

**POLSCI 100 - American Politics**  
Online Instruction  
Spring 2018

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## Course Overview

This is a general education course that satisfies a requirement in the Social and Behavioral Sciences. While the course has many goals particular to this course (see below), it also has three goals in terms of the general education requirement at UW-Parkside: communication/literacy, reasoned judgment, and social and personal responsibility:

- Communication/literacy: Reading is emphasized. Students can expect around 8 hours of reading a week. Written communication is achieved through essay assignments and exams.
- Reasoned judgement: Students will be able to recognize a problem, analyze information, identify assumptions, and make conclusions based on a range of information.
- Social and personal responsibility: Students will understand and question values and beliefs about social, political, economic and historical contexts that construct diversity and inequality.

Introduction to American Politics is a survey course designed to acquaint you with the fundamental ideas, institutions, and actors that make up our governmental system. During the semester, we will examine the legal and structural basis of our government, evaluate the institutions that carry out its day to day functions, and analyze the role the individual citizen can play in influencing and affecting government. Also, since government and politics are things that go on around us all the time, we will follow the actions of the President, the Congress, the Courts, and the public. For this reason, current political events will be of special interest and importance to our studies.

A typical class day will consist of a combination of lecture, discussion, and analysis conducted against the background of larger political science questions regarding the role of government. At the end of this course, it is my hope that students will understand much more not only about American politics, but about the phenomenon of politics generally.

## Course Objectives

This class is designed to provide a basic understanding of the main actors, institutions, and practices that exist in American Politics. The exams and quizzes are designed in order to measure each of the objectives of the course. By completing the course, students will be better able to:

1. Identify the important institutions in American politics, as well as how they operate.
2. Recognize and provide examples of the actors and institutions critical to political outcomes in the contemporary American political environment.
3. Identify influential periods of history and events that have impacted and shaped contemporary American politics.
4. Critically analyze and answer questions related to course readings that have shaped the American political system.

## Course Requirements

### Online Instruction

Since the class is conducted online, attendance/participation is a difficult aspect of the course to assess. Further, several people are taking this class online because their schedules do not allow for regular, constant class attendance. Therefore, there is a great deal of leeway built into the completion of required coursework. However, it is up to you to pay attention to due dates and requirements. Finally, **you must have stable internet access for this class**. I will not at any point in the semester hear complaints regarding late assignments due to not having internet access. The level of technological knowledge for participating in this class is minimal.

In order to access any content on D2L, **you must complete a quiz dealing with the content of this syllabus**. The quiz can be attempted an unlimited number of times, cannot hurt your grade, and must be completed with a 100%. The point of the quiz is to ensure that you understand the guidelines and requirements for the class so that there is no possibility for complaints later. In addition, your completion of the syllabus quiz is a contract that both of us agree to the guidelines set forth in this class.

I expect that class reading will be done **prior to the lecture slides being posted**, and that students will ask questions in the discussion forums if they are not understanding something. The lecture slides are posted on Monday mornings at 8am. If at any point during the semester it is clear that students are not reading prior to attempting the quizzes, I will mandate that each student hand in on D2L one page of typed, single-spaced notes on the readings. The page of notes will accompany the quizzes in terms of determining the overall quiz grade.

**A note about conduct:** It is understandable that the class is not face-to-face, thus there is a certain level of anonymity. On rare occasions, this anonymity is accompanied by a lack of

formality or professional conduct. Please take note to not be disrespectful to other students. Further, I expect that emails to me will be accompanied by a professional header, consist of a professional tone, and include formal writing (as though it were a business email). If the emails are not drafted in this manner, I will simply not respond to them. If they are written in a professional manner, you can expect a response in two business days or less.

If you need technical support, you can contact the UW-Parkside help desk with inquiries regarding D2L problems at servicedesk@uwp.edu. Additional help or inquiries regarding success in the class should be directed at the Student Support Services center.

## **Participation = 15%**

You will be required to complete four tasks throughout the semester in order to receive participation points. First, you must introduce yourself on D2L in the Discussion section of D2L titled “Introductions.” I would like everyone to introduce themselves in a paragraph or two by the end of the second week of the semester. Your specific response is not graded, and you will simply receive points for completing the task.

The other three tasks require posting a review question for each of the three exams in the Discussion section of D2L. Further, you must respond to at least one student’s question for each review session. The discussion forum is located in the Discussion section of D2L titled “Review Session.” I will not reward you any participation points unless you do both of these tasks. You must complete the tasks BEFORE the exam opens.

