



**PSCI 110: American Government**  
Summer 2007  
Humboldt State University

MTWR 13:00-14:50, FH 125



Dr. Noah Zerbe  
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Office Hours: MW 11:00-12:00  
and by appointment

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***Course Description:***

The goal of this course is to familiarize students with the structures, functions, and processes of American government. We will explore the philosophical and historical roots of American politics, the three branches of government, and various political institutions like the media and political parties. While readings and lecture are an important component of this course, emphasis will also be placed on discussion and debate. I will cover the basic materials during the first half of most class sessions, while the second half will be reserved for discussions of class materials and current events or other class activities.

Successful completion of this course satisfies the State of California's American Institutions requirement in American and California government. This requirement exists because a basic familiarity with the structure, history and nature of American government represents the foundation of good citizenship. Accordingly, by the end of the course, students should be able to:

- recognize and evaluate the basic debates and issues in American government and American political history;
- explain the basic differences between conservative and liberal political beliefs;
- critically evaluate the values of US political culture;
- express a familiarity with formal and informal political institutions and their roles in American society;
- identify and describe the key functions of the three branches of government; and
- assess the causes and consequences of different forms of political participation, and outline the ways in which individuals and groups can affect political outcomes in the United States.
- connect current events with course materials.

***Required Book and Readings:***

The following book is required and available at the HSU Bookstore:

- Daniel Shea, et al. *Living Democracy*. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2007).

Note that this text is available in multiple formats. I have ordered the unbound version, as it is available at about half the price of the traditional text. If you prefer the hardbound text, you may order it at your discretion. Additional required readings are available through the course Moodle site.

In addition to the course readings, students are expected to keep abreast of current events by reading the New York Times daily. The New York Times is available free online

([www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)). Discussion of the events covered in the Times will be incorporated into the class and will be covered on the course exams.

**Course Requirements:**

- **Exams (2 @ 30% each):** There will be three exams in this course, each representing 25 percent of your overall grade. The exams will consist of two sections, weighted equally. The first section is comprised of a number of objective questions (multiple choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank). In the second section, you will be asked to identify and explain the significance of a number of terms in short answer format. The exam questions will draw on lectures, class discussions, and course materials. Dates for the exams are as follows:

Monday, July 16            Exam 1: American Democracy

Thursday, August 2       Exam 2: Issues & Institutions

- **Debate (20%):** Students will sign up for one of the debates, which will occupy the second hour of the dates listed below. Note that the purpose of the debate assignment is to demonstrate the ability to create a reasoned, well-informed argument about American politics, working with others to develop that argument, and to present that argument in the face of an equally well-reasoned, well-informed counter-position. Guidelines for the debate are listed on the last page of this handout. Dates for the debates are as follows:

Wednesday, July 12      Topic 1: There is an inherent right to privacy in the Constitution.

Topic 2: The private ownership of firearms in the United States should be banned.

Monday, July 24            Topic 1: The United States should adopt an electoral system based on proportional representation.

Topic 2: The United States should mandate voting.

Thursday, July 27        Topic 1: There should be term limits for Members of Congress.

Topic 2: The electoral college should be eliminated.

- **Letter to the Editor (10%):** You will be responsible for writing a short letter to the editor on a topic of your choice related to the issues covered in class. Your letter should be short (no more than 500 words or two typed, double-spaced pages). Letters should be well-written and should take a reasoned and well-informed position on a current issue in American or Californian politics. You may not write a letter to the editor dealing with the same topic you debated. Letters are due in class on Monday, July 30.
- **Participation (10%):** The compressed summer schedule forces us to cover a great deal of material in a relatively short period of time. Consequently, missing a single class is equivalent to missing an entire week of classes during the regular semester. Regular attendance is therefore required. Regular participation in class discussions is also expected. In order to facilitate class discussions, I expect that you have completed the required readings for a given class *before* that class.

