PSI 243 - Contemporary Political Issues (3 credits)

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Contemporary Political Issues analyzes selected political issues facing governments at federal, state, and local levels, including their fiscal impacts. Students will examine, analyze, and assess the arguments presented by proponents and opponents of these issues. Students will also learn to develop persuasive positions on contemporary political issues. Students will be able to find, identify, and prioritize information pertinent to an issue. Among specific topics for discussion and examination will be the American political process; social change and public policy; the institutions of government; international relations; and the role of media in public policy and government.

TEXTS:

Selected readings from the instructor: For the first class on March 21, be prepared 1) to discuss Federalism in depth. Know its definition, application, strengths and weaknesses. 2) Read and be ready to comment on Ashcroft (later Gonzales) v. Oregon as it related to Oregon’s Death With Dignity Act 3) also know the details and outcomes of “Fletcher v. Peck,” McCulloch v. Maryland,” and “Gibbons v. Ogden.”

COURSE OBJECTIVES FOR STUDENT LEARNING:

Upon completion of this course students will:

1. Be able to identify and define all sides of an issue and their impacts on society.

2. Have developed thinking and logic skills to analyze and present arguments.
3. Have examined the fiscal, social, technological, and cultural impacts of legislation and public policy.

4. Have mastered the mining, analysis, and application of information and evidence.

5. Be able to make a persuasive case on an issue with supportive evidence and a solid logical foundation.

6. Have produced a critical paper and presentation on subject pertinent to class discussions.

7. Have mastered the use of problem solving to analyze and understand issues.

8. Have read and summarized two books on politics, economics, or history.

**OCTOBER 21 – FEDERALISM**

We’ll also discuss course policies and procedures, writing process, structures in argument and persuasion, and use and identification of evidence. See assignment above under “Texts”

**Assignment: Eminent Domain**

**OCTOBER 28 – EMINENT DOMAIN**

Introduction to logic, Occam’s Razor, book papers

**Assignment: Political parties/campaigns**

**NOVEMBER 4 – POLITICAL PARTIES/CAMPAIGNS**

Final paper discussion, persuasive writing: techniques, style, conventions, book papers

**Assignment: Local government**

**NOVEMBER 11 – LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

More logic, persuasive writing: techniques, style, conventions, book papers

**Assignment: New media**

**NOVEMBER 18 – NEW MEDIA**
Persuasive writing: techniques, style, conventions. (as needed), book papers

Assignment: Ethics and moral in politics and government

NOVEMBER 25 - ETHICS/MORALS IN POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

Ethics/morals papers due, persuasive writing: techniques, style, conventions. (as needed), book papers

Assignment: Final exam/papers

DECEMBER 2 – FINAL EXAM (open note)

DECEMBER 9 – FINAL PAPER PRESENTATIONS

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Attendance and interaction in Contemporary Political Issues are imperative and expected. The class is structured similar to a seminar, so your preparation and participation are critical. An absence will deduct 11 points from the final grade. If you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to make the arrangements for a make-up assignment. The maximum number of points that can be earned on a make-up assignment is 11. We may also have periodic quizzes in class. Your preparation and participation in class are worth (20 percent) of your grade.

2. Each student will be responsible for reading two political/economic/history books and then writing a two-page paper on each due at a predetermined schedule. Book titles must be approved by the instructor who will also provide a number of titles. These papers will be explained in detail during the first class. (40 percent)

3. Each student will research and present a 10-page, critical evaluation of a single issue. The topic will be the student’s choice, but must be accepted by the instructor. Copies of the paper will be distributed to the class prior to the presentation. The presentation should be about 10 minutes, not including questions and comments from classmates and the instructor. (20 percent)

4. Each student will have a final, open note exam in class. It will cover the topics from our reading, lectures, and class discussion. (20 percent)
5. Contemporary Political Issues is more about gathering credible evidence, determining what it means, and critically thinking about it as it is about defining and sorting political and historical concepts. (although they are important, too.) To that end, our class discussion will be critical to your success in this class. Be prepared and be prepared to be challenged. More about this the first night.