### **Active Learning: Interaction and Feedback**

The three review sessions are intended to provide a forum for students to process course material and apply course concepts in an interactive format. This interaction will allow for “student - student” and “student - instructor” interactions, whereby students are expected to guide discussions and learning through specific questions. Each student will not only write an original question, but is expected to respond to at least one other student’s question. Further, as your Instructor, I will take an active role in clarifying confusion and providing additional information that serves to advance student understanding in a given content area.

Finally, there are weekly discussion boards set up for you to provide questions if your understanding is deficient in a specific area. The weekly discussion boards are not mandatory. Instead, they are intended to guide students to increasing levels of responsibility for their own learning.

### **Active Learning: Student Engagement**

The lecture slides will use contemporary examples of political phenomena to illustrate course concepts. These concepts, often contentious, are designed to challenge student understand-

ings of given issues and explore new ways of analyzing institutional performance, political arguments, and political history. Therefore, students are expected to keep up with contemporary news in order to familiarize themselves with the presented issues. Present in the lecture slides are discussion questions that provide the opportunity to examine and assess their own understandings of new material. Although students are not expected to submit written responses to these discussion questions, this self-directed learning enables students to more fully interact with other members of class during review sessions, and clarifies points of confusion on which to seek further clarification. Again, these exercises are intended to guide students to increasing levels of responsibility for their own learning.

### **Quizzes ([11 -1] x 2.5 = 25%)**

There will be 11 quizzes in this class worth an overall 25%. The quizzes are intended to ensure that you are reading the material, and that your level of comprehension is as at a point where you do well on the exams. The quizzes are to be accessed on D2L the week before we start most topics. The quiz will close at midnight on Sunday the week before we start a topic.

You are allowed to take each quiz three times, and I will count the highest quiz grade out of the three attempts. Further, at the end of the semester I will drop the lowest quiz grade. The quizzes are open-note, open-book format. The time limit for quiz completion is 53 mins. Finally, there are no make up quizzes. You have over three days to complete the quiz. Therefore, I will not allow anyone to make them up. The quizzes are set up to be graded immediately upon completion.

### **Exams (3 X 20% = 60%)**

There will be three examinations during the course of the semester, listed in the course schedule. Each exam is worth 20% of your overall grade. Since a strong argument has arisen regarding the usefulness of multiple choice exams, and some people argue that they are “bad test takers,” I offer two options for the exams. Each student will have the choice between two different exams for the midterm and final, listed below:

**Exam Choice 1:** Online, multiple choice exam - The exam will consist of 50 multiple choice questions worth 2 points each. The exam time is limited to 53 minutes (which is the normal length of the in-person class), and you are not allowed to use your notes. **The exam will open on Friday the prior week at 10pm and close on Friday at 10pm the week of the exam.** For example, the first exam opens on Friday March. 8 at 10pm and closes on Friday March. 15 at 10pm. Therefore, you are welcome to take the exam at any point in that 7 day window. The multiple choice exams are set up to be graded immediately upon completion.

**Exam Choice 2:** Take-home, essay exam - The exam will consist of three essay questions, and you must choose **two** to answer. Each essay question should be answered in  $2\frac{1}{2}$ -3 typed, double-spaced pages (You may not write less than  $2\frac{1}{2}$  or more than 3 pages. If the essay is

shorter or longer than the instructions, you will receive a 0%). The essay questions will be posted on D2L at the same time that the multiple choice exam opens. **The exam answers must be turned in on D2L at 10pm the week of the exam when the multiple choice exam is due.** Failure to turn in the exam on time will result in an automatic 0%. Further, you must follow an **Argumentative Essay Guideline** handout posted on D2L to the letter or you will receive a zero. Finally, you are allowed to come talk to me about the essays prior to turning them in. The essay exams will be graded by the instructor within 2 weeks.

## Late Work

Late work is not accepted. All of the assignment due dates, criteria for completion, and full explanation are provided well ahead of time. In addition, all of the assignments are turned in electronically on D2L without physically being in class. Therefore, there is no excuse for late work. Makeup exams will not be allowed except for extreme circumstances.

