

Grande Prairie Regional College
Political Studies 1020
Introduction to Political Institutions, Processes and Problems
University Transfer
Winter 2008

Instructor: Tom Enders, PhD

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Office hours: W 4:15-5:45 p.m.-5/F 1:30-3 p.m. and by appointment

Room: E306A

Time: M,W 14:30-15:50

College Calendar course description:

This course is an introduction to the institutions, processes and problems of government emphasizing Canadian and other democratic governments. The course includes discussions of law, constitutions, civil liberties, public opinion, voting behaviors, electoral systems, political parties, interest groups, federalism and nationalism. This course offers an introduction to different fields of political study. Problems to be examined may include: political integration, the right to national self-determination, humanitarian intervention, globalization, global warming, terrorism and other issues.

Course description, winter term 2008:

This course is designed to introduce you to political institutions and processes, primarily through a comparison of Canadian and American political systems. How similar are they? How significant are the differences? What are their best features? What reforms should be considered?

This is an election year in the United States and may well be an election year in Canada, too. Alberta voters may also be called upon to elect a provincial government. Consequently, special attention will be given to election-related topics. How do we elect governments? What are the advantages and disadvantages of Proportional Representation? Why do people vote as they do, or not vote at all? Does use of the media detract from or enhance the democratic political process?

Among the political problems to be examined are: the role of the courts in making decisions about the definition of marriage, the legality of marijuana use and other matters; and accommodating regional and ethnic differences in Canada and a democratic Iraq.

Course objectives:

By the end of this course you should be able to define key terms, explain major functions of various components of political systems, and think critically about the performance of the systems. You should be better able to compare, contrast, scrutinize, analyze, question, argue and think clearly and independently about political players and political systems. You should leave with basic knowledge to utilize as a citizen - and as a student when pursuing further academic study of politics.

Course requirements:

Midterm exam.....	30%
Term paper.....	30%
Final exam.....	40%

Conversion table:

A+ 90 - 100	B+ 76 - 79	C+ 67 - 69	D+ 55 - 59
A 85 - 89	B 73 - 75	C 64 - 66	D 50 - 54
A- 80 - 84	B- 70 - 72	C- 60 - 63	F 0 - 49

For conversion of letter grades to the four-point scale see Calendar p. 37.

Please note that you are expected to write the final exam when scheduled by the Registrar's Office - with possible exceptions in the case of compelling and urgent circumstances beyond your control.

Also note: You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with College Calendar information pertaining to cheating and plagiarism, for which there are a range of penalties (see pages 44-5). Also note and observe key dates during the term (pp. 15-16).

Required Readings:

1. Mark Dickerson & Thomas Flanagan, An Introduction to Government and Politics: A Conceptual Approach, 7th edition. Scarborough: Ontario: ITP Nelson, 2006.
2. Selected database and internet readings as well as Blackboard postings.

Topics

I. **Introduction.** What is politics? What is Political Science? The value of a liberal arts education. The political process.

II. **Elections and Election-related topics**

- A. The selection of executives and legislatures in Canada and the United States. The Single-Member Plurality System
- B. Proportional Representation and other electoral systems
- C. Political parties. Functions. Philosophies. Kinds of parties and party systems
- D. Elections. Functions. Voting behaviour. Voter turnout.
- E. News media. Functions. Leanings. Election coverage. Attack ads.

III. **Government institutions and political processes**

- A. Political culture. Canadian and American attitudes compared - on the role of government in society, equality, war, religion and other matters.
- B. Parliamentary vs. presidential systems. Party voting. Checks on power.

Effectiveness. Accountability.

- C. The executive branch. Functions. Are the Canadian and Americans heads of government too powerful?
- D. Legislatures. Functions. Different views on the role of the representative
- E. Bureaucracies. Impartiality, fairness, efficiency and accountability
- F. Local government. Responsibilities and issues. Organization. Political parties.
- G. The courts and rights. The American Bill of Rights, The Canadian Charter of Rights and the notwithstanding clause. Same-sex marriage, capital punishment, and other issues.
- H. Interest groups. Functions. Methods. Determinants of Success. Ideological interest groups. Think tanks.

IV. Federalism and accommodating national and ethnic identities and aspirations

- A. Sovereignty and sovereignty options - unitary, federal and confederal arrangements
- B. Quebec
- C. Aboriginal Peoples
- D. Iraq