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American Government: A Comparative Approach

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It is difficult, if not impossible, for students to understand their own political system without fundamental points of comparison. This includes evaluations of other democratic systems, such as those in the United Kingdom or Israel, as well as contrasts with authoritarian and totalitarian forms of governance, such as the regimes in Nigeria and China. By making such comparisons, students are better able to understand both the strengths and weaknesses of the American system.

Traditional courses in American government continue to play an important role in the civic education of young people; however, the American system of governance certainly has not developed in a vacuum. Which is to say that offering students differing perspectives on what constitutes legitimate political rule, makes them better able to see how and why they live under the type of government they do today.

The course begins with readings in basic liberal political thought, including John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and James Madison. As the course progresses, the students are required to compare the theories and foundations of American democracy with those of other nations. From the students' perspective, the course evaluates the American system in terms of what it is and what it is not.

In short, by investigating the political processes in other societies, American students form the necessary foundations to better understand their own system. From here, students may begin to answer the questions that lie at the center of any course in American government: How are citizens represented by their government? How does their government compare with others? Are other forms of government more effective in representing the interests of their people?

By using a comparative approach in answering these questions, the course more realistically reflects the fundamental changes and challenges confronting young people today.

There is no doubt that the world has become increasingly interconnected and interdependent; consequently, it has become vital that students understand how and why people participate or do not participate in their own political systems.

Furthermore, the course addresses some of the more pressing issues of our times, including how religion and the media influence state action. In both of these cases, while the institutions transcend political borders, they influence the decision-making process in particular countries in different ways. A comparative approach to the study of American government

provides examples of how people in various societies have chosen to integrate these institutions.

Finally, drawing from their new-found knowledge of the American system of government and those of other countries, students have the opportunity to form educated opinions and criticisms of the American political system. Thus, the course has in part achieved its objective by enabling students to think about the aforementioned questions on their own. As Vaclav Havel has observed, "[f]reedom and democracy, after all, require everyone to participate and thus to share responsibility."

American Government: A Comparative Approach

Purpose of the Course: This course is an introduction to American government in a comparative context. The emphasis will be on the American political system, i.e., theoretical foundations, institutions, governmental authority and power (and its divisions), the actors in American politics, national issues, and the making of public policy. In addition, the course will compare and contrast the American political system with the political systems in other democracies and in authoritarian and totalitarian societies.

Design of the Course: The course is designed to introduce American college students at the freshman or sophomore levels to the comparative study of American government with other democratic and non-democratic systems. The framework involves a "search for similarities and differences between and among political phenomena, including political institutions (such as legislatures, political parties, or political interest groups), political behavior (such as voting, demonstrating, or reading political pamphlets), or political ideas (such as liberalism, conservatism, or Marxism). Everything that politics studies, comparative politics studies; it just undertakes the study

with an explicitly comparative *methodology* in mind" (Mahler, 3–4).

Rationale for the Course: Recent surveys in *The New York Times* and elsewhere indicate that young people today are less engaged by political ideas than any similar age group since the end of World War II. In fact, UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute concluded in 1994 that college freshmen were more "disengaged from politics" than "any previous entering class" in the 29 years that the survey has been given nation-wide to in-coming members of the freshman class.¹ The UCLA survey noted that "[o]nly 31.9 percent of the fall 1994 freshmen—the lowest figure in the history of the survey—say that 'keeping up with political affairs' is an important goal in life. This compares with 42.4 percent in 1990 and 57.8 percent in 1966" (Higher Education and National Affairs 1995).

For many of these students, the "I don't care," and the "It doesn't concern me" attitudes about American politics will govern their behavior for the rest of their lives. The absence of any concern about and knowledge of American politics is coupled with a deep ignorance about how people in other countries govern them-

selves. The problem is more serious than that involving students who cannot find Chicago on the map, or who think Communism is still a serious ideological threat to the United States.

As David Lillienthal said a half century ago, "[i]t is citizen participation that nourishes the strength of democracy." As educators, particularly in the community colleges which approximately 50 percent of all college students attend, we can engage students by providing them with a course that offers them the fundamentals of their own government and compares their political system with some of those in the world which are similar and some of those which are different. The key to engagement is the methodology employed in an introductory course. If an educator gets the attention of his/her students, it is possible and it is important to interest young citizens in politics and in the well being of their community, especially if American democracy is to remain healthy for these people and for future generations.

Methodologies for the Course:

The course will employ various methodologies. They include:

1. Traditional lecture-discussion. Although the syllabus which is included in this report may appear to be ambitious, even overly so, the topics can be modified to meet the needs of the instructor and his/her students.

