

Politics and American Culture Syllabus

Collins 22E(x2783)

Virtual Office Hours: 9-10 pm MWF mcsmith@cedarville.edu

Smith, Mark (Dr.) on Groupwise

Course Description

This course serves as an introduction to America's politics and culture, with emphases on the Constitution, political institutions, and political participation, and their interaction with the Christian faith.

Course Objectives

Students will:

- Learn the keys to effective political participation in America, as well as understand the unique demands of Christian citizenship in a democratic context.
- Understand a wide array of contemporary and historic political issues, and begin to develop the skill of Christian discernment when engaging those issues, as well as recognize the presence and impact of divergent worldviews in relation to those issues.
- Integrate the biblical worldview with the academic content surrounding the study of American government in general, and American political culture, the founding era, the Constitution, Civil Rights and Liberties, Institutions, elections, public policy, and political behavior in particular.

Departmental Objectives

Students will:

- Exhibit critical analysis in evaluating historical and/or contemporary issues.
- Demonstrate the ability to integrate biblical truth with their academic disciplines through the investigation and study of society.

University Objectives

Cedarville University seeks:

- To undergird the student in the fundamentals of the Christian faith and to stimulate each student to evaluate knowledge in the light of Scriptural truth.
- To increase each student's awareness of the world of ideas and events which are influencing our contemporary culture and to prepare each student to participate knowledgeably in our society.
- To enable each student to develop sound critical and analytical reasoning.

Texts

Patterson, Thomas E. 2009. *We the People: A Concise Introduction to American Politics*, 8th Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill. (Hereafter referred to as "Patterson") ISBN: 9780073378961

Gerber, Mitchel, editor. 2009. *Sources: Notable Selections in American Government*, 3rd Edition. New York: Dushkin/McGraw-Hill. (Hereafter referred to as "Sources") ISBN: 9780073379838

Other readings are linked to on WebCT.

Grading Scale

A	94-100	C+	77-79
A-	90-93	C	74-76
B+	87-89	C-	70-73
B	84-86	D	65-69
B-	80-83	F	64 or below

Assignment Details

Quizzes

Quizzes will be delivered via WebCT. All course units will have one quiz and the lowest quiz grade will be dropped. These will be objective (multiple choice) and subjective (short answer). Quizzes will cover readings due for that unit, so Unit 1 readings are covered in Quiz 1, etc.

How to take a quiz

- Log in to WebCT
- Click "Assessments" from the menu on the left.
- Click on the quiz you want to take and follow the on-screen instructions

Group Assignments

Each unit will also have one written project for your group. The projects are defined on WebCT. A draft of the project is due on Thursday of every week, and the final draft is due Saturday night. Twenty percent of this grade will be based on the quality of these assignments. All group members will receive the same grade for these.

Fifteen percent of the grade will be based on how your fellow group members grade you. At the end of the course, then, all students will grade other group members using a group evaluation form in that will be released in WebCT. This should discourage laziness and encourage all students to work together to complete assignments.

In order to complete these assignments, then, groups will be forced to communicate with one another, either via email, blogs, WebCT discussions, etc... This will be up to group members to figure out. The rubric for these assignments is included below.

Guidelines

All assignments are due on the dates set forth in WebCT. No late assignments are accepted. Also, all assignments are to be posted on the corresponding unit's blog, which can be found under the "Discussions" link from the main menu in WebCT. You can find the prompt for your group essay under "Activities" on the current unit's page in the Online Classroom. When you post your final essay:

Be sure to include the Group Name in the subject of your post on the blog

All posts should be 300-350 words

Assignments are graded on a 10 point scale: 3 points for understanding the argument(s) or issue(s), 3 points for quality of critique/analysis, 4 points for execution—format, grammar, syntax, clarity, spelling, punctuation).

Understanding:

- 3 The group shows a clear and obvious grasp of argument(s) or issues related to the assignment. The group makes pointed and specific distinctions.
- 2 The group displays a reasonable understanding, but is sometimes vague and overly general. The group may miss a key point or difference.
- 1 The group displays a relatively poor understanding of the arguments and issues. The essay is quite vague.
- 0 The group misses the boat and does not display a college-level understanding of the material.

Critique:

- 3 This post shows independence of thought and does not simply parrot one side or the other. This is insightful and sharp in its critique. The authors are confident, but properly so, and take clear positions.
- 2 The authors have reasonable criticisms, shows interaction with ideas, but not independence. The post might parrot one side's arguments against the other to some extent.
- 1 The authors simply restate the points of others. There is little critical thought involved.
- 0 This post made no reasonable effort to offer meaningful thoughts.

