American Politics—POL 10100/002  
Kent State University  
Fall 2005

Professor Jason MacDonald  
302 Bowman Hall, #37  
Phone: 330-672-8936  
Email: jmacdon1@kent.edu

Office Hours: MW, 9-10, 3:30-5  
Class Meetings: MWF  
2:15-3:05, Bowman 133

OVERVIEW

This introductory course on American politics and government provides you with essential information about important behaviors and institutions, demonstrating how important political phenomena relate to one another. This emphasis on the relationship between key facts is critical because it is not enough to merely know things. To be a truly critical and intelligent observer of politics, one must understand what leads events to occur and what drives individuals’ behavior. For example, knowing that President Bush won the 2004 presidential election and knowing how your member of Congress voted on the Central American Free Trade Agreement is great. However, only knowing this information does not produce an adequate understanding of these events. We want to know why President Bush won and why your member of Congress voted the way s/he did. Therefore, during the lectures and class discussions, I will consciously highlight the causes and consequences of the phenomena on which we focus.

The outline of this course is as follows. We will begin by examining the values on which the American political system was founded and the rules established during the founding of this system that continue to influence political outcomes today. Next, we will examine the behavior of individuals, interest groups, and political parties, and how this behavior affects the institutions of government. Finally, we will examine the institutions themselves.

TEXTS AND ADDITIONAL READINGS

The following book is required and is available in the bookstore:


NOTE: There are required readings for this course that are not in this text. These readings are available to you through the library’s electronic reserves service. To access these readings, itemized as “ER,” go to the library’s web site at [http://www.library.kent.edu](http://www.library.kent.edu), select the link for “Electronic Reserves,” select “Electronic Reserves: Documents and Course Materials,” and type in the course number, “pol 10100.” The password for this course is “politics15” (without the quotes).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There will be two quizzes, a midterm examination, and a final examination in this course. The quizzes are each worth 10% of your grade. The first quiz will be given at the midpoint between
the beginning of the course and the midterm. The second quiz will be given at the midpoint between the midterm and the final. The purpose of the quizzes—especially the first quiz—is not merely to assess your knowledge of the material but to help you to prepare for the examinations. By forcing you to familiarize yourself with the course material and by familiarizing you with the type of questions I will ask on the examinations, I hope to help you prepare for the examinations. The midterm examination, worth 40% of your grade, will be on Parts I & II of the course. The final examination, worth 40% of your grade, will be primarily on Part III of the course; however, some material from Parts I and II of the course will be on the final. I will provide review sheets for each of the exams.

The quizzes and examinations will test you both on the readings—especially those emphasized in class—and lectures. Therefore, it is important to attend lecture and keep up with the reading. **It is especially important to take comprehensive notes in lecture.** If you have questions about the quality of your notes, or on how to improve them, please bring them to my office hours, so that I can evaluate them, and if necessary, make suggestions on how you can improve them. Hopefully, focusing on taking quality notes in this class will improve your performance in your other classes as well: it is hard to think of a skill more critical to your success in introductory and intermediate undergraduate coursework than effective note-taking. Finally, although the readings are designed to compliment the lectures, you cannot make up for missing lecture by reading. In other words, if you miss class, you will not be able to rely on reading to learn the material you miss.

Make up exams, which consist only of essay questions, are reserved for emergency situations and official university functions. In all cases, the reason why a make-up is required must be documented (police report for an accident, doctor’s letter for a serious illness, letter from the athletic director for a sporting event, etc).

**DETERMINATION OF GRADES**

A = 93-100%; A-=90-92; B+=87-89; B = 83-86%; B-=80-82; C+=77-79; C=73-76; C-=70-72; D+=67-69; D=63-66; D-=60-62; F=59 and below.

I reserve the right to curve assignments to help you.

**DISABILITY POLICY**

University policy 3342-3-18 requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through Student Disability Services (contact 330-672-3391 or visit [www.registrar.kent.edu/disability/default.htm](http://www.registrar.kent.edu/disability/default.htm) for more information on registration procedures).
**COURSE SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS**

We may have a guest speaker for one class; therefore, I reserve the right to modify this schedule to make room for this speaker.

**Part I. Foundations of American Politics and Government**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 31</td>
<td>Conceptual Foundations (continued)</td>
<td>K&amp;J: Ch. 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 2</td>
<td>Constitutional Foundations</td>
<td>K&amp;J: Ch. 2; <strong>ER:</strong> Miller, “The People Can Act Unjustly”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 5</td>
<td><strong>Labor Day—NO CLASS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 7, 9</td>
<td>Constitutional Foundations (continued)</td>
<td>The United States Constitution (Appendix in K&amp;J); Madison, Federalist 10 (Appendix in K&amp;J); Madison, Federalist 51 (Appendix in K&amp;J)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 12, 14</td>
<td>Federalism</td>
<td>K&amp;J, Ch. 3; <strong>ER:</strong> John Donahue, “The Devil in Devolution”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 16</td>
<td>Civil Liberties</td>
<td>K&amp;J, Ch. 5; <strong>ER:</strong> Gideon v. Wainwright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 19</td>
<td>Civil Rights</td>
<td>K&amp;J: Ch. 4; <strong>ER:</strong> Kull, “Brown v. Board of Education”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Part II—American Political Behavior and Intervening Institutions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 21, 23</td>
<td>The role of public opinion and interest groups in a democracy</td>
<td><strong>ER:</strong> Olson, “Designing Institutions”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>QUIZ 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>QUICK 1</strong> on Part I will be on Sept. 23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 26, 28</td>
<td>Public Opinion</td>
<td>K&amp;J: Ch. 10; <strong>ER:</strong> Asher, “Sampling Techniques”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Oct. 7, 10  Political Parties  

Oct. 12, 14  Elections & Voting  
K&J: Ch. 11; ER: Weisman, “In Congress. . .”; Abramson, “Who Voted?”  

Oct. 17  Wrap up & Review  

Oct. 19  **MIDTERM EXAMINATION**  

**Part. III—American Political Institutions**  

Oct. 21, 24  Congress  
26, 28, 31  K&J: Ch. 6; ER: Deering, “Committees in Congress”; Schickler, “The House Leadership in an Era of Partisan Warfare”  

Nov 2, 4  The President  
7, 9  K&J: Ch. 7; ER: King, “A Mile and a Half is a Long Way”; Pfiffner, “Can the President Manage the Government?”  

Nov. 11  **Veteran’s Day—NO CLASS**  

Nov. 14  Begin the Courts; **QUIZ 2** on Congress and the President  

Nov. 16, 18  The Courts  
21  K&J: Ch. 9; ER: Lindquist, “Congressional Response to Federal Circuit. . .”  

Nov. 23  **Thanksgiving Break—NO CLASS**  

Nov. 25  **Thanksgiving Break—NO CLASS**  

Nov. 28, 30  The Bureaucracy  
Dec. 2, 5  K&J: Ch. 8; ER: Wilson, “Culture”; McCubbins, “Congressional Oversight. . .”  

Dec. 7  The Mess the Founders Made?  

Dec. 9  Wrap up & Review  

Dec. 13  **FINAL EXAMINATION:** 12:45pm-3:00pm