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**Department of Politics**

**Module Handbook**

**POL 2047**

**American Politics**

**15 credits - 2011**

POL 2047 (15 credits)  
Website: [www.jkarp.com/f2011/](http://www.jkarp.com/f2011/)

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University of Exeter

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## American Politics

**Module description:** This module provides an introduction to American political behaviour and institutions. We will discuss the design and rationale for the American political system and the implications it has for both citizen involvement and governing. We will also examine how reforms to governmental institutions and processes influence the way citizens interact with government. Throughout the module we will make comparisons between the American system and other democracies around the world.

**Readings:** The following is a list of essential and recommended readings. These are available for purchase at the campus bookstore. Copies are also available in the library but there are limited copies and they are only available for short term loan (ready text). Additional readings are available on the module website (web).

- Fiorina, Morris P., Paul E. Peterson, D., Bertram Johnson and William G. Mayer. 2011. *America's New Democracy*. 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. Longman Press.
- Brunell, Thomas L. 2008. *Redistricting and Representation: Why Competitive Elections are Bad for America*. Routledge. (available as an ebook through the library)
- Dahl, Robert A. 2002. *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Dalton, Russell J. 2008. *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation is Reshaping American Politics*. CQ Press.
- Fiorina, Morris P. 2010. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. 3rd Edition. Longman Press.
- Gelman, Andrew. 2008. *Red State, Blue State, Poor State: Why Americans Vote the Way They Do*. Princeton University Press. (available as an ebook through the library)
- Streb, Matthew J. 2008. *Rethinking American Electoral Democracy*. Routledge
- Wattenberg, Martin P. 2008. *Is Voting for Young People?* Longman Press.

**Lectures and tutorials:** The course is taught by weekly lectures, linked tutorials and independent study. Lectures present the theoretical framework, key issues and debates and help guide your reading. Tutorials consist of presentations and group discussion focused on study questions and issues raised by students. You will be given a handout for the tutorials which will follow from the lecture topics. All students will give presentations and will be expected to have read enough to contribute to the group discussions.

**Assessment:** One 1500-2000 word essay (50%) and a final exam (50%). Details about the essay will be distributed in class in the second week. You will be required to submit your essay to "Turnitin" (see details below) AND submit hard copies to the SSIS college office by November 17 at 4pm. Failure to submit your essay to Turnitin by the due date will result in a 5 point penalty. In addition, you will not receive a mark for your essay until you submit the essay to Turnitin. A 1 ½ hour final exam is scheduled for the week of 10-15<sup>th</sup> of January. The exams office (ext. 3020) will contact students by email regarding the time and place of the exam.

**Turnitin:** As discussed above, you must submit your essay to Turnitin which allows students to test their essays and module leaders to inspect them for evidence of plagiarism. This can be accessed through the Exeter Learning Environment (ELE). Click on the folder and follow the instructions to upload your essay in Word into the system. Note that you can only do this once. The system matches the text of your essay against all the text in its databases. All reports indicate a degree of matching of references and quotations, which is expected. However, higher levels of matching obviously indicate there is likely plagiarism. The system retains all text submitted to it. Submission of the same text in two different essays will therefore be detected if both are uploaded to Turnitin.

**PLEASE NOTE: ALL ASSESSED WORK MUST BE SUBMITTED TO THE SSIS COLLEGE OFFICE BY 4.00 PM ON THE DUE DATE. SEVERE PENALTIES APPLY AS DESCRIBED IN THE CSSIS UG HANDBOOK.**

**Intended learning outcomes:** The following list is provided to give you a general idea of what all students are expected to learn by taking this course. Please keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list.

1. Describe the rationale for the design of the American political system and how it differs from that used in other modern democracies.
2. Be familiar with the implications of that design for governing and the policy making process.
3. Understand why some citizens choose to participate in the political process while others do not.
4. Understand the role that political parties and interest groups play in the political process.
5. Understand how citizens form opinions about government and public policy and why their opinions may change over time.
6. Be able to explain what the most important factors are that determine why citizens vote the way they do and why it matters.
7. Understand the role of congressional committees in the legislative process
8. Understand the powers and limitations of presidential power in domestic and foreign policy.
9. Understand the role of the U.S. Supreme Court in the political process.
10. Describe and evaluate political and electoral reforms and their likely consequences.

