Instructor: Melissa Merry  
Office hours: By appointment. Usually, I am on campus at least one hour before class.  
Phone: 206-914-0649 (cell)  
Email: mmerry@sdcc.ctc.edu

**Required Material**

- Additional readings will be assigned and made available via the course website.

**Course Overview**

This course will provide an introduction to the workings of the American political system. We will examine the major institutions of government, paying particular attention to the ways in which government officials and extra-governmental actors--i.e., citizens, interest groups, and the members of the media--interact within those institutional boundaries. A central question guiding this course will be the extent to which the American political system lives up to democratic ideals. We will tackle this over-arching question from several directions. Below I list some examples of specific questions we will ask and answer along the way:

- Should members of Congress vote primarily on the basis of their constituents’ views? Is it ever justifiable for members of Congress to “vote against” public opinion?
- What is the relationship between the federal government and state governments? Are some issues, such as gay marriage, better dealt with on the federal or state level?
- What purpose(s) do political parties serve? What are the benefits and drawbacks of a two-party system?
- How does the news media cover politics? Does media coverage facilitate or distort public understanding of the American political system?
- Why is voter turnout so low in the United States? Is low turnout a problem for democratic governance?
**Grading**

Your course grade will be based on the following criteria:

- 15% -- Attendance and Participation
- 20% -- Paper assignment
- 30% -- Quizzes (10% each x 3)
- 35% -- Final exam

A separate handout will be distributed explaining the paper assignment.

Note: No extra credit projects will be available to students who feel that they need it to improve their performance. The best way to do well in this class is to stay on top of the reading, complete all assignments, and study for exams. Any extra credit that I do offer will be announced in class, and it will be available to all students.

**Participation Guidelines**

The class participation grade will be based on the frequency, quality, and enthusiasm of your contributions to classroom discussion. Especially in a class that involves discussion of politics, it is important to be respectful others’ viewpoints. Statements that are disrespectful of other students will not be tolerated.

**Attendance Policy**

Attending class is crucial. While the assigned readings contain much valuable information, a substantial portion of what you will learn in this class will come through debate and discussion with your peers. **Missing more than 2 classes means the following:** 1) you will miss substantial course material, and 2) your participation grade will decrease. For each additional class missed, there will be a deduction of 2% of your participation grade.

An important part of attendance is being on-time to class. Arriving late, leaving during the break, or leaving early are all distracting to the classroom environment. If you need to leave early, please let me know before class.

**Due Dates**

Due dates for the paper assignment and exams are firm. Late assignments will be penalized 10% per day. If you are facing extraordinary circumstances—such as illness or emergency—that prevent you from meeting a deadline, please let me know before the due date.

**Academic Honesty**

The Math, Sciences, & Social Science Division policies on academic honesty will be strictly enforced. Plagiarism, collusion in the writing of assignments, and cheating on exams will result in your failure for the assignment and, in all probability the course, and referral to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action. See the ACM Crossroads site for a useful definition of plagiarism, some examples, what to do to avoid the problem, and useful resources [www.acm.org/crossroads/doc/information/wg/plagiarism.html].

**Cell Phones**

Please turn off cell phones before class. Anyone whose cell phone rings during class will be responsible for bringing treats to the next class (in order to compensate us for the disruption!).
Disability Resources for Students
If you require an accommodation for a disability please contact Disability Services at ds@sccd.ctc.edu, or (206) 527-3697.

Important Dates
Oct. 17: Quiz 1
Oct. 24: Paper topic due at beginning of class
Nov. 5: Paper working bibliography due at beginning of class
Nov. 7: Quiz 2
Nov. 21: Paper assignment due at beginning of class
Dec. 3: Quiz 3
Dec. 10: Final exam

Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Assigned Reading</th>
<th>Due Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 24</td>
<td>• Course Introduction</td>
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<td>Sept. 26</td>
<td>• Defining Democracy&lt;br&gt;• Government under the Articles of Confederation&lt;br&gt;• Constitution</td>
<td>• Patterson pp. 37-72&lt;br&gt;• Patterson reading 2 “The Mischiefs of Faction”&lt;br&gt;• POV pp. 1-31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 1</td>
<td>• Federalism</td>
<td>• Patterson pp. 73-107&lt;br&gt;• POV pp. 52-57</td>
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<td>Oct. 3</td>
<td>• Civil Liberties</td>
<td>• Patterson pp. 109-149&lt;br&gt;• POV pp. 230-248</td>
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<td>Oct. 8</td>
<td>• Civil Rights</td>
<td>• Patterson pp. 151-189&lt;br&gt;• POV pp. 266-276</td>
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<td>Oct. 10</td>
<td>• Congress I&lt;br&gt;  o Lawmaking process&lt;br&gt;  o Filibuster&lt;br&gt;  o Redistricting</td>
<td>• Patterson pp. 359-403&lt;br&gt;• POV pp. 160-170</td>
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<td>Oct. 15</td>
<td>• Congress II&lt;br&gt;  o Mayhew and The Electoral Connection&lt;br&gt;  o Delegates, Trustees, and Politicos</td>
<td>• Patterson reading 11 “Running for Congress, Staying in Congress”&lt;br&gt;• POV pp. 148-159</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 17</td>
<td>• Executive Branch I&lt;br&gt;  o Presidential powers&lt;br&gt;  o Bargaining and going public</td>
<td>• Patterson pp. 407-447&lt;br&gt;• Patterson reading 12, “Presidential Power”</td>
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QUIZ 1 (Over Content From Sept. 24 to Oct. 15)
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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</table>
| Oct. 22    | • Executive Branch II  
             o Bureaucracy  
             • Patterson pp. 449-483  
             • Patterson reading 13, “Hurricane Katrina”  
             • POV pp. 182-190                                                                 | Paper topic due (1 paragraph summary)  
             Due at beginning of class on Oct. 24                                                       |
| Oct. 24    | • Judiciary  
             o Structure and operations of the federal court system  
             o Judicial decision-making  
             • Patterson pp. 487-524  
             • POV pp. 191-203                                                                 |                                                                                               |
| Oct. 29    | • Campaigns and Elections I  
             o Analysis of Campaign Ads  
             o Negative Campaigning  
             • POV pp. 86-93                                                                 |                                                                                               |
| Oct. 31    | • Campaigns and Elections II  
             o Film: *Taking on the Kennedys*  
             o Money in Elections  
             • Reading available via course website (“Campaign Finance”)  
             • Patterson pp. 278-289  
             • Patterson reading 13, “Hurricane Katrina”  
             • POV pp. 182-190                                                                 | Paper topic due (1 paragraph summary)  
             Due at beginning of class on Oct. 24                                                       |
| Nov. 5     | • Presidential Elections I  
             o Nominating process  
             o Electoral College  
             • POV pp. 94-116                                                                 | Paper assignment working bibliography  
             Due at beginning of class on Nov. 5                                                          |
| Nov. 7     | • Presidential Elections II  
             o Film: *Unprecedented*  
             • Reading available via course website (“Social Capital”)  
             • Patterson pp. 223-249  
             • POV pp. 68-85  
             • Reading available via course website (“Social Capital”)  
             • Patterson pp. 278-289  
             • Patterson reading 13, “Hurricane Katrina”  
             • POV pp. 182-190                                                                 | Quiz 2 (Over Content From Oct. 17 to Nov. 5)  
             Note: it is recommended that you get started on reading due Nov. 14                         |
| Nov. 12    | • NO CLASS—Veteran’s Day                                                                                                                  |                                                                                               |
| Nov. 14    | • Voting and Participation  
             o Explaining low voter turnout  
             • Civic engagement and social capital  
             • Patterson pp. 223-249  
             • POV pp. 68-85  
             • Reading available via course website (“Social Capital”)  
             • Patterson pp. 278-289  
             • Patterson reading 13, “Hurricane Katrina”  
             • POV pp. 182-190                                                                 |                                                                                               |
| Nov. 19    | • Public Opinion  
             • Berman pp. 218-240  
             • POV pp. 58-67                                                                 |                                                                                               |
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Pages</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 21</td>
<td>Political Parties</td>
<td>Patterson pp. 251-278</td>
<td>Paper Assignment Due at beginning of class on Nov. 21</td>
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<td>Nov. 26</td>
<td>Interest Groups</td>
<td>Patterson pp. 293-324</td>
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<td>POV pp. 129-141</td>
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<td>Nov. 28</td>
<td>Media I</td>
<td>Patterson pp. 327-357</td>
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<td>News Biases</td>
<td>Patterson reading 10, “To Publish...”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 3</td>
<td>Media II</td>
<td><strong>QUIZ 3 (Over Content From Nov. 7 to Nov. 28)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How the Media Cover Politics</td>
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<td>Dec. 5</td>
<td>Final Exam Review</td>
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**Final Exam:** Monday, Dec. 10, 6:00-8:30 p.m.

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<th>Grading Criteria</th>
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<tr>
<td>4.0 = 95 – 100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.9 = 94%</td>
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<td>3.8 = 93%</td>
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<td>3.7 = 92%</td>
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<td>3.6 = 91%</td>
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<td>3.5 = 90%</td>
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<td>2.8 = 83%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.7 = 82%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.6 = 81%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.5 = 80%</td>
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