

Political Science 105
Fall 2021
Office Hours: M 3-4:30; Th 1:30-3
or by appointment

Professor David Siemers
Sage Hall 1235 3-4:30 TTh
Phone: 424-3456 (PS Office)
email: siemers@uwosh.edu

American Government and Politics

(3 credit in person Quest 3 class)

Course Description: The official course description for this class says simply that you will learn the “organization, principles, and actual working of the American national government in all its branches.”



Politics all too often seems bitter, divisive, selfish, and idiotic. What is the remedy to these disappointments? The best answer is to develop civic knowledge—having informed, engaged, and well-meaning citizens. We need citizens who understand American history and political practices, who think actively about what kind of community they want to live in, and engage in civil, productive dialogue with their fellow citizens to help bring those visions about. An engaged populace can prompt government to do positive things, and hold politicians accountable. This course helps students improve their political knowledge and hone citizenship skills by studying institutions, elections, policies, and more informal arrangements like political parties and interest groups. The course features an ongoing civic engagement project. There is no prerequisite.

This course’s signature question: How do people understand and engage in community life?

Student Learning Outcomes

-Civic learning: be conversant in the formal structures and institutions of the national government, like the Constitution (week 2), Congress (week 9), the presidency (week 10), and the Supreme Court (week 12).

-Civic learning: possess an understanding of how politics works in the US based on its policies, less formal practices and circumstances, like public opinion (week 5) and non-governmental structures like media (week 6), political parties (week 7), and interest groups (week 8).

-Civic engagement: apply what you have learned in conjunction with your values to take a public stance on an issue of importance (ongoing civic engagement project about health care).

How this Course fits into your College Education

Quest III: As you have worked your way through our general education program (USP), you have taken classes that have helped orient you. Quest I introduced you to college and to UW Oshkosh in particular. Quest II continued that work by having you think about your major and career. Quest III goes beyond that to have you think about and participate in something larger: your community. This fits well with our signature question of “how do people understand and engage in community life?” We are, inevitably, a part of many communities, including our national community. As citizens of our cities, our states, and our nation we are ideally lifelong learners and engaged in what these communities are like. Broad based, intelligent engagement is the only reliable way to improve our communities and have them reflect our values. By examining the real-life issue of Social Security in depth, we will have the chance to think about what kind of community we are and what we should value.

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 (in areas of 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. We work on these things in this class by learning about politics, policies, and reflecting on how the public interest may be served by citizen action (AAC&U, <http://www.aacu.org/leap/what-is-a-liberal-education>)

Grading

| | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| Taking the initial pre-test | 10 points |
| 10 chapter worksheets, due noon Thursday week by week, each worth 10 pts. | 100 points |
| 3 exams | 60, 60, 70 points |
| Exercises related to your civic engagement project | 100 points |
| Attendance and Participation | <u>50 pts each</u> 500 points |

Attendance/Participation: I expect you to attend class and I take attendance. I won't worry about one or two unexcused absences, but if you have more than that, I will deduct 5 points from your 50 total for each absence that is unexcused. If you do have a University-recognized excused absence (illness, University event, family emergency, religious holiday etc.), let me know so I can mark you excused. I may ask for documentation.

I expect you to listen intently, and hope that you make comments and ask questions. I reward active participation. Please note that you never "lose points" in my class for participating in any meaningful way. You gain points by participating actively.

Civic Engagement Project: Through the semester you will be learning about health care in the US and health policy. I will lecture on health care outside of our regular class time, posting several lectures to Canvas. You will take a quiz on these lectures and then write a number of assignments on this topic. You will get instructions on how to write a position paper, a good letter to the editor, a good constituent letter to an elected official, and the final reflection. The graded portions of this project are as follows:

1. Quiz on health care/health policy in the US (20 points)
2. A position paper on a major question of public policy (20 points)
3. Letter to the editor (20 points)
4. Letter to state elected official (20 points)
5. Reflection on health policy in the US (20 points)

As an extra incentive to do well on this work, I will offer up to 5 extra credit points for those class members who get their letter published in a "hometown" newspaper (how many points you receive will depend on the quality of your work; show me an on line link or a printed version; needless to say, you should not send something out to be published unless you believe in its message) or who meet with a state official or their staff member on this subject (again, providing me with evidence of the meeting).

Optional for Credit—Question Time: You will have a Canvas Discussion box available to you each week to comment on or ask about the material presented in the textbook and lecture. I will present a selection of comments/answer questions on Thursday in a segment called "Question Time." While writing a comment or question is optional, I hope you take advantage of the opportunity to do this. As an incentive, I will give you an extra credit point (added to your last worksheet) if I use your question or comment. This enables you to direct our class in ways that interest you or to ask for clarification or additions to what I have presented. I envision this lasting about a half on hour on Thursdays, but if I don't have enough comments or questions to do this, I occupy our time in other ways.

