

**INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT & POLITICS (PS 105)
FALL 2017 – 3 CREDIT HOURS**

Instructor:	Jason Kalmbach, Asst. Prof. Department of Political Science	Class Time:	M/W/F 12:40 – 1:40
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

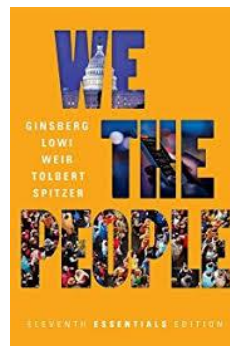
“Organization, principles and actual working of the American National Government in all its branches.”

COURSE OVERVIEW

This course offers an introductory overview of the American National Government. Utilizing a bottom-up approach, the class examines how the federal government in Washington D.C. operates. The class starts with a discussion of the constitutional foundation and structure of the American political system. We will then consider the social forces present in the United States that influence government activity, including topics regarding cultural norms and public opinion. Consideration is then given toward government institutions (i.e., President, Congress, and Supreme Court), examining how elected officials, judges and bureaucrats organize and respond to the demands of the citizenry. We will close the class by focusing on specific policy domains in order to illustrate how the political process works, as a whole. Throughout these discussions, students will accumulate civic knowledge and gain familiarity with the ways in which they can engage elected decision-makers to influence policy decisions.

COURSE READINGS

The following text is required of all students:



Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline J. Tolbert, and Robert J. Spitzer. 2015. *We the People: An Introduction to American Politics*. Tenth Essentials Edition: W. W. Norton & Company.

The publisher offers a paperback and electronic version of the text. Students are free to use either version. The supplemental online information offered by the publisher (i.e., practice quizzes, flash cards, etc.) is not required for the class.

Additional readings are added in the syllabus. The instructor may write-up material and post it on D2L throughout the semester. This will occur primarily when/if class time does not allow a full discussion of important topics. Furthermore, current event information may be introduced throughout the semester both electronically and via class lecture. These additional reading materials circulated throughout the semester are “fair game” for class assessment purposes. It is important that students read the material throughout the semester, as class time focuses on material not found in the readings while also featuring in-class activities.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The learning objectives for this class are divided into three categories: knowledge, analysis & communication. Students will be pushed to advance themselves in all three categories over the next 14 weeks.

Knowledge: “Any fool can know. The point is to understand.” – Albert Einstein

- 1) Describe and understand how the political process works within the United States in order to create rules and laws.
- 2) Understand the opportunities within society for citizens to influence elected decision-makers.
- 3) Understand your own personal political beliefs.

Analysis: “The number of those who undergo the fatigue of judging for themselves is very small indeed.” – Richard Brinsley Sheridan

- 4) Identify and analyze the corresponding assumptions and evidence that either supports or challenges specific beliefs, including your own.
- 5) Identify and analyze the trade-offs related to government action/inaction.

Communication: “The art of writing is the art of discovering what you believe.” – Gustave Flaubert

- 6) Effectively communicate, both orally and in writing, high-quality arguments that support your beliefs, being careful to ensure that they can withstand outside scrutiny.
- 7) Engage in difficult, yet respectful, conversations with those who either share or do not share your beliefs.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS AND WEIGHT

ONLINE QUIZZES:

There will be twelve short quizzes throughout the semester. The material for the quizzes covers the reading assignments for the week, featuring six to eight random questions per quiz. The quizzes are to be taken online via D2L and are timed. Students may attempt the quiz twice, receiving a different draw of questions. Students must complete the quiz by midnight, Sunday. The lowest two scores will be dropped. (15% of final grade)

REGULAR EXAMS:

There will be three exams throughout the semester. The examinations will cover in-class material only (lecture, videos, and other miscellaneous content). Material from the book will only appear on the examination if it was also covered in class. The second and third exams will include questions presented on earlier exams in order to reinforce key concepts. The exam will feature a mix of multiple choice, true/false, and short answer. (30% of final grade)

FINAL EXAM:

The final exam is composed of questions students have seen throughout the semester on the regular exams. There will be a total of 20 previously seen questions, as well as a sampling of new questions from the last two weeks of class. (5% of final grade)

Learning Objectives: The quizzes and exams are intended to assess factual knowledge about American government (Objectives 1 and 2).

SIMULATION: In the third-to-last week of the semester, the class will conduct a short simulation. Students will act as both an analyst and elected decision-maker during this time.