Execution:

- 4 This post is well-written, concise, and flawless in grammar and syntax. There is excellent flow to the work and it is easily read. The post stayed true to format guidelines.
- 3 Though well-written, clear, and true to format guidelines, the post has perhaps one or two minor mistakes in grammar and syntax.
- 2 Adequately composed, this might lack concision (too wordy), and has maybe several minor mistakes in grammar and syntax, or one significant mistake (commasplice/ run-on sentence, incomplete sentence, several spelling or subject/verb agreement issues). The post perhaps strayed on one or more guidelines.
- 1 This is difficult to understand. There are several obvious mistakes in grammar and punctuation or spelling, and at least one mistake in following written guidelines.
- 0 This is a mess and is clearly the result of haste or poor effort. There are many syntax, grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors. Guidelines are either ignored or severely botched.

How to submit a group essay

Group essay must be posted under the corresponding unit's blog, which can be found under the "Discussions" link in the main menu in WebCT.

- Look under the "Blog" category for the blog for the current unit and click on it.
- Click "Create Message"
- Make sure to enter your group's name in the subject field.
- Enter your group's essay in the large text box provided for the message.
- Click "Post" to publish your essay to the blog.

Capstone Paper

All students will complete an essay based upon course content. The assignment is as follows:

The summer after you graduate from college, you decide to travel across the country. During your journey, you stop at a café to put up your feet, surf the internet, and toss some coffee down your throat. Clothed in your Cedarville t-shirt, a kindly, older couple approaches you. "Are you a student at Cedarville," the lady asks?

This begins a long, enjoyable conversation. You discover that the couple attended CU in the 1960s. You begin to swap stories about your experiences. As you discuss, it becomes obvious that the couple has a very different approach to life and culture, especially politics. Their attitude is summed up when the man remarks, "You are wasting your time if get involved, at all, in politics. The work of God's kingdom is all about saving souls, not casting votes or running for office. The whole process is corrupt, and even if you try, you won't make a difference. Honor God by focusing on being in the world and not of it. Politics is just 'of the world.'"

You remain polite, agreeably disagreeing with the couple. You part ways amicably, but the conversation gnaws at you throughout the remainder of your trip. When you return home, you find the older man's business card and decide to write the couple a long letter.

Your letter should deal with the following questions: should Christians involve themselves in politics? If so, how? If not, why not? Your letter should follow the guidelines set forth on the rubric attached to this syllabus.

Guidelines

All assignments are due on the dates set forth on the syllabus. No late assignments are accepted. Also, all assignments are to be turned in via electronic copy via WebCT. All written assignments will have the following format:

- Typed, double-spaced, 1" margins all around
- 12 point Times New Roman font
- Student's Name, ID #, Date, and Box # in the upper left-hand corner
- 5-7 pages

Assignments are graded on a 10 point scale: 3 points for understanding the argument(s) or issue(s), 3 points for quality of critique/analysis, 4 points for execution—format, grammar, syntax, clarity, spelling, punctuation).

Understanding:

- 3 The student shows a clear and obvious grasp of argument(s) or issues related to the assignment. The student makes pointed and specific distinctions.
- 2 The student displays a reasonable understanding, but is sometimes vague and overly general. The student may miss a key point or difference.
- 1 The student displays a relatively poor understanding of the arguments and issues. The essay is quite vague.
- 0 The student misses the boat and does not display a college-level understanding of the material.

Critique:

- 3 This paper shows independence of thought and does not simply parrot one side or the other. This is insightful and sharp in its critique. The author is confident, but properly so, and takes clear positions.
- 2 The author has reasonable criticisms, shows interaction with ideas, but not independence. The paper might parrot one side's arguments against the other to some extent.
- 1 The author simply restates the points of others. There is little critical thought involved.
- 0 This author made no reasonable effort to offer his or her thoughts.

Execution:

- 4 This paper is well-written, concise, and flawless in grammar and syntax. There is excellent flow to the work and it is easily read. The paper stayed true to format guidelines.
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- 1 This essay is difficult to understand. There are several obvious mistakes in grammar and punctuation or spelling, and at least one mistake in following written guidelines.
- 0 This paper is a mess and is clearly the result of haste or poor effort. There are many syntax, grammar, punctuation, or spelling errors. Guidelines are either ignored or severely botched.

Benchmarks

- Date TBA - Thesis Statement for Individual Writing Assignment Due
- Date TBA - Outline of Individual Writing Assignment
- Date TBA - Final Individual Paper Assignment Due

How to submit a benchmark or your final capstone paper

- Log in to WebCT
- Click "Assignments" from the menu on the left.
- Click the title of the item for which you want to submit an assignment and follow the on-screen instructions