

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT GOV-611

Regent University
Robertson School of Government
Summer 2006
Public syllabus: Virginia Beach/DC

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.

Throughout this course we will be operating on several assumptions. (1) That all truth is God’s truth. (2) That Christians of good will can disagree over matters of politics, just as they do over matters of faith and practice. (3) That a better understanding of the history of American government can help shed new light on contemporary problems.

CONNECTION TO THE PROGRAM OF STUDY:

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, in which we expect many of you to play important roles upon graduation. 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, political management, and political theory -- that they may wish to study in greater depth in elective courses.

INSTRUCTION:

This course is an intensive traditional graduate course that will meet three times per week over four weeks. Spirited 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 session we will engage in lecture, discussion, and debate on American government past and present.

TEXTS:

REQUIRED:

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

The Holy Bible [any commonly used version].

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

Wilson, James Q. American Government: Institutions and Policies. Houghton Mifflin, 2002. ISBN 0-618-29980-7.

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.]

Caveat emptor: In addition to the assigned texts, additional readings may be supplied or assigned. The professor reserves the right to add or subtract readings as we proceed throughout the semester. In a course that encourages discussion, it is often beneficial to be flexible, depending upon the direction and depth of discussions.

ASSESSMENTS:

Your grade will be determined by the quality of your written work and your discussion. Discussion will include a formal oral presentation. Written work will include a major research paper due at term's end and one or more shorter occasional writing assignments throughout the term.

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

25% Occasional writing assignments
25% Midterm Paper
25% Final Paper
25% Participation and presentation

100%

RSG Grading Policy Statement:

“The following grading scale will be used in all courses taught by RSG faculty and those courses cross-listed with RSG regardless of which faculty teaches them: A 4.00 Superior; A- 3.67; B+ 3.33; B 3.00 Good; B- 2.67; C+ 2.33; C 2.00 Poor; C- 1.67; F 0.00 Failing. To remain in good academic standing, an RSG student must maintain a 3.00 grade point average. Other Regent schools may have different standards.”

RSG Incomplete Grades Policy:

“A student desiring an incomplete must submit a request to the course instructor or Academic Dean prior to the end of the term. An incomplete grade will be given in a regular course only for legitimate deficiencies due to illness, emergencies or extraordinary reasons acceptable to the professor, including equipment breakdown or shortages, and not because of neglect on the student's part. Incompletes require the final approval of the school dean, or his or her authorized representative. A regular grade will be given by the instructor if all requirements for the course are submitted by the end of the following academic term. The instructor will submit the new grade to the Registrar's office no later than two weeks after the beginning of the subsequent term. If all work is not submitted by the end of the term following the granting of the incomplete, a grade of FX (NP for pass/fail courses) will be posted automatically unless a Request for Extension of Incomplete has been approved and submitted to the Registrar's Office. The FX shall be counted as an F in the computation of the GPA. Any student desiring reinstatement to the course after an FX or NP has been posted must register for the course in a subsequent term and pay the full current tuition for the course.”