*A Note on Written Work:* All written assignments submitted for this course should be properly formatted and cited. I expect that you will proofread your work before submitting it to me, and ideally you will have someone else proof it as well. Consequently, a maximum of two errors (grammatical, improper citation, etc.) per page will be accepted. One point will be deducted from your grade on the assignment for each error beyond the second on each page. All citations must be in APSA format. A style guide is available at

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/DocAPSA.html>

**Moodle Site:** Course information will regularly be posed to the course Moodle Site. If you are not familiar with Moodle, please let me know and I will provide a brief overview on accessing and using it. You can access the course site at:

**Moodle:** <http://learn.humboldt.edu>.

Your initial login will be your axe id for your username (e.g., nrz3)

Your initial password will be your student identification number

**Contacting Me:** The most effective way to contact me is through e-mail (noah.zerbe@humboldt.edu). Barring unusual circumstances (being out of town, ill, in a blackout, etc.) I will respond within 24 hours. If not, send me a followup.

**Late Assignments** will be penalized at a rate of one-half letter grade per day. All assignments are due in class on the due date listed in the syllabus. Make up exams will not be scheduled without a valid medical excuse. If you have scheduling problems with any due dates, please contact me well before the assignment or exam is due.

**Appeals:** I am happy to speak with you about marks earned on a particular assignment. Before coming to discuss a grade, however, I request that you: (1) take 24 hours to read my comments before approaching me to discuss the mark; (2) write a detailed explanation of your question, including the specific reason(s) why you think your mark should be changed; and (3) submit your written response to me, and make an appointment with me (either during my office hours or at some other time) to discuss the grade. Under no circumstances will I discuss grades over e-mail or telephone.

**Academic Honesty & Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is the representation of someone else's work as your own, and includes but not limited to having someone else do your work or failing to properly attribute work to their sources. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense, and will result in an automatic zero for the assignment, failure of the course, and potentially more serious sanctions from the University according to the Academic Honesty policy. Please contact me *before turning in your assignment* if you are unsure of what constitutes plagiarism.

***In consideration of your fellow students, please turn off mobile phones before entering the classroom. If you absolutely must arrive late or leave early, please enter or leave quietly and sit near the door to minimize the disruption to your colleagues.***

**Support:** HSU offers excellent resources to help you succeed in your academic endeavors. These include the Library, Computer Labs, Computer Help Desk, Academic Support Center, Learning Center, and Writing Center. I strongly encourage you to take advantage of them!

**Disability Resources:** If you have a documented disability and would like to discuss academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible. Our campus Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) can assist you with the accommodation process and can be reached at (707) 826-4678 or (707) 826-5392 (TTD). The SDRC is located in House 71 (Little Apartments) off Library Circle.

## Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Readings & Assignments
<b>Part 1: American Democracy</b>		
Mon, July 2	Course Introduction	None
Tues, July 3	American Political Culture	Shea, ch. 1
Wed, July 4	No Class	Happy July 4 <sup>th</sup> !
Thurs, July 5	No Class	Happy Break!
Mon, July 9	Historical Backdrop	Shea, ch. 2
Tues, July 10	Federalism	Shea, ch. 3
Wed, July 11	Civil Rights & Liberties	Shea, ch. 5
Thurs, July 12	Debating Civil Rights	Film: Eye on the Prize Debate: Right to Privacy Debate: Gun Control
Mon, July 16	Exam 1	
<b>Part 2: Issues and Institutions</b>		
Tues, July 17	Political Socialization & Opinion	Shea, ch. 9
Wed, July 18	The Media	Shea, ch. 10 Film: Orwell Rolls in His Grave
Thurs, July 19	Interest Groups	Shea, ch. 11
Mon, Jul 23	Elections and Campaigning	Shea, ch. 12
Tues, July 24	Debating Issues and Elections	Debate: PR Electoral System Debate: Mandatory Voting
Wed, July 25	The Institutions: The Congress, Presidency and Judiciary	Shea chs. 4 & 6
Thurs, July 26	The Institutions (con't)	Shea chs. 7 & 8
Mon, July 30	Economy and Society	Film: Is Wal-Mart Good for America?
Tues, July 31	Debating Institutions	Debate: Term Limits for Congress Debate: Eliminate the Electoral College
Wed, Aug 1	Wrapping Up	
Thurs, Aug 2	Exam 2	