

# **POLITICS 100 W**

## **THE AMERICAN DREAM OF SUCCESS**

Fall 2009  
Chambers 1096  
9:30 MWF

Dr. Susan Roberts

“What is collapsing along with Detroit is an American archetype, the premier twentieth century dream of what it means to be a manufacturing worker in this country. From the \$5 a day at Ford in 1914 through the yearly cost of living raises and benefits by the UAW, the auto industry came to symbolize the blue collar upward mobility and empowerment”

- Ben Austen  
Harper's Magazine, August 2009  
“End of the Road: After Detroit & the Wreck of an American Dream”

“Who then are the kinds of persons to whom emigration to America may be advantageous? And what are the advantages that they reasonably expect?”

- Benjamin Franklin, 1782

“I say that you ought to get rich, and it is your duty to get rich. . . .Money is power, and you ought to be reasonably ambitious to have it. You ought because you can do more with than you could without it. Money printed your Bible; money builds your churches ...”

- Russell Conwell, *Acres of Diamonds*, 1861

America's economic downturn/crisis/recession has undoubtedly compromised our “American Dream of Success.” Whether this change of our set of expectations about our country's promise will be permanent remains to be seen. The “American Dream” is not only a dream of success. It is more of promise of success, and this dream animates all that we do as individuals and as a nation. From our very origins as a “city upon a hill,” an essential aspect of American political culture is the belief that America is somehow a unique and blessed nation. As evidenced from our immigrant origins to Horace Greeley's call to “go west young man,” there is an intractable belief that with hard work and luck, Americans can be successful.

The view of America as a blessed country is by no means a relic of our history. President Bill Clinton summed up this belief in an address to the Democratic Leadership Council in 1993 when he stated that “The American dream that we were all raised on is a simple but powerful one -- if you work hard and play by the rules, you should be given a chance to go as far as your

God-given ability will take you.” Americans view themselves as resourceful, resilient, and compassionate, and for that we will be rewarded.

The recent narrative about Supreme Court Justice Sotomayor’s childhood and her successful triumph over modest beginnings and ethnic identity has been but another example of this American Dream. The story of “only in America” has been echoed by many prominent Americans during the discussion on her appointment.

Americans are engaged in a heated debated over immigration. We will be asking ourselves to what degree is this land of opportunity open to various ethnic groups? How does it influence our policy expectations?

This question of immigration cuts to the heart of this “American Dream of Success.” The title of a recent article in The New York Times Magazine summed up this discourse all too well. The article by Alex Kotlowitz was entitled “All Immigration Politics Is Local (And complicated, nasty and Personal).” The description of the immigration in the small town of Carpentersville, Illinois seems to capture the dynamics of the immigration question nationwide. One local resident stated that immigrants “want the American dream, but they don’t want to assimilate. Immigrants are what made this country great, but the immigrants of yesterday are totally differently people. They don’t have the love of this country in their hearts.”

Our goal is to learn to be better writers and thinkers. The context of this American Dream offers much to discuss and much to digest. To take a composition course does not inoculate you from poor writing. Learning to write is a life long effort. We must learn to express ourselves in a variety of contexts.

One important step is for students to abandon the idea that they are perfect writers. Each and every one of us will benefit from rigorous editing and more deliberate writing. You may receive grades which are not as stellar as the grades you received in high school, but they will improve with your effort.

**This is a writing seminar with demands of engagement and discussion.** We have the opportunity to exchange ideas and questions. We have the opportunity to begin your college career in ways that extend far beyond writing.

**Textbooks:**

Washland & Ash

Immigration: A Wadsworth Casebook in Argument

Hochschild & Scovrnick	<u><a href="#">The American Dream &amp; the Public Schools</a></u>
Cullen	<u><a href="#">The American Dream: A Short History of an Idea That Shaped a Nation</a></u>
Jillson	<u><a href="#">Pursing the American Dream</a></u>
“Writing in College”	<u><a href="http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/resources/collegewriting">http://writing-program.uchicago.edu/resources/collegewriting</a></u>
W.W. Norton Handbook	<u><a href="http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/bullock2_readings_handbook_ebook/welcome.asp">http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/bullock2_readings_handbook_ebook/welcome.asp</a></u>

**General Course Requirements & Information:**

Participation, engagement and discussion:

Students are expected to participate frequently in this course. The quantity of participation does not equate precisely with quality of engagement in the seminar. There are many different ways to evaluate discussion and participation. Assessing student participation in discussion can take many forms. I will be offering guidelines after the first week of class as to ways to generate better discussion. You and I are both responsible for the depth of our deliberation.

