American Politics

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| **Credit level:**4 |
| **Length:** Semester 2 |
| **ECTS credit value:** 8 |
| **College and School:** Lazarski University in Warsaw, Faculty of Economics and Management |
| **Module Leader:** Spasimir Domaradzki, PhD |
| **Host Course:** BA International Relations |
| **Progression and assessment board:** N/A |
| **Pre-requisites:**N/A |
| **Co-requisites:**N/A |
| **Special features:**N/A |
| **Access restrictions:**N/A |
| **Summary of module content:** Every analysis of international relations takes into consideration the US perspective. Hence, knowledge of US political system, decision making process and practical examples is essential in order to accurately understand and assess political, economic and social processes in international relations. The main objective of the module is to provide students with a basic knowledge and understanding of American politics. The module will accent on the historical evolution of the American colonies, the establishment of the United States and the evolving nature of the American political system and politics. Interdisciplinary, the module will accent on geographical and economic considerations and will highlight the specificity of the American political culture. The module will cover an outline of political, constitutional, and social history, including the constitutional system of rights and liberties, as well as current political issues. |

**Assessment Methods**

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| **Rank** | **Assessment type** | **Assessment name** | **Weighting** | **Qualifying set** (where the minimum mark required applies across multiple assessments) |
| 1 | Portfolio | Portfolio | 60 |  |
| 2 | Closed Book Exam | Written exam | 40 |

**Synoptic assessment**

*N/A*

**Learning outcomes**

By the end of the module the successful student will be able to:

1. Explain modern America as a distinctive civilisational entity, exploring its global influence and impact on the international system.
2. Analyze key aspects of US history, society, politics, and legal systems, considering their influence on domestic and international political processes.
3. Assess the fundamental ideas shaping American society and their connection to global political dynamics.
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the modern, complex, and controversial field of civil rights and liberties in the universal context.
5. Analyze versatile subjects taken from history, society, politics, legal system.
6. Identify and assess critically ideas which drive American society as a fundamentally rights conscious society, examining its influence on both domestic policy and international rights discussions.
7. Explain the connection between the US understanding of rights and the international rights culture, considering how American values align with global human rights frameworks.

**Course outcomes the module contributes to:**

* L4.2 Competence in understanding rival accounts of the international system and the historical dimensions of global order.
* L4.3 Sensitivity to the role of political culture and power in shaping our perceptions of political order within International Relations, understood through different regional, theoretical and cultural frameworks.
* L4.5 The ability to evaluate the role of historical, structural, cultural and ideational dimensions of domestic and international political processes, in theory and in practice

**Indicative syllabus content**

* Historical overview of the early Republic: Colonial America, the Revolution and the Founding Period: Declaration of Independence 1776, the Virginia Bill of Rights, the Constitution and the federal Bill of Rights, the XIV Amendment and the incorporation of the Bill of Rights into the state system. The political, social and constitutional history: the Hamiltonian system, the Jeffersonian and Jacksonian revolutions, the Manifest Destiny, the slavery issue, the Civil War.
* The constitution and the US political system: Congress, the President and his administration, the Supreme Court The political system: the electoral system, parties, media, military. The challenge of internal politics: minorities, affirmative action, feminism, the challenge of the welfare state, identity politics.
* The rise of progressive liberalism and the New Deal, the Cold War and the rise of global America. The rise of the Supreme Court and its role as a vehicle of social change – from the Marshall Court to the Robert’s Court
* The Supreme Court’s emergence as the main interpreter of individual rights, the ‘living Constitution‘ doctrine, the unwritten fundamental rights in the Constitution and the Culture Wars over interpretation of rights. The importance of the Amendments in American constitutional system of rights.
* Procedural Due Process and Substantive Due Process; modern Contract Clause Doctrine; the Taking Clause. Procedural rights in criminal and civil cases; rights of the accused; death penalty and its international implications; Privacy rights and reproductive rights: the abortion controversy, ‘homosexual marriage’ controversy etc.
* Slavery and its political and cultural history; the Civil Rights Revolution and its consequences. Women and equal rights: three phases of the feminist movement; affirmative action controversies; other selected issues and rights: e.g. immigration.
* Transnational justice and the American understanding of rights. The United States and the human rights culture as an issue of culture war’s controversies.

**Teaching and learning methods.**

This module employs interactive seminars as its primary teaching method, providing a good learning environment for level 4 students transitioning to university education. The small class size (up to 20 students) facilitates consistent student engagement and personalized attention, creating a supportive learning community where students can develop confidence in discussing complex political concepts. The seminar integrates various active learning approaches including: identification and presentation of discussed topic; guided discussions on key readings and contemporary issues; case study analysis of pivotal American political events; collaborative problem-solving activities; debates on contentious political and constitutional issues; primary source analysis (historical documents, Supreme Court opinions); multimedia engagement with political speeches, interviews, and documentaries. While occasional lecture components introduce new topics, the emphasis remains on participatory learning. Detailed written feedback will be provided on all assessments in a written form, with opportunities for one-to-one tutorial guidance available throughout the semester.

