

Democracy in the United States and France
Political Science 197C, Fall Semester 1999
TR 1:00-2:15, 244 Hammond

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Course Description

The US and France, both vibrant and representative democracies, could scarcely differ more in the organization of their constitutional systems and in the styles of their political life. In this course, we will examine the two contrasting systems in detail, discussing the relative merits of two different ways of organizing a democracy. Whereas the US system is characterized by federalism, separation of powers, and tremendous diversity of local government authorities, the French system features centralized power, an executive branch that vastly overwhelms the legislative branch in power, weak local governments, and much greater power for the national government. Whereas the US system seems to put an emphasis on representation, this can sometimes come at the expense of efficiency. The French system is much more efficient, but with much greater power for the central government.

The course will involve reading about the current political system of France and comparing it to what you should already know about the United States. We will read two books in their entirety: *The French Polity*, which reviews the French political system; and *America the Unusual*, which reviews the ways in which the US government differs from many other western democracies. In addition, we will read various articles distributed in class, and each student will read independently for papers on topics related to class discussions.

Class discussion will be encouraged; writing assignments will be short but numerous; exams will be essays. The course should cause more reflection about the merits and flaws of our own political system through an in-depth look at another. The course is limited to a small number of students in order to encourage discussion and one-on-one work with the instructor.

Grades will be calculated as follows:

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| First Exam: | 30% |
| Second exam: | 20% |
| First short paper: | 10% |
| Second short paper: | 10% |
| Term paper: | 20% |
| Class Participation: | 10% |
| Total: | 100% |

You will write two short papers (5 pages each), and one longer paper (10-12 pages, double spaced). The short papers are due after sections in the syllabus covering French social, cultural, and historical factors, first, and second, the French governmental structure. You can write on any topic that interests you within those categories, with my approval. The short papers should focus on providing a clear description of how the French system operates and then on evaluating its merits and faults. Choose a narrow topic (for example, why the French have both a President and a Prime Minister, why they have a national police force rather than local ones like we do, why their Parliament is weaker than our Congress, why they have so many political parties) and focus solely on exploring the reasons, implications, and merits of it. These papers should not require much outside reading. However, you should start thinking about them early, and you should discuss your proposed topic with me.

You will also write a longer paper, due on the last day of class. In this paper, you should be explicitly comparative. That is, you should discuss both the French and American ways of handling the topic. For this paper, you should work in the library, through the internet, and using a variety of sources. Standard bibliographical references should be used, and your paper should not only describe the differences between the two countries in detail, but it should also explain the reasons for these differences and evaluate the impact of them.

The syllabus included here provides for some leeway in what we will discuss during the last week of class. Depending on student interests, class discussions, and available materials, we will discuss a select number of topics of French politics in some detail. Materials will be handed out or made available to you ahead of time, and we will discuss those in class. Think about topics that you might want to discuss: race relations, immigration, the educational system, religion and politics, labor unions, why they don't have a Bill of Rights, or other topics. These are also topics you might write your term papers on. Of course, we'll keep the readings light in that last period since your term papers are due on the last day of class.

There will be two exams in class, as noted in the daily schedule below. These will include identifications/short answers and some essays. There will be choices available, and ample opportunity to explain what you know. The first exam will cover the first book, on the French system, and the second exam will focus on the concept of American exceptionalism, with reference to the second book assigned. Bring a blank blue-book to class those days.

Papers are due on the days indicated in the syllabus. Late papers will be reduced by 10 points (one letter grade) for each work day (NOT class day) they are late, beginning at the minute class ends. So a paper due on Tuesday handed in on a Thursday will be reduced by 20 points. My advice: hand in your papers early and often. You can drop them by my office—have a secretary note the time.

Books for purchase at the University Book Store:

?? Safran, William. 1998. *The French Polity*, 5th ed. New York: Longman

?? Kingdon, John W. 1999. *America the Unusual*. New York: St. Martin's/Worth Publishers.