2. Readings. There are very few basic textbooks appropriate for this kind of course and for the students involved. Many American government textbooks make a half-hearted (and usually unsuccessful) effort to compare some aspects of the American political system with other democratic or non-democratic systems. The book selected, *American Government: A Comparative Approach* by Charles Dunn and Martin Slann, truly focuses on the American political process in a comparative context. The book accomplishes the purpose of a comparative political analysis by including studies, for example, of legislatures, ideologies, constitutions in old and new democracies and in

non-democratic societies. The book is supplemented by recommended readings for most of the topics. Experience suggests that educators will use additional readings to accomplish their own course objectives. The list of supplemental readings, therefore, is not an extensive one.

3. Topics/themes. These are standard for any basic course in American government, but there is a major effort to provide students with a comparative framework. How do other democracies work? How does the United States compare with a non-democratic society in terms of political institutions, the formulation of public policy, and the protection of human rights? These and many other comparative questions are suggested by the topics and themes of the course. The educator is free to add or to substitute other examples. The countries were chosen because of their relevance to the topics, e.g., China and human rights or South Africa and a new democracy.

4. Films. Two kinds of films were selected for the course: motion pictures and documentaries. Since American politics is so rich a subject for dramatization, many motion pictures would be appropriate for this course. Three, in particular, were selected. They are: "The Manchurian Candidate" (because of its emphasis on the impact of totalitarian control on the individual), "Bob Roberts" (because of its focus on the modern American political campaign), and "Missing" (because of its concern for the absence of democratic guarantees and the impact of American foreign policy, through the CIA, on another country's political process). In addition, several PBS documentaries were selected, including many from the excellent *Frontline* series. This section may also be modified to accommodate the interests of the educator and his/her students.

5. Simulations. These are superb exercises for students because they provide a "hands-on" experience. The two included were created to involve students in the political process by relating how American politics works through coalition building and how difficult it is to fashion pub-

lic policy by writing a plank for a political party on a controversial issue. Long experience with model United Nations simulations suggests that they are ideal for stimulating student interest and for involving students in real-life political actions after they have participated in the simulation.

6. Internet. The use of the Internet serves at least one and possibly several purposes. The Internet can be a valuable source of additional information for many of the topics in the course. Internet sites are included where appropriate. Students may have the opportunity to interact at some of these sites, and they may suggest other available resources. Finally, there may be a possible link between a course in the U.S. and one in another country through the Internet and E-mail. [Please see the Internet activities included in these materials.]

Notes

1. The survey, conducted under the auspices of the American Council on Education, is the nation's oldest and most complete assessment of student attitudes. In 1994, the survey questioned 303,703 students at 670 two-year and four-year colleges and universities.

References

- Mahler, Gregory. 1994. *Comparative Politics: An Institutional Approach*. 2nd Ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- American Council on Education. 1995. "Survey Reveals Trends Among College Freshmen." *Higher Education and National Affairs*. 9 January: 1-6.

About the Authors

Richard Reitano is professor of government at Dutchess Community College, a unit of the State University of New York, in Poughkeepsie, New York.

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SYLLABUS

REQUIRED TEXT:

Dunn, Charles W., and Martin W. Slann. 1994. *American Government: A Comparative Approach*. New York: Harper Collins College Publishers.

Course Outline

I. From Hobbes, Locke, and Madison to the Washington Beltway: The Fundamentals of Government

Readings:

- Dunn and Slann, chapters 1, 2, and 5
- John Locke's *Second Treatise of Government*, chapters 2, 3, 7, 8, 9
- Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan*, chapters 13 and 17
- James Madison, *Federalist No. 10*

Films: "America: 200 Years and Counting" (from PBS's *Frontline*) and "Values Matter Most"

A. From a "state of nature" to civic society: what do governments do for their citizens?

1. What is civil society? Why did we enter into such an agreement?
2. How does civil society protect us from the state of nature?
 - a. Democracy
 - b. Authoritarianism
 - c. Totalitarianism

B. American style democracy

1. Political theory of American democracy
2. How has this theory been translated into practice?
 - a. Federalism
 - b. Centralism ("Big Government")

Case study: 1994 mid-term elections . . . a return to states' power?

3. Is the United States truly a democracy?
 - a. Role of the voter in the American political process (topics include the electoral college)
 - b. Do American elections really offer a choice?
 - c. Representative democracy versus direct representation
 - d. "Winner-take-all"
 - e. American voting patterns: gender, race and ethnicity
 - f. Patterns of registration and voter turn-out

C. A look at other democracies

1. Historical background of British and French democracies
 - a. Evolution of democracy in the United Kingdom
 - b. The Constitution of France's Fifth Republic
2. Systems of voting (proportional representation versus winner-take-all)
3. The electoral process in other democracies
4. The issue of voting rights

D. The nature of the political process in authoritarian and totalitarian societies: Iran and China

E. The United States and China: A comparison of fundamental political institutions

Terms to remember: federalism, anti-federalism, electoral college, democracy, authoritarianism, totalitarianism, proportional representation, and winner-take-all.

