Introduction to American Politics 46.101
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Note: You will find a link to the course page on my UML faculty site.
Office: Coburn 400 Hours: M/W 11:15 – 12:45 and by appointment

Course Description
By examining how issues of race, class, and gender have shaped the American legal and political system, this course explores the origins of present-day political principles, problems, and trends. Topics covered include the ratification of the Constitution, the evolution of industrial capitalism, the causes and consequences of the Civil War, the campaign for woman suffrage, the Great Depression, the civil rights and women's rights movements, deindustrialization, the war on terror, and the loss of confidence in government that has characterized American politics in recent decades. As we move into the present, we will pay particular attention to the way major aspects of American political history play into ongoing efforts to address climate change, the defining political challenge of our time.

Course Objectives
At the end of this course, students should come away with a general understanding of the historical, legal, economic, and social factors that influence political policy and decision-making, as well as the philosophical beliefs and traditions that define the scope of political change.

There are no prerequisites for this course, but students will be graded according to their ability to convey accurate information in written assignments. Consequently, students with writing problems would be wise to postpone taking this course until they have had a chance to improve their writing skills.

Homework Assignments, Papers, and other Course Requirements
You do not have to purchase any books for this course. All required reading materials will be accessible via the course web site, and all of the materials that you need to complete assignments will be available well before your work is due, usually two weeks ahead of the deadline.

Weekly Reading Questions
You will be required to email brief answers to approximately 5 questions on the readings each week. Since these questions are designed simply to make sure that you are keeping up with the readings, they will be straightforward and easy to answer.

Even though your answers will be brief, you must write in complete sentences in response to all non-fill-in-the-blank questions. Remember that you will be evaluated according to your ability to convey accurate information in college-level writing. Consequently, your answers to the reading questions must be written in complete sentences, free of spelling errors, properly punctuated, and grammatically correct.
Midterm Exam

The midterm exam will require you to write two summaries of two different articles. You must choose these two articles from a list of hyperlinked texts that I will provide well in advance.

Your midterm summaries should not contain any opinion or undocumented assertions. Instead, your job is simply to recount the major points made in each article. Your midterm summaries must be formatted for Microsoft Word and submitted via email using your uml address.

Each of your midterm summaries must be at least 500 words, and each will be evaluated according to your ability to convey accurate information clearly and completely. Consequently, your summaries must be free of grammatical and spelling errors, carefully organized, thoughtfully argued, and factually correct.

I will return your corrected midterm with a general evaluation of your participation in class discussion and your weekly homework assignments, as well as your midterm summaries.

Final Paper/Presentation

For your final paper/presentation, you may choose between two options:

1. You may summarize and analyze a major political issue, topic, or debate either of your own choosing or selected from a list that I will supply well in advance. Your summary and analysis must be at least five pages long. I will furnish most of the articles you will need to complete the final paper if you choose one of the topics on the list. However, you must also locate at least two additional sources on your own.

I will also provide a list of thesis statements that you can use as written or rewrite however you think best. If you would like to see examples of thesis statements that I have made available in previous courses, please visit: http://faculty.uml.edu/sgallagher/ThesisStatements.htm.

Note: You may draw your final paper entirely from sources of your own choosing if you supply me beforehand with working links to full texts of any articles that you plan to use. You must submit a complete draft of your final paper, including working links to all sources, two weeks in advance of the final deadline.

2. You may create a website on a significant political topic. In order to fulfill this option, you must already possess the expertise needed to develop an attractive and readable web site. Please do not choose this option if you have never created a website before. Although you should include multimedia materials such as images and video files, you must also include a detailed summary of your topic on your site. Also, you must submit a thesis statement, a list of links to sources, and a detailed project description two weeks in advance of the deadline. As with your other assignments, your grade in this case will hinge on your ability convey accurate information in college-level prose.

No matter which of these options you choose, you must submit a complete first draft of the final paper or website approximately two weeks before the final deadline. Your first draft should not be a rough draft, that is, it should not contain any incomplete sentences, grammatical errors, or informal notes. Instead, since the purpose of the final assignment is to encourage you to write at your highest level, you should turn in a carefully proofread and polished version the first time around. Then, after you revise your work in response to my corrections and editorial suggestions, which I will send within a week of receiving your draft, you will be able to submit a revised paper at the end of course that reflects your full academic potential.
Your presentation, which must address the same topic as your paper, will be scheduled soon after the midterm exam. Depending on the size of the class and students’ interest in particular topics, you may be required to make a team presentation. We will work out these details in class.

Attendance Policy

Students who miss more than three class sessions without a valid written excuse place themselves in danger of failure unless they contact me to provide a legitimate reason for their absences.

Academic Integrity Policy

UML students are expected to perform their own work, respect their classmates, and behave professionally. More information on UML's Academic Integrity Policy can be found at: http://www.uml.edu/catalog/undergraduate/policies/academic_dishonesty.htm.

Grade Formula:

Reading questions and participation in class discussion = 25%  Midterm = 35%  Final Paper/Presentation = 40%