

Political Science 105  
Spring 2024  
Office Hours: MF 10:20-11:30; W 11:30-12:30  
or by appointment

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# American Government and Politics

(3 credit in-person Quest 2 class, Sage Hall 4232, 9:10-10:10 MWF)

**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. There is no prerequisite.

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 (week 2) and its interpretation (week 12), federalism (week 3), and the branches of government (weeks 10 to 12).
- Examine key public policies (weeks 4, 5, 13 and 14) and learn the role of citizens (weeks 6, 7 and 9), groups (week 8), and elections in the making of policy (week 9).
- Ethical reasoning: consider your own values, your place in American government, and to promote discussion and dialogue about government with your peers (Friday exercises and class discussion).

## How this Course fits into your College Education

**Quest II:** Quest II continues your orientation to the University. Quest II is typically taken with either a Speech course (Comm. 111) or a Writing course (WBIS), whichever you did not take last semester. It includes an ethical reasoning component that prompts you to think analytically and with care about others and the world. Passing this course qualifies you to take Quest III.

Additionally, you are expected to submit a polished resume, attend one of the three career/job preparedness fairs below, get tutored on job preparedness by the Career Center (Reeve Union Theatre during your normal class time on **Feb 28<sup>th</sup>**) and participate in an academic open house.

- March 5<sup>th</sup>** Internship and Career Fair (11:30-3:30 in Kolf)
- **March 19<sup>th</sup>** Health Care Career Fair.(11-1 in Reeve Union 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Ballroom)
- **April 17<sup>th</sup>** Summer Job and Internship Fair (11-1 in Reeve Union 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Ballroom)

**How to Succeed in this Class:** Doing well here isn't a magic formula; you will do better if you:

1. come to class
2. complete all the weekly topic worksheets
3. be aware of and get to know some key terms each day
4. ask questions and be involved
5. read assigned pages and take good notes
6. have a good attitude about learning

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

10 chapter worksheets, due end of Thurs. week by week, 10 pts. ea. low score drops	90 points
3 exams	60, 60, 50 points
Friday class exercises	60 points
Attendance and Participation	<u>40 points each</u>
	400 points

**Textbook:** You are expected to purchase *We the People* 14<sup>th</sup> Essentials edition by Ginsberg and coauthors. The book is available either new or used in the University Bookstore. You are encouraged to share the book with another member of the class to defer costs. There are many different editions of this book, but to all be on the same page, you should have this specific edition.

## How Your Week is Structured in this Class:

M	Tu	W	Th	F
	←read assigned textbook pages→		topic worksheet due by end of day Thurs.	
	prepare for “what’s on your mind” segment on appropriate weeks		read assigned news article in Canvas	“in the news”
lecture— Intro. to weekly topic (9:10-10:10)		“what’s on your mind”		worksheet rvw.
		finish topic lecture (both 9:10-10:10)		topic activity (all 9:10-10:10)
	topic worksheet available by Tues. evening in Canvas			

## Graded Course Components

**Topic Worksheets:** After completing your reading of the textbook chapter and listening to lecture, you will complete a worksheet every week, except the first week 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, your notes and my PowerPoint. You have until the end of the day Thursday to complete a worksheet. Talking about chapters and concepts with other students or me can be helpful and is encouraged, but don’t copy answers from someone else, because then you don’t really gain any knowledge on the subject or any skills in the process.

**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. Work on tests is required to be your own. **Exams will be held on Fridays: March 8th, April 19<sup>th</sup> and May 17<sup>th</sup>.** To be made up at a later time, any missed exam requires documentation of illness or University-sponsored event.

**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 4 points from your 40 total for each absence that is unexcused. If you do have a University-recognized excused absence (illness, University event, family emergency, religious holiday etc.), please let me know so I can mark you excused. I will ask for documentation in the case of repeated absences.

I expect you to listen intently, and hope that you make comments and ask questions, which help make this a better class. I reward active participation. Please note that you don’t “lose points” for participating in any meaningful way. You gain points by participating.

**“What’s on Your Mind?”** On most Wednesdays we will have a class segment called “what’s on your mind.” You will be put into three groups. I will call on individuals in the group responsible for preparing on that day and ask you what’s on your mind that pertains to politics. This could be just about anything that is relevant to the course. You can make 1) **make an observation**; 2) **ask me a question**; or 3) **poll your classmates about something** of interest. As a help in preparing for this, I am requiring you to **download a news app: NPR**. On NPR’s app you can look through the topics “national” and “politics” for political news. Also helpful is Public Television’s PBS Newshour site: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/>. You don’t have to draw from these sources, but they are good sources of news and I encourage you to consult them as you make your way through the course. Your work here is part of my consideration for your participation grade.

**Friday Class Activities:** Each Friday when we don’t have a test, we will engage in a structured activity designed to get deeper into a topic and develop your analytical skills. There will be points attached to these exercises each week, but the purpose is to do them and learn in a low stakes environment. So long as you participate and hand in what is required you will do fine.

### **Course Calendar: Topics, Activities, Readings, and Assignments**

Week of February 5<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup>

topic: course introduction; Americans and their Political Values

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

“What’s on your mind”: Group 1 February 7<sup>th</sup>

week 1 class activity: political perceptions versus reality

Week of February 12<sup>th</sup> through February 16<sup>th</sup>

topics: The US Constitution (and other constitutions)

reading assignment: *We the People*, pp. 33-40; 47-62

“What’s on your mind”: Group 2 February 14<sup>th</sup>

topic worksheet #1 due by the end of the day February 15<sup>th</sup>

week 2 class activity: what is in the Constitution and why?

what is not in the Constitution that might be?

