

Comprehensive Course Syllabus

United States Government and the Constitution

Instructor: Eric R. Smith, Ph.D.

Email address: esmith@aurora.edu

Office Hours: By appointment

Class Meeting Times: Mod 3 (A, B, D)

Class Location: A114

Course Description

This course will give students a broad, introductory analytical perspective on government and politics in the United States with the Constitution as a central document informing class discussions. This course considers both general concepts used to interpret U.S. government and politics as well as an analysis of specific examples. It will develop a familiarity with the various institutions, political groups, beliefs, and ideas that constitute U.S. government and political life. Students will become acquainted with a variety of theoretical perspectives and explanations for various behaviors and political outcomes.

Learning Goals and Outcomes

Students successfully completing this course will:

- know important facts, concepts, and theories pertaining to U.S. government and politics by collaborating with peers, and discussing in class, to build an understanding of history and policy.
- understand typical patterns of political processes and behavior and their consequences (including the components of political behavior, the principles used to explain or justify various government structures and procedures, and the political effects of these structures and procedures) by synthesizing information and ideas into a coherent argument in papers and discussions.
- be able to analyze and interpret basic data relevant to U.S. government and politics (including data presented in charts, tables, and other formats) by discussing ideas in class and attempting to resolve differing conceptions involved in the production of a research paper.
- be able to critically analyze relevant theories and concepts, apply them appropriately, and develop their connections across the curriculum by drawing appropriate conclusions and making generalizations based on reliable information in both discussions and writing.

Primary SSLS

A Develop automaticity in skills, concepts, and processes that support and enable complex thought.

IV.A Construct and support judgments based on evidence.

IV.B Write and speak with power, economy, and elegance.

V.A Identify, understand, and accept the rights and responsibilities of belonging to a diverse community.

Instructional Design and Approach

Group projects, presentations and quizzes, as well as reading discussions will accompany each of the themes listed below. Two major papers will synthesize the material in the course. Class discussions are a primary mode of teaching and learning in history courses.

Constitution, Rights, and Liberties

Political Beliefs and Behaviors

Political Parties, Interest Groups and Mass Media

Institutions of National Government

Public Policy

Required Texts & Course Materials

Krutz, Glen and Sylvie Waskiewicz. 2017. *American Government*.

Note: The required textbook for this course is an open access resource. This book is available online free of charge to all students. A link to the text has been posted on Moodle and here:

<https://openstax.org/details/american-government>

Other Electronic Resources:

<https://www.oyez.org/>

<https://caselaw.findlaw.com/court/us-supreme-court>

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/>

<http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/>

<http://www.pewresearch.org/>

Assessment Practices, Procedures, and Processes

Each quarter there will be several formative assessments (e.g. reading quizzes, short paper, discussion posts) and a longer assessment (e.g. a paper, presentation or project). **Assessments in the class fall into three basic categories with the following weights for the semester: essays (60 percent), presentations and participation (20 percent), and in-class assessments (20 percent).**

Students will confront source material on their own, before class discussion in formative papers. Frequent quizzes will also hold students accountable for course material. Longer essays will give students the opportunity to make their own conclusions about the subject matter and to practice writing and the construction of arguments.

Students will confront source material on their own, before class discussion in formative papers. Frequent quizzes will also hold students accountable for course material. Longer essays will give students the opportunity to make their own conclusions about the subject matter and to practice writing and the construction of arguments. Students will turn in two summative assessments.

Itemized Description of Assignments

Rights Essay

How we understand our rights and liberties is not merely static. Carrying around a copy of the Bill of Rights with you does not necessarily tell you what they mean in a Constitutional sense. In this essay you will trace the history of a right or liberty through Supreme Court decisions. Use the resources on the Moodle page to find Supreme Court cases on the particular right or liberty you have identified. Then cite at least five of these decisions and describe in this short essay how that right or liberty has changed over time through court interpretations. This policy paper must be double-spaced and typed in 12 pt. Times New Roman font. Use one inch margins, and do not use four spaces between paragraphs. Students will also follow the citations parameters set out in the policy memo assignment. This assignment will be 3-4 pages and submitted to Turnitin.com by the date in the assignment's slot at the website (see the Moodle page for Class ID and password).

Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Mass Media Essay

Develop a thesis and explain the interactions between parties, interest groups, and the mass media. The essay will work best covering one particular subject and must contain an assessment of the intersections between all three groups. (The paper must also include a bibliography or proper footnotes that list each source used in a proper citation format: Chicago Style preferred. Citations do not count toward the page length requirements.)

This policy paper must be double-spaced and typed in 12 pt. Times New Roman font. Use one inch margins, and do not use spaces between paragraphs. 5-6 pages.

UNSDG Policy Memo

Students are required to produce a policy memo in which they propose a policy solution to one of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). In this memo, students must make an argument to a relevant national political official – President Trump, Senate Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, etc. – about how best to solve this policy conundrum.

The structure of the paper should be as follows. First, students should briefly identify the issue and discuss the problems surrounding it. Next, students must draw upon **academic/legitimate** sources from current events-related (e.g., The Wall Street Journal, The Economist) and/or scholarly (e.g. The American Political Science Review, Journal of Politics) journals in order to explain potential solutions to this problem.

Discussion Posts and Responses

In most respects, politics requires interaction with others. Citizens and their leaders regularly communicate their ideas through conversation, debates, blogs, op-eds published in leading news outlets, and in many other ways. Students will have numerous in-class opportunities to discuss

politics with their colleagues, honing their arguments through engagement with their peers and the instructor. Simultaneously, students will have opportunities to engage with one another electronically, the increasingly preferred method of communication for many of us.

