

PLS 2120: AMERICAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Course Description

This course, which is appropriate for students of any major, is an introduction to American national government. It builds breadth of knowledge and utilizes multiple perspectives to introduce students to the constitutional basis, institutions, structure, politics, development, processes and political culture that comprises American government and politics---and considers the impact that cultural and social diversity in the U.S. has had on it. The focus is upon: (a) the creation and development of the important structural features; (b) the specific institutional plan and the powers and functions of each branch of government; (c) the nature of American politics and mass political participation, including parties, elections media and campaigns, as well as social movements; (d) the policy process and theories of who governs America; and (e) modern political culture, including the liberty state and civil rights.

Suggested Course Materials

Cal Jillson, *American Government, Political Development & Institutional Change*, 8th ed. (Routledge, 2014)
The New York Times

Suggested Evaluation and Policy

Two exams (true/false, multiple choice, and short-answer, essay): 35% each
Six quizzes (true/false, multiple choice): 20%
Participation: 10%

Suggested Schedule and Reading Assignments

<u>Date</u>	<u>Segment</u>	<u>Reading</u>
Week-1	I. History & Structure	Chapter 1
	a. Introduction to Politics & Political Science	Chapter 2
	b. Institutional Precursors in Rome and England & Types of Governments. <i>Quiz 1</i>	
Week-2	c. The Constitution & the Founding of American Government	Chapter 3
	d. Federalism. <i>Quiz 2</i>	Chapter 10
Week-3	II. The Institutions	Chapter 9
	a. The Presidency	
Week-4	b. Congress. <i>Quiz 3</i>	Chapter 11
Week-5	a. The Bureaucracy	Chapter 12
	b. The Supreme Court	
Week 6	<i>Review & Exam-I</i>	
Week-7	III. Mass Political Participation	Chapter 5
	a. Public Opinion, the Media	Chapter 4
	b. Political Participation	
Week-8	c. Political Parties. <i>Quiz 4</i>	Chapter 7
Week-9	d. Elections & Campaigns	Chapter 8
	e. Comparative Election Systems	
Week-10	IV. The Policy Process	Chapter 6

Week-11	a. Interest Groups b. The Policy Making Process. <i>Quiz 5</i> c. Theories of Who Governs d. Initiative, Referendum & Recall	Chapter 15
Week-12	V. Politics, Rights & Liberties a. American Political Culture & Ideologies	Chapter 13
Week-13	b. Civil Rights. <i>Quiz 6</i> c. Civil Liberties	Chapter 14
Week-14	d. Foreign Policy	Chapter 16
Week-15	<i>Review & Final Exam</i>	

THE WRIGHT STATE CORE: ELEMENT 5 LEARNING OUTCOMES

<p><u>Element 5 Learning Outcomes</u></p> <p>a) Critically apply knowledge of social science theory and methods of inquiry to personal decisions, current issues, or global concerns b) Explain and critique the methods of inquiry of social science disciplines c) Demonstrate an understanding of the ethical issues involved in the acquisition or application of social science knowledge d) Demonstrate, from a social science perspective, an understanding of the responsibilities of an informed and engaged citizen</p>
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This course addresses several of the University’s Learning Outcomes, but most notably, it will promote students’ participation in democratic society as informed and civically engaged citizens. After taking this course, students will understand how democracies work and their roles and responsibilities as citizens.

PLS 2120 will meet the Learning Outcomes of Element 5 by providing the following content and will be measured by the following range of methods:

a) Critically apply knowledge of social science theory and methods of inquiry to personal decisions, current issues, or global concerns.

The course covers the following theories in political science:

Institutional structural theory, such as: separation of powers, checks and balances, the rule of law, limited government, and new & old federalism;

Theories of institutional operation, such as politico, trustee or delegate (representation theories); Jeffersonian democracy (virtuous public) versus Jacksonian democracy (populism); Madisonian v Hamiltonian conceptions of American institutions; theories of sovereignty, and regime theory in judicial politics,

Public policy theories, such as: Interest-group pluralism, elite theory, policy markets & equilibrium, democratic theory, oligarchy, majoritarianism and populism; mixed government and mixed economy, and agent-principal theory in bureaucratic politics.