II. Democracy as a Model for Government

Readings:

- Dunn and Slann, chapters 2 (review) and 3
- James Madison, *Federalist No. 51*

Film: "The Manchurian Candidate"

- A. The origins of the American constitutional system
 1. The Articles of Confederation
 2. Constitution
 - a. The Great Compromise
 - b. Bill of Rights
 3. What problems, created by the Articles of Confederation, did the Constitution solve?
 - a. Empowered central government with the ability to levy taxes and pay debts
 - b. Created a viable forum for the formulation of a coherent national foreign policy
 - c. Created a body to regulate interstate trade
 4. From the supremacy clause to the elastic clause: the expansion of power
 5. The amending process
- B. Constitutions in other democracies
 1. The concept of federalism in the "new" South Africa
 2. The United Kingdom's unwritten constitution
- C. Constitutions in authoritarian and totalitarian societies: Documents written to protect certain political, economic, and social power
- D. The United States and Cuba: a constitutional comparison

Terms to remember: Articles of Confederation, Virginia Plan, New Jersey Plan, Great Compromise, supremacy clause, elastic clause, and republican form of government.

III. The Power and Division of Government

Readings:

- Dunn and Slann, chapter 4

Films: "Contract With America" (from PBS's *Frontline*) and "Revitalizing American Federalism"

- A. American federalism
 1. Constitution creates a federal system (system of shared powers)
 - a. Supremacy Clause (national government)
 - b. Reserved Clause (state governments)
 - c. Shared powers
 2. The rationale of federalism
 3. Issues of federal control: the debate continues
 - a. Mandates
 - b. Conditions on aid (topics include federal assistance to states; block grants)
 - c. Nixon's "new federalism"
 - d. The "Reagan Revolution"
 - e. The 1994 "Republican Revolution"
- B. Federalism in other democracies (topics include the "new" South Africa and "Thatcherism")
- C. Federalism in authoritarian and totalitarian societies
- D. The United States and South Africa: federalism compared

Terms to remember: federalism, Supremacy Clause, Reservation Clause, shared powers, block grants, mandates, conditions on aid, and unitary system.

IV. Checks and Balances: The separation of powers

Readings:

- Dunn and Slann, chapters 10, 11, 12 and 13
- John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, chapter 11
- Alexander Hamilton, *Federalist No. 78*

Film: "So You Want to Buy a President" (from PBS's *Frontline*)

A. Executive Branch

1. The responsibilities of the President
 - a. Commander in Chief of the United States armed forces
 - b. Chief executive of the United States government
 - c. Chief of State
2. The Constitution and the President
3. The election of the President: The electoral college and the Constitution
4. The expansion of executive branch bureaucracy and powers: President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal
5. The responsibilities of chief executives in other democracies
 - a. United Kingdom
 - b. France
6. The election of chief executives in other democracies
 - a. Israel
 - b. Japan

B. Legislative Branch

1. The role of the American Congress: "All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives."
 - a. Law-making body of the United States
 - b. Power to levy taxes
 - c. Budget making (shared power between executive and legislative branches)
 - d. Power to confirm
 - e. Power to make war
 - f. Power to impeach
2. The people's house: The House of Representatives
3. The upper house: Senate
4. Conflict between the Legislative and Executive Branches: Checks and Balances
5. Conflicting interests: Congress and gridlock
 - a. Democrats versus Republicans
 - b. How a bill becomes a law: Law making in Congress
 - c. Let me tell you another . . . the filibuster
 - d. The role of special interest groups
6. Legislatures in other democracies
 - a. House of Commons and House of Lords: Legislative power in the United Kingdom
 - b. Legislative power in Israel: Democracy through a unicameral legislative body
 - c. Legislative power in South Africa: A mixed model
7. Legislatures in authoritarian and totalitarian systems
 - a. China
 - b. Nigeria

Terms to remember: legislature, Senate, House of Representatives, bicameral, unicameral, gridlock, power of impeachment, power to try all impeachments, filibuster, and pork barrel spending.

