CURRENT ISSUES IN AMERICAN POLITICS  
(POL1000-A, Fall, 2008)  

TIME AND PLACE: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9-9:50 AM in Cushing Stevens Auditorium  
INSTRUCTOR: Mary McHugh  
OFFICE HOURS: MWF 10-11 AM and/or by appointment  
Office: Sakowich Campus Center, Room 380 – x. 5123  
Home: (978) 568-0414 (no calls after 10 P.M. please)  
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COURSE DESCRIPTION/OBJECTIVES:  
This course is designed to enhance the student’s understanding of contemporary political issues using common concepts and theories in political science. You will be asked to inquire into and contextualize your own political values and views in the hopes of becoming a more reflective and conversant citizen. Through readings, assignments, and lectures, you will gain an understanding of the nature and complexity of important issues in American politics and how decisions about these problems are resolved. The course will provide you with tools and approaches for analyzing political events and phenomena in American Politics. By the end of the course you should be able to think critically about these problems and solutions and be able to formulate arguments to support or refute political decisions.  

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:  

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT PROJECT (10%) – A frequent subject of discussion in this class will be the disconnection of government from the people. Thus, a part of this course will be aimed at finding ways in which we as citizens can regain some measure of influence on politics. This assignment is designed to help you think about this issue. See details below  

CLASS PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE (10%)  
You will find that many issues cannot be fully understood by reading about them or listening to my lectures on them. Class discussion and participation is both encouraged and required. Your full engagement is essential for lively and informative class discussions as well as for optimizing your own learning. At times during the semester you will be asked to attend a Discussion Group outside of the normal class time. These times will be provided to you in advance according to your schedules. I will track your attendance and you will be marked down after three unexcused absences (Excused absences include medical problems, college sanctioned trips, and family emergencies). In addition, there will be occasional Current Events/Reading Quizzes. These quizzes will require a minimal level of preparation and will be factored into this part of your grade. As you can see, it is in your best interest to attend all classes and discussion sections.  

OPTIONAL SERVICE LEARNING COMPONENT (10%) – See below for further details
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT POINTS

Students throughout the semester will be participating in Civic Engagement activities and earning points. This is possibly the easiest part of the course and the most important. Your success in college depends on your active participation in the learning process in the same way that our political system depends on the active participation of its citizens. Therefore, one of the goals of this course is to encourage and facilitate active participation in the political process and in groups that try to affect political issues, to help demonstrate the links between individuals and politics. Grading for civic engagement points will be awarded as follows (No pluses or minuses):

A = 60 or more points  B = 50 points  C = 40 points  D = 30 points  F = 0-29 points

Some Ways to Accumulate Civic Engagement Points

PARTICIPATING IN ORGANIZATIONS

- Join any organization on campus that works with political issues. At a minimum, you must attend three meetings, or attend two meetings and help with one event during the semester. 20 points.
- Join an off-campus political organization, including a group organized around a specific political goal or set of goals, a political party affiliation, or an organization that works to promote the welfare of the community. Points and requirements are the same as those listed for on-campus groups above.

CITIZEN EDUCATION AND ACTIVISM

- Attend Convocation on September 10th. (10 points)
- Attend a lecture on a topic of political significance. (10 points per lecture)
- Watch a movie that corresponds to an issue from class (10 points - maximum of 2 movies)
- Participate in Constitution Day or UN day (20 points)
- Attend a meeting or legislative session of the city council, state or national legislatures in either the North Andover area or in Boston, or in your home city/state. (10 points per meeting).
- Call your state or national representatives or senators to ask them to take a certain position on upcoming legislation. (10 points, maximum of two calls).
- Write and send a letter to the editor of a paper on a topic about which you have strong feelings. (10 points)
- Attend a campaign, rally, protest, symposium or other event of political significance. (10-20 points depending on time commitment).
- Give blood (If you do not meet the requirements for giving blood, you can earn points by volunteering at the blood drive.) (10 points).
- Organize or assist at a blood drive on campus. (20 points).
- Participate in Merrimack in the City Day (20 points).
- Volunteer at a non profit organization (10-20 points depending on the time commitment)
- Interview an issue advocate or someone affected by an issue (10 points)
- Participate in a Walk/Fundraising Event (10 points)
- Watch a debate (10 points)
- Vote in an election (10 points)
- Win a class debate (10 points)

Students may negotiate with the instructor over other possible point sources. The point of the exercise is to encourage students to become more active and informed as citizens.

In order to earn your points you must write up these activities. This is not difficult. For most activities, a paragraph or two describing what you did and what you learned, as well as when and where the activity took place, is fine. For lectures, films, and plays, I would also like at least a few lines of reaction to what you saw. You must also include documentation of your actions (e.g. flyers from lectures attended, blood donor stickers, copies of letters sent, etc.) If you have any question about what constitutes appropriate documentation for a specific action, ask. Write-ups should be submitted on a monthly basis (10/1, 11/1, 12/1). Write-up will not be accepted after December 12th.

To avoid cheating, I will ask for verification of your Civic Engagement activities. Although your final write-up will be due on the first of the month, you must also submit a verification form through Blackboard within 48 hours of doing any Civil Engagement activity.
**OPTIONAL EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ASSIGNMENT**

As part of the service learning program at Merrimack, you may choose to gain extra credit by spending time volunteering in the Merrimack Valley Area. For this project you will be expected to volunteer at a location relating to a public policy for a minimum of 12 hours during the semester. (This volunteering is in addition to the civic engagement project but you can use your experience as 20 points).

In addition to completing the 12 hours of service, you will also have to turn in a brief 3 page paper regarding the site you worked at, what your duties were, and how this experience relates to specific class material or discussions and what your overall experience was like (stories, events, effect on you, etc.). Grading will be weighed more heavily on how well you connect the service to the themes of the course material. *This paper is due on the last day of class (DECEMBER 12th).*

If you want to do this option you should fill out the student information form and schedule an appointment with the Stevens Service Learning Center (X 5125 – Campus Center 380) for assistance in placement at an appropriate site and other details. If you already have a location where you want to work or already work with agencies outside of the resources of the Stevens Center, you must clear the site with me in advance. If you choose to volunteer, it is very important that you fulfill your commitment, thus, be sure to weigh this option carefully.

**Work on Political Campaigns or in the Polling Institute can also be given credit. Please see me for approval.**
Civic Engagement Point Verification Form
Fall, 2008

On ____________________________ (date, day of week and time) at
_______________________________ (place), I completed the following activity
_______________________________ (name or description of activity) for __________ (number
of points) Civic Engagement Points. I certify that I, ____________________________ (name) completed
this activity and that all information is truthful.

Date submitted: __________________

Signature: _____________________

REACTION/ANALYSIS
For most activities, a paragraph describing what you did and what you learned is fine. For lectures, films, and plays, I would also like
at least a few lines of reaction to what you saw.