *The final examination is not cumulative.* Tests are closed-book and cannot be taken more than once. *Both exams will be in the system at all times, so take extra care when logging in that you are logging in for the correct exam! If you take the wrong exam there is literally nothing anyone can do to “fix” it.*

The exams cover a wide range of material and require knowledge of broad concepts and specific factual details. The main factor that will distinguish the types of questions on the exams from those on the quizzes is that the quiz questions will tend to be more detail-oriented and the exam questions will tend to be more concept-oriented.

**Bonus Opportunities (up to 5 points maximum added to FINAL GRADE)**

Students may be given bonus opportunities in order to improve their grades. For example, students may be asked to critically analyze, **not** summarize, a film or event broadcast via television or a web site **selected or approved by me**. The analysis should (1) present the core argument or main thesis, (2) organize your critique logically and coherently present your argument, with supporting examples, and a conclusion, and (3) draw a clear relationship between the event and the course content (i.e. readings, lectures, notes etc.). Papers should be 2 pages maximum, typed and double-spaced in a 10- to 12-point font with 1-inch margins. **No handwritten bonus write-ups accepted.**

**The deadline for taking the midterm is Monday of Week 8, October 12. The deadline for taking the Final exam is Friday of Week 16, December 7.**

**PLEASE NOTE:** This course is designed to be flexible with the potential to modify the course content to meet the needs and special interests of the students. The instructor at any time without prior notice may modify the schedule, as necessary. **Also, there is MANDATORY ATTENDANCE for any guest lectures or class presentations.**

**Weeks 1 and 2 – Welcome! (Should be completed by Friday, August 31, 2007)**

**READ:**

**Part 1** Why Should We Care about American Democracy?

Chapter 1. Should We Care about Politics?

Chapter 2. The Constitution and Federalism: Setting the Ground Rules for Politics

Appendices A-F (Text) and The Articles of Confederation (web site)

**REVIEW (optional, but to your benefit):**

“Government in America” PowerPoint file, Chapters 1 and 2

**Week 3 (week ending Friday, September 7, 2007)**

**Part 2** Citizenship and Democracy

**READ:**

Chapter 3. What Is Public Opinion, and What Does It Have to Do with Me?

**Week 4 (week ending Friday, September 14, 2007)**

**READ:**

Chapter 4. Who Are We, and What Do We Do?

**Week 5 (week ending Friday, September 21, 2007)**

**Part 3** Connections between Citizens and Government

**READ:**

Chapter 5. Mass Media: Influencing What We Think About

**Week 6 (week ending Friday, September 28, 2007)**

**READ:**

Chapter 6. Political Parties: Connecting Us to the Electoral Process

**Week 7 (week ending Friday, October 5, 2007)**

**READ:**

Chapter 7. Campaigns and Elections: Vehicles for Democratic Expression

**Week 8 (week ending Friday, October 12, 2007)**

**READ:**

Chapter 8. Interest Groups: Accessing Government through Common Membership

**MIDTERM EXAM (25%) DUE BY FRIDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2007, 8:00 P.M.  
TAKE EXAM IN COMPUTER LAB, 2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR, STEWARD HALL  
CLOSED BOOK – WE RELY UPON YOUR HONOR**

**Week 9 (week ending Friday, October 19, 2007)**

**Part 4** Institutions of Democracy

**READ:**

Chapter 9. Congress

**Week 10 (week ending Friday, October 26, 2007)**

**READ:**

Chapter 10. The Presidency

**Week 11 (week ending Friday, November 2, 2007)**

**READ:**

Chapter 11. The Federal Bureaucracy

**Week 12 (week ending Friday, November 9, 2007)**

**READ:**

Chapter 12. The Judiciary

**Week 13 (week ending Friday, November 16, 2007)**  
**Part 5 What Government Does and How Well It Works**

**READ:**

Chapter 13. Establishing Civil Rights  
Spencer Overton, "Stealing Democracy"