## Grading Scale

Grade	Percentage
A	= 92% - 100%
A-	= 90% - 91%
B+	= 88% - 89%
B	= 82% - 87%
B-	= 80% - 81%
C+	= 78% - 79%
C	= 72% - 77%
C-	= 70% - 71%
D+	= 68% - 69%
D	= 62% - 67%
D-	= 60% - 61%
F	= below 60%

NOTE: In cases in which a student is on the borderline between grades (e.g., 91.5), I will always round up to the higher grade, provided that you have attended class regularly and engaged in regular and active participation in class.

If you have any questions about grading policy in general, or any questions about any particular grade you received, please come see me in my office. I will be more than happy to discuss your grade with you and find ways in which your work can be improved and your grade raised.

## Academic Dishonesty

**I take plagiarism extremely seriously.** Let it be noted for the record that cheating in any form will not be tolerated. Anyone caught cheating on an examination will be punished according to University guidelines. In addition, if a paper is handed in without any citations, improper citations, or plagiarized material the paper will receive a zero, and you will be referred to the university for disciplinary action. I will assume that you either copied the material or did not complete the assignment as was required. Please consult the section on student academic dishonesty in the Student Guidebook for a listing of the practices that may be considered cheating.

**It is the University's policy to provide, on a flexible and individual basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have documented disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact Disability Services for a letter of verification to provide to their instructors. Disability Services is located in WYLL D175 and can be reached at 595-2372 or dss@uwp.edu**

## Required Reading

Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore J. Lowi, Margaret Weir, and Caroline J. Tolbert. 2017. *We the People: An Introduction to American Politics* Eleventh Core Edition. W.W. Norton & Company.

**Note: Do not buy the book before the first day of class. In the introduction forum, I will go over your options in terms of course materials.**

## Class Schedule

NOTE: Reading for a particular day should be done before attending class on that particular day. I have been known to randomly call on students and ask them questions from the reading. Therefore, it is in your interest to be prepared in order to receive attendance points. In addition, the schedule is subject to change based on the flow of class discussion.

### Part I - Political Science Research

#### Week 1: Feb. 4 - Feb. 8

Syllabus

Student introductions

Topic: *Introduction*

Topic: *Social Scientific Methods; What is American Politics?*

### Part II - The Origins and Foundations of American Government

#### Week 2: Feb. 11 - Feb. 15

Topic: *American Political Culture*

Read: Ginsberg, Ch. 1

Topic: *The Founding*

Read: Ginsberg, Ch. 2; Declaration of Independence; Agrarian Justice (READ CLOSELY)

#### Week 3: Feb. 18 - Feb. 22

Topic: *The Constitution*

Read: U.S. Constitution; Federalist Papers 10 & 51 (READ CLOSELY)

Topic: *Federalism*

Read: Ginsberg, Ch. 3

#### Week 4: Feb. 25 - Mar. 1

Topic: *Civil Liberties*

Read: Ginsberg, Ch. 4, Bill of Rights

#### Week 5: Mar. 4 - Mar. 8

Topic: *Civil Rights*

Read: Ginsberg, Ch. 5

#### Week 6: Mar. 11 - Mar. 15

EXAM I - Friday March 8th to Friday March 15th

## **Part III - Forming and Expressing Beliefs**

### **Week 7: Mar. 18 - Mar. 22**

Topic: *Public Opinion*

Read: Ginsberg, Ch. 6

Topic: *Political Participation & Voting*

Read: Ginsberg, Ch. 8

### **Spring Break Mar. 25th - Mar. 29th**

### **Week 8: Apr. 1 - Apr. 3**

Topic: *Political Parties*

Read: Ginsberg, Ch. 9

### **Week 9: Apr. 8 - Apr. 12**

Topic: *Campaigns & Elections*

Read: Ginsberg, Ch. 10

### **Week 10: Apr. 15 - Apr. 19**

**EXAM II - Friday Apr. 12 - Friday Apr. 19**

## **Part IV - Three Branches of Government**

### **Week 11: Apr. 22 - Apr. 26**

Topic: *The Legislative Branch - Congress*

Read: Ginsberg, Ch. 12

### **Week 12: Apr. 29 - May 3**

Topic: *The Executive Branch - The Presidency*

Read: Ginsberg, Ch. 13

### **Week 13: May 6 - May 10**

Topic: *The Judiciary - The Federal Courts*

Read: Ginsberg, Ch. 15

**EXAM III - Friday May 10th - Friday May 17th**