

POLSCI 100 - American Politics

Fall 2020

MWF 11:00am-11:53pm

Dr. Michael A. Hansen

Assistant Professor

Office: GRNQ 219

Office Hours: Mon. 1-2pm (and by appointment)

Email: hansenm@uwp.edu

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

Attendance/Participation

Attendance in class is necessary in order to fully comprehend the material and develop the critical thinking skills that accompany class discussion. Class instruction includes a mixture of lecture and class discussion. If you do not attend class, it will be much harder to understand important concepts and ideas. That being said, I do not have an official attendance policy. If you miss class, your homework, exam, and argumentative essay grades will suffer. Therefore, I do not want to “double punish” you by also taking off for attendance.

In order to circumvent any misunderstandings regarding this course, **you are required to 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%. No content on Canvas will unlock until the quiz is completed. 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.

I expect that class reading will be done **prior to class**, and that students will come to class prepared with notes on the readings so that they can engage in discussion. If at any point during the semester it is clear that students are not reading prior to class, I will mandate that each student hand in at the start of class one page of typed, single-spaced notes on the readings as an aspect of your quiz grades.

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 Canvas before we start a topic. The quiz will close at 11am the day we start the particular topic or set of

topics. The quiz due dates are shown on Canvas and there is no excuse for missing a quiz.

You are allowed to take each quiz three times, and I will count the highest quiz grade out of the three. 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 one hour. Finally, there are no make up quizzes.

Argumentative Essays (2 x 7.5% = 15%)

There will be two short, argumentative papers assigned throughout this semester. The objectives in this paper are to present a thesis and thoroughly defend your argument through the presentation of evidence. The important aspect to note about this type of assignment is to be aware of how your argument could possibly be undermined. If it is possible to break your argument with a one or two sentence statement you have not succeeded in the task, and thus will not receive a satisfactory grade on the assignment.

The essays are graded based mostly on the strength of your argument. However, grammar, sentence structure, paragraph structure, and overall organization are taken into account when assigning your essay grade. An “Argumentative Essay Guideline” is posted on Canvas. **You should follow the guideline to the letter!** A failure to follow the essay guideline will result in an automatic 0% on the essay, which is a loss of 5% of your grade. There are no excuses, and your grade will not be re-evaluated. If you make an appointment or come to office hours, I will be more than willing to read your essay and give you comments before you hand it in. **There are no excuses for not doing well on these essays.**

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: In-class, multiple choice exam - The exam will consist of multiple choice questions worth 2 points each. The opportunity to answer bonus questions will be available.

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 online a week before the in-class exam. **The exam answers must be turned in on Canvas before the start of the in-class exam.** Failure to turn in the exam on time will result in an automatic 0%.

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 can be turned in electronically on Canvas without physically being in class. Therefore, there is no excuse for late work. Finally, there are two options for the exam, and one of the options does not require you to be in class. Therefore, 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. 2019. *We the People: An Introduction to American Politics*. Twelfth Core Edition. W.W. Norton & Company.

Note: Do not buy the book before the first day of class. In class, 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.

Week 1: Sep. 2

Syllabus

Student introductions

Topic: *Introduction*

Part I & II - Political Science Research & The Origins and Foundations of American Government

Labour Day: Sep. 7 - No class

Week 2: Sep. 9

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

Week 3: Sep. 14 - Sep. 16

Topic: *American Political Culture*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 1

Topic: *The Founding*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 2; Declaration of Independence; Agrarian Justice (READ CLOSELY)

Week 4: Sep. 21 - Sep. 23

Topic: *The Constitution*

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

Topic: *Federalism*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 3

Week 5: Sep. 28 - Sep. 30

Topic: *Civil Liberties*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 4, Bill of Rights

Week 6: Oct. 5 - Oct. 7

Topic: *Civil Rights*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 5

EXAM I - Monday Oct. 12th

Part III - Forming and Expressing Beliefs

Week 7: Oct. 14

Topic: *Public Opinion*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 6

Week 8: Oct. 19 - Oct. 21

Topic: *Political Participation & Voting*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 8

Essay I Due - Oct. 21 (11:00am on Canvas)

Research Question: 1) Why is voter turnout among the young so low in comparison to older people? (Think: What aspects of the life situations of many young people might contribute to this problem?) 2) In the conclusion paragraph, offer one or two concrete steps our political system could take to motivate young people to take part in politics at higher rates.

Week 9: Oct. 26 - Oct. 28

Topic: *Political Parties*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 9

Week 10: Nov. 2 - Nov. 4

Topic: *Campaigns & Elections*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 10

EXAM II - Monday Nov. 9

Part IV - Three Branches of Government

Week 11: Nov. 11

Topic: *The Legislative Branch - Congress*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 12

Week 12: Nov. 16 - Nov. 18

Topic: *The Legislative Branch - Congress*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 12

Topic: *The Executive Branch - The Presidency*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 13

Essay II Due - Nov. 16 (11:00am on Canvas)

Research Question: Constituent opinion, interest groups and political parties all influence the voting decisions of members of Congress in various ways. However, it is ultimately up to each member to decide how to cast his/her vote on any piece of legislation. Which influence is most important? Explore each of the influences mentioned above and discuss how each could be a potential positive and negative influence on members decisions.

Week 13: Nov. 23 - Nov. 25

Topic: *The Executive Branch - The Presidency*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 13

Topic: *The Judiciary - The Federal Courts*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 15

Thanksgiving - No Class Nov. 26 - Nov. 27

Week 14: Nov. 30

Topic: *The Judiciary - The Federal Courts*

Read: Ginsberg et al. (2019), Ch. 15

EXAM III - Monday Dec. 2 - 10:30am-12:30pm