Four times throughout the semester, a discussion prompt relating to the course material will be posted on Moodle. Students will have 72 hours to respond to this prompt. After the 72 hours has lapsed, students will have an additional 48 hours to respond to at least one of their classmates' posts. One of the goals of this exercise is to encourage students to share political ideas outside of the traditional classroom setting, while also helping them develop their critical thinking and written communication skills.

Students may earn up to 20 points total for their two responses to each prompt. Their initial post is worth up to 10 points, and their response to their classmates' post is worth an additional 10 points. Posts should be thoughtful, meaning that they show a grasp of the material covered and an application of that material to the questions posed. Responses should incorporate clear language and proper grammar, and they should be at least 300 words in length. Any post less than 300 words will receive a zero grade. No exceptions.

Syllabus Addenda Policies & Procedures

STUDENT EXPECTATIONS

My expectation is that, at least once per class, you voluntarily respond to a question or comment from your teacher or another student. I want this class to be based on your questions and discussions about them. As to why participation in class is important beyond your grade, consider these statements from some of today's business leaders:

"We are routinely surprised at the difficulty some young people have in communicating: verbal skills, written skills, presentation skills. They have difficulty being clear and concise; it's hard for them to create focus, energy, and passion around the points they want to make."

-- Mike Summers, VP for Global Talent Management at Dell

"I want people who can engage in good discussion—who can look me in the eye and have a give and take. All of our work is done in teams. You have to know how to work well with others. But you also have to know how to engage customers—to find out what their needs are. If you can't engage others, then you won't learn what you need to know."

-- Clay Parker, engineer and president of the Chemical Management Division of BOC Edwards

"People who've learned to ask great questions and have learned to be inquisitive are the ones who move the fastest in our environment because they solve the biggest problems in ways that have the most impact on innovation."

-- Mike Summers, VP for Global Talent Management at Dell

All quotations taken from Tony Wagner, *Rigor Redefined* (2008).

Study Habits: I expect you to take notes in this class. If I think a topic is important enough to put on the board, or to have groups research and present, it's probably important enough to be on

an assessment and something I expect you to know. It would also be wise to take notes as you read and to review those notes after we have covered the material in class. This is effective studying!

Electronic Devices: Use of the electronic devices in class is forbidden unless the instructor explicitly indicates that they can be used. The recording of this class in either audio or video form is forbidden by the instructor except where the student has a documentable condition in which it would be necessary in which case the student can meet with instructor after class to discuss accommodations.

This means, from the moment class starts, unless I ask you to use it, I don't expect to see devices in use. Here's why:

Researchers have repeatedly found that students who use laptops in class learn less than their "disconnected" peers (see Cornell's 2003 study "The Laptop and the Lecture"). Studies at Princeton and the University of California have found students who take notes on laptops performed worse on evaluations such as quizzes than those who took notes by hand "even when laptops are used solely to take notes, they may still be impairing learning because their use results in shallower processing"

--"The Pen is Mightier than the Keyboard," 2014

But electronic device use in class harms more than just the user – it also negatively impacts students seated nearby. Sana, Weston, et al (2013) found that:

participants who multitasked on a laptop during a lecture scored lower on a test compared to those who did not multitask, and participants who were in direct view of a multitasking peer scored lower on a test compared to those who were not. The results demonstrate that multitasking on a laptop poses a significant distraction to both users and fellow students and can be detrimental to comprehension of lecture content.

Therefore, I require that you please keep your devices away during class unless you have been specifically asked to use it, and I would encourage you to keep it closed in other classes, as well. If you have a special need that requires accommodation in this area, please see me.

Attendance: Attendance is expected in this class. Athletes or students in activities will need to remind the instructor of upcoming events.

Respect Accorded Students and Faculty: Courtesy and respect to each other and to the instructor should be maintained at all times in both e-mail correspondence and in class. All written correspondence to me should follow the form it would if being sent to the head of a company you are working for. I expect your best grammar, punctuation, and language use. The right to dissent shall not be stifled, but the need to reflect and articulate intelligently is also demanded. Questions should be directed toward the instructor. Class debates should address the issue at hand and its supporting evidence, not differences in student personalities or opinions. Although we are seeking informed opinions and an analytical bent to our discussions.

Please do not expect instant feedback on assignments or to inquiries. The instructor does not have an undergraduate sleep schedule in which texts are sent at 3:00 AM and responses come at 3:01 AM. Please be considerate of this and be patient. The instructor will offer the most timely feedback possible. Written work will require at least a week (at which point you should feel free to nag). Email inquiries have at least a 24-hour turnaround.

Late Work: Be on time, turn in assignments as scheduled, back up your files! Use a USB drive. Late assignments are otherwise penalized a half a grade per day except where otherwise indicated in the syllabus. All essays must be submitted in order to pass the course.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND PLAGIARISM

All of the work you turn in for this course should be your own. Claiming as your own the work of others, in whole *or in part*, will result in a referral to the appropriate campus office. Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams in their book *The Craft of Research*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) explain that:

You plagiarize when, intentionally or not, you use someone else's words or ideas but fail to credit that person. . . . You plagiarize even when you do credit the source but use its exact words without using quotation marks or block indentation. . . . You [also] plagiarize when you paraphrase a source so closely that anyone putting your work next to it would see that you could not have written what you did without the source at your elbow.