Course Calendar: Topics, Activities, Readings, and Assignments

Week of September 9th

topic: course introduction; baseline "pre-test"; the citizen and government
reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 1

civic engagement project: view lecture posted to Canvas—Introduction to Health Policy

Week of September 14th and 16th

topics: the Constitution and its origins; intro to health care

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 2

civic engagement project: health policy lecture #2 (Canvas)

topic worksheet #1 due Sept 16th at noon

Week of September 21st and 23rd

topics: federalism

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 3

civic engagement project: **in class quiz on health policy Sept 23rd**

topic worksheet #2 due Sept 23rd at noon

Week of September 28th and 30th

topics: civil liberties

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 4

civic engagement project: **position paper on health care question due Weds. Sept 29th**

topic worksheet #3 due Sept 30th at noon

Week of October 5th and 7th

topic: civil rights

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 5

first midterm exam October 7th (in class)

Week of October 12th and 14th

topic: public opinion

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 6

civic engagement project: effective advocacy 101—letters to the editor (Canvas)

topic worksheet #4 due Oct 14th at noon

Week of October 19th and 21st

topic: media in the US

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 7

civic engagement project: **submit letter to the editor by October 22nd at 6 PM**

topic worksheet #5 due Oct 21st at noon

Week of October 26th and 28th

topic: political parties and interest groups

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter

civic engagement project: how to write a good letter to an elected official (Canvas)

topic worksheet #6 due Oct 28th at noon

Week of November 2nd and 4th

topic: political participation and elections
reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 9
civic engagement project: **submit letter to elected official** by Nov. 5th at 6 PM
topic worksheet #7 due Nov 4th at noon

Week of November 9th and 11th
topic: Congress
reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 10
second midterm exam November 11th (in class)

Week of November 16th and 18th
topic: presidency
reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 11
civic engagement project: lecture, final thoughts on health policy in the US (Canvas)
topic worksheet #8 due November 18th at noon

Week of November 23rd
topic: the bureaucracy
reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 12
civic engagement project: **reflection on health care in US** due by November 23rd
11:59 PM
Thursday is Thanksgiving, no class

Week of November 30th and December 2nd
topic: federal courts
reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 13
topic worksheet #9 due Dec 2nd at noon

Week of December 7th and 9th
topic: domestic policy
reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 14
topic worksheet #10 due Dec 9th at noon

Week of December 14th and 16th
topics: review and final exam
reading assignment: none
final exam December 16th, including “post-test” (in class)

Course and University Policies

Please Note: If you have trouble meeting the requirements in the course because of such things as limited computer access, personal illness, or family emergency please let me know. If circumstances warrant I will be happy to make reasonable accommodations.

Explore Courses are designed to acquaint you with the breadth of knowledge required of a well-rounded college graduate. With your other University Studies Program courses you are offered a **liberal arts education**, one that helps

acquaint you with what human beings have considered important, what they have learned, but also to appreciate how much we don't know. This course fits into that liberal arts education by acquainting you with important rules, processes, and practices used in our society and by offering an understanding of our history, traditions, challenges, policies, and choices.

Early Alert takes place in the fourth or fifth week of the semester. We do this to make students in danger of performing poorly in a class aware of their status and to suggest that you take advantage of additional resources offered to boost your grade.

Masks in the Classroom: As we are still in an active pandemic, masks have been required in all UW Oshkosh buildings at all times. I cannot begin class unless all students are properly masked.

Expectations: Barring a documented medical necessity or a pre-approved University-sanctioned event, tests must be taken on time. All tests must be taken to pass the course. All written work is to be your own, unless you are explicitly instructed to work together.

Academic Honesty: A college education is intended to develop your skills, knowledge, and confidence. Assignments are designed to work on these very things. Taking others' work as your own, having others do work for you or copying their answers, quoting or paraphrasing without attribution, and other forms of academic dishonesty short-circuit the learning process and are not acceptable. Plagiarism is using others' ideas without giving them credit. Most of it is inadvertent; some is intentional; some covers a small amount of text, others involve a whole paper. If you have plagiarized, University rules require me to meet with you, to show you what I believe has occurred and ask you for your explanation. Examples of academic dishonesty and possible sanctions are here (see UWS 14.03 and 14.04): <https://www.uwosh.edu/stuaff/images/Chapter%20UWS%2014.pdf>

Office Hours: On Thursdays I will be in the office. If I am not in the office on Monday afternoons office hours you will find me on the digital platform Microsoft Teams. Teams is available to all UWO students. Find Teams by clicking on the 3 by 3 set of dots to the immediate left of the UWO banner toward the top left of your Outlook email. When logging into Teams, look closely at the status symbol. A green dot means I am available. A red dot means I am on another call. You can leave a message on email or on Teams and we can connect later. *The main point to remember is that I am available to you. Please use the office hours that professors provide. We are here to help.* If you have a schedule conflict with my office hours send me a message and we can work things out, including finding an alternative time.

Class Quality and Feedback: The Department of Political Science is committed to offering you a high-quality classroom experience, and we take your feedback very seriously. If you have concerns about anything related to this course, assignments, or teaching method, you are encouraged to first speak with your instructor directly. If you are not comfortable speaking with the instructor, you are invited to speak with the Chair of the Department of Political Science, Dr. James Krueger. He can be reached at kruegerj@uwosh.edu. Should he be unable to resolve your concerns, he will guide you to appropriate resources within the College of Letters and Science.

Disability Accommodations: It is the policy and practice of UW Oshkosh to create inclusive learning environments. If there are aspects of this course that result in barriers to your inclusion, please notify me as soon as possible. You are also welcome to contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 920-424-3100 or dean1@uwosh.edu. For more information, visit the Services for Students with Disabilities website at: <http://www.uwosh.edu/deanofstudents/disability-services>.

Note: If any major changes are made to this schedule and these policies, I will announce them in a timely manner via your UW Oshkosh email account and make a revised syllabus available.

The following URL contains a description of students' consumer protection rights required by the Students Right to Know Act of 1990: <https://uwosh.edu/financialaid/consumer-information/>

Political Science majors (and prospective majors): You should be taking Political Methodology (PS 245) in your sophomore year (or, if you cannot, in the first semester of your junior year at the latest). PS 245 is a prerequisite for our capstone course Political Analysis (PS 401) and cannot be taken concurrently with PS 245. You should save all your graded work from this class and the others in the major.