

POLITICAL SCIENCE 101 (B): POLITICS AND NATIONAL ISSUES
Spring 2009
T R 2-315 PM, 204 Harrison Hall

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this course is to serve as an introduction to politics and U.S. national issues within the context of the Miami Plan as a Foundation course. With an eye toward meeting the goals of the Miami Plan, this course focuses on a range of issues in American politics, including (but not limited to) health care, poverty, education, energy, torture, and homeland security. We will also pay very close attention to the transition and “first 100 days” of the new Obama administration. We will approach these issues, and the goals of the Miami Plan, from the perspective of the discipline of political science as we try to understand these issues, sort through competing claims, and ultimately ponder the responsibilities of citizenship in a liberal democracy.

READINGS

Brooks Jackson & Kathleen Hall Jamieson (2007), *unSpun: Finding Facts in a World of Disinformation*. NY: Random House.

CQ Researcher (2008), *Issues for Debate in American Public Policy*. Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press (9/ed.).

Tony Robinson (2009), *The New Administration's First 100 Days Workbook*. NY: Longman.
Other readings will be emailed to you and/or posted at the course BlackBoard site.

POL 101 AND THE MIAMI PLAN FOR LIBERAL EDUCATION

This course contributes the goals of the Miami Plan at the Foundation level in a variety of ways, but the overarching goal is to introduce students to how political scientists approach the Miami Plan's goals through the study of political issues in the U.S.

Critical Thinking: For political scientists, critical thinking begins in identifying and understanding the nature of a political question or issue; asking the key question: “of what is this an instance?” Key characteristics of political issues include that they are contested, that they often involve winners and losers, and that call for reasoned judgment rather than assertions of personal taste. Political issues are neither just matters of subjective opinion nor questions for which there is one right answer. This course seeks to cultivate in students the ability to think analytically and to engage the evidence that different perspectives offer as the pursuit of solutions to political problems. Most political issues are neither simply factual nor simply a matter of personal taste. Instead, most require the evaluation of evidence and reasoning in the context of different perspectives, the evaluation of claims made by different political actors involved in a question, the examination of the assumptions that underlie competing arguments, and the weighing of competing values and goals so as to arrive at one's own reasoned judgments. This class won't tell you what you should think about health care in America, or poverty, or crime (catch The West Wing reference: “crime, boy, I don't know...”), or whether or not we ought to torture alleged terrorists, but it is meant to help you develop the skills to make informed judgments amidst the profusion of competing arguments, sources, and information that surround these issues.

Learning outcomes: 1) be able to distinguish political questions from fact questions and from questions of subjective preference; 2) identify major issues and alternative answers related to political questions; 3) find and evaluate evidence related to political questions; 4) identify assumptions underlying claims related to political questions; 5) draw conclusions about one's own answers to political questions.

Activities and assignments: In-class exercises, reading assignments, and out-of-class assignments that require students to distinguish political questions, identify and evaluate assumptions, arguments, and evidence advanced in relation to political questions, and draw conclusions. Students will also engage in research exercise to learn to find and evaluate information.

Understanding Contexts: One key insight of political science is that “where you stand (on an issue) often depends on where you sit (what your interests are).” This observation is not meant to be cynical about the motives of others; rather, it teaches us to be cautious about the claims that others make about political issues. This means that we consider the obvious stakes that political actors have in an issue as well as the less-obvious interests or stakes. We will develop skills to identify these stakes, and cultivate the understanding that the answers to political questions may seem more or less appealing depending on one's context, and that context (rather than malevolence) may influence a political actor's position on an issue.

Learning outcomes: be able to identify how context affects positions taken on political questions.

Assignments and activities: discussion of reading assignments and other materials to examine how context affects positions on political questions.

Engaging with other Learners: Politics is a quintessentially social activity. It is about what goes on in the public sphere, the *polis*, and we seek to cultivate in students the skills to engage with others more effectively. Realizing the limitations imposed by fairly large class size, this course will provide opportunities for students to engage with other learners in a variety of ways. Effective engagement involves both *effective reception* (critical reading and listening skills, ability to evaluate information, etc.) of information and ideas, and *effective articulation* of one's own position or analysis. These skills are cultivated through reading, writing, questioning, and discussion. I will lecture, but I will also ask you questions; and you'll ask me questions. Students will ask questions of each other. We will often break into smaller groups for discussion or debate. And teams of you may be assigned certain tasks and required to report back to the class.

Learning outcomes: 1) become more effective in critical reading and listening; 2) become more effective in articulating one's own position or analysis.

Assignments & activities: 1) class discussions directed toward promoting more effective articulation and listening; 2) discussions and analyses of assigned readings to promote critical reading; 3) small group discussions and debates.

Reflecting and Acting: Political scientists have long been concerned with informed political action by citizens, which is also a prerequisite for a healthy liberal democracy. Students in political science classes do not directly engage in political action (at least not in class); rather, they develop skills and acquire knowledge that will assist them in their own political actions. Our focus is to help students identify access points that they might use to get more involved, and to cultivate in students the habit of reflecting before acting, to use reflection to inform and improve political action.

Learning outcomes: enhance students' preparation for active citizenship.

Activities and assignments: reading, writing, and discussion all contribute to preparation for reflection and action, including a focus on citizen access points to the political process.