Theories of rights and liberties, including: collectivism versus individuality; justice, autonomy, fundamental rights and Due Process; and social caste, political pathology, social distance and racism.

American political ideologies, such as liberalism, conservatism, socialism, libertarianism, and progressivism and the active state.

The course covers at least five methods of political science inquiry: (a) quantitative studies (empiricism, statistics and data, models and estimation); (b) case studies and illustration; (c) historical development; (d) comparative assessment and (e) theoretical elucidation.

The course will critically apply theories and methods listed above to personal decisions:

Decisions concerning voting, registration, partisan affiliation; watching, interpreting and reading news; getting involved in campaigns and elections, and other civic engagement; understanding how the political system and public policy affects their lives; and respecting the dignity and history of others.

to current issues:

Supreme Court issues, such as: appointments and confirmations; recent Constitutional decisions, on equal marriage, religious freedom, and abortion;

Institutional issues, such as: gerrymandering, executive orders, gridlock, Congressional obstruction, filibuster and government shutdowns;

Election issues, such as: super delegates, presidential debates, polls, insiders v. outsiders and the so-called “rigged system,” midterm elections, third parties, open versus closed primaries, caucuses, the electoral college, social media, and foreign interference in elections;

Policy issues, such as: budget deficits, tax plans, student loans, legalizing pot, voter id laws, climate-change regulations and coal companies, Citizens United, as well as various issues for American foreign policy;

Issues of cultural significance, such as: equality (in regards to race, class, religion, gender, sexuality, etc.). This could include police shootings and the emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement, the crash & economic recovery, democratic socialism and “the revolution;” immigration, nativism & the rise of Trumpian politics, mass incarceration, partisanship, dealignment & the changing political conception of “being independent”;

and global concerns:

The focus is on American foreign policy as an instrument of government, but also includes attention to how the world shapes and has shaped American government and politics.

Specific topics may include: American military budgets and weaponry; executive agreements; foreign preferences in American elections; world elections systems (e.g., parliamentary systems and proportional representation) voting practices in other countries (e.g., mandatory voting laws).

The application of political ideologies to current US and global concerns will be measured through exam essay questions (or reading questions or in-class discussion questions). For example,

students will compare and contrast different ideologies on policy issues, such as climate change or tax plans.

b) Explain and critique the methods of inquiry of social science disciplines.

Students will be able to explain and critique the means by which political science investigates American government, including:

Polls and study results;

Important textual sources, such as the Federalist Papers and provisions of the United States Constitution;

Historical events, such as the Civil Rights Movement;

Rules of procedure & structure, which is what forms the basis of institutions;

Development, which is the change in institutions and practices over time;

Case analysis;

Identifying norms and patterns;

Theoretical conceptualization.

Students' knowledge of the above theories and methods of inquiry will be measured through quantitative exam questions. For example, students will analyze polling results to predict an outcome.

c) Demonstrate an understanding of the ethical issues involved in the acquisition or application of social science knowledge.

Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the ethical issues involved in the knowledge political science has about American government. Specifically, they will be able to understand:

Policy Process Ethics, such as: who gets what & how; the role of stakeholders versus non-stakeholders in public policy; the controversial power of committees, experts & iron triangles; the controversial role of interest groups in the system; the power that forces outside of a congressional district play upon a representative;

Institutional Ethics, such as: the power of committees and seniority in Congress; the decline of Congress as the most important and powerful policy institution; the rise of the president as the Chief Legislative officer; and strong versus weak executives;

Political-Process Ethics, such as: how congressional seats are purposely made safe instead of competitive; the rise of political polarization;

Electoral Ethics, such as: whether the electoral college is outdated; the role of money in campaigns; whether it is time for America to switch to a different election system, such as proportional representation and multi-party systems;

Legal Ethics, such as: judicial activism v. restraint; the need for an independent judiciary and law enforcement; the legitimacy of judicial review.

Students will demonstrate their understanding of ethical issues in class discussion exercises and in the essay exams. For example, they will discuss how gerrymandering is affecting American democracy.

d) Demonstrate, from a social science perspective, an understanding of the responsibilities of an informed and engaged citizen.

