INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL SCIENCE

This course provides an overview of some of the main issues in contemporary politics, and an introduction to the main questions, concepts, and debates in the discipline of Political Science. We will focus on the area of Comparative Politics, which examines the different forms and structures of states around the world, and add in some discussion of the main concepts in Political Philosophy, which shapes the major debates about politics around the world. Throughout the globe, many of the fundamental elements of political life are now the subject of rapid change and deep conflict, making it a particularly important and exciting time to study politics. In this course, we will organize our analysis around the nature and future of “democracy” and the challenges it faces from authoritarianism in its various forms – with an emphasis on the such developments as national and ethnic conflict, globalization, terrorism, and widespread dissatisfaction with existing political institutions. As practitioners of the discipline that focuses on the study of politics, political scientists have developed a variety of theories, concepts, and tools to analyze political action. Over the course of the semester, we will apply many of these to the uncertain and complex world we are now living in.

By the end of the course, students should be able to demonstrate the following:

- The ability to explain and compare the different forms of states in the contemporary world.
- An understanding of the major sources of political change in the contemporary politics.
- The ability to explain and evaluate some of the central concepts in Political Science.
- The ability to use these concepts to analyze one of the major challenges to democracy in the world today.

READINGS:

The following books are required for the course and are available in the College bookstore:

Alan G. Smith, A Comparative Introduction to Political Science. (Rowman & Littlefield)
Gerry Stoker, Why Politics Matters, 2nd edition. (Palgrave)

There will be occasional additional readings assigned over the course of the semester.
COURSE OUTLINE:

In this outline, I organize the course topics and readings into broad sections; as we go along, I will provide more specific assignments for each day of class. We will try to stick as closely as possible to the outline, and make our way through all the material. However, I also intend to be flexible, and we may make changes to the schedule in response to class interest and discussion, as well as to development in the larger world of politics.

A) Introduction to Politics and Political Science. What is politics about? What is the State and what is its role in organizing modern politics? What are the relationships between “states,” “nations,” and “governments”? What are the main issues and controversies in contemporary political thought? What are the main features and justifications of Democracy?

January 16-23 – Course Introduction: Politics, Power, and Political Science.
Reading: Smith, Chapters 1 and 2.
Stoker, Preface and Introduction

Reading: Smith, Chapter 4.

February 1-6 – Contemporary Political Philosophy and Ideology.
Reading: Smith, Chapters 5 and 6.

February 8-13 – Challenges and Dilemmas of Democracy I.
Reading: Dahl, On Democracy, Parts I, II, and IV.
Stoker, Chapter 1.

Thursday, February 15 – First Exam.

B) Politics in the Modern State: Economics, Culture, and Participation. How does Capitalism shape modern society and politics? What roles do culture and the media play in shaping the attitudes of citizens and operation of government? How do interest groups, political parties, and elections link citizens and governments? What is the connection between these institutions and political processes and the growing crisis of Democracy?

February 20-22 – Political Economy and Capitalism.
Reading: Smith, Chapter 7.

February 27- Political Attitudes: Culture and the Media.
Reading: Smith, Chapter 8.

March 3-11 – Spring Break.
March 1-13 – Interest Groups and Political Parties.  
**Reading:** Smith, Chapters 9 and 10.

**Reading:** Smith, Chapter 11.

**Thursday, March 22 – Second Exam.**

March 27 – Authoritarianism.  
**Reading:** Smith, Chapter 15.

March 29-April 2 – Easter Break.

**Tuesday, April 3 – No Class: Monday Classes meet.**

**Thursday, April 5 – No Class: Professor at Conference.**

C) Politics in the Modern State: The Crisis of Contemporary Democracy? What are the main institutions of government in modern democracies? How are the relationships between legislatures and executives managed? Is Democracy in trouble in the contemporary world? If so, why and what can be done about it? Are Stoker’s arguments, or Dahl’s, persuasive?

