



Background

Apocalyptic. Mind-blowing. Almost no one in the United States or the world expected Donald Trump to get elected President of the United States. Yet here we are, almost two years since that earthshaking election. President Trump's ascension has brought many issues of American government front and center: the emoluments clause, rules about presidential incapacity, the limits of the power of the president to shield himself and his allies from prosecution, and so much more. Add to this mix the Kavanaugh confirmation, the potential Democratic capture of the House in the upcoming elections, an erratic North Korea, trouble in the Middle East, Brexit—it's an amazing time to learn more about American government!

Introduction

The goal of this course is the study of government of the United States. This being an extremely broad topic, emphasis will be placed on the origin and function of the various branches of government and their interaction. In addition, we will be studying the interplay of governing institutions and the policy outputs that result. Particular issues of current public controversy (such as gun control, abortion and freedom of speech) will also be addressed.

Philosophy

In order to demonstrate your (eventual) mastery of the study of US government, it is key that you demonstrate your competence in two areas: (1) Grasp of all relevant facts and data. This will hopefully be accomplished through the reading of our fabulous textbook and other primary sources. (2) More importantly, I expect to see synthesis. By this, I mean that I want you to blend the facts and data you have learned with the opinions of other scholars and commentators. Through this and your own life experiences, I expect you to formulate your own opinions on every aspect of government we study. I will never penalize you for the content of your opinion. What I will concentrate on is your ability to express your opinion clearly, thoughtfully and articulately. I also want to see you back your opinion up through the use of examples or application in the real world. Be aware that I will be extremely rigorous when I examine your opinions; though there is no "right" opinion, there is a "right" way to express your support of your beliefs. In order to make sure that these beliefs are all well informed, we will be reading a variety of primary sources, newspaper and journal articles.

Grading

Tests and Quizzes: 50%

Thesis Paper: 15%

Homework: 20%

Class Work (including Class Participation): 15%

You will also have the ability to occasionally accrue some extra-credit points by doing a variety of jobs for me... I'll mention these opportunities to you as they arise.

Tests and Quizzes

A test will come at the completion of each unit. By their nature, tests tend to orient us more towards the facts. So at least half of all tests will be devoted to the basic facts that we have learned in that particular unit. But, of course, I also want synthesis, so I will place a great deal of emphasis on the essay section of each test. It is here that you will apply the information you have learned and use it to formulate your opinions. Of course, cheating is intolerable and is an insult to both the class and me. If I catch you cheating, it will result in an automatic zero on the test. Also, you'll have lost my trust—a commodity more precious than your grade.

Quizzes will be far less formal, but I will still take them seriously. They may be announced or they may be surprises. Most likely, they will be given to gauge how assiduous your reading has been. All homework quizzes will be graded 1-10, and will count as a homework grade in addition to counting towards your test and quiz grade.

Thesis Paper

This will be a paper in which you advocate for an idea or policy change relating to American Government. We'll deal with this more later on in the term. I will tell you that it will be about 5-7 pages long and will be due about two weeks before the end of the term.

Homework

All homework will generally have two components: (1) reading and gathering of facts, and (2) synthesis of this information through the expression of an opinion on those facts. You may hand in *three* late homework assignments. Homework should be longer than one, but shorter than two pages. PLEASE DOUBLE SPACE! Homework should be submitted via Dropbox and is due by the time that class starts the day after the assignment.

Participation and Conduct

What occurs in class is especially important since it is the only time we are all together as a group. As a result, it is vital that you come to class prepared to discuss the previous night's reading. I expect you to be active and engaged and insightful. I would also appreciate it if you were witty and entertaining, but this is of course not required. If you are shy about public participation, I urge you to make every effort to overcome your fears. If you absolutely cannot overcome these fears, come and see me privately and we can work out some sort of alternative. Participation is key since the substance of most of our classes will be discussion. I prefer this discussion to be an internal debate, with myself in the role of moderator. Of course, I expect you to respect the voices of your classmates, so please try to avoid interruptions and the like.

Sleep Policy

I understand that Stuyvesant students work way too hard and take on far too many responsibilities. A lot of this is beyond your control as the college process becomes steadily more insane. As a result, you may occasionally fall asleep. If you do fall asleep, I will not be mad at you! But I will wake you up immediately—otherwise I will soon be presiding over a dormitory. The cure for this problem is getting more sleep at night—only sleep deprived people will fall asleep when they don't want to.

Laptop Policy

Unless you have a special accommodation, I do not allow laptops to be used in my class. They place a screen-as-wall in between you and the rest of the class and also are portals to distraction and web-browsing. I will allow you to take notes on a tablet as long as it's flat on the desk and I can see what you are typing.

Absence/Lateness

Don't be absent. Don't be late. If you are absent, I need a note from a parent, guardian, doctor or religious figure. If you are late, I require a note. If you are repeatedly absent without excuse, you will force me to call home and get you into trouble. If it continues, I'll fail you. Unexcused lateness will lead to reductions in your class participation grade.

Format of Work

I expect all work to be neat and well presented. Please keep all graded work in our shared Dropbox folder! Also, please use the following header for homework:

Your Name	Mr. Polazzo
9/1/18	Period 6
Homework 1	

Finally...

I expect you to be informed about current events. The sites that I generally check are the New York Times (particularly the columnists and politics sections), Slate (particularly stuff by John Dickerson), Politico and New York Magazine. For the best horse race coverage, you can't beat Real Clear Politics as well as Nate Silver's Fivethirtyeight.

All homework assignments can be found on my website: polazzo.com

If you want to e-mail me, please contact me at mpolazzo@gmail.com. This ensures that I will get your message. Do NOT use my NYC DOE account—I do not check it very often, if at all.