Freshman Year Seminar 129: American Public Policy on TV

Spring 2013
T 2:10-3:25 p.m.
Haslam 125

David J. Houston
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M 1:30-3:30, R 2:00-4:00

Course Description

What are the arguments on competing sides of policy debates? Who are the official and unofficial actors in government? We will use the hit television series “The West Wing” to illustrate some of the contemporary controversies over public policy. Watch as the Bartlett Administration engages and battles Congress, interest groups, religious leaders, and public opinion to craft effective and politically acceptable public policy. Among the policy issues we will see President Bartlett and his staff wrestle with are: the death penalty, immigration, legalizing marijuana, same-sex marriages, the estate tax, and even eliminating the penny from U.S. currency and the shape of the world map.

Course Requirements

Students are required to submit 3 policy reflection essays that discuss their thoughts about a policy issue that was a featured storyline in The West Wing episodes that will be shown. Essays are to be at least 1 page single-spaced with 1” margins on all sides and 12 point font. Each essay should identify the arguments on both sides of the issue and the groups or individuals on each side as depicted in an episode of The West Wing, as well as the student’s own thoughts about where they stand on the issue. Essays are to be turned in at the start of the class the week following the viewed episode. (If a student attends all 11 class sessions, only 2 policy reflection essays must be submitted.)

Students must attend at least 8 of the classes 10 sessions. All grades are S/NC.

Students with Disabilities

Students who have a disability that may require individualized accommodations should inform me of these needs at the beginning of the semester. I will make every effort to accommodate your needs. Also, please take advantage of support provided by the University.
**Required Texts**

None.

**Changes to Course Requirements and Schedule**

Any changes to course assignments, readings, or schedule will be announced in class.

**Weekly Topics**

Course Introduction (1/15)

1. Episode 1.1: Pilot (Introducing the Bartlet Administration) (1/15)

2. Episode 1.14: Take This Sabbath Day (1/22)
   Issues: the death penalty, the role of religion in decision making

3. Episode 1.20: Mandatory Minimums (1/29)
   Issues: mandatory minimum sentences, drug abuse

4. Episode 2.4: In this White House (2/5)
   Issue: pharmaceutical companies and AIDS

5. Episode 2.8: Shibboleth (2/12)
   Issues: school prayer, immigration

6. Episode 2.15: Ellie (2/19)
   Issue: legalization of marijuana

7. Episode 2.20: The Fall’s Gonna Kill You (2/26)
   Issue: tobacco industry

8. Episode 3.1: Isaac and Ishmael (3/5)
   Issue: terrorism

9. Episode 5.9: Abuel Banat (3/12)
   Issue: physician assisted suicide

10. Episode 5.10: The Stormy Present (3/19)
    Issue: national security vs. personal privacy