Your total grade for participation will also include factors such as being prepared for class, meeting deadlines for class assignments, and peer assessment of your contributions. Students will periodically be given updates on their evolving participation grade.

Conferences:

During the semester, students will be expected to attend at least two mandatory conferences to discuss your writing. Missing a scheduled conference is equal to two absences in class. Students should come prepared to these conferences to discuss their previous work, their present work, and their ideas for future writing assignments. Failure to exhibit preparation for the conference will result in the termination of the conference.

Attendance:

This class abides by a formal attendance policy. You may not miss more than four classes. Absences beyond four will result in a deduction of one letter grade for each absence. The only excused absences are those accompanied by a notification from the Dean of Students’ office. It is strongly advised NOT to miss ANY classes.

Contact Information:

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 Office Hours: 10:30 – 11:20 WF

1:30 – 3:00 W  
Thursday by appointment  
I am in class all day Monday.

I am often in my office and you are *welcome* to drop by to inquire as to a meeting. I would also welcome the change to go to lunch with students from time to time, normally from 12:30 and on.

Plagiarism:

Please consult the college handbook current definition of plagiarism and its accompanying penalties. We will devote class time to this subject. Please read the appropriate section in writing handbook.

**ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE**

M Aug 24	Introduction/ Writing Inventory of strengths and weaknesses Take Home Writing Assignment: First Writing Memory
W Aug 26	<i>Introduction to the American Dream</i> Presentation of Reich: Tales of A New America
F Aug 28	Class Review of Take Home Assignment
M Aug 31	Cullen <u>American Dream</u> Introduction Ch 1: Dream of the Good Life Ch 2: Dream Charter: Declaration
W Sept 2	Discussion of Absentee Mentor assignments Discussion O Safire's "How to Read a Column" Ideas on discussion roles & responsibilities in this seminar Wadsworth    Part One: Analyzing & Writing Arguments Ch 1: Analyzing Arguments
F Sept 4	Continued – Ch 2: Avoiding Fallacies <i>Myth &amp; the Making of a Nation</i> Jillson Ch 1: American Dream & Role in History
M Sept 7	General discussion of Mentor selection Wadsworth    Ch 3: Writing the Source Based Argumentative Paper

W Sept 9	Jillson Ch 2: American Dream & Promise of a New Nation.
F Sept 11	Jillson Ch 3: The Dream Defined: The Founders
<b>*****Absentee Mentor Paper #1 Due*****</b>	
<b>In class</b>	
M Sept 14	Jillson Ch 6: The Dream Defended: Age of Reform
W Sept 16	Jillson Ch 7: The Dream at High Tide: Opportunity to Entitlement
F Sept 18	Peer Review of Selected Absentee Mentor Papers
M Sept 21	Discussion of Plagiarism
W Sept 23	<i>Myth of Immigration &amp; Achievement</i> Cullen <u>American Dream</u> Ch 3: Dream . . . Upward Mobility
F Sept 25	Cullen <u>American Dream</u> Ch 4: The Dream of Equality  Students assigned to bring article on immigration for next class
M Sept 28	Wadsworth Beecher – “Threat of Catholic Immigrant” Lieflet – “Story of Irish Cook” Polacheck – “Chicago Sweatshop” Hall Ets – “An Italian Immigrant. . . Camp”  Discussion and presentation of articles from class members
<b>*****Absentee Mentor Paper #2 Due*****</b>	
<b>In Class</b>	
W Sept 30	Wadsworth Antin – “Have We Any Right to Regulate Immigration?”  Jacoby - “Too Many Immigrants?”
F Oct 2	Conferences
M Oct 5	Wadsworth Mukherjee – “Two Ways to Belong to America”

Hwan Kim – “As American As Possible”

W Oct 7 Conferences

F Oct 9 Wadsworth Alba – “Assimilation’s Quiet Tide”  
Schiller – “Transnationalism”

**\*\*\*\*\*Absentee Mentor Paper #3 Due\*\*\*\*\***  
**In Class**

M Oct 12 *Fall Break*

W Oct 14 Wadsworth Appendix A:  
Research Topics & Selected Imm. Bibliography

F Oct 16 Catch up day

M Oct 19 *Myth of Dream and the Benchmark: Home Ownership*  
Cullen American Dream  
Ch 5: Detached Houses: Dream of Home Ownership