C. Judicial Branch

1. The federal judiciary: "The judicial power of the United States, shall be vested in one supreme Court, and in such inferior Courts as the Congress may from time to time ordain and establish."
 - a. Cases dealing with all Constitutional issues (topics include judicial review)
 - b. Cases in which the United States is either the defendant or the plaintiff
 - c. Conflicts between states
 - d. Federal cases tried by jury
2. The federal court system in the United States
 - a. The appointment of federal judges

- b. The federal court system
- 3. The courts in other democracies
 - a. The independence of the judiciary in France, Japan, and the United Kingdom
 - b. The power of judicial review: A comparison with the United States
- 4. Courts in authoritarian and totalitarian societies
 - a. China
 - b. Nigeria

D. The United States and Nigeria: Separation of powers in both countries

Terms to remember: judicial review, appellate courts, opinion, dissenting opinion, majority (concurring) opinion, precedents, grand jury, petit jury, class action suit, rule of four, and original jurisdiction.

Internet sites of interest:

- 1. United States House of Representatives at <http://www.house.gov/>
- 2. United States House of Representatives gopher (document retrieval) at <gopher://gopher.house.gov/>
- 3. United States Senate at <http://www.senate.gov/>
- 4. United States Senate gopher at <gopher://gopher.senate.gov/>
- 5. French Senate at <http://www.senat.fr:80/asomm.html> (includes links to other government resources)
- 6. British Parliament at <http://www.publications.hmso.gov.uk/Parliament/Parliament.htm>
- 7. White House at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/Welcome.html>
- 8. U.S. Federal Judiciary at <http://www.uscourts.gov/>

V. The Influence of Public Opinion and the Mass Media on the Political Process

Readings:

- Dunn and Slann, chapters 6 and 9

Film: “Bob Roberts”

- A. Public opinion and the mass media
- B. Who sets the public agenda in the United States?
 - 1. Does public opinion guide the Washington agenda?
 - a. Election of representatives based on their proposed agenda
 - b. Use of public polling to guide legislative agenda
 - 2. Does the mass media guide the Washington agenda? If so, who sets the media's agenda?
 - a. Media as the representative of public opinion
 - b. Media as an independent political actor (topics include the “media elite”)
 - 3. Does Washington guide public discourse and opinion? If so, do lawmakers use the media to achieve this goal?
 - a. Do our leaders know what's best?
 - b. C—SPAN, CNN, and the use of the media to generate public interest in political discourse (topics include government regulation of media)
- C. Good looks and money a must: Political candidacy in the age of mass media
 - 1. Campaigns and political outcomes in the age of mass media

Case study: The first televised debate—John Kennedy & Richard M. Nixon and the 1960 Presidential election
 - 2. Campaign finance in the age of mass media
- D. Media in totalitarian and authoritarian societies
 - 1. Censorship of the press
 - 2. Media as a tool of state propaganda
 - a. Use of media to discredit opposition figures
 - b. Use of media to bolster the image of a totalitarian/authoritarian regime

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E. A comparison of the role of the media in the United States and the United Kingdom

Terms to remember: public opinion, mass media, and campaign finance.

Internet sites of interest:

1. C—SPAN at <http://www.c-span.org/>
2. CNN at <http://www.cnn.com/>
3. New York Times at <http://www.nytimes.com>
4. the London Times at <http://www.the-times.co.uk/news/pages/home.html?1280399>

VI. Political Parties

Readings:

- Dunn and Slann, chapter 8

A. Political Parties in the United States

1. The Republicans and the Democrats: The only show in town
 - a. Party affiliation based largely on general ideological beliefs (“big government” and the welfare state versus “individual responsibility” and “private initiative”)
 - b. No issue-specific parties
2. America’s two-party system
3. Is the American party system in a period of political realignment, dealignment, or expansion?
 - a. What is political realignment? Are voters and/or law-makers becoming increasingly issue-specific?
 - b. What is political dealignment? Are our law-makers becoming increasingly susceptible to party discipline?
 - c. Will the landscape change? The future of third parties in American politics

B. Coalition building: Political parties in other democracies

1. Is political stability dependent on a two-party system?
2. Multi-party systems
 - a. Issue-specific parties
 - b. “Personality” parties
 - c. Coalition building (little broad-based support)

C. Political parties in authoritarian and totalitarian systems

1. Uni-party systems (and non-party based political systems)
2. False democracy: Is there freedom to join a chosen party even when there is a plurality of parties?

D. Political parties in the United States and the role of parties in South African politics

Terms to remember: two party system, multi-party system, political coalition, political realignment, political dealignment, and coalition building.

Internet sites of interest:

1. Republican Party Index at <http://www.republicanparty.com/>
2. Republican Internet Directory at <http://www.gopgo.com/>
3. Democratic National Committee at <http://www.democrats.org/>
4. Democratic Party Index at <http://www.democraticparty.com/>
5. Reform Party at <http://www.reformparty.org>
6. The Libertarian Party at <http://www.access.digex.net/~lphq/lphq.html>

VII. Interest Groups

Readings:

- Dunn and Slann, chapter 7

A. What are interest groups? What are political action committees or PACs? How do organizations become classified as interest groups or PACs?