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| **Activity type** | **Category** | **Student learning and teaching hours\*** |
| **Lecture** | Scheduled |  |
| **Seminar** | Scheduled | 60 |
| **Tutorial** | Scheduled |  |
| **Project supervisor** | Scheduled |  |
| **Demonstration** | Scheduled |  |
| **Practical classes and workshops** | Scheduled |  |
| **Supervised time in studio/workshop** | Scheduled |  |
| **Fieldwork** | Scheduled |  |
| **External visits** | Scheduled |  |
| **Work based learning** | Scheduled |  |
| **Scheduled online learning** | Scheduled |  |
| **Other learning** | Scheduled |  |
| **Total scheduled** |  | 60 |
| **Placement** | Placement |  |
| **Independent study** | Independent | 140 |
| **Total student learning and teaching hours** |  | 200 |

\*hours per activity type are indicative and subject to change.

**Assessment rationale: why has this assessment been used for this module?**

As this is a level 4 module, its aim is twofold. On one hand, it aims to familiarize students with the specifics of American politics, history, ideas, political culture, and economy and their interconnectedness with the institutional political arrangement of the state. On the other hand, the module contributes to the development of appropriate learning habits, essential for level 4 and beyond.

**The portfolio (60%)** comprises a multimedia policy brief and an analytical response paper.

**Policy Brief**: Students will create a professional policy brief (equivalent to 1000 words) analyzing a contemporary U.S. foreign policy challenge. This brief must include visual elements (infographics, maps, timelines) and present concise, evidence-based recommendations.

**Analytical Response Paper:** Students will write a 1000-word critical analysis examining a pivotal presidential decision or policy and its domestic/international implications.

Both components are submitted together as a single portfolio assessment, and students will receive **one** overall mark worth **60%** of the total module grade. The individual component weightings are 50% each of the portfolio grade.

These home assignments not only assess students' analytical skills but also train them to express ideas clearly and concisely—an essential ability in international relations careers. Mastering this skill enhances their employability in careers that require drafting concise reports under time constraints, such as journalism, policy analysis, intelligence, corporate communications, legal advisory, and international organizations (addresses module LOs 1, 2, 4, and 6).

**The final exam (40%, 90 minutes)** consists of two components: (1) essay question: Students will respond to one essay question from a choice of topics that require synthesis of module materials and demonstration of critical thinking. (2) Policy Analysis Exercise: Students will analyze an unseen case study of American policy (domestic or international) and produce a structured response identifying key stakeholders, constitutional factors, historical precedents, and potential outcomes. This authentic assessment prepares students for professional scenarios requiring rapid analysis and decision-making and aligns with LOs 3, 5, and 7.

Students will be informed about the ethical considerations of AI usage in preparing their assessments. They may use it for tasks such as preliminary research, literature inquiry, and brainstorming ideas. Regular seminar discussions will include guidance on appropriate AI usage in academic work.

**Assessment criteria: what criteria will be used to assess my work on this module?**

Assessments will be evaluated according to four key areas aligned with module learning outcomes:

* **Knowledge and Understanding:** Demonstrates comprehensive understanding of American political institutions and their historical development; Accurately explains key events, policies, and constitutional principles; Shows awareness of the distinctive features of American political culture; Recognizes connections between domestic politics and international relations.
* **Critical Analysis and Argument:** Develops coherent, well-structured arguments supported by relevant evidence; Demonstrates critical engagement with **module** materials and independent research; Evaluates competing perspectives on American politics and policy; Shows ability to connect theoretical frameworks with practical applications.
* **Research and Evidence:** Utilizes appropriate scholarly sources and primary materials; Demonstrates ability to synthesize information from diverse sources; Applies relevant evidence to support key points; Shows awareness of contemporary debates in American politics
* **Communication and Presentation (Professional Skills):** Communicates ideas clearly and effectively in appropriate formats; Structures work logically with clear introduction and conclusion; Demonstrates proficiency in academic writing conventions; For policy briefs: effectively incorporates visual elements and professional formatting.

Each assessment will be evaluated against these criteria with detailed feedback provided to support ongoing learning and improvement.

**Sources**

**Essential Reading**

Gary Wasserman, Elliott Fullmer, The Basics of American Politics, 17th ed. Routledge 2023

Schuck, P.H., Wilson, J.Q., 2008. *Understanding America: the anatomy of an exceptional nation*. New York: PublicAffairs.

Rabkin, J., 2005. *Law Without Nations?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Manent, P., 2007. *Democracy without Nations?* Wilmington DE: ISI Books.

**Recommended Reading**

Robert P. Singh, American Government and Politics: A Concise Introduction First Edition, SAGE Publications, 2003

Smith, S.W., Shelley, M.C., Barber, B.A., 2015. *American Government and Politics Today, The Essentials* *2015 – 2016 ed.,* Boston: Cengage Learning.

Andreson, B.C., 2007. *Democratic Capitalism and Its Discontents*. Wilmington, DE: ISI Books.

Mauk, D., Oakland, J., 2005. *American Civilization: An Introduction*. 4th ed. London: Routledge.

Mansfield, H.C., Winthrop, D., 2004*. Introduction’ to Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America. Chicago: Chicago University Press.*

Huntington, Samuel P. *American Politics, The Promise of Disharmony*, Harvard University Press, 1983