"The past is never dead; it's not even past."

-- William Faulkner. *Requiem for a Nun*

This course is an introduction to American national politics and government. American government is, by design, complex. Like other introductions, the course sorts through those complexities in a step-by-step study of the political process by which legislators are chosen, laws are passed, and policies are implemented. What makes this course unique, however, is that our primary textbook is the first to adopt an explicit "American political development" (APD) approach to its subject. At the risk of oversimplification, the APD approach to American politics is historical. At the beginning of each chapter, the authors trace the development of one of America’s unique governing institutions, elements, or political forces from its origins, marking periods of continuity and dramatic change along the way. The goal is not just to describe the critical events in our history that have shaped our governmental system, but to better understand how those events reveal how America’s institutional framework has created and continues to create avenues and possibilities for political action and change, while raising obstacles and limiting opportunities for others.

If this is all a bit mystifying, do not worry; we will be spending the first week of the semester explaining it. Also, I am not dogmatic about applying the APD approach to the study of American politics. It provides us with a strong narrative framework to orient our discussions, but one that the class is invited to challenge and debate.

By course’s end, I expect the class to meet the following goals. Students should be able to explain the basic roles and functions of America’s political institutions, identify and explain the political struggles and historical eras that shaped America’s political development and, lastly, to be able to use the knowledge you gained here to become more engaged citizens, if not through direct political action, then in your conversations about politics with family, friends, and co-workers outside the classroom.
So, if you take this course, get ready to become absorbed in the intellectual origins, history, and practice of American politics today.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Course Texts – Available at the Macalester College Bookstore.


All other readings are either available on our “Moodle” class page or easily accessible online.

Finally, everyone is required to follow contemporary politics through another serious news source (e.g. The New York Times, The Washington Post, C-SPAN, slate.com, Meet the Press, The New Republic, the Nation, The Weekly Standard, National Public Radio etc.), blogs (e.g. talkingpointsmemo.com, andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com), targeted political websites (womenandpolitics.org, factcheck.org) and other unconventional, ironic, or semi-serious ones (e.g. The Daily Show). I try to use today’s events as a starting point for our discussions, and the class will be more alive if you keep up with current events.

Take this time to read and think about politics. If you uncover an article, stumble on a website, listen to a program, or see a show that is relevant to what we are discussing in class, let us know. Have fun with it! The more into it you are, the better our class will be.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Your grade for this class will be based on your performance on the exams, your weekly online postings, and daily class participation. The breakdown is as follows.

1. Midterm exam on Thursday, October 21st – 20%
2. Final Exam on Wednesday, December 15th – 35%
3. Weekly online reactions on Moodle – 30%
4. Class participation – 15%

There is more on each of these below, following the course schedule.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Formative Experiences

I. Introductions\(^1\)
   A. "Who are We?"\(^2\)
      2. Syllabus passed out.
   B. Rosh Hoshanah – no class on Thursday, September 9\(^{th}\).

II. American Political Culture
   A. What is America’s political culture?
      1. Marc Landy & Sidney Milkis *American Government: Balancing Democracy and Rights* (Ch. 1, pp. 1-22) [henceforth, referred to as Landy & Milkis\(^3\)].
      2. Landy & Milkis (Ch. 2, pp. 33-62).
      3. Alexis de Tocqueville (1835). *Democracy in America*, Volume 1, Book 1, Author’s Introduction (first four paragraphs), Volume 1, Book 1, Chapter 15, Volume 2, Section Two, Chapters 1, 2 and 4.\(^4\)
         http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DET/TOC/toctoc.html
      4. Visit PEW Research Center People and the Press
   B. Balancing Democracy and Rights
      1. The Declaration of Independence (Landy and Milkis, Appendix 1).