B. What are the goals of each interest group? How do they achieve these goals in the United States?

Case study: the National Rifle Association

Readings:

- “N.R.A., in Burst of Defiance, Vows to Defeat Clinton in ’96,” *The New York Times*, 21 May 1995, p. A1.
- “A Life Saved, a Life Lost: Gun Issue Gets Personal,” *The New York Times*, 1 April 1995, p. A1.

Film: “The Long March of Newt Gingrich” (from PBS’s *Frontline*)

1. Courting of political incumbents
2. Courting of political candidates
3. Financial contributions to national political committees
4. Informing the public

C. The influence of interest groups in other democracies

D. Interest groups in America and interest groups in Israel

Terms to remember: interest group and PAC.

Internet sites of interest:

1. National Rifle Association at <http://www.nra.org/>
2. National Endangered Species Act Reform Coalition at <http://www.nesarc.org/>
3. National Right to Life at <http://www.nrlc.org/>
4. Planned Parenthood at <http://www.ppfa.org/ppfa/index.html>
5. Rock the Vote at <http://www.rockthevote.org/>
6. Environmental Defense Fund at <http://www.edf.org/>
7. American Association of Community Colleges at <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/>
8. Smith, Dawson and Andrews (lobbying firm for hire) at <http://www.sda-inc.com/>

VIII. Politics and Religion

Readings:

- Dunn and Slann, review pages 217 and 225–226
- “Jefferson’s Nightmare,” *The New York Times*, 9 August 1996, p. A27.

A. In God We Trust: Religion and American politics

1. Role of religion in the construction of America’s democratic foundations
2. Separation of church and state
3. Religious organizations as special interest groups
 - a. Does lobbying by religious groups (e.g., the Christian Coalition) violate separation of church and state?

Case study: Ralph Reed and the Christian Coalition

Readings:

- Jacob Weisberg, “The Religious Right Hype,” *The New York Times*, October 23, 1995, pp. A22–23
 - “The Religious Right Readies Agenda for Second Hundred Days,” *The New York Times*, 16 May 1995, p. A1.
 - Michael Crowley, “Tumbling Dice,” *New Republic*, June 17, 1996, pp. 16–18
 - “In Abortion Wars, High Tech Arms,” *The New York Times*, 9 August 1996, p. A20
- b. How do religious organizations compare with interest groups?

4. A new religious test for political candidates?

Case study: John Kennedy and the 1960 Presidential election

Readings:

- “Rev. G. Weigel says Roman Catholic Church Would Not Try to Interfere with Roman Catholic President’s Political Activities,” *The New York Times*, 28 September 1960, p. A1.
- “Professor Lopez Disputes Weigel on Confessor’s Role,” *The New York Times*, 4 October 1960, p. B42.

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- B. Religion in other democracies
 - 1. Is a strict separation necessary?
 - a. Israel
 - b. Turkey
 - 2. How does religion impact policy making in these two nation-states?
- C. Religion in theocracies and other authoritarian systems
 - 1. Law according to the Sha'ria
 - a. Iran
 - b. Saudi Arabia (Theocracy or not?)
 - 2. Religion in secular authoritarian and/or totalitarian societies
 - a. Nigeria
 - b. Cuba
- D. Religion in American and Iranian politics

Terms to remember: secularism and theocracy.

Internet site of interest:

- 1. Christian Coalition at <http://www.cc.org>

IX. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Readings:

- Dunn and Slann, chapter 14

Film: "Missing"

- A. Civil liberties and civil rights in the United States
 - 1. How are these terms defined in the United States?
 - a. Civil liberties: constitutionally granted freedoms and liberties
 - b. Civil rights: equal access under the law of civil liberties
 - 2. Bill of Rights
 - a. Central to the passage of the Constitution
 - b. The importance of the Fourteenth Amendment
 - Outline of basic rights of United States citizenship
 - Representation according to number
 - "Criminal free" federal government
 - "Validity of the public debt"
 - 3. The evolution of civil liberties in the United States
 - a. 1st Amendment (1791): Have we gone too far? Who's to judge?
 - b. 2nd Amendment (1791): is a strict interpretation appropriate for today's America?
 - 4. How have civil rights evolved in the United States?
 - a. The 13th Amendment (1865)
 - b. The 19th and 24th Amendments (1920 and 1964, respectively)
 - c. The 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act
 - d. Affirmative action: Civil rights or reverse discrimination?
 - e. Gay rights legislation: Special treatment or equal protection?
- B. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights in other democracies
 - 1. The British response
 - 2. The Israeli response
 - 3. The South African response
- C. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights in totalitarian and authoritarian societies
 - 1. Equality under the law: civil liberties as defined by the authoritarian state (China)
 - 2. Limitation of liberties by totalitarian regimes to protect power (Nigeria)
- D. American civil liberties and civil rights and human rights in China.

