What is political science? What exactly is so scientific about studying politics? Glad you asked. Political science, as defined by Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, is “the description and analysis of political and especially governmental institutions and processes.” Political scientists study how governments operate, how people vote and why elected officials make certain choices. In short, political science is just what it sounds like: a thoughtful way to study government and politics.

This course will teach you how to examine and discuss the basics of American Government. You will learn about the institutions, ideas and interests that form the backbone of this country’s political system. Along the way, we will discuss issues and current events that apply to themes in our readings. You might have strong opinions about those topics. Perhaps you are liberal or conservative, or maybe you are undecided. In this course, it doesn’t matter — my job isn’t to change your mind. Although we might discuss political parties and ideology during the course, I won’t try to pass off my personal views as fact. Instead of asking you to think differently, I will ask you to think critically about politics. I’ll challenge you to objectively analyze ideas and thoughtfully evaluate key terms about the political system. In summary, I’m not here to tell you what to think. Instead, my objective is to show you, as freshly minted political scientists, how to learn about politics and why you should become empowered to think for yourselves. For that reason, you must bring an open mind to this course.

Therefore, after finishing this course you should be able to:
1. Understand and describe the foundations of the American political system, including the patterns of federal, state and local governments.
2. Demonstrate the ability to analyze and write effectively about the political process, along with evaluating political statements and ideas.
3. Recognize and evaluate the interests and institutions of the American political system.

Required Materials:
- LegSim registration ($16). Create a profile at www.legsim.com
- A computer with Internet access and the ability to play video clips
ASSIGNMENTS

Course material will include chapters from the Bardes textbook, activities, writing assignments, and articles posted on the class web site. Points will be given for the following:

I. LegSim online simulation 100 points
We will conduct an 8-week online simulation in which you'll interact with one another as “lawmakers” in the U.S. Senate. During this time, you will propose laws, lead committees, create alliances with other Senators and debate policy. Register at www.legsim.org (there’s a $16 fee). Points will be awarded based on participation and grasp of key concepts.

II. Final Exam 100 points
The final exam will be based on the reading (textbook and weekly articles) and lectures. If you only do the readings and skip most of the class sessions, you won’t pass the final. The exam will be given online during Finals week at the Blackboard site for this class.

III. Weekly Journal 100 points
You will answer a weekly essay question posted in the Weekly Journals. I will post the question every Sunday, starting the second week of class, and you will be required to post a thoughtful, concise and well-researched answer in no less than 150 words by Friday at 8:59 p.m. to receive credit. Each post will be worth five (5) points, and you will be graded on the completeness and accuracy of your answer. You must also include a link or citation to at least one outside source (NOT an assigned reading), such as a media news story or scholarly article. There will be a question posted on Sunday of Finals week that will be worth 20 points.

IV. Discussions 100 points
Each week I will start a discussion thread on our Discussion Board with a question about a topic from our readings or something controversial in the news. You must post a respectful, polite and thoughtful response to both my original post and also one of your classmates’ responses to receive points for that week’s discussion. Each response (both to my post and your classmates’ posts) must be at least 100 words to receive credit. Participation in the discussions is worth five (5) points each week, with a final discussion worth 20 points during Finals Week.

V. Quizzes 100 points
We’ll usually have a weekly quiz instead if there’s no exam scheduled. Quizzes cover the previous week’s reading, including chapters from the textbook and assigned articles. Each quiz will be worth 10 points and you can drop two low scores.

Reading assignments and slide shows
I will assign textbook chapters and articles every week, along with an online slide show lecture. You will find these assignments in the Current Week page in our course site. The course exams will include material from the readings and slide shows, so make sure to take notes while reading.
Total possible points: 500 points

Your final grade will break down on the following point scale:

A=450-500 points (90 percent and higher)
B=400-450 points (80-89 percent)
C=350-400 points (70-79 percent)
D=300-350 points (60-69 percent)
F=299 points and below (<60 percent)

The grades are pretty simple. If your point total falls in one of brackets above, that's your letter grade. Score 299 points or lower and you will fail the course; score anything higher and you will pass. If you'd like to know your grade at any point in the course, just add up your points and divide by the number of possible points. I will update your grades twice: once halfway through the semester and also right before the final exam, so please do not ask me at other times during the semester to add up your grade.

