Overview:
The primary purpose of this course is to instill in the student a basic understanding of how the American political system works. The secondary objective of this course is to familiarize students with the philosophical traditions and the major historical events that have shaped today's institutions, politics, and policies. The tertiary goal of this course is to prepare students for future democratic citizenship by augmenting your political awareness, interest in politics, sense of citizen duty, and capacity for critical analysis of the American political scene. To accomplish these objectives, the course lectures, readings, and assignments have been organized to cover the following key areas: (1) the Formal Institutions of American Government, (2) Early Governance, the Constitutional Framework & Political Ideology, (3) Public Policy & the Policy-Making Process (4) Citizen Participation & Democracy, and (4) Contemporary Issues & Controversies in American Political Life.

Requirements & Grading:
For each class meeting I have listed required readings. Students are expected to come to class having read everything on the required reading list. The required texts for the course are:


Any reading assignments not from these two texts will be provided in class or made available on our course website on Blackboard, [http://blackboard.stonybrook.edu](http://blackboard.stonybrook.edu). In addition, several class meetings have news stories from democracynow.org assigned to them. Democracynow.org makes these stories available in video or text format; all students should have internet access and should thus be able to watch the videos for these assigned news stories. To access these stories, 1) Go to democracynow.org, 2) click on “past shows” listed in the row menu at the top of the site, and 3) locate the show by following the links for year, month, and day.

The focus of this course is learning and thinking, not memorization and regurgitation. There will be no MIDTERM or FINAL examinations for this course. Instead, the course will rely more heavily on student READING. To ensure that students are holding up their end of the bargain and actually completing the assigned readings, the core of each student's grade in this class will be based upon weekly reading-check quizzes.
Grading will be based upon students’ scores on 14 weekly reading-check quizzes and 4 political news coverage assignments. The actual percentage breakdown in terms of final course grade is as follows:

**Weekly Reading Quizzes (50%)**
**Political News Coverage Assignments (50%)**

**Reading-Check Quizzes:**
The reading quizzes are in place for me to make sure that you are doing the reading. There are 14 weeks of class meetings with assigned readings, and thus there will be 1 weekly reading-check quiz each for each of these 14 weeks. Each reading check quiz will consist of 10 questions, combining multiple choice. These will be derived from the assigned readings for the specific class meeting in which the quiz is administered (if the quiz is on Tuesday, it will cover the readings due that Tuesday). There will be ABSOLUTELY NO make-up quizzes: Up to 3 missed quizzes will be given the value of the average score of all of your quiz scores at the end of the semester. After three missed quizzes, the student receives a zero that is non-negotiable. There will be one quiz a week, but I will not tell you in advance which day. This will be done to encourage students to read for each class meeting. While I have no official attendance policy, any gambles students take with their grades as pertains to attendance, missed quizzes, and average score substitutions will be the sole responsibility of the student.

**Political News Coverage Assignments:**
Increasing one's awareness, information, and concern about important political and economic events in the national and international arena is essential to citizenship. The purpose of these assignments are to get students to pay at least some attention to news issues, to think about matters that transcend the concerns of college life, and to think about how these events matter to you, the country, the world, at all? This assignment essentially requires students to read two news articles per week. Every two weeks, on the Thursday meeting, students will be required to turn in the 4 new articles they read as well as a reflection paper. There are 4 of these assignments for this course. The details of this assignment are as follows:

- 2 articles per week, 4 per each assignment, dated for confirmation, submitted with reflection paper. Due weeks 1 through 8.
- No more than 2 articles per assignment can cover the same issue, and these two articles on the same issue must appear on different days or news sources
- Articles must be relevant to issues of politics, government, labor & economy, public opinion, citizen participation, or foreign affairs
- 1 of the 4 articles must address an issue deemed a social/political problem
- 1 of the 4 articles must be from [www.democracynow.org](http://www.democracynow.org)
- Reflection paper should be at least 2 pages, but no longer than 3 pages (double spaced)
- Reflection paper must address the following questions:
  - Why you think this issue is newsworthy?
  - How does this issue relate, if at all, to any material covered in the course?
  - Does the issue affect your life? If not, why? If so, how?
  - Does the issue affect other people? Who and How?
Class Schedule & Reading Assignments

I. Foundations

Week 1
Sept. 1: Introduction to the Course
Sept. 3: Intro to American Government
  Reading: LD, chpt. 1; DFTF, chpts. 1 & 2

Week 2
Sept. 8: Development of the American State
  Reading: LD, chpt. 2; DFTF, chpt. 4
Sept. 10: Development of the American State
  Reading: LD, chpt. 3; DFTF, chpt. 5
Due: Political News Coverage Assignment #1

