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; and the role of media in public policy and government.

TEXTS:
Selected readings from the instructor: For the first class on June 2, 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 researched and presented four papers on contemporary controversies in politics, economics, or social and cultural transformations.
JUNE 2 – FEDERALISM
We’ll also discuss course policies and procedures, writing process, structures in argument and persuasion, the use and identification of evidence, and information audits. See assignment above under “Texts”
Assignment: Ethics/morals readings: http://is.gd/grq5dE; information audit; two “Game Changers 1-2”

JUNE 16 – ETHICS/MORALS IN POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
“Game Changers,” Introduction to logic, Occam’s Razor, class preparation
Assignment: Local government clip files; “Game Changer 3”

JUNE 23 – LOCAL GOVERNMENT
Final paper discussion, persuasive writing: techniques, style, conventions
Assignment: New Media reading: http://is.gd/omsVjy; http://is.gd/7VH7ed; http://is.gd/G1R2uF; “Game Changer 4

JUNE 30 – NEW MEDIA
More logic, persuasive writing: techniques, style, conventions, book papers
Assignment: Money in government reading, understanding Citizen United et al: http://is.gd/09PmCr; http://is.gd/nJ6Ama; “Game Changer 5”

JULY 7 – MONEY/ACCESS/INFLUENCE
Persuasive writing: techniques, style, conventions. (as needed), book papers

JULY 14 – FINAL EXAM (open note)

JULY 21 – 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 writing and presenting five weekly two-page papers (“Game Changers”) on modern controversies in politics, economics, or social and cultural transformations. A book review may be substituted for one paper but the title must be approved in advance by the instructor. These papers will be explained in detail during the first class. (5 x 8 pts = 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. Every requirement must be completed.  
6. 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.