

Syllabus – Elective Course

Course title:

France and the USA: Political Culture and Conflict

Credits:

6 ECTS credits

Teaching language:

English

Target students:

Students interested in politics, foreign policy, history, culture, and ethics

Teacher in charge of the course:

Prof Dennis Coyle, PhD (Department of Politics, Catholic University of America)

COURSE PRESENTATION

Prerequisite:

University-level English skills, with at least one course in politics or history. Basic familiarity with France and the United States is a plus, though not required

Content:

This course is intended to introduce students to the great sweep of political history and culture in two self-styled exceptionalist countries that share so many values, aspirations and experiences yet are also fundamentally different. Today, each country faces great challenges at home and abroad, with critical elections in 2022. Both countries are grappling with terrorism and related questions of issues of identity, security, and openness. Both face the rise of populist movements on the right and left that have shaken up traditional political elites, alliances and parties and are challenging global neoliberalism. And as in all the world, Covid is straining government resources, economies, and everyday lives. This course gives students the background to understand what makes France and the United States “tick” and how their governments and people perceive and react to these challenges today and tomorrow.

Culture is broadly interpreted here to include political institutions, values, and ideas; language; popular and high culture; history, and even geography—all the elements that form the backdrop for political conflict. All these elements show critical similarities and differences in France and the United States. This comparative perspective is central to the course. Indeed, Tocqueville (whom you will encounter in the course) said that all knowledge is comparative. That is, we understand new phenomena by comparing them with what we already know or have experienced and seeing what is familiar and what is different or surprising. Comparison makes minds think, both in life and in more formal courses. We will begin the course by sharing our experiences, interests and

backgrounds, and then giving examples of cultural habits you have encountered, drawing on that which you know best to begin thinking comparatively about culture.

Prior introductory courses in Politics and French are helpful but not required; no prior knowledge is assumed. It's great to have students with varied backgrounds, interests, and levels, as your insights and challenges will be different, and we can all learn from each other.

Class sessions will cover:

- Class themes, goals, and participants
- Introduction to comparing cultures – geography, experience, and language
- French and American history and culture: Tocqueville and a tale of two countries
- The “foundings” of the two nations: revolutions amid continuities
- Ideologies: understanding republicanism, conservatism, socialism, and liberalism in past and present
- Civil (and uncivil) society, beginning with the tensions between individualism and conformity, and intellectualism and pragmatism
- The ties that bind: Contrasting institutions and norms for education and religion
- Fundamental private ... such as markets and voluntary associations
- Political institutions, including presidents and parliaments, courts and constitutions
- Principles and practical conflicts over centralized power and cultural conformity, such as local control, national uniformity, and the European Union
- The People in politics, from political parties to protests
- Domestic and foreign policy conflicts and issues, including identity, immigration, security, and a just and prosperous economy
- Concluding by considering the present and future of these two “exceptionalist” countries
- ... and what they teach us about the challenges to liberal democracy and welfare-state capitalism throughout the West

Site visits and/or guest speakers will be included.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of the course, the students should be able to:

- Understand the cultural bases of politics
- Compare French and American political cultures and histories
- Identify current political movements and actors and contrast their views
- Identify and describe key civic and social institutions and their impact on politics and citizens
- Compare French and American political institutions and practices
- Describe and assess policy problems related to political culture and identity, such as security, immigration and economic change

WORKLOAD

French contact hours = 60 minutes (in some countries/institutions, 1 contact hour = 45-50 minutes)

Form:	Number of hours	Comments
Face-to-face, in-class, on-site learning	39 hours	13 sessions of 3 hours

Additional field trips	2 hours	
Approximate personal work / homework	13 hours	
Student total workload	54 hours	

EDUCATIONAL METHODS

Lecture, discussion, presentations, site visits, sharing of experiences

RESOURCES

Course materials will be supplied in class or available online. Sources of excerpts and references will include, among others:

- Jean-Benoît Nadeau and Julie Barlow, *Sixty Million Frenchmen Can't Be Wrong* (Sourcebooks, 2003)
- Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vols. I and II (Vintage, 1990)
- Helen Drake, Alistair Cole, Sophie Meunier and Vincent Tiberj, eds., *Developments in French Politics*, 6th edition (Bloomsbury, 2021)
- Charles Hauss, *Politics in France* (CQ Press, 2008)
- Ross Steele, *The French Way*, 2nd ed. (McGraw-Hill, 2006)
- Extracts from key French and American thinkers in history and today
- Current commentary and news articles on French and American politics

ASSESSMENT

Form	Number	Duration	Comments
Continuous assessment (30%)			Journal and short assignments
Final exam (50%)	1	2 hours	Examination covering all aspects of course
Student participation (20%)			Preparation, attendance, and participation in class discussions

This syllabus is based on information available at the time of publication (December 2021). Changes may occur.

For updated information about course content, please contact us: lilleprograms@univ-catholille.fr