

Spring 2017
Politics & Literature – United States
POLA 4450-01

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This course will introduce students to selected contemporary novels in American literature. These novels guide us into the lives of many Americans and the values, customary practices, and power relations that characterize them.

For this course “politics” can involve the formal institutions of government or it can involve social relations between average citizens. Narratives depicting encounters with government, politics, communities, or other citizens – written by those whose primary activity is artistic and intellectual, not political – provide a unique insight into the processes by which we relate to one another and consent to be governed. They constitute valuable textual material for political analysts.

To that end, we will read several novels written by American authors that are set in the United States. These novels may or may not be overtly political, but all will relate to themes that are common in American politics and civic life. As with many aspects of American politics, the novels we read in this course will relate to an overarching theme: who is an American? The concept of identity permeates political life: who should vote? who should be receive government benefits? who should be eligible for public service? (and who should *not*?) The tension between community/power/conformity and individuality/freedom/liberty is nearly a constant throughout American history; these works for fiction clearly illustrate this tension, how it is resolved, and the impact of the resolution.

Course Objectives:

1. To read, understand, and be able to criticize the works of literature.
2. To be able to relate the themes of the novels to current concepts in American politics, government, and civic life.
3. To develop an interdisciplinary perspective on enduring themes in American politics.

Program Outcomes: This course addresses the following program outcome:

1. Students will have knowledge of the political institutions and processes that affect government and politics in the United States, as seen through the lens of the humanities.

Learning Outcomes: After completing this course, students will be able to:

1. develop an understanding of citizenship in the local or national community.
2. demonstrate critical thinking skills by being able to structure and evaluate normative political arguments.
3. formulate and defend a thesis in both written and oral forms.
4. enhance their knowledge of the political institutions and processes of the government of the United States.

Required Texts: There are 6 required texts for this course:

- Roth, Philip. 1997. *American Pastoral*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.
- Boyle, T.C. 1995. *The Tortilla Curtain*. New York, NY: Viking Press.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. 1977. *Ceremony*. New York, NY: Penguin Classics.
- Fountain, Ben. 2012. *Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Kahf, Mohja. 2006. *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. New York, NY: Carroll & Graf.
- Winters, Ben H. 2016. *Underground Airlines*. New York, NY: Mulholland Books.

In addition to the texts, there are several required articles located on MyTulane/Canvas; these are marked with an asterisk in the Course Outline. Logon to <https://tulane.instructure.com/>, click on the course link for Politics & Literature, and on the left side of the page click on the link for Files.

Assignments: There will be four components to the grade in this course. At various (and random) points during the course I will assign short homework assignments or in class assignments or administer short pop quizzes. These are designed to insure students are keeping up with the reading and will measure students' understanding of the material – in other words, if you're doing the reading and coming to class/taking notes/participating, these will be easy. In addition, there will be a two-part essay assignment; in both assignments students will address themes from multiple texts to address concepts in American politics. More details on the essay assignment are at the end of this syllabus. Finally, attendance and participation will count toward the final course grade. These components will contribute to the final course grade as follows:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Assignments/Quizzes	Varies	25
Essay – First Part	March 9	20
Essay – Second Part	May 13	30
Attendance / Participation	Weekly	25
TOTAL		100

Grading: This course will be graded according to Tulane's plus/minus grading system. Accordingly, letter grades will be assigned as follows:

A	92.5% and above	C	72.5% to 77.4%
A–	90% to 92.4%	C–	70% to 72.4%
B+	87.5% to 89.9%	D+	67.5% to 69.9%
B	82.5% to 87.4%	D	62.5% to 67.4%
B–	80% to 82.4%	D–	60% to 62.4%
C+	77.5% to 79.9%	F	59.9% and below

Grades will be available by seeing me during office hours. I will not provide grades over email or by phone.

Course Policies: Students are expected to attend each class, to be on time, and to have all course materials read **prior** to the class in which they are discussed. Please turn off all electronic devices during class. **Laptop computers are not permitted in class**; please turn them off and put them away before class starts. All assignments must be completed for a student to pass the course. Requests for regrading any exam or assignment must be made no later than one week after it has been handed back. No make-ups will be allowed except in very serious circumstances (I reserve the right to determine what is “very serious”). Course incompletes will only be allowed for circumstances in which the student is physically unable to complete the course; the student must otherwise be passing the course in order to be granted an incomplete.