A few more things….

- **Class participation** is a great way to score additional points. However, your contributions have to be meaningful. Emailing me articles and news clips or posting additional (and insightful) comments on the discussion board would count for participation points.
- **Make-up assignments and extra credit will not be offered.** Unfortunately, there are no exceptions to this rule. You may drop one exam during the semester in case you skip a test or didn’t do well.
- **Cheating will not be tolerated.** You must maintain the same standards of academic honesty that I would expect in a live classroom. Taking an exam with a group of your classmates is not allowed and you will be dropped from the course if this happens. Plagiarism (copying another person’s work) on any writing assignment is also forbidden.

Disability Statement - Students in need of accommodations in the college learning environment:

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a learning disability should contact Learning Services in the Library and Learning Resource Center (LLRC), room 1766, phone (707) 256-7442. A Learning Disability Specialist will review your needs and determine appropriate accommodations.

If you need accommodations for physical or other types of disabilities, schedule an appointment with DSPS Counselor, Sheryl Fernandez, in the Counseling Department located on the top floor of the 800 building, phone (707) 253-3040 for appointment.

All information and documentation is confidential. Please feel encouraged to make an appointment with me privately to discuss your specific learning needs in my class.
COURSE SCHEDULE: POLITICAL SCIENCE 120
(subject to minor changes with adequate notice)

Week 1: Introduction to American Government
August 18 to August 24:
- *American Government and Politics Today*, Chapter 1: The Democratic Republic, pp. 4-24
- Lecture slide show
- “The World’s Smallest Political Quiz” (activity)
- “What is a Socialist?” (article)
- “Why the federal government is necessary” (video)
- “Is Obama a Socialist?” (article)
- Weekly discussion and journal entries

Week 2: The Constitution
August 25 to August 31:
- Lecture slide show
- “Do You Know that the Constitution is Unconstitutional?” (article)
- “American Political Culture” (article)
- “Madison’s Constitutional Convention Notes” (video)
- *Political Culture: Match* (word game)
- Sign up for LegSim account
- Weekly discussion and journal entries
- Quiz 1

Week 3: The Constitution
September 1 to September 7:
- Lecture slide show
- “Federalist Papers” (article)
- *Edward Snowden: the whistleblower behind the NSA surveillance revelations* (article and video)
- *Can the Constitution still protect our privacy in the digital age?* (article)
- *Checks and Balances: Match* (word game)
- Weekly discussion and journal entries
- Quiz 2

Week 4: The Bill of Rights
September 8 to September 14:
- Lecture slide show: Part I and II
- “We the People’ Loses Appeal With People Around the World”
- “It’s a Free Country: Know Your Rights!” (video)
- “Top Secret America” (video)
- Complete LegSim profile
- Weekly discussion and journal entries
- Quiz 3
Week 5: Federalism
September 15 to September 21:
- Chapter 3: Federalism, pp. 82-94
- Lecture slide show
- “Marijuana Initiatives Spark States’ Rights Legislation” (article)
- “Americans Favor States’ Rights on Same-Sex Marriage and Marijuana Use” (article)
- “Would Obama Legalize Marijuana if He Wins Reelection?” (video)
- “Obama’s War on Pot” (article)
- Weekly discussion and journal entries

Week 6: Federalism
September 22 to September 28:
- Chapter 3: Federalism, pp. 94-108
- Lecture slide show
- “The Path to Civil War” (video)
- “State power and the federal government” (video)
- Poli Sci crossword puzzle (game)
- “States’ Rights is Rallying Cry for Lawmakers” (article)
- Weekly discussion and journal entries
- Quiz 4

Week 7: Political Parties
September 29 to October 5:
- Chapter 8: Political Parties, pp. 250-263
- Lecture slide show
- “He Flipped!” (article)
- “The Big Flip” (article)
- LegSim simulation begins! Log into www.legsim.org and start playing
- Weekly discussion and journal entries
- Quiz 5