Week of February 19<sup>th</sup> through February 23<sup>rd</sup>

topics: Federalism

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

topic worksheet #2 due February 22<sup>nd</sup>

“What’s on your mind”: Group 3 February 21<sup>st</sup>

**attend academic open houses—meet with relevant departmental representatives**

class activity: what are my own politics like?

February 26<sup>th</sup> through March 1<sup>st</sup>

topics: Civil Liberties

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

**Feb 28<sup>th</sup> go to Reeve 307** for Career and Professional Development office presentation

topic worksheet #3 due February 29<sup>th</sup>

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

Week of March 4<sup>th</sup> through March 8<sup>th</sup>

topic: Civil Rights

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

**March 5<sup>th</sup> finished resumes must be uploaded to VMock and Handshake**  
**first midterm exam March 8<sup>th</sup> (in class)**

Week of March 11<sup>th</sup> through March 15<sup>th</sup>

topic: Public Opinion

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

“What’s on your mind”: Group 1 March 13<sup>th</sup>

**March 12<sup>th</sup> Bethany Rentsch delivers Brandon Colligan Memorial Lecture on Civic Engagement, 5:00-6:15 PM in Reeve Ballroom (room 227)—this counts for six points if you attend in person—zero if you do not without being excused**

topic worksheet #4 due March 14<sup>th</sup>

class activity: confirmation bias and fact-checking

Week of March 18<sup>th</sup> through March 22<sup>nd</sup>

topic: Media and Political Information

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

“What’s on your mind”: Group 2 March 20<sup>th</sup>

topic worksheet #5 due March 21<sup>st</sup>

Week of March 25<sup>th</sup> through March 29<sup>th</sup> **Spring Break!**

Week of April 1<sup>st</sup> through April 5<sup>th</sup>

topic: Political Parties and Interest Groups

reading assignment: *We the People*, pp. 222-246; 254-9

“What’s on your mind”: Group 3 April 3<sup>rd</sup>

topic worksheet #6 due April 4<sup>th</sup>

April 5: no class—I will be at a Political Science conference

Week of April 8<sup>th</sup> through April 12<sup>th</sup>

topic: Political Participation, Campaigns and Elections

reading assignment: *We the People*, pp. 265-282; 291-300

“What’s on your mind”: Group 1 April 10<sup>th</sup>

topic worksheet #7 due April 11<sup>th</sup>

class activity: Electoral College simulation

Week of April 15<sup>th</sup> through April 19<sup>th</sup>

topic: Congress, the Legislative Branch

reading assignment: *We the People*, pp. 310-315; 323-337

**second midterm exam April 19<sup>th</sup> (in class)**

Week of April 22<sup>nd</sup> through April 26<sup>th</sup>

topic: The Presidency

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

topic worksheet #8 due April 25<sup>th</sup>

“What’s on your mind”: Group 2 April 24<sup>th</sup>

class activity: desirable character traits in politicians;

what actions yield authoritarian outcomes and undermine democracy

Week of April 29<sup>th</sup> through May 3<sup>rd</sup>

topic: The Federal Courts (note we skip the chapter in Bureaucracy)

reading assignment: *We the People*, pp. 402-23; 432-436

“What’s on your mind”: Group 3 May 1<sup>st</sup>

topic worksheet #9 due May 2<sup>nd</sup>

class activity: you be the judge—decide a federal case

Week of May 6<sup>th</sup> through May 10<sup>th</sup>

topic: Domestic Policy

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

topic worksheet #10 due May 9<sup>th</sup>

class activity: saving Social Security

Week of May 13<sup>th</sup> through May 17<sup>th</sup>

topic: Domestic Policy, continued

reading assignment: none

**final exam May 17<sup>th</sup> (in class)**

## **Course and University Policies-The Fine Print!**

**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>)

**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.

**Expectations:** Barring a documented medical necessity or a pre-approved University-sanctioned event, tests must be taken on time. All written work is to be your own, unless you are explicitly instructed to work together. If you are ill or have a University-recognized event, please let me know as soon as possible and I will excuse you from attendance for the relevant date(s), understanding that it is your responsibility to get information from class and do any make-up work. If you would have repeated or prolonged illness, I will ask you for documentation.

**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:** I would love to see you during my student office hours, MF 10:20-11:30 and W 11:30-12:30. If you want to meet remotely we can do so 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, you are encouraged to first speak with me directly. If you are not comfortable doing that, you are invited to speak with the Chair of the Department of Political Science, Dr. Tracy Slagter. She can be reached at [slagtert@uwosh.edu](mailto:slagtert@uwosh.edu). Should she 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](mailto: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/>

**Note to Political Science Majors:** Political Science majors should take Political Methodology (245) in either their sophomore year or the first semester of their junior year. If you have questions about this requirement, your course schedule, possible internships, or career preparation please reach out to your faculty adviser. Students are encouraged to meet with their faculty advisers at least once per year. If you are unsure who your adviser is, you can check Titanweb or email Ms. Angelee Hammond at [hammond@uwosh.edu](mailto:hammond@uwosh.edu).

**Electronics Policy:** Given that many studies show that those who take notes by hand do better than those who take notes on a computer, I encourage you to take notes in a physical notebook by hand. If you choose to use your computer and its use seems to be a distraction, I will note it to you, first in a private email and then, if necessary, in class itself. Studies show that peers sitting next to a student distracted by their computer perform worse, so it's not just you I am concerned about, it is your classmates' as well.