

PS105: AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS [3 CREDITS]

University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh
Spring Semester 2017

Class meets T/TH 9:40-11:10, Sage 3235
T/TH 11:30-1:00, Sage 3235

Office hours: W 10-11 & 1-3, and by
appointment.

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or use the TitanApps Chat function!

Course Description: This course invites students to explore the institutions which make up the government of the United States, its policies, and politics. What are the underlying values, theories of government, and compromises which comprise our public institutions? How do these institutions and the perspectives of those who engage them combine to produce our public policy? How can you, as a citizen-activist, participate effectively in our democracy? To begin answering these questions, we will examine the relationship between citizens and their government in the United States, with an emphasis on the many ways in which individuals participate in the political process. The course will also explore current political debates over public policy at both the national and state levels to gain a better sense of how these policies affect our lives. The product of these experiences will be a deeper understanding of the issues, institutions, and inputs necessary for effective civic engagement. As members of a democratic society, we cannot escape the influence of government on our lives. Through civic engagement, you can add your voice to popular debates, and help determine the course of our democracy.

Course Learning Outcomes:

- Learn about the many institutions of our federal government, such as the Constitution, legislature, presidency, judiciary, and electoral systems
- Understand and engage the values underlying policy and structural choices which comprise our government and public policy
- Learn about public policies at the national level, including social welfare, healthcare, and fiscal policies
- Practice written communication skills
- Develop deep knowledge about the fundamental principles of and central arguments about democracy over time as expressed in the United States
- Encourage a disposition to create and participate in democratic governance structures of school, college, and the community

Required Texts:

Lowi, Ginsberg, Shepsle, and Ansolabehere. 2014. *American Government: Power and Purpose* (Core 13th Edition) Norton.

Additional course readings will be available on Desire2Learn.

Liberal Education is an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. It provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g. science, culture, and society) as well as in-depth study in a specific area of interest. A liberal education helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings. (AAC&U; http://www.aacu.org/leap/What_is_liberal_education.cfm) Our approach to liberal education is articulated through the University Studies Program, but is similar to the general education programs of all other four year universities.

The University Studies Program: The University Studies Program (USP) is your gateway to a 21st century college education at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. This Quest II course emphasizes ethical reasoning. Upon completion of this course you will be ready to enroll in Quest III, and then Connect.

Ethical Reasoning: People engage in reasoning in a number of ways. We are capable of theoretical reasoning – reasoning about, for instance, the way a system of ideas or claims is connected. We are capable of practical reasoning – reasoning about what to do and how to do it. Ethical reasoning is a form of reasoning we all do when we ask questions like “Should I do this?” “Is it right to do that?” “Is this policy good?” “Am I doing what I should to be a good person?” “What should a good person do?” Thus, ethical reasoning is, broadly, reasoning that incorporates our beliefs about values (good, bad). Ethical Reasoning typically reaches a conclusion of the form “X is right/wrong” or “I should do X/not do X”.

In this course, you are addressing the **Signature Question:** How do people understand and engage in community life?

What is Civic Learning? Civic knowledge consists of an awareness and understanding of the various political and social processes that impact the nature and quality of life in local, state, national, or global communities. It also encompasses the cultivation of skills which may be useful in public life, like effective communication and ethical reasoning. Civic engagement means having an appreciation for and applying the values gained from civic knowledge in real world settings, directed at improving the quality of life in the communities of which one is a part. Civic knowledge and civic engagement emphasize learning, reflection, and action in order to create better communities.

Course Requirements:

Weekly Readings Quizzes (15%): Students will have weekly, 5 question quizzes on D2L. These quizzes are designed to help you evaluate how well you understand the readings and prepare you for our in class exams, which will have questions written in the same style. Quizzes will be posted to D2L by Saturday of each week and should be completed no later than 9:40am on Tuesday. Quizzes cannot be made up without a university-approved excuse. **Your time will be limited so please complete your reading before you take the quiz.** Each student will receive only one attempt per quiz.

Current Events Writing Assignments (15%): Students will prepare a 5 page (double-spaced) paper due by noon on Wednesday, April 19th. The paper will ask students to reflect on their ongoing analysis of the content and editorial decisions of a current media outlet (chosen on the first day of class). More information about this assignment will be provided during the semester.

Campus Conversation and Reflection Essay (5%): All students will attend one of the event on March 8th 6pm, Reeve Ballroom (227C). Upon completing the event, students will complete a 2-page reflection essay. This essay (12 point Times New Roman or Garamond font, 1 inch margins, single-spaced) will briefly (no more than one paragraph) describe the event and make connections with class material, particularly with regard to media usage and the ability to connect with other students about current events and politics. Students are also invited to share their reflections or thoughts about the event. These essays will be **due** to the D2L dropbox by noon on Monday, March 13th.

Please speak with the instructor as soon as possible if you have a conflict with this event—attendance is required for course completion!