Terms to remember: Civil Liberties, Civil Rights, and equal protection.

Internet sites of interest:

1. NAACP at <http://www.naacp.org/>
2. ACLU at <http://www.aclu.org/>

X. Public Policy

Readings:

- Dunn and Slann, chapter 15

A. What is public policy in the United States?

1. Economic policy
 - a. Fiscal policy (topics include deficit management)
 - b. Monetary policy
 - c. Government intervention: Helpful or harmful?
 - d. Tax system
 - e. Trade policy: Isolation or globalization?
2. Social policy
 - a. Public assistance and social insurance
 - b. American welfare state: Economic rights?
3. National defense and foreign policy
 - a. Defense spending: The myth of the peace dividend
 - b. Foreign policy: The protection of American interests abroad

B. How is public policy made in the United States?

1. Cooperation between the legislative and executive branches
 - a. Economic policy: Shared powers
 - b. Defense spending: Shared powers
 - c. Social policy: Shared powers
 - d. Foreign policy: Dominated by the executive branch?
2. Effect of extra-governmental forces on public policy formulation
 - a. Interest groups (topics include lobbying groups, labor, and business)
 - b. Public opinion
 - c. Media

C. Public policy in authoritarian and totalitarian societies

1. Exclusion of extra-governmental forces
2. Role of totalitarian executive in public policy formulation

D. Public policy formulation in the United States versus public policy in France

Terms to remember: first policy, monetary policy, and public assistance.

SIMULATION: Coalition Building

In the United States, the government is based on a two-party system. The dominance of the national political landscape by the Democrats and Republicans means that one of the two parties will control the House of Representatives, the Senate, and the Presidency. While one party may not control all three (or any of the three), political debate is nonetheless largely between the Democrats and the Republicans. In some other democracies, however, more than two parties dominate politics. Such multi-party democracies ne-

cessitate coalition building. Because no one group can gather enough electoral support to have a majority in the legislature, parties are forced to combine forces with other parties, creating what is called a coalition.

As can be seen in the United States Congress, it is often difficult for two parties to agree on legislation. Imagine attempting to pass legislation acceptable to four and five parties! This is indeed a difficult thing to do. To give you an indication of just how arduous a task this

can be, the class will be simulating a legislature in a multi-party democracy. Students will be broken up into three groups, and each will be given a party title and a position on a topic. The groups will be charged with building a majority coalition so that legislation can pass. But remember, parties must not compromise their fundamental principles!

Coalition Building has several goals:

1. To provide a hands-on experience through which students will gain a

- basic understanding of multi-party legislatures;
2. To introduce students to debate;
 3. To introduce students to the idea of political give-and-take; that is, to show students what is necessary for a democratic legislature to be successful.

The simulation particulars are as follows:

Tasmania, formerly a part of Australia, has been granted independence. The Tasmanian founding fathers have decided to continue the Australian liberal democratic tradition and have held elections; a multi-party legislature is in place. The legislature is unicameral, and has been officially named the House of the Tasmanian People (HOTAP). There are three parties in the legislature, each with an equal number of seats: the Tasmanian Devils; Our Father; and the TIFOFS (Tasmanians In Favor of a Free Society).

The Tasmanian Devils are extremely conservative socially, politically, and economically. They believe that Tasmania should be for Tasmanians, and fights for “0” immigra-

tion, high tariffs on foreign goods, and extremely limited freedom of speech at home. The Devils have actually spoken of banning certain words from Tasmanian speech, including our, father, abortion, and personality. Our Father is a bit more moderate, advocating limited free trade, limited immigration, and free speech as long as it is not deemed “morally subversive” by the state. Finally, the TIFOFS advocate free trade, unlimited immigration, and complete freedom of speech and expression. Clearly, the three parties do not have an overly friendly relationship.

The first item on HOTAP’s legislature agenda is internet regulation. Like citizens of many other nations, the Tasmanians are quickly becoming avid users. Indeed, many Tasmanians look to foreign sources for information, including news and cricket scores.

However, along with these positive aspects of the internet come the negatives: pornography, hate group material, and, according to the Tasmanian Devils, American music and

dress. HOTAP must enact a law on this issue; the internet law will set the standard for freedom of speech in the newly formed country. While the constitution broadly calls for freedom of speech, this law will effectively interpret and define broader constitutional principle. Finally, many in Tasmania view Our Father as the peacemaker, but it is extremely difficult to say what side of the fence the party will fall on over the issue of internet regulation.