- 1) **ANALYTICAL PAPER:** Every student will write their own policy analysis (roughly three to four pages, single spaced). The instructor will offer a range of topics for the students to select from, although other topics may be available upon consultation with the instructor. The task is to describe an existing policy and the problem it was intended to solve, give an update on the status of the problem, outline a few additional policy solutions, and use the techniques introduced in class to make a formal policy recommendation. This is an expanded, formal version of some of the weekly in-class activities. (30% of final grade)
- 2) **PARTICIPATION:** Students will take turns formally presenting their paper to an assigned group, with the group then acting as decision-makers who will decide whether to accept or reject the recommendation. Students are expected to participate and engage in critical discussions with their peers during the simulation week even when not presenting. (5% of final grade)

Additional details on the memo required for the simulation are included on D2L, including a template and grading rubric. Students must use the template for the assignment to be graded.

Learning Objectives: In the process of drafting the policy brief, students are demonstrating critical thinking skills (Objective 4 and 5) and practicing communicating ideas through written and oral presentations (Objective 6 and 7). In this process, students will come to understand their own political beliefs (Objective 3).

ONE-PAGE REFLECTION: At the end of the semester, students will complete a one-page reflection (single-spaced) of the course that outlines the most important content introduced throughout the semester. This document should cover the content you hope to remember years down the road. Elements of the discussion should also include a reflection of what students learned from the simulation. Ideally, there is a connection. That is, the simulation and policy briefs helped create awareness about the challenges governments face in solving societal problems. More details will be provided on D2L. (5% of final grade)

Learning Objectives: The intent of the reflection is to concisely highlight the knowledge gained over the 14-week period (Objective 1) as well as further developing communication skills (Objective 6).

IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES: The last class of the week will usually feature an in-class activity designed to get students thinking about US government activity. The primary activity will be a policy brief, where students will be introduced to a societal problem that historically involves government action. In assigned groups, students will complete a policy brief worksheet (provided by the instructor) in-class. More details will be available on D2L. The instructor will also offer an example the second week of class. (10% of final grade)

Learning Objectives: The assignment requires students to identify and analyze ethical issues related to the problem (Objectives 3 through 5). Group interaction allows for civil debate (Objective 7).

ADDITIONAL CLASS POLICIES

DUE DATES & MAKEUP POLICY

This syllabus establishes timelines for the class and provides notice that assignments are due on specified dates and times. Timely completion of the assignments is expected. There will be a 10% penalty if an assignment is late. No work will be accepted beyond the two days of the original due date.

Waivers: Extreme circumstances do occur, such as a family crisis and personal hospitalization. The instructor will work with students on a case-by-case basis to determine whether a waiver to the makeup policy above is warranted. Students are expected to show progress toward their assignment in order to receive a waiver.

E-PORTFOLIO

The ePortfolio system allows students to store, share, and reflect on their work. Students are encouraged to upload their work associated with the simulation for reflection later in their academic career.

EARLY ALERT

The instructor will utilize “Early Alert” to notify students of their class grade approximately one month into the course. The purpose of the alert is to notify students of their progress early in the semester. There will be ample opportunity for students to make adjustments and receive a satisfactory grade even if Early Alert suggests a low score.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS

The [Dean of Students Office](#) coordinates accommodations for students with disabilities. If students feel they require accommodations, please make sure to coordinate with their office.

TECHNOLOGY BAN

Technology use is prohibited in the classroom. Cell phones should be silenced and located in bags or pockets. Ear pieces are also likewise banned. Laptop use is only allowed with special permission and (if granted) must be used in the front row near the instructor. The class will stop when technology is in use during lecture, discussions, and presentations. Students who continuously slow down class by utilizing technology will be asked to leave.

- o [Why technology is bad](#)

CLASS COURTESY

With the class discussions, there is sufficient opportunity for students to interact with others. Under all circumstances, students are expected to respect the ideas of their colleagues. Friendly debate is encouraged, but personal attacks and other forms of incivility will not be tolerated.

REMINDER FOR MAJORS

You should take Political Methodology (245) in either your sophomore or first semester of their junior year. PS 245 is a prerequisite for the senior capstone, Political Analysis (401), and cannot be taken concurrently.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

All work submitted for this class is expected to be original and in the student's own voice. This policy is in accordance with the student code of conduct within the University of Wisconsin system: "[A]cademic Honesty is fundamental to the University, and academic misconduct is taken very seriously. Students are responsible for the honest completion and representation of their work, for the appropriate citation of sources, and for respect of others' academic endeavors" (UWS, 14.01). Misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cheating, the failure to follow instructions, and plagiarism. Of special emphasis is plagiarism, which consists of using the ideas, phrases, theories, and/or arguments of others without proper citation. Plagiarism may include failing to reference a source when paraphrasing the work of another, or it may include copying and pasting information straight from a source without quotations or a reference. Without proper quotations and citations, writers are claiming the work of others as their own. This behavior is unethical, possibly criminal in some contexts, and has real-world consequences. The [library](#) offers further information.