Week 3
September 15: Civil Liberties & Rights
  Reading: LD, chpt. 5; DFTF, chpts. 10 & 11
September 17: American Political Culture
  Reading: LD, chpt. 9; DFTF, chpt. 3

Week 4
September 22: Ideology and Opinion in the U.S.
  Reading: Shively, Power & Choice, chpt. 2; Hochschild, Voices of Dissent, “What is the American Dream?”
September 24: Institutions of Government: The Presidency
  Reading: LD, chpt. 7; DFTF, chpt. 16
Due: Political News Coverage Assignment #2

Week 5
September 29: Institutions of Government: Congress
  Reading: LD, chpt. 6; DFTF, chpt. 15
October 1: Institutions of Government: The Judiciary
  Reading: LD, chpt. 4; DFTF, chpt. 18

Week 6
October 6: Institutions of Government: The Bureaucracy
  Reading: LD, chpt. 8; DFTF, chpt. 17
October 8: Non-Governmental Political Institutions: Political Parties
  Reading: LD, chpt. 13; Democracynow.org, Oct. 2, 2008 “No Debate: How the Republican and Democratic Parties Secretly Control the Presidential Debates”
Due: Political News Coverage Assignment #3

Week 7
October 13: Non-Governmental Political Institutions: The Media
  Reading: LD, chpt. 10; DFTF, chpt. 13
October 15: The Democratic Process: Elections and Participation
  Reading: LD, chpts. 12; DFTF, chpt. 14

Week 8
October 20: The Democratic Process: Interest Groups and Pluralism
  Reading: LD, chpt. 11; DFTF, chpts. 12 & 19
October 22: Public Policy & The Policy Making Process
  Reading: LD, chpt. 14; DFTF, chpts. 6 & 8
Due: Political News Coverage Assignment #4

II. Current Issues in American Politics

Week 9
October 27: The Culture Wars

Reading: Frank, Voices of Dissent, “What’s the Matter with America?”; Fiorinia, Culture War?, chpts. 1, 2 & 3

October 29: The Culture Wars

Reading: Fiorinia, Culture War?, chpts. 4 & 5; Gelman, Red State Blue State Rich State Poor State, chpts. 1 & 2

Week 10
November 3: The Economic Crisis & Government Regulation of Wall St.

Reading: Phillips, Bad Money, Preface xi-xxvii


November 5: The Economic Crisis & Government Regulation of Wall St.

Reading: Philips, Bad Money, Preface xxvii-lxxiv

Democracynow.org, Feb 13, 2009 “Robert Kuttner and Michael Hudson on the Obama Administration’s $789 Billion Economic Stimulus Package and $2.5 Trillion Bank Recovery Plans”


Week 11
November 10: Energy & the Environment

Reading: DFTF, chpt. 9; Heinberg, Peak Everything; ILSL policy brief, “Energy Self-Reliant States.” & “Concentrating Solar and Decentralized Power”

The End of Suburbia

November 12: The Politics of Food


Week 12
November 17: Politics of the Local Economy

Reading: Wendell Berry, “The Idea of a Local Economy”; Mitchell, Big-Box Swindle, Introduction & chpt. 1

November 19: Politics of the Local Economy

Reading: Mitchell, Big-Box Swindle, chpt. 2

Week 13 No Classes (Thanksgiving Break)

Week 14
December 1: The Politics of Healthcare


December 3: Healthcare Reform

Reading: Woolhandler & Himmelstein, Physicians for A National Health Program “Paying for National Health Insurance—And Not Getting It.”

Democracynow.org, Aug 14, 2009 “You Do Not Cut Deals with the System That Has To Be Replaced: Ralph Nader on Secret White House Agreements with the Drug
Industry.”

Week 15
December 8: Political Corruption & the Failure of Democracy
Reading: William Greider, Who Will Tell the People, chpts. 1 & 3
December 10 (Last Day of Class): Political Corruption & the Failure of Democracy
Reading: William Greider, Who Will Tell the People, chpts. 4 & 5

Final Exam Weeks
NO FINAL EXAM
NO CLASS MEETINGS

The University Senate Undergraduate and Graduate Councils have authorized that the following required statements appear in all teaching syllabi (graduate and undergraduate courses) on the Stony Brook Campus.

Americans with Disabilities Act:
If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, ECC (Educational Communications Center) Building, room128, (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

Academic Integrity:
Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Faculty are required to report and suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/

Critical Incident Management:
Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn.