

University of North Dakota

American Government I

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POLS 115
Spring 2006
MWF 9 a.m.

General overview:

This course is designed to provide a basic introduction to the theory and practice of modern American national government. We will examine the role of the Congress, the Courts, and the Presidency in making policy, both domestic and foreign. We will consider the role citizens play in the national political system. To do this we will study elections and public opinion, as well as other forms of political activity. Finally, we will address the role of elites such as business and the media in influencing policy outcomes. Overall, we will examine some of the problems and challenges facing the American political system at the beginning of the century.

Students should be prepared to question their basic assumptions about American government. Americans seem to alternate between overly positive self-congratulation and apocalyptic negativism about their political system. One of the goals of this course is to provide the student with the necessary tools and information to make informed judgments about political events, policies and institutions.

Students are expected to be aware of the political events occurring during the semester. Information about current political events will be discussed in class and students will be expected to be ready to answer questions about those events on the tests. *(Please note that students will also be expected to be informed about the evolving political effects of the events of September 11, 2001. Students are expected to be aware of both the domestic and international implications of the "War on Terror.")*

Overall, current events will be discussed in class and students will be expected to be ready to answer questions about those events on the tests.

Important note: Due to the size of the class, lecture will play a central role in teaching and learning. Because of this fact, students should be ready to attend all classes and be attentive. Keep in mind that much of the material on the tests will come from lectures. Therefore attending class is vital.

Remember: **Silence means assent.** If you sit there and fail to ask questions if something is unclear, I will assume you understand and move on.

Important dates:

First test: February 3

First response paper due: February 17

Second test: March 3

Third test: April 3

Second response paper due: April 12

Final examination/Fourth Test: Monday, May 8, 8 a.m.

*Note: the fourth test is **NOT** cumulative.*

Blackboard:

Additional course readings, PowerPoint slides, announcements and other class information can be found on the Blackboard site for POLS 115.

Grades:

Grades will be based on:

- (1-4) Four in class examinations (20% each for 80% of total grade),
- (5-6) Two 2 page response papers (10% each for 20% of total grade)
- (7) Attendance and quizzes will factor into grades in borderline cases.

Grades will follow the traditional scale.

**Note: No extra credit assignments will be given, or accepted.*

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to attend all classes. You are also expected to read the assignments before class. **Students who miss a large number of the semester's classes should expect serious reductions in their grades. Material for the tests will be based on both reading and class lecture. Therefore, if you miss many classes you will surely have problems on the tests. You will also miss quizzes.**

Class Participation:

While this is a large lecture, students are still expected to participate if possible. Participation means:

- 1: attending class,
- 2: participating in discussion,
- 3: raising questions for class consideration,
- 4: being in class to take unannounced quizzes.

E-mail Policy:

Students are strongly encouraged to communicate with the instructor via e-mail.

Texts:

The following text is required and is for sale at the Bookstore:
Thomas E. Patterson: *We the People, 6th Edition* (McGraw-Hill)

Note: Be sure to get the sixth edition

Web-Site:

There are a number of websites related to the textbook:

www.mhhe.com/pattersonwtp: The site for this book.

www.mhhe.com/american.gov: The McGraw-Hill American Government "supersite."

Topics and Reading Assignments:

Please note that all reading assignments and dates are subject to change.
Assignments marked with * will be posted on Blackboard.

January 11: Introduction: Policies, Definitions, Setting the Stage

Part 1: The Theory and History of a Complex, Federal Republic.

January 13 and 18: Some Key Basic Questions and Concepts, or What is America?

A: What is the purpose of government? What are the limits of its powers?

B: What do we mean by "individualism," "freedom," "liberty," "order," "equality?"

C: What do we mean by "democracy?"

Readings: *We the People*: Chapter 1.

No Class January 16: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

January 20, 23 and 25: The Founding and the Constitution.

- A: American political ideas and practice before the Constitution.
- B: The Constitution: An act of political brilliance or an expedient compromise?
- C: The principles and assumptions behind the Constitution.

Readings: *We the People*: Chapter 2.

The Declaration of Independence (See Appendix of Textbook)

The Constitution of the United States (See Appendix of Textbook)

Federalist #10 and *Federalist #51* (See Appendix of Textbook)

January 27, 30 and February 1: Federalism: Or What Good are the States?

- A: The center vs. everybody else. Or why have states at all?
- B: The evolution of central government power. Or why the states can't be trusted.
- C: Federal power under assault. Or the states strike back.
- D: The need for federal power. Or why Washington is not always the problem.

Readings: *We the People*: Chapter 3.

***** **First Test: February 3*******

Part 2: Voting and Elections: Opinion, Participation and Parties.

February 6, 8 and 10: Public Opinion: Or Are We Measuring it or Creating it?

- A: Public opinion and democracy: the key assumptions.
- B: Socialization and ideology. Or why do we believe what we believe?
- C: The media: bulwark of democracy or creator of discontent?
- D: Polls and polling. Or what does instant opinion mean for democracy?

Readings: *We the People*: Chapters 6 and 10.

February 13, 15 and 17: Participation: Or It's More Than Just Voting.

- A: What is participation?
- B: Why don't people vote? And is that really so bad?
- C: How does protest fit into American democracy?

Readings: *We the People*: Chapter 7.

*******First Response Paper Due: February 17*******

No Class February 20: President's Day (Washington's Birthday)

February 22, 24, 27 and March 1: Political Parties and Elections: What Do the Parties Stand For?

- A: Why only two parties?
- B: Ideology and the need to win elections.
- C: The electoral process. Or, it's not just money that matters.
- D: What is the "candidate-centered campaign?"
- E: Case Study of an Election, or What it Takes to Win.

Readings: *We the People*: Chapter 8.

Film: "Taking on the Kennedys"

Short Film: "The Terminator"

Short Films: "The King of Retail" and "Magical Media Tour"

Campaign commercial: "Adams vs. Jefferson, 1800" and assorted real commercials.

*******Second Test: March 3*******

Part 3: The Operations of Government: Power and Where It Lives.

March 6, 8 and 10: Congress: Or America's Least Favorite Institution.

- A: What makes an issue an "issue?"
- B: How Congress works, and doesn't work.
- C: What is representation? Should I do what my constituents want?

Readings: *We the People*: Chapter 11.

*Jacoby: "The Gerrymandering Scandal"

*Murphy: "Who Should Redistrict?"

Short Film: "I'm Just a Bill" from *School House Rock*

Short Film: "I'm an Amendment to Be" from *The Simpsons*

No Classes March 13, 15 and 17: Spring Break

March 20, 22 and 24: The Presidency: Too Strong? Not Strong Enough?

- A: The explicit powers of the President. Or, what's on paper.
- B: The implicit powers of the President. Or, how the President became imperial.
- C: "Leader of the free world?" Party boss? The contradictions of the presidency.

Readings: *We the People*: Chapter 12.

*Rakove: "Who Declares a War?"

March 27, 29, and 31: The Courts: Lawmaking by Another Method?

- A: Judicial supremacy and review.
- B: The Supreme Court, or the nine wise men and women.
- C: The Supreme Court as an alternative government.

Readings: *We the People*: Chapter 14.

*******Third Test: April 3*******

Part 4: The Making and Unmaking of Public Policy.

April 5 and 7: Interest Group Politics: Or Getting Washington to Listen and Do What You Want.

A: What is an interest group?

B: Lobbying. Or making your wishes known.

Readings: *We the People*: Chapter 9.

Short Film: "Hat Dance"

April 10 and 12: The Bureaucracy: Or Meet the Real Government?

A: The Metastasis of the Clerks.

B: Do Bureaucrats make policy?

Readings: *We the People*: Chapter 13.

*******Second Response Paper Due: April 12*******

No Classes April 14 and 17: Easter Holiday

April 19 and 24: Public Policy: How Policy is Supposed to be Made.

A: Models of policy making.

B: Issues and networks. Or, what makes an issue an issue (revisited)?

C: Policies and actions. Or, unintended consequences?

D: Educational and Welfare policy: Why so controversial?

E: Economic policy: Who really controls the economy?

F: Foreign policy: An American Empire?

Readings: *We the People*: Chapters 15, 16, 17.

No Class April 21: Midwest Political Science Association Meeting in Chicago.

April 26, 28 and May 1: Civil Rights/Liberties in American Political Life.

A: Rights in conflict. Or, my rights are better than yours.

B: Rights vs. democracy. Or, we can't always follow the will of the people.

C: Civil Rights: Always expanding?

D: Affirmative action. Redress for past wrongs or modern pork barrel?

Readings: *We the People*: Chapters 4 and 5.

May 3: Review and Catch Up Day.

******* Fourth Test: Monday, May 8, 2006, 8 a.m. *******

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY

Scholastic dishonesty is covered in Section 3-3 of the University of North Dakota 'Code of Student Life.'

It states:

Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cases of dishonesty may be handled as a scholastic matter or as a disciplinary matter at the discretion of the instructor. Instructors choosing to treat the case as a scholastic matter **have the authority to decide how the incident of dishonesty will affect the student's grade in the course.** [emphasis added] ... Instructors choosing to treat the case as a **disciplinary** matter will refer the case to the Dean of Students for possible resolution;... (p. 10)

A full explanation and definition is in the code.

Cheating on a Test:

Cheating on a test includes, but is not restricted to:

1. Copying from another student's test.
2. Possessing or using material during a test not authorized by the person giving the test.
3. Collaborating with or seeking aid from another student during a test without permission from the instructor.
4. Knowingly using, buying, selling, stealing, transporting, or soliciting in whole or in part the contents of an unadministered test.
5. Substituting for another student or permitting another student to substitute for oneself to take a test.
6. Bribing another person to obtain an unadministered test or information about an unadministered test.
7. Collusion means unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic work offered for credit.

If you violate any of the above provisions, you will receive an F for this course. If you have any questions about my policies in this area, please see me for clarification.

Statement on General Education Requirement (GER) goals of this course.

Political Science 115, American Government, is included in the Social Sciences GER. This course provides a useful introduction to the ideological, theoretical and practical basis of American politics. Students taking this course develop a more complete understanding of the American political system and American political culture. They are also given a greater historical understanding of the changes that have occurred in the United States and its politics, especially as regards questions of race, gender and political practice over the last 250 years.

Critical Thinking-- Students are encouraged to take a critical position toward the material. They are also equipped to examine political events and actions in a critical and informed manner.

Informed Choices-- Students are assisted in making informed choices, in this case, about political issues, by examining key questions, both historical and contemporary in American government. They are given historical information which serves to educate them about contemporary problems. The goal is to further their growth as informed citizens.

Methods in social science—Students are made aware of methods employed by political scientists to analyze political events.

Breadth of knowledge-- Political science deals with all the key issues of society. Therefore, this course deals with history, culture, religion, and questions of race, gender and ethnicity.

Diversity/Multiculturalism – Questions of race, gender and ethnicity are dealt with on many levels. They include law, political participation, public opinion and access to the political system. The history and practice of American government revolves, to a great extent, around the demands of excluded or marginalized groups for recognition of their rights as citizens. Students are made aware of these issues.

Disability Support Statement

If you have emergency medical information to share with me, if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, or if you need accommodations in this course because of a disability, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible. If you plan to request disability accommodations you are expected to register with Disability Support Services (DSS) (190 McCannel Hall, 777-3425).