Introduction to American Politics

This honors seminar offers an introduction to American politics that emphasizes the confluence of ideas, mores, institutions, and interests, in the constitutional system. This course covers more theory, and the readings are more demanding, than other versions of GOV 310.

One of the main objectives of the course is to deepen your understanding of the practical aspects of contemporary public affairs by developing your ability to understand the theoretical foundations of American politics. Although we cover the nuts and bolts of politics there is much more theory in this version of GOV 310. If you have registered for this section mainly because 310 is a legislative requirement that you need to fulfill, this is not the right version for you. There is a substantial workload in this class.

Regular attendance, thorough and timely preparation, and active participation are all necessary to do well.

Course requirements:

1. Four essays (approximately 1000 words each). Three of these will be assigned analytic essay topics. The last will be a book review of a title chosen by the student from a long list of provided possibilities. (15% each essay, 60% of total course grade)

2. Two in-class tests. These will count 15% each, 30% of total course grade.

3. Class participation. (10% of course grade). Both informed participation and occasional leadership of the seminar will be graded.

No make-up exams or late papers, except for documented medical or other emergencies.

Texts: (tentative)
Mary Nichols and David Nichols, Readings in American Government, Ninth Edition
Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, Its Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism
Bruce Ackerman, Before the Next Attack: Preserving Civil Liberties in an Age of Terrorism