**April 10 – Diagnosing the Problem.**  
**Reading:** Stoker, chapters 2-4.

**April 12-17 – “Pathologies” of Contemporary Democracy?**  
**Reading:** Stoker, chapters 5-8.

**April 19-24 – Back to Institutions: Contemporary Democratic Government.**  
**Reading:** Smith, Chapters 12 and 13.

**April 28-May 3 – Can We Fix Democracy?**  
**Reading:** Stoker, Part III and “Conclusions.”  
Dahl, Chapters 16 and 17.

**Tuesday, May 1 – Papers Due.**

ASSIGNMENTS:

Your grade for this course will be based upon your work on the following assignments:

1. A short answer/essay exam, which will be given in class on Thursday, February 15. Your grade on this exam will count for 20% of your total grade for the course.
2. A short answer/essay exam, which will be given in class on Thursday, March 22. Your grade on this exam will count for 20% of your total grade for the course.

3. A combined debate/research paper assignment. During the semester, the class will be divided into groups, each of which will be responsible for presenting a debate on one of a set of specific topics related to the course themes. Students in each group will be required to develop a topic and write an 8 page paper on a research question related to the theme of their debate. The paper will be due on Tuesday, May 1. Your performance in the debate will count for 10% of your total grade in the course, and your grade on the paper will count for 20% of your total grade for the course. [30% total]

4. A final exam, which will combine coverage of the final sections of the course with a cumulative element. Your grade on this exam will count for 30% of your total grade for the course. The exam will be given on Monday, May 7 from 3-5:30 pm. [NOTICE: You should note that date and time NOW and make sure to plan any vacations, etc. around that date. “Leaving early from campus” will not be an acceptable excuse for rescheduling the final exam.]

**DISCUSSION AND PARTICIPATION:**

In addition to lectures and presentations that focus on the main course readings, we will take time regularly to discuss developments in political life, and the debates surrounding them. The more preparation you put into class preparation, and the more actively you participate in class discussions, the more you will get out of the class. [NOTE: I will take attendance regularly over the semester, and all students are expected to attend all classes. I do realize that emergencies happen, and so will enforce the following policy: All students will be allowed three absences over the semester. However, if you are absent more than three times, your final grade for the course will be reduced by 5 points for each day over three. (This policy does not apply to dates when exams are given or assignments are due.])

**GRADING SYSTEM:**

Each assignment will be graded on a point system, with 100 points being the maximum possible. You will then be given a letter grade that matches the score. I will use the following grading scale on each assignment:

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

In calculating your final grade, I will average and weight the numerical totals, and assign the appropriate letter grade.

**NOTE:** The major assignments of this class will require you to present ideas and arguments in written form, and in grading your work, I will be looking primarily at the quality and persuasiveness of your analyses and arguments, your ability to clearly support your opinions and conclusions. As a result, the quality of your writing, in addition to the quality of your analysis and arguments, will be weighed in determining your grade on each assignment.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND HONESTY:**

All students should note and consider carefully the following policies:

- **Absences from Exams:** “Absence from an announced examination results in a failing grade for the examination, unless suitable arrangements are made for a special examination.” (*Westminster College Undergraduate Catalog*, p. 71) For this course, I will recommend a make-up exam only if I am notified more than 12 hours in advance of the scheduled exam, and the reasons for missing the exam are sufficiently compelling.

- **Plagiarism and Cheating:** These and any other forms of academic dishonesty and theft will not be tolerated in this class. They are a violation of the norms of mutual respect, individual integrity, and the open exchange of ideas, and are subject to severe penalties, including automatic failure in the class. We will discuss the meaning and importance of academic honesty early in the class, and you can also consult the *Westminster College Undergraduate Catalog*, pp. 71-76 for the Westminster College Academic Integrity Policy. This Policy will be followed in our class.

One specific element of this policy is worth emphasizing right now. Whenever you submit a piece of writing, it must include the proper citations for all of your sources, including readings used in the course. For this course, you will be required to use the American Political Science Association style guide, which we will review in class. Failure to appropriately cite your sources will result in a reduction of your grade on the assignment.

**HOW TO FIND ME:**

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Office Hours – Wednesday – 10 am -3 pm  
And by appointment.