III. The Founding
   A. Why Amend the Articles of Confederation?
      1. Landy & Milkis (Ch. 2, pp. 62-80).
      3. The Constitution (Appendix 2).
      4. Landy & Milkis (Ch. 3).
   B. The Argument for Ratifying the Constitution

\(^1\) Roman numerals in the outline refer to the week of the semester
\(^2\) The letters refer to the days of the week the readings, listed below, will be discussed. The letters A and B refer to Tuesday and Thursday, respectively.
\(^3\) The assigned pages should be read prior to coming to class.
\(^4\) Volume 1, Book 1, Author’s Introduction (first four paragraphs), Volume 1, Book 1, Chapter 15 (Unlimited Power of the Majority of the People in the United States and its Consequences) & Volume 2, Section Two, Chapter 1 (Why Democratic Nations Show a More Ardent Love and Enduring Love of Equality), Chapter 2 (Of Individualism in Democratic Countries) and Chapter 4 (That the Americans Combat the Effects of Individualism with Free Institutions)
IV. The Case Against Ratification, then, and the Call for Institutional Reform. Now
A. The Anti-Federalists
B. The Case for and Against the Filibuster

   **Pivotal Relationships**

V. Crucial Episodes of American Political Development
A. Path Dependence in American Politics
   1. Landy & Milkis (Ch. 1, 21-26).
   2. Landy & Milkis (Ch. 4)
B. An Alternative Reading of American Political History

VI. Limited Government (postings are due either Tuesday or Thursday)
A. The Decentralized Republic
   1. Landy & Milkis (Ch. 5)
B. Economic Liberalism and Democracy
   1. Landy & Milkis (Ch. 6, pp. 243-247, 257-281, 294-295, 300-304).
   2. Essay questions passed out [*mistake!*]

VII. Midterm week
A. Class in review
B. Midterm Exam
   1. **Part one in class on October 21st**
   2. **Part two must be emailed to me by 3pm on Friday, October 22nd.**

VIII. Congress
A. Congress as a Representative Body
   1. Landy & Milkis (Ch. 7)
   2. Group assignments passed out

   **Fall Break!!!**
IX. Congress and the President
   A. The Rise of the Modern Presidency
      1. Election Day! Vote!
      2. Landy & Milks (Ch. 8).

   B. Executive-Legislative Affairs: The Obama Presidency as a Case Study
      3. Everyone is assigned to find, read, and be prepared to discuss an article, from a reputable source, on the expected impact of the election results on the Obama White House's forthcoming legislative agenda.

X. The Bureaucracy
   A. TBA to accommodate the expected birth of my baby.
   B. The Rise of the Administrative State
      1. Landy & Milks (Ch. 10)

XI. The Judiciary
   A. The Supreme Court and Judicial Review
      1. Landy & Milks (Ch. 9)
   B. The Debate over Constitutional Interpretation

Political Forces

XII. Political Parties
   A. The Evolution of Modern Party Politics and Impact of Partisan Politics on the Distribution of Wealth & Income in America
      1. Landy & Milks, Ch. 11.
   B. Thanksgiving – no class

XIII. Political Participation and Public Opinion
   A. A Crisis in Citizenship?
      1. Landy & Milks, Ch. 12 (638-640, 656-682).
B. Polling the People: To What Ends?
   4. View selections from PBS Frontline’s The Persuaders in class.

XIV. The Internet as Salve or Irritant?
   A. The Impact of the Internet on Political Participation
   B. Class in Review

Final Exam in class on Wednesday, December 15th from 1:30 to 3:30pm

ASSIGNMENTS, EXPECTATIONS, AND POLICIES

Weekly Assignments
Beginning September 16th, I will post a discussion question every Thursday tying the upcoming week’s readings on Moodle to a contemporary political controversy or issue. Typically, I will accompany the question with one or two required and short one to three page readings such as a newspaper article, e-magazine articles, or online blog posting. You are required to post an online response to this question. Except for the first two postings, all postings must incorporate or respond to one or more of the comments that have already been posted.

On September 16th, I will distribute a handout in class describing the expectations and rubric for grading these online written assignments. To give you a sense of what’s required, postings are expected to be two to three substantive paragraphs in length, or between 200 and 400 words.

Each week, I will identify three of the best postings for all to see. Those posters will receive a double credit, crediting them with an A and exempting them from the following next week’s forum.

All told, there will be eleven opportunities to post. I grade the best ten. This means that everyone’s allowed to skip or drop one at no penalty.

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5 Excepting October 14th, the Thursday before the midterm.
Midterm and Final Exam
There are two exams, and each exam has two parts. The first part is taken in class, and involves a mix of multiple choice questions, short concept identifications, and short-answer questions covering the assigned readings, discussions, and lectures. **The second part of the exam is a take-home essay question, which you have 24 hours to answer.** These essays should be approximately four pages, double-spaced or 1000 words in length using normal font and paper with one-inch margins. Essays are penalized that unreasonably precede or exceed the word limit by 250 words or one page. The first parts are not cumulative; the second part or essay section is cumulative.

