

Political Science 105
Fall 2023
Office Hours: M 3-4:30; Th 1:30-3:00
or by appointment in Sage 4622 (my office)

Professor David Siemers
email: siemers@uwosh.edu
Phone: 424-3456 (PS Office)

American Government and Politics

3 credit in-person Explore class; Sage Hall 3232, 3:00-4:30 TTh;

Course Description: The description for this class says 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 and productive dialogue with 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.

There are no prerequisites for this course.

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

Student Learning Outcomes

Describe the major components of the US government, including the Constitution and its interpretation, federalism, and the branches of government.

Examine key public policies and learn the roles of citizens, groups, and elections in the making of policy.

Grading

10 chapter worksheets, due by the end of the day Thursday week by week, 10 pts. each (your lowest score drops out)	90 points
3 exams	60, 60, 50 points
Thursday class exercises	80 points
Attendance and Participation	<u>30 points each</u>
	400 points

I use a standard scale 93% and above = A, 90-92.9% = A-, 88-89.9 = B+, etc.

Textbook: You are expected to purchase *We the People* 14th Essentials edition by Benjamin Ginsberg and his coauthors. There are many different editions of this book, but to all be on the same page, you should get this specific edition. The book is available either new or used in bookstores and on line. You may share this book with another member of the class to defer costs.

Readings: Every week you will have an article from the news to read (I will post this to Canvas by Sunday at the latest). Please read this article by Tuesday's class, as it will serve as an introduction to the topic at hand. I have also assigned pages from your textbook each week (assignments by week are listed below). I am often having you read less than the full chapter so that we can concentrate a bit more closely on the parts that are assigned. I supplement your reading material with lecture. **I strongly suggest having the reading done by Tuesday.**

How Your Week is Structured in this Class:

M	Tu	W	Th	F
read assigned pages in book chapter & news article				
	first class period (3-4:30)		second class period w/ class activity (3-4:30)	
	topic worksheet available by T evening in Canvas		topic worksheet due by end of day Thurs.	

Graded Course Components

Topic Worksheets: After completing your reading of the textbook chapter and being in lecture, you will complete a worksheet every week, except the first week, the week of Thanksgiving, and the weeks of our tests. These worksheets will be posted in Canvas under the Quiz function by Tuesday evening. Worksheets will be timed, but you may use your book and your notes. You have until the end of the day Thursday to complete a worksheet. Talking about chapters and concepts with other students or with me can be helpful and is encouraged, but don't copy your quiz answers from someone else, as then you don't gain the knowledge you should on the subject, and this is academic dishonesty.

Exams: Exams will consist of a variety of assessment mechanisms, multiple choice, identification of terms, and essay questions. They will be taken in class, and they are closed book and closed note. You can expect some questions to be familiar from the weekly worksheets. Work on tests is required to be your own. The first two tests are worth 60 points each and the last is worth 50 points. Exams will be held on Thursdays: October 5th, November 9th and December 14th.

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 3 points from your 30 total for each absence that is unexcused. If you do have a University-recognized excuse (illness, University event, family emergency, religious holiday etc.), let me know so I can mark you excused. I may ask for documentation, particularly with repeated absences.

I expect you to listen in lecture, take notes, work in good faith with your peers, and hope that you make comments and ask questions. I reward active participation. Please note that you never "lose points" for participating in any meaningful way. You gain points by participating.

Thursday Class Activities: Each Thursday when we don't have a test, we will engage in an activity designed to get deeper into a topic and develop your analytical skills. There will be a few points attached to these exercises each week; the purpose is to do them and learn in a low stakes environment; participate actively, learn, and hand in what is required.

Course Calendar: Topics, Activities, Readings, and Assignments

Week of September 7th

topic: course introduction; syllabus; the citizen and government

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 1, pp. 5-28

class activity: political perceptions versus empirical reality

Week of September 12th and 14th

topics: the Constitution and its origins

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 2, pp. 36-40; 47-62

topic worksheet #1 due by the end of the day September 14th

class activity: what's in the Constitution and why? What's not and could be?

Week of September 19th and 21st

topics: federalism

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 3 pp. 64-82; 86-90

topic worksheet #2 due by the end of the day September 21st

class activity: what are my own politics like?

Week of September 26th and 28th

topics: civil liberties

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 4 pp. 92-110; 113-118

topic worksheet #3 due by the end of the day September 28th

class activity: how free are countries around the world, including the US?

Week of October 3rd and 5th

topic: civil rights

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 5 pp. 124-151

first midterm exam October 5th (in class)

Week of October 10th and 12th

topic: public opinion

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 6 pp. 160-181

topic worksheet #4 due by the end of the day October 12th

class activity: confirmation bias and fact-checking

Week of October 17th and 19th

topic: media and political information in the US

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 7 pp. 190-210; 217-220

topic worksheet #5 due by the end of the day October 19th

class activity: how different sources cover “the news”

Week of October 24th and 26th

topic: political parties and interest groups

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 8 pp. 222-246; 258-9

topic worksheet #6 due by the end of the day October 26th

class activity: money in politics; who donates to whom? campaign finance reforms

Week of October 31st and 2nd

topic: political participation, campaigns and elections

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 9 265-282; 289; 291-300

topic worksheet #7 due by the end of the day November 2nd

class activity: the 2020 and 2022 elections

Week of November 7th and 9th

topic: Congress

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 10 pp. 308-315; 323-337

second midterm exam November 9th (in class)

Week of November 14th and 16th

topic: the presidency

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 11 pp. 342-356; 363-370

topic worksheet #8 due by the end of the day November 16th

class activity: desirable character traits in a president;

what actions yield authoritarian outcomes and undermine democracy

Week of November 21st

topic: bureaucracy

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 12. Pp. 372-394

no topic worksheet due

Week of November 28th and November 30th

topic: the federal courts

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 13 pp. 402-422; 432-436

topic worksheet #9 due by the end of the day November 30th

class activity: you be the judge

Week of December 5th and 7th

topic: domestic policy

reading assignment: *We the People*, chapter 14 pp. 441-469

topic worksheet #10 due by the end of the day December 7th

class activity: how can we fix Social Security for your generation?

Week of December 12th and 14th

Topic: foreign policy and course summary

reading assignment: none

no topic worksheet

final exam December 14th (in class)

How this Course fits into your College Education

Explore Society: Explore courses encourage you to develop a breadth of knowledge and an appreciation for the wide-range of knowledge that exists. This course is about American politics, a topic that directly affects you every day. Part of the goal of this course is to have you recognize its importance. Ideally, this knowledge will prompt a stronger, lifelong interest, and an appreciation for the work required through politics and political activity benefit our communities.

Liberal Education is an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change. It provides students with knowledge of the wider world (in areas like 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>)

Course and University Policies

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. I do invite you to consult with me about the class or your grade at any time.

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: Offer an opportunity for you to meet me to discuss the class or anything else on your mind, like current politics. I will be in my office on the hours listed at the top of the first page. If you would want to meet virtually we can do so by phone or 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. *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 out 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, I encourage you to speak with me. If you are not comfortable with that you may speak with the Chair of the Department of Political Science, Dr. Tracy Slagter. She can be reached at slagtert@uwosh.edu. Should he be unable to resolve your concerns, she 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>.

Syllabus changes: 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.