Based on the brief description of the three parties above, the class must form a coalition so that a majority of HOTAP members will vote for the bill. While it is highly unlikely that all three parties will work together, it is essential that at least two do so. Work diligently . . . remember, the future of speech in Tasmania rests on your shoulders.

The end product of this simulation should be a basic bill explaining the Tasmanian government’s position on internet regulation. The piece of legislation must be passed by a majority of the class.

SIMULATION: The Making of a Party Platform Plank

Both the Republicans and Democrats outline their basic beliefs and goals in a document called a “party platform.” Within the platform, statements, or “planks,” are put forth regarding specific issues. While it is virtually impossible to create a proclamation that voices each and every opinion held by party members, platforms attempt to present a broad, cohesive party statement. An interesting contemporary case of conflict that may arise within a party over a platform issue is the parties’ attempts to formulate positions on immigration.

One of the most divisive issues in American politics today, immigration is under fire from many conservative camps. The most popular claims is that the immigrant population drains public resources, takes jobs away from native U.S. citizens, and, as some have maintained, contributes

to the decay of the American fabric. These arguments are countered with strong economic evidence that immigration actually helps the economy and arguments centering on the fact that virtually every U.S. citizen descends from an immigrant. In fact, many argue that immigration is the thread that holds the American fabric together. Of course, immigration is a complex issue, one that involves much more than the number of legal immigrants admitted to the United States each year. Other issues include dealing with illegal immigration and refugees. After reading the following brief history of American immigration, the class will engage in a discussion of the merits and faults of both those in favor of and opposed to immigration. This discussion has several goals that will be outlined following the introduction below.

When Professor Oscar Handlin wrote *The Uprooted* in 1951, the now-classic study of “emigration as the central experience of a great many human beings,” he made an essential point: immigration was never easy. In fact, it was a complex and difficult process, and it affected everyone, those who were “uprooted” as well as those who received, however reluctantly, the new visitors (and soon-to-be permanent residents and citizens) to America’s shores.

Today, America’s ethnic diversity is taken for granted, but this was not always the case. In the early years of the American experience, Native Americans were joined by black slaves from Africa and white European Protestants. In the 19th century, Irish and German immigrants arrived in significant numbers. These Europeans constituted what histori-

ans have called the First Wave of immigration.

After the Civil War, and especially at the beginning of the 20th century, other groups came from eastern, central, and southern Europe. Together, they constituted the Second Wave of immigration. Despite the notion that America was the great "melting pot" or a "mosaic" of different peoples, each successive group faced a wall of discrimination based on the ethnic differences represented by the new immigrants. In short, assimilation has never been quick or easy: too many groups experienced what the Irish confronted ("No Irish need apply") or what the Italians faced ("No I-talians welcome") when they settled in the eastern United States. In addition, the so-called "Nativist" reaction to Catholic immigrants characterized much of the nineteenth century.

After World War II, and especially since the 1970s, America received the Third Wave of immigration with the arrival of thousands of Vietnamese, Cambodians, Filipinos, Thais, Russians, East Europeans, and Latin Americans (Mexicans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Central Americans). In 1965, a new immigration law reversed a trend that had been in existence for about 100 years. The old immigration policy favored immigrants from Europe; the 1965 law allowed 20,000 people a year to immigrate from any one country. It also allowed the new immigrants to send for members of their families after establishing residence in the United States. Many of the newcomers spoke very different languages, looked very different, and retained very different traditions from a majority of American citizens long after they had arrived. While some Americans welcomed the additions to American culture, the arrivals of the new immigrants created significant political and social tensions. In 1980, Congress created a special category of immigration for those who wished to come to America because they faced political "persecution" at home, significantly increasing the overall number of legal immigrants.

Americans began to raise questions in the 1980s in response to the large number of immigrants coming

to America. Did they take jobs away from American citizens? By being willing to work for lower wages, haven't they affected the living standard of American workers? Doesn't immigration cost too much? What about tax increases to pay for services for immigrants? Who should be allowed to come here anyway? What should government do about illegal immigration? Won't too much immigration eventually endanger the essential national character of America?

In the late 1980s, Congress responded to the "immigration problem" by enacting the Simpson-Mazoli Act which required that employers document the citizenship of their employees. If an employer knowingly employed an illegal immigrant, he or she could be subjected to civil and criminal penalties. Amnesty was granted to illegal aliens, but only if they could demonstrate to the Immigration and Naturaliza-

tion Service that they had lived continuously in the United States since January 1, 1982. Congress also passed an immigration law in 1990 that favored those immigrants with college degrees and technical and scientific skills.