All papers for this course will be submitted electronically through the Dropbox on D2L. The papers will undergo a plagiarism check via Turnitin. The penalty for plagiarism varies by the severity of the violation. If the offense is minor, the instructor will work with the student to correct the oversight. However, moderate to severe violations will be reported to the university. For these latter offenses, the first assignment found in violation will receive a zero. If there is a repeat offense, the student will receive a zero for the class.

Make sure you know your rights: [disciplinary procedures](#)

CITATION METHOD

The citation method is at the discretion of the student (APA, MLA, or other), although the student is expected to be consistent in the citation method throughout the paper. The [Purdue Online Writing Lab](#) has extensive information on how to properly cite references.

QUOTATIONS

Quoting a source directly is acceptable if proper citation is provided. However, quotations are used to provide emphasis or to help an author strengthen the argument. As such, quotes should be used sparingly. Papers with an originality score greater than 10% from Turnitin will be returned for a rewrite.

CLASS SCHEDULE

The course will proceed as follows. Adjustments will be made pending how the how the class progresses, current events, and the extent of class discussion. The Dahl readings will be available on D2L and/or through the Polk Library.

Week of Sept 4 Introduction: A quick introduction to political science, an overview of the syllabus, additional expectations for the course, and a framework for understanding why governments exist. Key terminology will also be introduced.

Read: Gutting, "[Are Your Political Opponents Crazy?](#)"

Read: Chapter 1, "Introduction: The Citizen & Government"

Read: Rudalevige, "[Note to Donald Trump: This is why you can't run government like a business.](#)"

Assessment: Quiz regarding above reading assignments due by 11: 59 PM on Sep 10

Week of Sept 11	<p>The US Constitution: An overview of the US Constitution. Attention is directed toward the rationale for drafting the document, as well as understanding the “hooks” in the document that are argued to support modern day government activity.</p> <p>➤ Friday Activity: Collaborative exploration of US Constitution.</p> <p>Read: Chapter 2, “The Founding and the Constitution” Read: Appendix, The Constitution of the United States Read: Dahl, Chapter 2 (What the Framers Couldn’t Know) – on D2L Read: Sabl, “The Constitution was designed to weed out demagogues. Now it encourages them.”</p> <p style="color: red;">Assessment: Quiz regarding above reading assignments due by 11: 59 PM on Sep 10</p>
Week of Sept 18	<p>Federalism: Discussion of the power-sharing mechanisms between the states and federal governments. How has this relationship developed over time, and how do we see federalism at work today in contemporary policies?</p> <p>➤ Friday Activity: First policy brief (federal minimum wage)</p> <p>Read: Chapter 3, “Federalism” Read: Trounstein, “How racial segregation and political mismanagement led to Flint’s shocking water crisis.”</p> <p style="color: red;">Assessment: Quiz regarding above reading assignments due by 11: 59 PM on Sept 17</p>
Week of Sept 25	<p>Civil Rights & Liberties: Discussion focuses on the difference between rights and liberties, and how the courts’ (and society’s) expectations have changed over time.</p> <p>Read: Chapter 4, “Civil Liberties and Civil Rights” Read: Belzer, “Can civil-rights law stop racial discrimination on Airbnb?”</p> <p style="color: red;">Assessment: Quiz regarding above reading assignment due by 11: 59 PM on Sept 24 Assessment: First Examination on Friday</p>
Week of Oct 2	<p>Public Opinion: Public opinion studies are used by scholars of all disciplines. How exactly do researchers go about measuring public opinion? What are the pitfalls associated with surveys? What do surveys tell us about perceptions of American politics? Ultimately, does government do what the people want?</p> <p>➤ Friday Activity: Second policy brief (nutrition)</p> <p>Read: Chapter 5, “Public Opinion” Read: How people’s sensitivity to threats illuminates the rise of Donald Trump Read: Lelkes & Sniderman, “Democrats’ policies are more popular. But Republicans are more ideologically unified.”</p> <p style="color: red;">Assessment: Quiz regarding reading assignment due by 11: 59 PM on Oct 1</p>