At the end of the semester, students taking this course will be asked to complete, in addition to the regular Political Science Department evaluation, a questionnaire that asks students to evaluate the extent to which the course has met the goals of the Miami Plan.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES AND GRADING POLICIES

A tentative schedule is listed at the end of this syllabus. The instructor reserves the right to alter scheduled assignments, with notice, as conditions warrant. I expect that students will have carefully read the material assigned for a class period before that class. There will be three exams and a short written research assignment. The exams will be closed book and may feature a mix of objective questions as well short answers and essays. More directions about the written assignment will be forthcoming, but it will be a short paper, of about 5 pages in length, that will focus on the critical examination of news and academic sources and will require students to show fluency in basic social science research. From time to time I will assign short research tasks to be performed in between classes for discussion or debate in class, often based on the chapters of the *CQ* book. *Each time a CQ chapter is assigned, students should not only read the chapter and be prepared for questions and discussion, but they should also consult the Congressional Quarterly Researcher website and CQ Weekly Reports, via the Miami Library site, to check for the latest information on that issue and bring to class notes from that search. I may collect your notes from this search without warning.* We will often break into smaller groups for these discussions and debates. Students' presence and thoughtful participation in these exercises, and in class in general, is expected. I will take and record attendance randomly. I may collect and grade the worksheets associated with the units of the workbook, and I may administer quizzes based on the reading with no warning.

Students' final grade will be based on the following ratios: Exam 1: 25%, Exam 2: 25%, Exam 3: 25%, Written assignment: 15%, Attendance and Participation: 5%, quizzes and other collected assignments: 5%.

Papers will be submitted via BlackBoard through the Turnitin anti-plagiarism software. Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Terms and Conditions of Use posted on the Turnitin.com site.

Students' presence in class and ability to begin a dialogue about the assigned readings and issues in the course is expected. *Students will be called upon to begin or extend our class discussion.* There will be no extra credit assignments. Late papers will not be accepted. There will be no make-up exams except under extraordinary circumstances, of which the professor should be informed before the exam. As for the final examination, the university rules stipulate that no student shall be required to take four or more exams in a 24-hour period. For instances of excessive exams, the course whose subject three-letter abbreviation is nearest the **ending** of the alphabet needs to make the adjustment. An examination may be changed to a later time with the consent of the instructor. It may only be advanced to an earlier time with the consent of both the

instructor and the dean of the division in which the course is given. A student who has a Conflict or Excessive Exams and would like to move an exam is expected to notify the instructor whose exam would move by Friday, April 10th. Finally, students who require special accommodations should consult with the Rinella Learning Assistance Center immediately so we can best meet your needs; directions from the Center about necessary accommodations must be presented during the first two weeks of the semester.

CLASS ENVIRONMENT

The professor is committed to the department's policy of supporting the learning of all students, irrespective of gender, ethnicity, race, age, religion, handicapping condition, or sexual preference. Students should be able to expect that their learning environments are free from any form of prejudice. If prejudicial behavior occurs, you should talk to the professor and identify the specific offense or disparaging behavior. If you are not content with the resolution of your complaint you are encouraged to consult with the Department Chair. The university exists for learning and the free and open pursuit of ideas. Things that impede this mission are antithetical to the role of a university and will not be tolerated.

ACADEMIC HONESTY AND ATTENDANCE

Students in the class are governed by the university rules pertaining to academic misconduct and class attendance (see Undergraduate Academic Regulations, *The Student Handbook*). There are no University-recognized excused absences except for religious observances that require absence from a class session and other required class activities. Students must give written notification to their instructor within the first two weeks of class of the religious event that prohibits class attendance and the date that will be missed, if officially known. Instructors will, without prejudice, provide such students with reasonable accommodations for completing missed work. However, students are ultimately responsible for material covered in class, regardless of whether the student is absent or present. These and all other university rules are hereby incorporated by reference.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

<i>TUESDAY</i>	<i>THURSDAY</i>
Jan 13 Intro to Politics	Jan 15 CQ 2: Student Aid
Jan 20 CQ 13: Infrastructure	Jan 22 Workbook 3: Inaugural Address
Jan 27 CQ 3: Health Care	Jan 29 Workbook 4: Obama Appointments (last day to drop w/ no grade = Feb 2)
Feb 3 CQ 7: Oil Jitters <i>unSpun 1</i>	Feb 5 Oil, Con't.
Feb 10 CQ 12: Mortgage Crisis	Feb 12 *Exam 1*
Feb 17 TBA	Feb 19 <i>unSpun 2-3</i>
Feb 24 Workbook 5: Budget Priorities	Feb 26 CQ 4: Superbugs
Mar 3 CQ 5: Poverty	Mar 5 *Papers Due* <i>unSpun 4</i>
Mar 17 CQ 6: Guns	Mar 19 CQ 11: Hate Speech
Mar 24 <i>unSpun 5-6</i>	Mar 26 *Exam 2* (last day to drop w/ a "W")
Mar 31 Workbook 8: Public Approval	Apr 2 Workbook 9: Foreign Policy
Apr 7 CQ 16: Iran	Apr 9 Workbook 10: Prez & Congress
Apr 14 CQ 15: Immigration	Apr 16 Workbook 11: Executive Orders
Apr 21 CQ 10: Torture	Apr 23 <i>unSpun 7-8</i>
Apr 28 Workbook 12: Assessing 100 Days	Apr 30 Going Forward: <i>unSpun</i> conclusion

Final Examination: Thursday, May 7, 2009, 1230PM