

# American Politics – Political Science #101

Illinois Wesleyan University

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## 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 and executive branch bureaucracy, the judiciary, political parties, elections and participation, and public opinion. Students will develop an understanding of contemporary practices and gain some exposure to the historical roots of those practices. It is my expectation 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. I expect you will also become a better-equipped participant in our republican democracy. As the saying goes, democracy is not a spectator sport.

Beyond regular attendance in class, I expect you to participate meaningfully in our class discussions. Doing so will require preparation – reading, watching and thinking about videos, and working through assignments – before coming to class. You should not expect to be able to do this successfully based on prior knowledge. You will take four in-class exams via Canvas. Unless you have a learning accommodation, you may not take the exams remotely. You will also take several quizzes via Canvas outside of class time. There will also be several small individual written assignments. A couple of small-group assignments will require you to work with others and use a peer-evaluation process for grading (note penalty for not turning in peer evaluation form). Students often find this a challenging course. I will strive to test you on what you learn here, not so much on what you might have learned in high school.

## About grades and academic integrity:

Students' grades will be based on quizzes, exams, and several individual and small-group projects. The weighting of grades is explained below. Thoughtful and regular involvement in our discussions is crucial to your and our collective success. On our Canvas page you will find a study guide that should help you on quizzes and exams. Quizzes will include approximately 12 multiple choice questions. You will take all of the exams in class via Canvas. See dates and times below. Taking a quiz or exam at any other time requires my advance approval. Alternatives may be granted due to university-organized activities or documented illnesses. Simply neglecting to complete a quiz or exam during the designated time will not earn you a make-up opportunity. Any written work turned in late suffers a penalty of five percentage points per day, weekends included. If you are running behind schedule, email me late work in order to stop the penalty clock.

If you have a learning accommodation in place with the university, you should speak with me about your particular needs. I look forward to working with you to help ensure a successful experience. If you believe you need an accommodation, you should visit the Advising Office in Holmes Hall at your earliest convenience. You can reach the staff there at 556-3231.

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. Asking to take an incomplete in this course is very strongly discouraged. No student will be granted an incomplete without discussing the matter with me well in advance of the end of the semester. An incomplete requires a signed form, available at the registrar's website.

Grades are weighted as follows:

Quizzes (5% each, 4 of them)	20%
Exams (15% each, 4 of them)	60%
Small assignments (combined)	20%

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. This includes working on quizzes or exams with others, which is not something you are permitted to do. You may not use artificial intelligence to generate written work. In these cases of academic dishonesty 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.

Quizzes and exams: Quizzes in Canvas will be available for several hours on each of the Thursdays listed below. Once you access a quiz you will have a limited amount of time for your one attempt. Quizzes and exams mostly consist of multiple-choice questions. If you try to search for answers during the quizzes (which you should not) you will likely run out of time. During the first week of the semester put the quiz dates in your calendar.

Communication and resources: Check your IWU email account regularly, as I will share information often. Nearly all of my class presentations will be accompanied by PowerPoint files, all of which are available in Canvas. One strategy that many students find useful is to download the PP files and use these as spaces to take notes. You will find my PP slides to be mostly like frameworks that do not contain all of the information you will need to know (that's what reading ahead of time and coming to class is about).

### **About course readings:**

You will need to purchase one text for this course, though you have some flexibility about the particular edition. Go online to your favorite used book seller and find either the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of Scott Abernathy's, *American Government: Stories of a Nation* (Sage/CQ Press). The brief editions are acceptable. The text will lend some structure to our class discussions and will provide excellent explanations of concepts that I may cover only briefly in class. The more recent editions do little more than update you on election outcomes and some other developments, which we can discuss in class, and they will cost you quite a bit more than the older editions. The references below refer to chapter topics, which are clearly labeled in the table of contents. Depending on your edition, the chapter numbers may vary.

Other readings are either archived on our Canvas page or linked there. Strive to finish viewing / reading each week's videos / readings prior to coming to class. This will allow us to discuss the entire block of material whenever our conversations turn to those.

Spending quality time with the course text will help you to understand the material better. You will find that the quizzes and exams are designed to sort students who merely know the basics versus those who understand the material in greater depth.

Strive to read all of the week's material by Monday of each week

<b>Week of ...</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings</b>
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M: Course introduction

- Order a copy of the textbook

W: Some key concepts for thinking about American politics

F: Economic and representational inequality

Gilens essay (“Policy Consequences...”)

- Form groups to examine the Constitution
- Before class on Friday, watch this 13-minute Youtube video:

[https://www.ted.com/talks/hasan\\_kwame\\_jeffries\\_why\\_we\\_must\\_confront\\_the\\_painful\\_parts\\_of\\_us\\_history?subtitle=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/hasan_kwame_jeffries_why_we_must_confront_the_painful_parts_of_us_history?subtitle=en)

M: Labor Day – no class

W: Overview of the Constitution

The U.S. Constitution (read the whole thing)

F: Federalist Papers

Federalist Papers #10 & #51 (find online)

Abernathy, on the Constitution

W: The Constitution (groups 3 & 4 present)

F: The Constitution (group 4 presents)

M: Federalism

Abernathy, on federalism

W: Federalism

F: Civil rights and liberties

Abernathy, on civil rights

*Quiz #1: available on Canvas, Thursday 4:00pm to 11:59pm (material through the Constitution)*

M: Civil rights and liberties

Abernathy, on civil liberties

W: Civil rights and liberties

F: *First exam, covering all material from beginning of course through civil rights & liberties. In class, via Canvas. Bring a laptop or tablet*

M: Congress

Abernathy, on Congress

W: Congress

Mayhew reading

F: Congress

M: Congress

W: Presidency

Abernathy, on presidency

F: Fall Break Day – no class

*Write-up of city council meeting due in class*

*Senate vote analysis due in class on Thursday*

*Quiz #2: Canvas, Thursday from 4:00pm to 11:59pm*

M: Presidency

Neustadt reading

W: Presidency

SCOTUS: *Trump v. US* (summary)

F: Executive branch bureaucracy

Abernathy, on federal bureaucracy

M: *Second exam, covering material since 1<sup>st</sup> exam, through the executive branch. In class, via Canvas. Bring a laptop or tablet.*

W: Judiciary

Abernathy, on judiciary

F: Judiciary

Essays by Meese, Scalia, and Breyer

M: Judiciary

Excerpt from *King v. Burwell*

W: Political parties

F: Political parties

Abernathy, on parties, elections, participation

*Quiz #3: Canvas, Thursday 4:00pm to 11:59pm, covering the judiciary*

M: Voting, elections, participation

W: Voting, elections, participation

F: Public opinion

2024 election exit polls

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2024-elections/exit-polls>

*M: Exam #3, covering material since 2<sup>nd</sup> exam up through voting, elections, participation. In class, via Canvas. Bring a laptop or tablet.*

W/F: Thanksgiving break

M: Public opinion

W: Public opinion

Abernathy, chaps. 6 & 7

Zaller essay

Page & Shapiro essay

- *Public opinion graph assignment due on Wednesday*

F: Public opinion

*Quiz #4: Canvas, Thursday from 4:00pm to 11:59pm, covering public opinion*

*Final exam: This exam covers material since the 3<sup>rd</sup> exam, plus some foundational ideas we covered in the first couple of weeks. Bring a laptop or tablet. You will take this exam in class via Canvas.*