Course Format: This course will operate as a seminar; as such, students should be ready to engage one another in discussion. Of course, in order to participate, one needs to attend class and to have all required readings done in advance. Active, collaborative learning not only enhances your education, but is also more interesting to both student and instructor.

Course Accommodations: If you have any kind of special circumstances, such as a disability, illness, or handicap, or if you are involved with a university activity that requires you to miss class, let me know as soon as possible. This information is confidential. All students attending Tulane University with **documented** disabilities are eligible and encouraged to apply for services with the Goldman Center for Student Accessibility. Please see me or go to <http://www2.tulane.edu/studentaffairs/support/accessibility/> for more information. Students needing accommodations must provide me a copy of the accommodation granted by the testing center at least seven days before an exam, assignment, or other course requirement.

Policy regarding Academic Freedom: In any classroom situation that includes discussion and critical thinking, particularly about political ideas, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. Students may disagree with each other at times, or with me. These differences can help enhance class discussion and create an atmosphere where students (and I) will be encouraged to think and learn. In any event, grades will not be adversely affected by any beliefs expressed in class or in assignments.

Policy regarding Academic Integrity: As described in the Tulane University Honor Code, students are expected to uphold the honor and integrity of the academic process. Violations of the Honor Code include, but are not limited to, cheating on an exam (either providing answers to or receiving answers from another student), plagiarism (the use of another author’s words or arguments without attribution), and unauthorized collaboration (working with another person in preparing written work for fulfillment of any course requirement). If a student commits any violation of the Honor Code, I will pursue disciplinary action as outlined in the Honor Code.

Course Outline:

January 17	Introduction to the Class	
January 19		
January 24	<i>American Pastoral</i>	
January 26	Applebaum	
January 31	de Tocqueville*	
February 2	Schildkraut	
February 7	Spence	
February 9	<i>The Tortilla Curtain</i>	
February 14	Citrin	
February 16	Hopkins	
February 21	Peri*	
	Valentino	
February 23	<i>Ceremony</i>	
February 28	<NO CLASS: MG BREAK>	
March 2	Beidler*	
March 7	Holm	
March 9	Lynch	ESSAY 1 DUE MARCH 9
	Walzer	
March 14	<i>Billy Lynn's Long Halftime Walk</i>	
March 16	Conroy*	
March 21	Greene*	
March 23	Hayes	
March 28, 30	<NO CLASS: SPRING BREAK>	
April 4	Kustermans	
April 6	<i>The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf</i>	
April 11	Akhtar	
April 13	Gerges	
April 18	Kulczycki	
	Leonard	
April 20	<i>Underground Airlines</i>	
April 25	Bales	
April 27	Drescher	
May 2	Hopkins*	
	Olson	
May 13	ESSAY 2 DUE 12:00 PM	

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Essay Assignment

Part 1

Please answer the question with an essay of at least 10 pages (double spaced, 1 inch margins, 12 point type). The essay is due March 9, 2017.

What issues related to the American identity raised in the readings (both the novels and the scholarly material) we have done so far will be significant in American politics over the next 5-10 years? What perspectives on these issues do we see from the fiction writers, and do they conform to or contrast with the perspectives we see in the scholarly material? What can public policymakers learn from both the fictional and scholarly perspectives as they address the issues you identified?

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Essay Assignment

Part 2

Please answer these questions with an essay of at 12-15 pages (double spaced, 1 inch margins, 12 point type). The essay is due May 13, 2017. Be sure to turn in your paper for Part 1 along with your answer to Part 2.

1. Please revise your essay from Part 1 based on:
 - a. The comments I made on your paper
 - b. The additional readings we have done

2. What do the issues you raised in Part 1, as well as the other material from the novels, scholarly articles, film, and class discussion, tell us about what it means to be an American?
 - a. Are there issues that are fundamental to American politics, or are all political issues/debates merely ephemeral?
 - b. What does the presence of fundamental issues say about the American people?
 - c. What aspects of being an American are “good?” What aspects are “bad?” Are there “good” traits that, when taken to the extreme, become “bad?”
 - d. What should public policymakers know about the character of the American people as they address the issues you have identified?