More recently, Proposition 187 was passed in California as an attempt to deny welfare, education, and health benefits to illegal immigrants (mostly Latinos) who were once welcomed, whether they were legal or not, because of the cheap labor they brought to the state's agricultural endeavors. In fact, Governor Pete Wilson attempted to make immigration a major campaign issue during his brief run for the presidency, a view echoed by one of his rivals for the nomination, Pat Buchanan. In other states, there have been drives to make English the official language, thus deligitimizing any effort to establish Spanish as a co-equal national language.

INTERNET: A Comparative Approach

AN IDEA IN PROGRESS

The Internet should not be used either as a gimmick or as a substitute for traditional academic work. There certainly should be no diminution of academic standards in employing the Internet for the course.

A class in American Government and a class in British Government will be linked through the Internet. The syllabus for each course will be available on a home page for each course provided by the respective college or university. For the purposes of this exercise, there would be a common set of readers. The students in each class would then be asked to respond to a series of questions, e.g., "What is the impact of the media on [British or American] politics?" They would be asked to research the topic, to interview politicians in both countries, to interview voters in the U.K. and the U.S., and to offer their assessments. The results would be available periodically on each class's home page. Students would be encouraged to communicate directly through e-mail.

There are obvious logistics problems in setting this up, but the benefits would far outweigh the problems involved in making the arrangement work. Possible outcomes:

1. Creating a link between students in different societies.
2. Encouraging the students involved to engage in comparisons and contrasts regarding their respective political systems.
3. Reinforcing the importance of politics, the necessity to be engaged in the political life of one's country, and the rewards (intellectual and practical) resulting from academic work.

The groups in the Third Wave have created what has been called the “minority majority” problem, i.e., the immigrants bring their distinct problems to America and their distinct cultural and political beliefs (which the majority resists and often rejects).

In 1993, a *Time* magazine poll indicated that 73% of Americans favored stricter limitations on immigration to the United States. In 1995, *The New York Times* reported that Congress was considering the adoption of the “most restrictive changes in the nation’s immigration laws in 71 years. If enacted, the new law would crack down on illegal immigration, but it would also severely restrict a 30 year old policy of welcoming new immigrants.”

Ethnic diversity is a reality in America today, but this diversity exposes and intensifies cultural and economic class differences and divisions in society. The poet, Walt Whitman, once wrote: “Here is not merely a nation but a teeming Nation of nations.” We are truly a multilingual and multicultural society, but we are also an America divided along ethnic lines. There are many aspects to the immigration problem, and we will consider three of the most important related questions in this simulation.

Based on this information, the class will create a platform plank on immigration. The name of the party for which this is to be written is America For Americans’. While this name may be construed as one espousing isolationist views, the content of the plank will in large part

determine the meaning of the name; that is, the plank should define who has the right to become an American citizen. In addition to this plank, the Party Platform Plank simulation has several goals:

1. To help students sift through what is fact and what is myth regarding the controversial issue of immigration;
2. To demonstrate what kinds of discussion, negotiation, and compromise is involved in creating a platform for a party which represents distinct individuals and points of view;
3. Finally, the simulation aims to garner interest in what is a real and controversial topic in the United States.

To help achieve these goals, the class will be divided into three groups. The following questions should be viewed as starting point; discussion should not be limited to them alone.

Group 1 will be responsible for addressing United States legal immigration policy. How many immigrants per year should the United States accept? What kinds of public services should be available to legal immigrants? Should there be immigration requirements, such as a certain level of education? Should there be quotas for immigrants from certain regions of the world?

Group 2 will be responsible for addressing the refugee issue. Currently, citizens of politically repressive nations are eligible to apply to the United States for political asylum. Should this eligibility be ex-

panded? For example, should Rwandans attempting to escape ethnic genocide be eligible for asylum? Should women attempting to escape female genital mutilation be eligible? More generally, should citizens of nations that are accused of gross human rights violations be eligible for asylum?

Group 3 will be responsible for addressing the illegal immigration issue. Is illegal immigration a problem in the United States? If so, how should it be combated? Should illegal immigrants be denied all public services except emergency medicine? Should they receive emergency medical care? Should illegal immigrants arrested for felony crimes be automatically deported to their country of origin, regardless of the environment that led them to come to the United States? Is it wiser to better the conditions in developing nations onto spend increasingly larger sums of money attempting to control illegal immigration?

Once the individual groups have completed this part of the simulation, the class will meet in plenary and vote on each of the three parts of the immigration plank. Each individual will be allowed one vote for each of the three planks. A 2/3 majority is needed for the passage of each individual portion of the plank.

The final product of this simulation will be a document representing the views of the majority of voices in this class. While not all views can be expressed, it is the goal of this group to create a plank representing the views of the majority of individuals.