

PSI 243 Contemporary Political Issues

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This is a course in policy analysis and includes selected policy issues facing government. Students will examine polarizing political issues in two contexts: the arguments presented by proponents and opponents of each issue and the fiscal consideration given each issue by legislative bodies at the national level. Students learn how to evaluate viewpoints and develop positions on contemporary political issues. Specific topics of discussion include: the American political process; social change and public policy; the institutions of government; the connection between public rhetoric and fiscal policy; and international relations.

TEXTS:

Taking Sides, McKenna and Feingold, 15 ed.

Setting National Priorities, The Brookings Institute. (Available on the web. No need to purchase unless you want a paper copy. <http://brookings.nap.edu/books/081577401X/html/index.html>)

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

1. To identify and define the multiple factors of any issue.
2. Develop critical thinking skills to evaluate the arguments presented on both sides of an issue.
3. Examine fiscal and legislative priorities given each issue discussed.
4. Develop the ability to take an informed position on an issue and support that position with Evidence.

SESSION #1:

Course policies, procedures, and requirements.

Identification of the issues to be discussed.

Introduction to “incommensurable” arguments

SESSION #2: Democracy and American political process (Readings: Taking Sides -

Introduction, pp. XIV – XXV and ISSUE #2 and ISSUE #9)

Evaluation of Pro and Con

Potential/Actual legislative action

“Labels” and “Alignments”

SESSION #3: Institutions of Government (Readings: Taking Sides - ISSUE #7 and ISSUE #8)

The character of government and government officials

Legislating “Morality”

Responsibilities of the legislative and judicial branches of government

SESSION #4: Social Change and Public Policy (Readings: Taking Sides - ISSUE #9 and ISSUE #12)

Constitutional considerations

Definition of “terms” implicit in arguments

Debate vs. Argument

SESSION #5: (Readings: Taking Sides - ISSUE #10 and ISSUE #16)

Public vs, Private Reform

Social/Political Impacts

Fiscal considerations

SESSION #6: (Readings: Taking Sides - ISSUE #13 and ISSUE 14)

Budgets vs Services

Income Redistribution

Public spending priorities

SESSION #7: America and the World (Readings: Taking Sides - ISSUE #19 and ISSUE #20)

Defense vs Isolation

Exporting ideology

Diversification or division

SESSION #8: Synthesis and evaluation

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. ATTENDANCE and PARTICIPATION is critical to success in this course. The level of involvement in the course is a major factor in the final grade. Each absence will deduct 11 points from the final grade. If you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to contact the instructor and make arrangements for a make-up assignment to recover the points lost. A make-up assignment has a maximum value of 11 points.
2. Each student will research and present a critical evaluation of a single issue (not restricted to topics in the texts) of their choice. Written as a “Key Points Paper,” the work will not exceed three (3) pages. Copies of the paper will be distributed to the class prior to the presentation. The oral presentation should not exceed 10 minutes.
3. A take-home examination will be distributed at the sixth session and is due at the eighth session.