

# AMERICAN GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN OSHKOSH | POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

POLITICAL SCIENCE 105Q2 (002C) | SPRING 2024 | MWF 12:40–1:40 | SAGE 3218

A USP QUEST II COURSE | 3 CREDITS

---



Above: Presidential Candidates in February 2024 Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Nikki Haley. Source: [90](#)

---

## PROFESSOR

Jerry D. Thomas  
Pronouns: he/him/his  
thomasj@uwosh.edu

J.D., Chicago-Kent College of Law, IIT  
Ph.D., University of Kentucky  
M.P.A., University of South Carolina

---

## OFFICE HOURS

My office is Sage 4628. I am available during office hours T/TH 12:15–1:15, W 10:00–11:00, or by appointment.

---

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the organization, principles, and actual workings of the American national government in all its branches. The centerpiece of the course is institutions—congress, presidency, courts, and agencies. The course examines the Constitutional framework within which the system operates, including federalism, civil rights, and civil liberties. Considerable attention is given to social and political elements that influence institutions, such as voting and citizen participation, interest groups, media, and political parties. The course also examines

institutional outputs (policies), especially social policies related to race, gender, socio-economic status, and sexuality. There are no prerequisites for this course. This is a Quest II course in the University Studies Program (USP).

---

## **COURSE MATERIALS**

**We the People: An Introduction to American Government**, 15th Edition (Thomas E. Patterson). ISBN: 9781265708023.

### *Instant Access*

This course participates in UWO's Instant Access course materials program. The required textbook and Connect access will be delivered digitally through Canvas on the first day of class. This program ensures you are receiving your course materials at a significant discount. Your student account will be automatically billed for the required course material. This charge will be listed on your account as "Instant Access Course Material." If you drop the course or withdraw before the university's drop deadline, your charge for the materials will be automatically refunded to your student account.

### *How to Access Course Materials*

On the first day of class, log in to your Canvas account, find this class, and click **McGraw-Hill Connect** from the menus at the right. This will take you to an external website where you can access the textbook, quizzes, and review assignments. The first time you access it, you will need to register using your university email account. If for any reason you can't access the materials or you need assistance, please don't hesitate to email directly at [instantaccess@uwosh.edu](mailto:instantaccess@uwosh.edu).

We reference the textbook frequently during class. A phone or laptop might be helpful in class. An optional loose-leaf (paper) version of the textbook is available through the campus bookstore for an additional cost.

---

## **LEARNING GOALS**

### **Course-Specific Learning Goals**

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.

Discuss with classmates issues related to civil rights

Evaluate policy outcomes using a constitutional framework

Critically evaluate political ideologies and apply ideological frameworks to students' political and policy views

Engage the political system through media, community involvement, voting, and self-reflection

### **Political Science Department Learning Goals**

*Understand and apply theory frameworks*

Apply theoretical arguments and to explain or predict political phenomena

*Understand and explain contemporary politics*

Connect theory and history to answer "big questions" facing contemporary politics

*Analyze and explain political behavior, patterns, & events*

Use evidence in a variety of forms to construct arguments  
*Communicate effectively*  
Express information in ways accessible and appropriate to different audiences, both orally and in writing

---

## INCLUSION

Politics and government affect all people irrespective of political affiliation, socio-economic status, sex, gender, race, sexuality, national origin, ethnicity, veteran status, religion, physical or learning ability, and many other characteristics with which students commonly identify. I use teaching methods to foster input from everyone. *Input from all students is valued and expected.*

---

## ATTENDANCE

Attendance is expected and required. I take attendance at the beginning of class mainly to learn student names. Because participation in discussions and activities is required, you should remember that you cannot participate if you are absent. Absences are sometimes necessary, but it is unnecessary to contact me about absences unless it is an extended absence.

---

## EARLY ALERT

During the fifth week of classes, you will receive an e-mail notice about your progress in this course. This is called *Early Alert*. Early Alert helps you evaluate your study skills and performance, so you know if you are on the right track. If you need to make changes, there are many resources available. Early Alert grades are not permanent and do not appear on your transcript.

---

## ASSESSMENT AND GRADING

I use the 93/90/87 grading scale for this course.