Academic honesty: As you know, plagiarism is a serious problem. Sometimes it stems from a lack of understanding of the concept. Here's how I understand it. The author of a book or article is the owner of the ideas expressed there. You're free to use those ideas, but you have an obligation to make clear that you are using the ideas first expressed by someone else. That's simple: quotation marks indicate that it is a verbatim passage taken from the other author (generally anything over 3 words or so, but in some cases as little as one word); citations for more general ideas not explicitly quoted, but on which you relied, should come at the end of the sentence or paragraph where they were used. The form of the citation is not so important, so long as it is complete. That means you may use footnotes or the more common bibliographic style of (Jones 1984, 45) referring to a book published by Jones in 1984, page 45. Of course, if you do this you must also provide a list of references, and include Jones 1984 in that list.

In addition to the idea of plagiarizing an author, academic honesty also involves the simple ideas that the work you turn in for a class assignment must be your own, based on your own research and thinking, not that of someone else. My advice: cite your sources, and don't ask your roommate to write the paper for you. (Note also that it is not kosher to hand in the same paper for more than one course, or even to revise the paper you wrote in one course slightly so it fits the requirements for another.) Assignments must be done by you, for the course you are getting credit for. Feel free to come to me with questions, or to bring them up in class. As you begin your college career, it's a good idea to discuss this with faculty.

Here's the official line, from the *Student Guide to University Policies and Rules* (p. 44): "Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating of information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students." Penalties for academic dishonesty begin with the receipt of an F on the assignment in question.

The University does not discriminate against people with disabilities. If you have a disability that could affect your performance in class, see me about it early in the semester and we will ensure that reasonable accommodations are made, in accordance with the ADA.

Finally, after all that: Students in large universities often are unable or are hesitant to visit with their professors, either after class or even in office hours. This will be a small class, and I encourage you to visit with me after class to talk about this class or whatever else you like. Please also feel free to email.

Detailed schedule of topics, assignments, and readings:

August 24: Introduction

August 26: Historical and Constitutional Background of France
?? Safran, Ch. 1

August 31: The Economic and Social Context of French Politics

?? Safran, Ch. 2

September 2: No class (American Political Science Association meetings)

September 7: Political Culture and Background

?? Safran, Ch. 3.

September 9: Political Parties of the Left

?? Safran, pp. 73-87

September 14: Political Parties of the Right, Center, and the Greens

?? Safran, pp. 87-102

September 16: Elections, Results, and the Roles of Political Parties

?? Safran, pp. 102-129

September 21: The French Electoral System(s) and its (their) Impact

?? Safran, pp. 129-138

September 23: Interest Groups and Labor Unions in France

?? Safran, Ch. 5

?? **First short paper due (5 pages, double-spaced)**

September 28: Constitutional Systems

?? Safran, Appendix (The French Constitution of 1958)

?? US Constitution and Bill of Rights: see

<http://www.house.gov/Constitution/Constitution.html> and

<http://www.house.gov/Constitution/Amend.html>

?? Be prepared to discuss one aspect of how the structures differ

September 30: The French Presidency

?? Safran, pp. 177-190

October 5: no class

October 7: The Prime Minister

?? Safran, pp. 190-205

October 12: No class (Fall Break)

October 14: Legislative – Executive Branch Relations in France

?? Safran, pp. 205-214

October 19: The Organization and Weakness of the French Parliament

?? Safran, pp. 221-257

October 21: no class

October 26: Where the Power is: The Bureaucracy

?? Safran, Ch. 8

October 28: The Judicial System

?? Safran, Ch. 9

November 2: Public Policy in France

?? Safran, Ch. 10

November 4: Review of the French Political System

?? **Come to class with questions and comments**

?? **Second short paper due (5 pages, double-spaced)**

November 9: **In-Class Essay Exam**

?? Come to class with an empty blue-book and your mind full of answers

November 11: American Exceptionalism

?? Kingdon, Ch. 1-2

November 16: American Political Ideas and Culture

?? Kingdon, Ch. 3

November 18: Explaining American Exceptionalism

?? Kingdon, Ch. 4

November 23: Evaluating American Exceptionalism

?? Kingdon, Ch. 5

?? **Also review for exam today: come with questions**

November 25: No class (Thanksgiving Holiday)

November 30: **In-Class Essay Exam**

December 2: French-American Comparisons, Part One

?? TBA

December 7: French-American Comparisons, Part Two

?? TBA

December 9: Discussion, Review, and Comments

?? **Term Papers Due**