Students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of the responsibilities of an informed and engaged citizen, by learning about:

The historical creation of the independent three-branch system American government, including its historical precursors in Rome and England (Glorious Revolution);

The nature of the federal system, from its origins in agrarian culture to its modern incarnation in the age of the active state;

The nature of forces that aggregate politics, such as public opinion, the media, campaigns and mass political participation;

The role and development of political parties; the two party system and of “third-parties”; and the electoral system and national elections;

The creation and development of the modern presidency, the modern bureaucracy and administrative state; and of Congress and the Supreme Court

The policy process, party platforms, interest groups, experts, policy networks and subsystems

American political culture and political ideologies; the difference between civil liberties and civil rights; the struggle for a society free from racial and social prejudice; and the basic inalienable rights that comprise the American liberty state.

Through their performance in in-class discussion and on their essays, students will demonstrate that they understand the responsibilities of an informed and engaged citizen. For example, they will consider the parallels between the various struggles for equality.

III. MULTICULTURAL OUTCOMES

Multicultural Outcomes

- a)** Demonstrate knowledge of cultural, economic, social, political or racial diversities in the United States or throughout the world
- b)** Apply the methods of inquiry of the natural sciences, social sciences or the arts and humanities to understand cultural, economic, social or racial diversity
- c)** Demonstrate an understanding of contemporary social or ethical issues related to diversity
- d)** Demonstrate skills required to engage in an informed and respectful way with diverse people, cultures, and histories.

PLS 2120 will meet the Multicultural Learning Outcomes by providing the following content and will be measured by the following range of methods:

- a) Demonstrate knowledge of cultural, economic, social, political or racial diversities in the United States or throughout the world.**

In studying American government and politics, students gain a sense of the diversity (economic, social, political, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic, and racial, etc.) existing within the US, as well as a greater understanding of competing interests and the complex relationships between populations within the US and internationally.

Students will demonstrate that they have a sense of this through their performance on exams, quizzes[w2], with the use of student response cards, and in class discussion. For example, students will be able to identify strategic and tactical divides among movements for racial equality in the US.

b) Apply the methods of inquiry of the natural sciences, social sciences or the arts and humanities to understand cultural, economic, social or racial diversity.

Students will become familiar with the different research methodologies used in social science to analyze American government and politics. The course will employ qualitative and quantitative research from political science to examine contemporary issues including institutions, political processes, and political behaviors and cultures, among others.

Students will demonstrate their ability to apply these methods through their performance on exams and quizzes, with the use of student response cards, and in class discussion. For example, students will be asked provide a narrative summing up a series of quantitative data about how voting rights laws impact different groups.

c) Demonstrate an understanding of contemporary social or ethical issues related to diversity.

Students will be asked to consider many of the ethical questions that citizens and governments face in addressing social problems and making policy choices. Students will understand why an informed citizenry is critical to the functioning of a democratic society and state. The course promotes meaningful engagement through informed awareness by highlighting the similarities and differences between groups and within them. Through this process students will become more aware of their own position in society and how they attained their own worldviews, their biases, and how all of this affects their behaviors and actions.

Students will demonstrate these abilities in class discussion, with the use of student response cards, and through their performance on exams and quizzes. For example, students will be asked to sort through arguments to assess the extent of gender inequality currently existing in the US.

d) Demonstrate skills required to engage in an informed and respectful way with diverse people, cultures, and histories.

Students will understand why an informed citizenry is critical to the functioning of a democratic society and state. Through class and group discussion exercises about the development of American government and the American political system, students will learn about the contributions and challenges faced by a diverse range of individuals and groups. In

addition, students will be asked to consider how they acquired their own worldviews, to locate their bias and become aware of any faulty assumptions that are ingrained. This self-awareness will be developed through class and group discussion of important contemporary issues touching upon rights and liberty, such as mass incarceration, reproductive rights, immigration, and the war on terror.

In class discussions^[w3] students will exercise listening, critical thinking and other skills and work to make connections, develop a fuller understanding of, and empathize with people whose experiences and worldview may be different than their own.