Administrative Unit: History and Social Sciences Department

Course Prefix and Number: POSC 111

Course Title: American National Government

Number of Credit Hours: 3  Lecture Hours: 3  Laboratory Hours: 0

Catalog Description: Survey of the American political system, with emphasis on the Constitution, governmental structure, the political process and the economic system.

Prerequisite(s)/Corequisite(s): None.

Text(s): Most current editions of the following:


Any other standard text for American National Government.

Course Objectives:

- To survey topics related to American government.
- To increase awareness of political issues.

Measurable Learning Outcomes:

- Understand Congress, the Presidency, the Bureaucracy, and the Courts.
- Understand the U.S. Constitution’s structure and its primary provisions.
- Identify significant Supreme Court decisions interpreting the Bill of Rights.
- Describe the development of American federalism and explain its current application.
- Explain the impact of interest groups on American political decision making.
- Understand American political parties, their development, and their significance.

Topical Outline (major areas of coverage):

Note: Students enrolling in POSC 111 should be expected to improve their research and writing skills. They should be required to write a minimum of six typewritten pages as research assignment(s) or essay.

- Views concerning the proper role of government
• Laissez Faire vs. Activism
• Elitism vs. Pluralism
• People who have contributed to the role played by the American government, including Adam Smith, John Locke, Rousseau, and others

• The American Constitution
  • Background
  • Content
  • Interpretations

• Federalism
  • Constitutional Provisions
  • Court Interpretations
  • Historical Development
  • Role of federal grants-in-aid

• Civil Liberties
  • Court interpretations of the First Amendment; Speech, Press, Religion, and Assembly
  • Due Process Rights of Amendments 4-8
  • Other rights added over time

• Interest Groups
  • Examples of groups
  • Interest group tactics

• Political Parties
  • Historical development
  • Structure of party organization
  • Differences between major parties
  • Minor parties in America

• Elections
  • Primary System
  • Districting, their problems, and Court interventions
  • Presidential elections; primaries, conventions, the Electoral College

• Congress
  • Structure, committees, leadership, political parties
  • Powers and responsibilities
  • The process of legislation
• The Presidency
  • Powers and responsibilities
  • Constitutional requirements
  • Advisors

• The Federal bureaucracy
  • The need for bureaucracy; why the size of government has increased
  • The scope of bureaucratic activity
  • The difficulty of controlling the bureaucracy

• Federal Courts
  • Types of law
  • Organizational structure of federal courts
  • Court procedure
  • Judicial Review

Recommended maximum class size for this course: 35

Library Resources: Online databases are available at http://www.ccis.edu/offices/library/resources.asp. You may access them from off-campus using your eServices login and password when prompted.

Prepared by: David Roebuck

Date: March 23, 2006

NOTE: The intention of the master syllabus is to provide an outline of the contents of this course, as specified by the faculty of Columbia College, regardless of who teaches the course, when it is taught or where it is taught. Faculty members teaching this course for Columbia College are expected to facilitate learning pursuant to the course objectives and cover the subjects listed in the topical outline. However, instructors are also encouraged to cover additional topics of interest so long as those topics are relevant to the course’s subject. The master syllabus is, therefore, prescriptive in nature but also allows for a diversity of individual approaches to course material.

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