W Oct 21 Discussion of the Research process

F Oct 23 Peer Review of Proposals  
*Bring details on your research questions*

M Oct 26 Peer Review of Proposals

W Oct 28 Peer Review of Proposals  
**\*\*\*\*\*Success Paper Due\*\*\*\*\***

F Oct 30 *Myth of Education & Achievement*  
Hochschild American Dream & the Public Schools  
Introduction  
Ch 1: What Americans Want from Public Schools

M Nov 2 Hochschild American Dream & the Public Schools  
Ch 2: School Desegregation

**\*\*\*\*\*Research Proposals Due\*\*\*\*\***

W Nov 4 Hochschild American Dream & the Public Schools  
Ch 3: School Finance Reform  
Ch 4: School Reform

F Nov 6 Conferences

M Nov 9 Conferences

W Nov 11 Conferences

F Nov 13 Hochschild American Dream & Public Education  
Ch 5: Choice

M Nov 16 Jillson Dream At Ebb: Entitlement to Responsibility

**Rough Drafts of Research Paper Due**

W Nov 18 Hochschild American Dream & Public Education  
Ch 5: continued

F Nov 20 Hochschild American Dream & Public Education  
Ch 6: Separation & Inclusion  
Ch 7: Challenging the American Dream  
Ch 8: Public Schools in the New America

M Nov 23 continued

W Nov 25 *Thanksgiving Break*

F Nov 27 *Thanksgiving Break*

M Nov 30 Cullen American Dream  
Ch 6 & Conclusion: Dream of the Good Life &  
Extending the Dream

W Dec 2 Jillson Ch 9: American Dream in 21<sup>st</sup> Century

F Dec 4 continued

**Research Papers Due, 5:00 p.m.**

*Last day of regular classes*

\*\*I do not plan to use optional class days, but I may have no choice.

***There will be no final in this class. The “final” is your research paper.***

## ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

\*\*Unless otherwise advised, assignments should be handed in as paper (“hard copy”) and not as an electronic attachment.

1. Absentee Mentor Papers
  - ❑ Series of three short papers
  - ❑ Students adopt nationally syndicated columnist or essayist
  - ❑ Read his/her column on regular basis
  - ❑ Select 3 columns on which to write
  - ❑ Summarize their argument, discuss how the author marshals evidence, and discuss the degree to which you find their argument persuasive
  - ❑ Papers are 3 – 4 pages
  
2. Dream of Success Paper
  - ❑ One paper on concepts of success and the challenge of immigration
  - ❑ 5 – 7 pages
  - ❑ Paper = Deals with issues of immigration and reform proposals and American Dream. Topics to be discussed with me.
  
3. Research Paper
  - ❑ Highly structured
  - ❑ Heavily analytical
  - ❑ Proposals, Rough Drafts and Final Drafts
  - ❑ Topic to be individually crafted with American dream as core
  - ❑ Rigorous attention to documentation
  - ❑ 10 – 14 pages, excluding works cited
  - ❑ Footnotes preferable, including explanatory footnotes

Research Papers in the past have included:

- “The Lottery: Another Try for the Good Life”
- “The Changing Face of the American Family As Seen On Television”
- “Ability Grouping & the American Dream: Can They Be Reconciled?”
- “Consumerism: The Evolution and Practice of Buying Success”
- “The Measure of a Woman: Advertising & The American Woman 1910-1950”
- “Photography & The evolution of Race in the American Dream”
- “Sports Movies & Their Connection to the American Dream of Success”
- “American Women: Wives, Mothers & Workers”
- “Why Americans Are Losing Faith in the American Dream”
- “The Patriot Act: A Threat to the American Dream”
- “Violence: The Key to Success”
- “No More Miss Nice Girl”
- “Fantastical Reality: The Evolution of Agrarian Values”
- “The International Pursuit of the American Dream”
- “Making Capitalism Safe for Success”

**Grading:**

Discussion/ Presentation of Proposal	10%
Absentee Mentor Papers (3 @ 10%)	30%
Research Proposal	5%
Success Paper	15%
Research Paper Rough Draft	10%
Research Paper Final Draft	30%

Grades directly affected by their timely submission. There are presentations accompanying the research paper as well and these will be reflected in your discussion grade as well.

Students who routinely are tardy will see such reflected in their discussion grade.

Grades for the semester are not an exact science. Should one be situated on the borderline, factors such as initiative, willingness to participate in outside-class activities, and work in group projects will come into play.