### **Module Schedule**

#### **3 October (Week 1): The U.S. Constitutional Framework**

Topics: The problem of tyranny of the majority and the solution

Essential reading: *America's New Democracy* Ch. 1-2 and Federalist papers #10 and #51; *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* Ch. 1-3

Recommended reading: *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* Ch. 4-7

*Rethinking American Electoral Democracy* Ch.1, 9; *America's New Democracy* Ch. 3.

#### **10 October (Week 2): Ideology and Public Opinion**

Topics: Conservative vs. liberal, polls, and trends in public opinion

Essential reading: *America's New Democracy* Ch.4-6; *Good Citizen* Ch. 6.

Recommended reading: *Culture War?* Ch. 1-6 ; *Red State, Blue State, Rich State, Poor State* Ch. 1, 10. (web)

#### **17 October (Week 3): Political Parties and Interest Groups**

Topics: Reasons for the two party system, party competition, role of party identification

Essential reading: *America's New Democracy* Ch.9; *Culture War?* Ch. 7; *Redistricting and Representation* Ch. 1-2

Recommended reading: *Culture War?* Ch. 8-10. *Rethinking American Electoral Democracy* Ch.5

#### **24 October (Week 4): Voting and Elections**

Topics: The problem of low voter turnout, understanding vote choice, the 2008 election

Essential reading: *America's New Democracy* Ch.7-8; *Is Voting for Young People?* Ch. 4, 6

*Rethinking American Electoral Democracy* Ch.2.

Recommended reading: *The Good Citizen* Ch. 1-4; *Redistricting and Representation* Ch. 3; *Is Voting for Young People?* Ch.7.; *Red State, Blue State* Ch. 1-2.

#### **31 October (Week 5): Direct Democracy**

Topics: Arguments for and against direct democracy, initiative, referendum, recall. Can the American system be improved?

Essential Reading: *Rethinking American Electoral Democracy* Ch.4, “Direct Democracy” in *Reforming the Republic* (web)

Recommended reading: “Direct Legislation: When is it used and when does it pass?” in *Citizens as Legislators* (web)

### **7 November (Week 6): Representation**

Topics: Descriptive and substantive representation, women and minorities; redistricting, racial gerrymandering and incumbency advantage, congressional elections

Essential reading: *Redistricting and Representation* Ch. 4-5; *Rethinking American Electoral Democracy* Ch.7

Recommended reading: *Redistricting and Representation* Ch. 6-7

### **14 November (Week 7): Congress**

**Note: Essays due on 17 November by 4pm.**

Topics: Party leadership, committees, and the legislative process

Essential reading: *America’s New Democracy* Ch.10; *Redistricting and Representation* Ch. 6-7; *The Good Citizen* Ch. 7

### **21 November (Week 8): The Courts**

Topics: Principle of judicial review, activism and restraint, role in the political process, *Baker v. Carr*, *Shaw v. Reno*, *Bush v. Gore*.

Essential Reading: *America’s New Democracy* Ch.13; Except from *The Choices Justices Make* (web),

Recommended reading: “The Impact of Bush v. Gore on Public Perceptions and Knowledge of the Supreme Court” (web). *America’s New Democracy* Ch. 14-15.

### **28 November (Week 9): The President**

Topics: Formal and informal powers of the presidency, president in the legislative arena

Essential Reading: *America’s New Democracy* Ch.11; *The Politics of the Presidency* Ch.10 (web)

Recommended reading: “Monica Lewinsky's Contribution to Political Science” (on web).

### **5 December (Week 10): Presidency and Foreign Policy**

Topics: War powers, imperial presidency,

Essential Reading: “Freedom Fries and Presidential Power” in *The new imperial presidency: renewing presidential power after Watergate* (web); *A Divider, Not a Uniter* Ch.8 (web),

Recommended Reading: *The Imperial Presidency* especially Ch.3 and Ch.9. (ready text)

### **12 December (Revision week): No class**

Topics: Opportunity to catch up on reading before break and review materials in advance of the final exam.