Week 8: Political Parties
October 6 to October 12:
- Chapter 8: Political Parties, pp. 263-280
- Lecture slide show (watch all five video clips)
- “Separation of Powers” (video)
- “Partisan Psychology: Why Do People Choose Political Loyalties Over Facts?” (article)
- “Has The Tea Party ‘Sold Out’ To The Mainstream GOP?” (article)
- LegSim activities
- Weekly discussion and journal entries
- Quiz 6
Week 9: Congress
October 13 to October 19:
• Chapter 10: Congress, pp. 334-350
• Lecture slide show
• "I'm Just a Bill" (video)
• "Rand Paul's Filibuster" (video)
• Senators Wary of Filibuster 'Nuclear Option'" (article)
• "Building a Better Democracy" (article)
• Congressional Report Cards (interactive site)
• LegSim activities
• Weekly discussion and journal entries
• Quiz 7

Week 10: Congress
October 20 to October 26:
• Chapter 10: Congress, pp. 350-360
• Lecture slide show
• "House Republicans Adopt Earmarks Ban in New Congress" (article)
• "Lawmakers Find a Path Around an Earmarks Ban" (article)
• "Partisan gridlock dominates Washington" (video)
• LegSim activities
• Weekly discussion and journal entries
• Quiz 8

Week 11: The presidency
October 27 to November 2:
• Chapter 11: The presidency, pp. 370-385
• Lecture slide show
• "Imperial presidency threatening democracy?" (video)
• "The not-so-imperial presidency of Barack Obama" (opinion article)
• LegSim activities
• Weekly discussion and journal entries
• Quiz 9

Week 12: The presidency
November 3 to November 9:
• Chapter 11: The presidency, pp. 385-399
• Lecture slide show
• "Secret 'Kill List' Proves a Test of Obama’s Principles and Will" (article)
• LegSim activities
• Weekly discussion and journal entries

Week 13: Public Opinion
November 10 to November 16:
• Chapter 6: Public Opinion pp. 188-200
• "2012 Poll Accuracy"
• "Nate Silver" (video)
• "What Nate Silver Gets Wrong" (article)
• LegSim activities
• Weekly discussion and journal entries
Week 14: Public Opinion
November 17 to November 23:
- Chapter 6: Public Opinion pp. 188-214
- “Bush Aide Watches Polls and Public Perceptions” (article)
- “Study Finds Left-Wing Brain, Right-Wing Brain” (article)
- LegSim activities
- Weekly discussion and journal entries
- Quiz 10

Week 15: Public Opinion
November 24 to November 30:
- Short week: Thanksgiving
- Finish LegSim
- Rent “Wag the Dog” and watch over break (trailer)
- Weekly discussion and journal entries

Week 16: The Business of Getting Elected
December 1 to December 7:
- Chapter 9: Voting, Elections and the Media pp. 286-305
- “The DNA of Politics” (article)
- “How Biased Are the Media, Really?” (article)
- Elections and Public Engagement: Match (word game)
- News War: Part II episodes 9-12 (video)
- Weekly discussion and journal entries
- Quiz 11

Week 17: The Business of Getting Elected
December 8 to December 14:
- Chapter 9: Voting, Elections and the Media pp. 305-327
- “Everything You’ve Ever Wanted to Know About Voter ID Laws” (article)
- “What is the Electoral College?” (article)
- Political Compass test (survey)
- News War: Part II episodes 13-15 (video)
- Weekly discussion and journal entries
- Quiz 12
- Finals Review

Week 18: Finals
December 15 to December 21:
- Weekly discussion and journal entries
- Final Exam: December 18
I have read and understood the contents of this syllabus, and I understand the consequences of not following the assignments and rules. It is my responsibility to complete the assignments of this course, to study the course material and to attend each class meeting on time. I also understand that it is my right to ask the instructor, at any time, for clarification of any assignment, rule or my responsibilities for this course.

Signature___________________________________

Print name___________________________________

Date_______________________

Phone/cell number___________________________

Email address (print very neatly)__________________________________________

Anything I should know?____________________________________________________