Attendance and participation: (15%) The final portion of your grade in this class is your attendance and participation. Attendance is required for all classes. For each unexcused absence, you will lose 1.5% of your total course grade. You are considered absent to class **if you show up after I have finished taking the attendance for the day.**

Please note that excused absences are three things: severe (i.e. hospitalized) illness, death in the family, and required school activities. With proof of this absence (for example, an obituary, note from a coach, etc.), I am happy to work with you to cover missed material and make up assignments. Common illnesses (colds, sinus infections, flu), personal travel, etc. are not excused absences.

For participation, I expect you to come to class having completed all assigned readings, prepared to speak up and answer questions, and contribute substantively to class discussions. There is no specific number of times you should talk, but you should make a concerted effort to be active and involved in the class. Failure to do so will negatively impact your participation grade.

Mid-semester meeting: I would like to meet with each of you individually in the middle part of the semester to discuss how school is going for you and to address any concerns or questions you might have with the course, with the University Studies Program, or with the university in general. Students who take the initiative to set up and attend a meeting with me in Week 8 will receive extra credit for their participation grades.

Exams (50%): There will be two exams during the course, each worth 25% of your total course grade. The exams will take place on **March 16th and May 11th**. Exam format will be discussed closer to the first exam, but will likely include current events analysis, multiple choice, term identification, and essay components. The second exam will include all of the questions from the pretest in addition to content from the second half of the course.

Late Papers and Make-Up Exams: No extensions will be given on assignments unless you are subject to one of the three excused absences discussed above. You are welcome to turn writing projects in early (the dropboxes are already available on D2L).

Please note that computer problems are not an accepted excuse for late papers. You should always back up your work and far enough ahead that computer problems should not be an issue in handing in your project on time.

I will give a make-up exam in one of the excused absence circumstances above, but also with good reason if you know beforehand, provided you discuss the need for a make-up exam in advance of the test. For example, if you know at the beginning of class you must be out of town for a family event, I will give you a make-up if you tell me a week or more before the test date. The make-up test will contain different questions than the test given in class.

Regrading Policy: I will be glad to take another look at a paper or test you feel is not graded fairly, with the following conditions: you must wait 24 hours after the paper or exam is handed back, you must speak to me in person about it during my office hours or by appointment, and you must tell me in writing why you think you deserved more points. The reason for this is that I would like for you to take the paper/exam home and carefully read and think over comments before we talk. If I feel your paper was graded inaccurately, I'll change the grade in your favor, but I also reserve the right to lower your grade upon rereading the paper, if, after reevaluation, I think you received too high a grade. All requests for regarding must be received within 2 weeks of the assignment being returned.

Academic Honesty: All graded work is to be your own. If you have any question relating to proper citation style please review the lecture material from our first day of class and visit the political science department website: <http://politicalscience.uwosh.edu/for-students/writing-resources/>. Remember: any ideas or quotations borrowed from other sources require a citation!

Early Alert: Early Alert is a process designed to help you evaluate your study skills and your class attendance so that you know if you are on the right track. During the 5th week of classes, you will receive a grade for your overall progress in each of the courses you are taking, based on your performance in the first 3 weeks of class. These Early Alert grades are not permanent and will not appear on your transcript. If you need to make some changes, there are resources available to support your academic success (see below).

Course Tutor: The Center for Academic Resources (CAR) provides free, confidential tutoring for students in most undergraduate classes on campus. CAR is located in the Student Success Center, Suite 102. Check the Tutor List page on CAR's website (www.uwosh.edu/car) for a list of tutors. If your course is not listed, click on a link to request one, stop by SSC 102 or call 424-2290. To schedule a tutoring session, simply email the tutor, let him/her know what class you are seeking assistance in, and schedule a time to meet.

Reading Study Center: The Reading Study Center is an all-university service whose mission is to facilitate the development of efficient college-level learning strategies in students of all abilities. The center offers strategies for improved textbook study, time management, note-taking, test preparation, and test-taking. For more information, email readingstudy@uwosh.edu, view the website (<http://www.uwosh.edu/readingstudycenter>), visit them in Nursing Ed Room 201, or call 424-1031.

Long Night Against Procrastination: This now semi-annual event brings librarians, writing center staff, reading study center staff, advisors and instructors to Polk to support students as they get a start and make progress on major research or writing projects. Faculty present at the last event reported important contact with their students during, what amounted to, extended office hours. Students can make progress on their assignments and connect with resources for research or writing and, most importantly, to the refreshments table for snacks, coffee, soda and more. Event details are listed in the course calendar below.

Reading Assignments: Reading assignments are given in the course calendar in this syllabus (below). Assigned reading for a class day is given as the "Reading Assignment" below each entry. I expect you to have done the reading for each class ahead of time, quizzes will cover the material listed for that day. Reading assignments are subject to change, and any change will be announced in class.

Course Calendar:

- Week 1: T, Jan. 31st: Course introduction and media source selection
- Reading assignment: syllabus
- TH, Feb. 2nd: Thinking about the current context of our politics.
- Reading assignment: Fox and Lawless "Introduction"; Thomas E. Mann "Admit It, Political Scientists: Politics Really is More Broken Than Ever"
- Week 2: T, Feb. 7th: What are politics, political science?
- Reading assignment: Lowi, et al., Chapter 1
- TH, Feb. 9th: The media: good for what, exactly?
- Reading assignment: Lowi, et al., Chapter 14
- Week 3: T, Feb. 14th: The Constitution: A perfect document or current politics compromise?
- Reading assignment: Lowi, et al., Chapter 2; U.S. Constitution
- TH, Feb. 16th: Reflecting on our values: What government should do and why.
- Reading assignment: Hudson 'Preface'; U.S. Bill of Rights and the United Nations' Universal
- Week 4: T, Feb. 21st: Federalism: How many governments is "The Government"?
- Reading assignment: Lowi, et al., Chapter 3
- TH, Feb. 23rd: Navigating our governments: Decisionmaker targeting
- Reading assignment: Douglas-Gabriel "Going to a public college isn't as affordable as it used to be" [Washington Post or D2L]; Graham, Chapter 3

- Week 5: T, Feb. 28th: Civil Rights: how much? For whom? When? What is ‘equal’?
- Reading assignment: Lowi, et al., Chapter 5
- TH, Mar. 2nd: Civil Rights: The faces may change but the hassles are just the same.
- Reading assignment: Pierceson, *Sexual Minorities and Politics*, Chapter 6; Stern “Texas Supreme Court Agrees to Consider Rolling Back Same-Sex Marriage Rights”
- Week 6: T, Mar. 7th: Civil Discourse: A rights enabler?
- Reading assignment: *PS: Political Science*, 2012, “Political Civility Symposium” [on D2L]
- W, March 8th: Campus Conversation R227C 6pm**
- TH, Mar. 9th: Civil Liberties: What can’t we say and do? According to whom?
- Reading assignment: Lowi, et al., Chapter 4
- Week 7: **M, Mar. 13: Campus Conversation Writing Assignment Due**
- T, Mar. 14th: The Courts: Neutral arbiters or ideological activists?
- Reading assignment: Lowi, et al., Chapter 9
- TH, Mar. 16th: **First Exam**
- Reading assignment: Prepare for the exam.
- T, Mar. 21st: Spring Break
- TH, Mar. 23rd: Spring Break
- Week 8: T, Mar. 28th: Congress: Who is represented? Who are ‘the People’?
- Reading assignment: Lowi, et al., Chapter 6
- TH, Mar. 30th: Congress: How to say a lot while doing very little.
- Reading assignment: Drutman and Teles, “Why Congress Relies on Lobbyists Instead of Thinking for Itself”
- Week 9: T, Apr. 4th: What exactly do Presidents “do”?
- Reading assignment: Lowi, et al., Chapter 7
- TH, Apr. 6th: Who are bureaucrats? How many are there?
- Reading assignment: Lowi, et al., Chapter 8
- Week 10: T, Apr. 11th: Where does the money come from? Monetary, Fiscal, and Tax Policy
- Reading assignment: Prior edition of Lowi 426-446 on D2L
 - **Long Night Against Procrastination – Polk – 6-9pm**
- TH, Apr. 13th: Where does [~half] of the money go? Social Policy and Healthcare
- Reading assignment: Prior edition of Lowi 447-475 on D2L; Scotus Blog, *King v. Burwell*
- Week 11: T, Apr. 18th: What is a “special” interest? Why do most perceive the term negatively?
- Reading assignment: Lowi, et al., Chapter 13
- W, Apr. 19th: Writing Assignment Due**
- TH, Apr. 20th: Understanding group interests and tactics.
- Reading assignment: Olson, “The Logic of Collective Action”; Alinsky, “Tactics”
- Week 12: T, Apr. 25th: Public Opinion: what sense can we make from ‘the will of the people’?
- Reading assignment: Lowi, et al., Chapter 10
- TH, Apr. 27th: Public Opinion and The Press
- Reading assignment: Allen, Daniller, Tallevi, Mutz “Declining Trust in the American Press: Models of the Survey Response”

- Week 13: T, May 2nd: Political Parties: How do we assess their strength?
▪ Reading assignment: Lowi, et al., Chapter 12
TH, May 4th: A first look at elections: communications and participation
▪ Reading assignment: Geer “News Media and Negativity in Presidential Campaigns”
- Week 14: T, May 9th: Elections: Does one system fit all?
▪ Reading assignment: Lowi, et al., Chapter 11
TH, May 11th: **Final Exam**
▪ Reading assignment: Prepare for the exam