

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT GOV-611

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Regent University
Robertson School of Government
Spring 2008
Public syllabus

PROFESSOR:

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

In its early years the American republic was called an “experiment.” (James Madison, the “Father of the Constitution,” called it that.) If longevity equals success, it seems the American experiment in constitutional government has succeeded. The U.S. Constitution is the oldest written national constitution in force in the world today, by a considerable margin. That fact tells us that the American constitutional order is a stable one compared to the governments of other nations, but there are questions begging to be asked. How does that government work? What features made and make the American system so stable? What are its strengths and weaknesses? Are there relevant differences between how it was designed to work and how it works today? More: Is the American government a *good* government, in any sense morally superior to the forms of government of other, less stable, regimes? How should the Constitution be interpreted? Not unrelated, what role should the Supreme Court play? What role should religion play in American politics? An overarching question, posed in James Q. Wilson’s American Government is, who governs? The exploration of such questions will inevitably take us into questions of ends (principles) and means (process) of American government.

American Government GOV-611 is a core course in the Robertson School of Government (“RSG”) and is therefore required of all RSG students. There are several pithy ways of summing up the subject matter of this course on American government: its ideas and institutions, its principles and process, etc. But the function of this course in the larger curriculum of RSG is clear: we expect all graduates of RSG to have a thorough understanding of American government. This is in keeping with the mission of the School of Government and Regent University as a whole. The course will also expose all RSG students to specific areas in the study of government -- including public policy, public administration, international relations, and political theory -- that they may wish to study in greater depth in elective courses.

INSTRUCTION:

This course is a traditional graduate course that will meet once per week for three hours of lecture and discussion. Student participation is welcomed and expected. Our two main texts consist of James Q. Wilson's classic American Government and a point-counterpoint reader on current debatable issues in American politics. Each week we will engage in lecture, discussion, and debate on American government past and present. Vigorous student participation is welcomed and expected. It is also expected that you will bring open minds and hearts to the material and to your colleagues in class during discussion. Differences of opinion naturally occur in such discussions, and are healthy; our mutual respect, civility, and Christian charity will keep them from becoming acrimonious.

Distance education students will complete all assigned readings and papers, and will participate in a virtual classroom via the on-line Blackboard medium, in weekly Discussion Board postings. These postings will consist of responses to professor-initiated discussion questions as well as responses to postings by other students.

TEXTS:

REQUIRED:

Hamilton, Alexander et al. The Federalist Papers. Ed. Clinton Rossiter. Penguin, 2003. ISBN 0-451-52881-6.

McKenna, George et al., eds. Taking Sides: Clashing Views on Controversial Political Issues, Expanded. 15th ed. McGraw-Hill, 2005. ISBN 0-07-351495-0.

Tulis, Jeffrey K. The Rhetorical Presidency. Princeton University Press, 1988. ISBN 0-691-02295-X.

O'Brien, David M. Storm Center: The Supreme Court in American Politics. 7th ed. W. W. Norton, 2005. ISBN 0-393-92704-0.

Wilson, James Q., and John J. DiIulio Jr. American Government. **Dolphin ed.** Houghton-Mifflin, 2006. ISBN 0-618-57682-7.

SUPPLEMENTAL:

Kurland, Philip B. and Ralph Lerner, eds. The Founders' Constitution. 5 vols. University of Chicago Press, 1987; <http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders>. (Note: this edition is entirely on-line and requires no book purchase.)

ASSESSMENTS:

Grades will be determined by the quality of written work and discussion. Discussion will include a formal oral presentation. Written work will include several papers spaced evenly throughout the semester, at least one of which will be a traditional research paper conforming to the Turabian guide for term papers.

Distance education students will fulfill their discussion requirement through on-line postings in Blackboard, to include responses to questions posted by the professor and responses to postings by other students.

The approximate grade calculus (subject to change) will be as follows:

75%	Writing assignments
25%	Participation and presentation

100%	