

American National Government – Political Science #101

{sample syllabus only – this may not reflect the details of the current course}

Illinois Wesleyan University

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Course description and requirements:

This course surveys the major institutions and processes of American government and politics: the Constitution, federalism, Congress, the presidency, judiciary, and executive bureaucracy, political parties and elections, the media, and public opinion. The course will give students an understanding of contemporary practices and some exposure to the historical roots of those practices. Because many of the learning opportunities will come through class discussions, students must be prepared to discuss assigned readings in class. Students are expected to complete each week's assigned readings (see below) before the first class meeting of each week. Regular attendance and punctuality are vitally important. Some weeks' reading assignments are longer than others. Reading ahead and careful note taking from both reading and class discussions are strongly encouraged.

Students' grades will be based on 3 exams, several individual/small group projects, and class participation. Each of the first two exams is worth 25% of the final course grade. The final exam is worth 30%. Contributions to small group projects will be worth 10% of the course grade. Active participation in class discussions will make up 10% of your grade. By participation I do not mean merely coming to class. Thoughtful and regular participation in our discussions is crucial to your and our collective success. Thoughtful questions count for a lot in my way of thinking. Sitting in silence all semester will cost you a letter grade. A few days before each exam I will distribute a list of questions resembling the questions you will face on the up-coming exam. This will give you a framework for study and should be taken as a rough indicator of the level of difficulty and style of the questions that will appear on the exams. Taking an exam at any time other than in class on the designated exam date requires my advance approval.

Grading policy and statement on academic integrity:

Final course grades will be assigned as follows: 90-100% = A/A-; 80-89% = B+/B/B-; 70-79% = C+/C/C-; 60-69% = D; below 60% = F. The boundaries for plus and minus grades typically fall about three percentage points on either side of the decile. Taking an incomplete in this course is very strongly discouraged. Under no circumstances will a student be granted a grade of incomplete without discussing the matter with me well in advance of the end of the semester.

I am aware that academic dishonesty has become common at some institutions. While I am sure that very few, if any, Illinois Wesleyan students would cheat on class assignments, the university's policy and my policy on academic dishonesty bear repeating. Academic dishonesty fundamentally undermines the mission of the university and cheapens our collective enterprise. Students caught cheating on an exam or engaging in plagiarism on written assignments will receive a failing grade for the course. In these cases I will also file a formal complaint with the administration. Per the university's academic dishonesty policy, the administration will move to expel from the university any student who is the object of two such substantiated complaints. See the university catalog for further explanation.

Course readings:

One text is required and available at the university bookstore:

We the People: An Introduction to American Politics, shorter 5th edition, Ginsberg, Lowi, and Weir, W.W. Norton & Co., 2005 [ISBN 0393926192, paper] – this is referred to below as “TEXT”

Selections from several other works will be assigned. The underlined selections below are on electronic reserve (password: washington)

Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment, 2nd edition, Morris Fiorina, 1989 (selected chaps.)

The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion, John Zaller, 1992 (epilogue only)

Various essays listed by author's last name and underlined below (most of these are taken from Cigler & Loomis, *American Politics: Classic and Contemporary Readings, 6th edition*, Houghton and Mifflin Co.)

Note: Federalist Papers #10 and #51, the Constitution, and the Declaration of Independence appear in the appendix of your textbook.

Week of ...	Topics	Readings
	Course overview Foundations of American Government	TEXT, chapt. 1 Declaration of Independence Federalist Papers #10 & #51 <u>Hoffstadter essay</u>
	The Constitution	TEXT, chapt. 2 The Constitution
	Federalism Civil Rights and Liberties	TEXT, chapt. 3 & 4 <u>Lawrence & Garner v. Texas (2003)</u> <u>Donahue essay</u>
	Civil Rights and Liberties	TEXT, chapt. 5
	Congress	TEXT, chapt. 12 <u>Fiorina, chapt. 1, 5, 8 & 13</u>
	Congress <i>First exam: covering all material to date</i>	
	The Presidency	TEXT, chapt. 13 <u>Neustadt essay</u>
	The executive branch bureaucracy	TEXT, chapt. 14
	Congressional-Executive relations The federal judiciary	<u>Posner essay</u> <u>Brennan/Meese debate</u>
	The federal judiciary	TEXT, chapt. 15
	<i>Second exam: covering all material since first exam</i>	
	Political parties & campaigns	TEXT, chapt. 9 & 10 <u>Campbell essay</u>
	Voting & elections	TEXT, chapt. 8

Citizen participation

TEXT, chapt. 7
Putnam essays 1 & 2

Public opinion

TEXT, chapt. 6
Traugott essay

Public opinion

Page & Shapiro essay

The media

Zaller, epilogue

Conclusions

Final exam: cumulative w/ emphasis on last portion of the course