Grading the Weekly Online Forum Postings
I will assign letter grades for both essays, and then assign percentages for the purpose of weighting them later with the points accumulated on participation and on exams.

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<td>98</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<td>B</td>
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Class Participation
The better the discussions, the better the class. So, please come to class on time and prepared. Express your views, but be respectful of others who offer an alternative point of view.

Attendance is taken daily. Excused absences include (1) illness with a signed note from a medical clinic, physician or nurse, (2) participation in a special, college-related event (such as chorus, band, or athletics) that is not a practice, and (3) other unique circumstances (such as a graduate school interview, death in the family, etc.), which are excused on a case-by-case basis. Unless it is unexpected, you should notify me about your absence at least one week in advance.

If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to check with other students to see what you might have missed and collect any handouts distributed (please do not email the instructor asking for notes, a synopsis, lecture reenactment, etc). There is no mechanism for making up classes.

Cell phones, iPhones, iPods, BlackBerry devices and other technologies are to be stowed away and turned off before class. I really discourage the use of laptop computers from being used, unless there is a documented reason for using it. Eating and drinking is okay, so long as it is not disruptive.

Note about participation: While I know some students are more confident speaking before their peers than others, your vocation will likely involve group speaking in some capacity.
Take a career in public policy, for example. It’s hard to influence decision makers if they cannot hear you. If they hear you, they are more likely to pay attention to what you write. Conversely, decision makers are likely to tune out those who try to dominate discussions and not take into account or, more accurately, listen to the opinions of others. In that spirit, here are the standards by which I will weekly grade your course participation.

- A C grade (75) is given to students who that week attended class, actively listen, but when called upon, it is unclear if they read the material assigned for that closely.
- A B grade (85) is given to students who contributed to discussion in a meaningful way such that it is clear that they prepared for class and actively listening to the discussion.
- An A grade (95) is given to students who demonstrated all the criteria above, but who made a noteworthy contribution in class, revealing a higher level of engagement with the material through a close reading with it and independence of thought; an attempt to make connections between the readings and/or other course discussions and readings; and/or connecting comments to other points that are made, by myself or others, in a way that keeps the conversation going and, hopefully, elevating it.

If I am absent, use the class to lecture, to proctor an exam, or show a film. everyone will receive the maximum amount of points for that class.

There is a one-third grade deduction for being more than five minutes late to class, taking an extended leave of absence, or for taking the time to nap.

Everyone can miss two class periods, without penalty. The exception is, of course, on days in which you have a group assignment, presentation, or exam. Participation grades are docked one-third for every unexcused day missed after two.

You are welcome to ask me what your participation grade is any time, but I will let everyone know what their individual participation grades on an attachment on their graded midterms.

**Tabulating the Final Grades**
To tabulate the final grades, I use the following table.

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<th>Grade</th>
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<td>B-</td>
<td>79.5 – 82.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>89.5 – 92.4</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>76.5 – 79.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>86.5 – 89.4</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>72.5 – 76.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>82.5 – 86.4</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>69.5 – 72.4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
OTHER NOTES

Email: I prefer to meet during office hours than respond via email. If you do email me, please account for a 24-hour grace period on weekdays and 48-hour grace period on weekends for responding to emails. If it is critical that I respond sooner, please note that in the subject line.

Incompletes: A final grade of "incomplete" is rarely given and granted only in the case of documented events or issues that prevent fulfillment of all the course requirements.

Academic Dishonesty: Do not cheat or plagiarize another's work! This applies to either the essay or the exams. If you do, you will receive a zero for that assignment with no possibility of making that up.

Disabilities:
Lastly, I am committed to providing assistance to help you be successful in this course. Reasonable accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please meet with the Associate Dean of Students who serves as the coordinator for services for students with disabilities. It is important to meet with her at the beginning of the semester to ensure that your accommodations are approved and in place to begin the semester successfully. The Associate Dean can be reached in the Office of Student Affairs, 119 Weyerhaeuser, by phone at 651-696-6220, or email llandrem@macalester.edu.