

American National Government – Political Science #101

Illinois Wesleyan University

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class wiki: www.iwu-american-government.wikispaces.com

class blog: www.iwu-american-government.blogspot.com

About the scope of the class:

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, elections, and participation, the media, and public opinion. In this course students will develop an understanding of contemporary practices and some exposure to the historical roots of those practices. It is my hope that you will come away from this course with a good understanding of how political institutions shape popular preferences and vice versa, and that you will become a much more critical consumer of political information in the American context.

About the style of the class:

This is not a lecture course. Most of our class sessions will be spent in discussions, activities, and student responses to materials I provide. This course design requires that you keep up on the readings and assignments and that you come to class every time ready to respond to these assignments. There will be some small-group activities that will require you to meet with peers outside of class. You will need to make time in your schedule for these meetings. Pleading that you are too busy will not be a successful strategy. Regular class attendance and punctuality are vitally important. Some weeks' reading assignments are longer than others. I encourage you to read ahead and take careful notes from those readings, in addition to the notes you take in class. I have high expectations, and many of you will find this to be a very demanding class. I very much encourage office visits. Even better is to ask those questions in class so that everyone else can benefit from the discussion.

About grades and academic integrity:

Students' grades will be based on 3 exams, several individual/small group projects, and class participation. Each of the exams is worth 25% of the final course grade. Performance on individual and small group projects will be worth 15% of the course grade. Class participation counts for another 10% of the course grade. Thoughtful and regular involvement in our discussions is crucial to your and our collective success. A few days before each exam I will distribute a list of questions resembling those you will face on the upcoming 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.

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.

About technology:

If your cell phone goes off while in class I will expect you to leave promptly, disturbing others as little as possible on your way out, and to not return until the next class meeting. You will need a portable computer memory device for this class. You will need to check your IWU e-mail account regularly, as I will send you materials often. Most of my class presentations will be accompanied by Powerpoint files, many of which I will make available on-line. You may find it helpful to bring those files with you to class, either electronically or on paper, to help your in-class note taking. Laptop computers are very welcome in class, though you must not allow non-relevant applications to become a distraction to you or others.

About course readings:

One text is required and available at the university bookstore:

Readings in American Politics: Analysis and Perspectives, Ken Kollman (W.W. Norton, 2010)

Selections from several other works will be assigned. The underlined selections below are on electronic reserve at the IWU library. I leave you to find a few other readings on-line.

Week of ...	Topics	Readings
August		
23	Course overview	
	Foundations of American Government	Declaration of Independence (internet) Federalist Papers #10 & #51 (Kollman 2.1, 2.2)
30	The Constitution	The Constitution (internet) Kollman 2.3, 2.4
September		
6	Federalism	Kollman 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 <u>Ginsberg, Lowi, Weir, <i>We the People</i>, shorter 7th edition, ch. 3</u> Kollman 4.3 (<i>Roe v. Wade</i>)
13	Congress	<u>Patterson, <i>The American Democracy</i>, 9th edition, ch. 11 ("Congress")</u> Kollman 5.1, 5.2, 5.3
20	Congress	Document on how a bill becomes a law (U.S. House of Reps), available at: http://www.house.gov/house/Tying_it_all.shtml

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First exam: covering all material to date

The presidency

Kollman 6.1, 6.2, 6.4, 6.5

October

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The executive branch bureaucracy

Cindy Skrzycki, chapter 2

Alison Berry, "Forest Policy up in Smoke"
available at:

<http://www.perc.org/pdf/Forest%20Policy%20Up%20in%20Smoke.pdf>

Hugh Hecl, "Issue Networks and the Executive Establishment"

Patterson, *The American Democracy*, 9th ed.

ch. 13 ("The Federal Bureaucracy")

(optional: if you feel you need more info)

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The federal judiciary

Federalist paper #78 (internet)

Kollman 8.1, 8.2, 8.3, 8.4

(internet): Thomas's concurring opinion in *Gonzales v. Carhart* (2007); Stevens's dissent in *DC v. Heller* (2008)

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The federal judiciary

Scalia and Breyer essays

Posner essay

Meese essay

Second exam: covering all material since first exam

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Political parties

Campbell essay

Kollman 12.1, 13.3, 13.4

November

1

Voting, elections, participation

Kollman 12.2, 13.1

Putnam essays 1 & 2

Abromowitz essay, "The Obama Generation"

(search at: www.rasmussenreports.com)

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Interest groups

Public opinion

Kollman 11.1, 11.2

Kollman 9.1

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Public opinion

Page & Shapiro essay

Zaller, epilogue

Kollman 14.1, 14.2

The media

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The media

Canon, Coleman, Mayher, *Faultlines: ..., 2nd ed.*,
ch. 7

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Summing up

Student presentations (Tuesday)
Course evals, exam review (Thursday)

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