### **9-14 January: Finals Week**

## Information about Essays and Marking

**Essay writing guide:** You can find lots of advice relating to essay writing at:  
<http://www.huss.ex.ac.uk/politics/undergrad/polEssayWriting.pdf>

You can also obtain support from Academic Services who provide one-to-one guidance and information on all aspects of academic study and skills. See <http://www.services.ex.ac.uk/edu/student-learning-skills/resources.shtml>

**Essay marking:** The following criteria will be used in assessing your essays:

1. Definition of the topic
  - Has the topic been clearly defined and directly addressed?
2. Structure of the essay
  - Does the introduction present a clear statement of the issues to be covered?
  - Does the essay have a clear structure or organisation in which a) the main points are developed logically; and b) the relevance of the material to the theme or argument is clear?
  - Is there an effective conclusion which draws together the main points?
3. Content
  - Is there evidence of adequate reading and research?
  - Has the question being answered?
  - Is the breadth of coverage adequate?
  - Are the issues and ideas analysed in sufficient depth?
  - Are arguments supported by evidence, examples, sources and quotations?
4. Analysis
  - Are the arguments logical and consistent?
  - Are opinions based on evidence and/or logic?
  - Does the essay show evidence of independent thought?
5. Presentation
  - Fluency and style of writing
  - Spelling, grammar, paragraphing
  - Presentation of data: effective use of figures and tables and correct use of units and quantities
  - Neatness and legibility
  - Sources: are sources acknowledged? Are references cited? Are references presented correctly?

**Overlap of assessed work:** Students are reminded that they are not permitted to submit the same piece of work for assessment in two different modules, or substantially reproduce essay or exam answers within modules. Essays or dissertations which are found to duplicate entirely, or in part, the work which a student has already submitted for assessment will be subject to a penalty depending on an assessment of the severity of the case. In extreme cases a mark of 0 might be awarded. Students who are concerned about possible overlap in their assessed work should seek advice from their Module Leaders. Students who are resitting modules where they are required to re-submit coursework in all modules (other than the dissertation) must ensure that the coursework is new work and has not previously formed part of any assignment assessed by the Department.

**Plagiarism:** Cheating (plagiarism) is defined as any illegitimate behaviour designed to deceive those setting, administering and marking the assessment. Cheating may take various forms, including:

- 1.1. The use of unauthorized books, notes, electronic aids or other materials in an examination
- 1.2. Obtaining an examination paper ahead of its authorized release
- 1.3. Acting dishonestly in any way including the fabrication of data, whether before, during or after an examination or other assessment so as to either obtain or offer to others an unfair advantage in that examination or assessment;
- 1.4. Collusion i.e. the representation of another's work or ideas as one's own without appropriate acknowledgement or referencing, where the owner of the work knows of the situation and both parties work towards the deceit of marker. (In plagiarism the author of the work has not knowingly authorized the use of her or his work).
- 1.5. Plagiarism i.e. the act of representing another's work or idea as one's own without appropriate acknowledgement or referencing. There are three main types of plagiarism:
  - 1.5.1. Direct copying from a book, article, fellow student's essay, student or lecturer's handout, thesis, web page or other source without proper acknowledgement.

1.5.2. Claiming individual ideas derived from a book, article, handout, thesis, web page or other source as one's own, and incorporating them into one's own work without acknowledging the source of these ideas.

1.5.3. Overly depending on the work of one or more works (as outlined in 1.5.1 above) without proper acknowledgement of the source. By, for example, constructing a piece of written work based on extracting large sections of text from another source and merely linking these together with a few of one's own sentences.

How to avoid being accused of plagiarism: In order to avoid being accused of the more inadvertent forms of plagiarism you need to ensure that you adopt the following aspects of good practice:

2.1. Adopt a good note-taking technique.

2.1.1. You need to make sure while you are reading and taking notes that you keep accurate records of the author, title, and publication details of source, including page numbers (if relevant).

2.1.2. You need to make clear in your own notes where you have copied a quote word for word from your source, so that when you come to write up your notes you know which parts are in your own words, and which are in the words of your source.

2.1.3. Similarly you need to make clear in your own notes where you have taken an idea from your source.

2.2. Accurate referencing. Make sure that you have referenced your work in accordance with the referencing guide set out in your departmental handbook; remember referencing conventions do vary between disciplines.

Plagiarism consists of any form of passing off, or attempting to pass off, the knowledge or work of others as one's own. It is a form of cheating. Examples of plagiarism include unattributed quotes from a book, magazine or article; copying from the notes or essays of others; the submission of work actually written or dictated by others; and unattributed use of other peoples' ideas. Remember, plagiarism includes information from books, newspapers, journals and the Internet. All work will be checked against specialist plagiarism software. You should be aware that University rules on plagiarism are strict and can result in failing the course and, at times, expulsion.