Week of Oct 9 **Media & Interest Groups:** Informal actors are groups not specified in the U.S. Constitution, but their efforts are key to realizing policy change. The discussion will focus on how these two actors influence public opinion and ultimately help shape public policy.
 ➤ **Friday Activity:** Third policy brief (social security solvency)

Read: Chapter 6, “The Media”

Read: Chapter 8, “Interest Groups”

Read: Becker, “[A politician walks into a joke. Does she get elected?](#)”

Assessment: Quiz regarding reading assignments due by 11: 59 PM on Oct 8

Week of Oct 16 **Campaigns & Elections:** Political parties are interested in maintaining power. They accomplish this through creating alliances so that they are successful in the election process. The discussion will emphasize how political parties organize themselves, and the actions can they take to realize their goals. Emphasis is also placed on how elections are run in the United States.

Read: Chapter 7, “Political Parties, Participation, and Elections”

Read: Ansolabehere et al., “[Trump claims millions of illegal voters swayed the popular vote. We pre-debunked his evidence.](#)”

Assessment: Quiz regarding reading assignments due by 11: 59 PM on Oct 15

Assessment: Second Examination on Friday

Week of Oct 23 **Congress:** The founders envisioned Congress as the most powerful branch. Discussion focuses on party leadership, chamber rules, and the extent to which Congress can be considered functional. Congress redistricting and opportunities for reform (assuming Congress is indeed dysfunctional) are also discussed.
 ➤ **Friday Activity:** Designing an education system.

Read: Chapter 9, “Congress”

Read: Kousser, “[If you want a more powerful President Trump, impose term limits on Congress.](#)”

Read: Lewallen, “[Republican leaders in Congress want to move fast. That’s risky.](#)”

Assessment: Quiz regarding reading assignments due by 11: 59 PM on Oct 22

Week of Oct 30 **President:** The role of the president has expanded considerably over time. How can we understand this expansion? Today, what are the powers of the presidency, and is he really as powerful as made out to be by the press and his opponents?
 ➤ **Friday Video:** Journey’s with George on Friday

Read: Chapter 10, “The Presidency”

Read: Colomer, “[The electoral college is a medieval relic. Only the U.S. still has one.](#)”

Assessment: Quiz regarding reading assignments due by 11: 59 PM on Oct 29

Week of Nov 6	<p>Bureaucracy: After Congress & the president formalize a new law, it is up to the bureaucracy to implement and enforce the legislation. Sometimes the bureaucracy is told specifically what to do by elected decision-makers. At times, the bureaucracy has been granted considerable discretion to develop policies on their own, absent guidance from elected officials. We'll dive into more detail here.</p> <p>➤ Friday Activity: Budget exercise</p> <p>Read: Chapter 11, "Bureaucracy" Read: Rudalevige, "The Cabinet was the easy part. Staffing (and steering) the bureaucracy takes much more work." Assessment: Quiz regarding reading assignments due by 11: 59 PM on Nov 5</p> <p>***Due Friday (Nov 10) by 5:00 PM: analytical memo for simulation</p>
Week of Nov 13	<p>Courts: One theme in political science is that the US Constitution is fairly vague. Terms are utilized but definitions are lacking. The Supreme Court provides meaning to these words. Discussions here will focus on how the judicial process and how courts ultimately come to decisions on constitutional matters.</p> <p>➤ Friday Activity: Revisiting the US Constitution</p> <p>Read: Chapter 12, "The Federal Courts" Read: Moffett et al., "The Supreme Court is taking far fewer cases than usual. Here's why." Assessment: Quiz regarding reading assignments due by 11: 59 PM on Nov 12</p>
Week of Nov 20	<p>Assessment: Third Examination on Monday</p> <p>Wednesday / Friday: No Class</p>
Week of Nov 27	<p>Simulation Week: Students take turns presenting their memo to their group. The non-presenters function as decision-makers, asking the presenter questions, and then ultimately deciding on whether to accept, accept with modifications, or reject the proposal. The exercise will repeat throughout the week until all students have presented their paper.</p>
Week of Dec 4	<p>Policy Examples: The last two chapters of the book bring everything together, discussing government activity with respect to domestic and foreign policy.</p> <p>Read: Chapter 13, "Domestic Policy" Read: Chapter 14, "Foreign Policy"</p> <p>Assessment: Quiz regarding reading assignments due by 11: 59 PM on Dec 3</p>
Week of Dec 11	<p>Policy Examples: Continue policy discussions.</p> <p>Assessment: Final Exam on Wednesday Due Friday by 5:00 PM: one-page reflection</p>