A 93–100 B 83–86 C 73–76 D 63–66  
A- 90–92 B- 80–82 C- 70–72 D- 60–62  
B+ 87–89 C+ 77–79 D+ 67–69 F 0–59

### Participation (25%)

Participation is based on student preparation for and contributions to class. Minimally, students must attend class, read, and prepare. Participation comfort levels vary substantially. At one end of the spectrum are *deathers*—students who fear public speaking (more than death). I structure the class to help students overcome this fear. On the other end of the spectrum are *gunners*—students are eager to speak and tend to dominate conversations. These students should be mindful that learning involves active listening and should provide classmates with an opportunity to speak. Quality of participation is important. Students receive the best participation grades when they demonstrate critical thinking and assimilate complex ideas, including classmates' ideas, across a range of topics. These participators contribute meaningfully to the learning of others, including the professor. Students write a reflection at the end of the term assessing their own participation, both strengths and challenges.

### **Connect Quizzes and Other Assignments (25%)**

There is a quiz and a review exercise for each chapter. Review exercises are optional; quizzes are required. See *Quiz Guidelines* below. In addition to regular quizzes, there are graded class activities and homework assignments throughout the term that are also required.

### **Exams (2 exams x 25% each = 50%)**

Exams are a combination of objective, short answer, and essay questions.

---

### **DEADLINES AND MISSED ASSIGNMENTS**

Turn in assignments on the due dates. Students who miss assignments are excused only for university-approved reasons (e.g., documented illness, family death, university-sponsored activity).

---

### **QUIZ GUIDELINES**

1. All quizzes are accessed through *Canvas*, which is linked to *Connect*.
2. You may use textbooks for quizzes. Quiz questions are based on textbook material.
3. Quizzes are automatically graded. As soon as you finish, you receive your grade.
4. You may take each quiz *up to three times* before the deadline. I record the grade from your *highest* attempt. Questions are pulled randomly from a pool. If you take a quiz more than once, some questions differ.
5. I drop the lowest quiz (or assignment) grade at the end of the course.
6. Quizzes are *due at 12:30 PM before the class when we discuss that chapter*. Quizzes are available well ahead of due dates.

---

### **UNIVERSITY STUDIES PROGRAM (USP)**

The University Studies Program (USP) is your gateway to a 21st century college education at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. This Quest II course is the second in a series of courses you will take to introduce you to the campus and all it has to offer, the vibrant Oshkosh community, and the challenges and opportunities of academic life as you pursue a liberal education. In these courses, you'll be exposed to three "Signature Questions" that are central to a UW Oshkosh education. The signature question for this course is: *How do people understand and engage in community life?*

Quest classes are designed to provide a solid foundation for the rest of your education here, no matter which major you choose. Your USP courses will also provide the opportunity for you to Explore and Connect as you begin your college education. For further information about the unique general education program at UW Oshkosh, visit the University Studies Program website at [uwosh.edu/usp](http://uwosh.edu/usp).

### **Liberal Education**

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 (e.g. 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. This course supports the foundation of a liberal education. Namely, it provides students with a framework for social responsibilities connected with participating in a democratic society.

### **Ethical Reasoning**

An important component of Quest II is its emphasis on ethical reasoning. People engage in reasoning in a number of ways. We are capable of theoretical reasoning—reasoning about, for instance, the way a system of ideas or claims is connected. We are capable of practical reasoning—reasoning about what to do and how to do it. *Ethical reasoning* is a form of reasoning we all do when we ask questions like “Should I do this?” “Is it right to do that?” “Is this policy good?” “Am I doing what I should to be a good person?” “What should a good person do?” Broadly, ethical reasoning incorporates our beliefs about values (good, bad) and typically reaches a conclusion of the form “X is right/wrong” or “I should do X/not do X.”

---

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

Expectations for Academic Honesty: A college education is intended to develop your skills, knowledge, and confidence. Graded assignments are designed to work on these items. Thus, to gain the skills, knowledge, and confidence of a college-educated person all graded work is to be your own. When you are directed to work alone, an assignment or test must be done by you, its primary ideas are to be your own, and any outside materials should be dealt with properly (quoted when using someone’s words, and cited when quoting or referencing them in any other way). When your teacher directs you to work in teams, the work is to be done by the team. More information can be found [here](#).