Web Chat: Thursday – 7:00 p.m., details to be announced

**Week 14 (week ending Friday, November 23, 2007)**

**READ:**

Chapter 14. Protecting Civil Liberties  
Spencer Overton, "Stealing Democracy"

Web Chat: Thursday – 7:00 p.m., details to be announced

**Week 15 (week ending Friday, November 30, 2007)**

**READ:**

Chapter 15. Domestic Policy and Policy Making

**Week 16 (week ending Thursday, December 6, 2007, 8:00 p.m.)**

**READ:**

Chapter 16. Foreign and Defense Policies

**FINAL EXAM (30%) DUE BY FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2007, 8:00 P.M.**  
**TAKE EXAM IN COMPUTER LAB, 2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR, STEWARD HALL**  
**CLOSED BOOK – WE RELY UPON YOUR HONOR**

**Appendixes**

- A. Declaration of Independence
- B. Constitution of the United States
- C. Federalist No. 10
- D. Federalist No. 51
- E. Anti-Federalists and the Constitution
- F. Race and the U.S. Constitution
- G. The Presidents and Vice Presidents of the United States
- H. Presidential Election Results, 1789–2004
- I. Party Control of the Senate and House of Representatives, 1901–2007
- J. Twentieth-Century Justices of the Supreme Court

**Discussion Board Postings**

You will have the opportunity to post to several Moodle discussion threads during the course of the term. The first discussion thread offers each of you the chance to introduce yourself. Topical discussion boards for each section of the course, with threads for each chapter will also be available on an optional basis. There is no length requirement other than that you must have something substantive to say. You may of course respond on more than one topic or respond more than once on each discussion board if you like. Remember to use proper netiquette – internet courtesy. Challenging a person's ideas is acceptable; but insulting the person who voiced the ideas discourages the cooperative learning process.

All discussion board participation is voluntary, but strongly encouraged. At the end of the course, if someone's scores are borderline between one grade and the next and that person has engaged in significant discussion board participation, I will bump the grade up to the next level.

It is strongly recommended that students **make appointments with the instructor for taking tests early**. You cannot, however, make appointments more than two weeks in advance of your intended test date (not the test deadline). If you want to take tests early you may do so.

Be sure to schedule yourself enough time to finish a test. Budget extra time for possible software complications: Thirty minutes is the average time needed to complete the exams, and appointments are for one hour. **Budget extra time for possible software complications.** The lab fee for this class also entitles you to use the computers in SCKY for word processing, web browsing, etc. Absolutely no food or drink allowed is in the lab. For more information, check the SCKY Web page at: <http://www.simmonscollegeky.edu/>.

### **Whom Should You Contact?**

For questions concerning administration and scheduling of **exams**, or questions regarding **quiz or exam content, activities, moodle postings, essays** or grading, contact **Professor Hicks** at mhicks@simmonscollegeky.edu.

### **Final Grade Calculation**

Final grades are calculated based on your percentages on the 15 chapter quizzes at 2% each, completion of the 15 interactive activity quizzes at 1% each (credit/no credit), and the midterm and final exams at 25 and 30% respectively. The grades in the class Moodle page will be updated only twice – after the midterm and then again after the final.

After the midterm, I will also post an item on the grade sheet showing your average so far. If necessary, I reserve the right to apply a curve at a level which I deem appropriate. While a curve is a possibility, you should not count on it; rather, you should assume that your grade will be based on your raw scores and the cutoffs below.

If I do use a curve, no one will receive a grade below where the raw scores would have placed you; but depending where you are in relation to the cutoffs, it is possible that some students' letter grades would increase while others would not, or that some students' letter grades would increase more than others.

Cutoffs for letter grades are as follows:

<b>Minus</b>	<b>Plain</b>	<b>Plus</b>
<b>A</b> 90-93.33	93.34-96.66	96.67 +
<b>B</b> 80-83.33	83.34-86.66	86.67-89.99
<b>C</b> 70-73.33	73.34-76.66	76.67-79.99
<b>D</b> 60-63.33	63.34-66.66	66.67-69.99
<b>F</b> 0-59.99		