UWO is committed to academic integrity for all students. System guidelines state, “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.” We expect students to review and adhere to procedures related to academic honesty as outlined in Chapter UWS 14, Wisconsin Administrative Code, available on the Dean of Students website [here](#). Students should direct specific questions regarding the code (and institutional procedures approved to implement the code) to the Dean of Students Office.

---

### **STUDENT CONSUMER INFORMATION**

Students should see the following URL for disclosures about essential consumer protection items required by the Students Right to Know Act of 1990 available [here](#).

---

### **GRIEVANCES**

The Department of Political Science is committed to offering you a high-quality classroom experience, and we take your feedback 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. Tracy Slagter at [slagtert@uwosh.edu](mailto:slagtert@uwosh.edu). She will be super helpful.

### 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, check TitanWeb or email Angelee Hammond at [hammond@uwosh.edu](mailto:hammond@uwosh.edu).

---

### ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

UWO provides reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or meet course requirements. We accommodate *flexibly* and *individually*. Register with *Accessibility Services* or Project Success to get an accommodation recommendation form.

#### Accessibility Services

125 Dempsey Hall

(920) 424-3100

[dean1@uwosh.edu](mailto:dean1@uwosh.edu)

[Accessibility Services Website](#)

---

### REGISTER TO VOTE (AND VOTE)

This is a political science class. I encourage everyone to participate in our democracy. Minimally, voting is a great start.

#### Wisconsin Registration Methods & Deadlines

- *In Person*: The Friday before Election Day
- *By Mail*: Postmarked at least 20 days before Election Day
- *Online*: 20 days before Election Day
- *At the Polls*: You may register to vote in person at your polling place on Election Day. You must provide documents for proof of residency and proof of identification. Other Wisconsin voting information can be found at [MyVoteWisconsin](#).

#### Other States

Students who live in other states can easily find out how to vote with a little bit of online research. Every state has an option for submitting an absentee ballot, and many states have early, in-person voting if you make a trip home. A great starting place for your research is [Vote.org](http://Vote.org).

---

### SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS

Changes to the schedule are inevitable, especially in a course on American government and politics where current events drive our focus and discussions. Changes to the schedule will be communicated in class or through e-mail. If substantive changes are made, notification will be provided in a timely manner and a revised syllabus made available.

#### Week 1 (Feb 5): Introductions and Course Overview

- Introductions, Syllabus, Connect, and Canvas



- Model of American Political System
- Current Events

### **Week 2 (Feb 12): Political Thinking and Political Culture**

- Political Thinking and Culture (chapter 1)
- Connect Quiz for Ch. 1
- Constitutional Democracy (chapter 2)
- Connect Quiz for Ch. 2
- Current Events

### **Week 3 (Feb 19): Constitutional Democracy and Federalism**

- Constitutional Democracy (continued)
- Federalism (chapter 3)
- Connect Quiz for Ch. 3

### **Week 4 (Feb 26): Civil Liberties**

- Civil Liberties (chapter 4)
- Connect Quiz for Ch. 4
- Current Events

### **Week 5 (Mar 4): Civil Rights & Group Projects**

- Equal Rights (chapter 5)
- Connect Quiz for Ch. 5

### **Week 6 (Mar 11): Student Projects and Presentations**

### **Week 7 (Mar 18): Wrap-up, Review and Midterm Exam**

### **Week 8 (Mar 25) Spring Break**

### **Week 9 (Apr 1): Public Opinion and Political Participation**

- Public Opinion/Political Socialization (chapter 6)
- Connect Quiz for Ch. 6
- Political Participation (chapter 7)
- Connect Quiz for Ch. 7

### **Week 10 (Apr 8): Political Parties, Campaigns & Elections**

- Parties, Candidates, & Campaigns (chapter 8)
- Connect Quiz for Ch. 8
- Current Events

### **Week 11 (Apr 15): Congress**

- Congress (chapter 11)
- Connect Quiz for Ch. 11

### **Week 12 (Apr 22): Presidency**

- Presidency (chapter 12)
- Connect Quiz for Ch. 12

**Week 13 (Apr 29): Agencies**

- Federal Bureaucracy (chapter 13)
- Connect Quiz for Ch. 13
- Current events

**Week 14 (May 6): Courts**

- Federal Judicial System (chapter 14)
- Connect Quiz for Ch. 14

**Week 15 (May 13): Wrap-up, Review, and Final Assessments**

- Review, Exam, Course Evaluations, and Participation Reflections