

## PLS 2120 American National Government

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*“A people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.”*

James Madison, 1822

### COURSE DESCRIPTION

Welcome to American National Government. This class aims to equip you to be a well-informed citizen who sees the complexity, the flaws, and the promise of the American political system. As James Madison stated, in order for democracy to flourish, we need to be armed with knowledge. Unfortunately, many Americans are ill-informed or uninterested in the political process. To the untrained observer, American government can often seem confusing, frustrating, mean-spirited, and dominated by self-interested elites and corporations. However, politics is a process by its very nature designed to take these preferences and combine them with those of everyone else, enacting policy decisions in a peaceful manner. Given this goal, what expectations should we have of our political system and how well do we believe it represents the will of the public?

The goal of this course is to introduce you to political science as a discipline while teaching you the fundamentals of government and politics in the United States. The aim of this class is *not* to teach you what to think about politics nor a venue for you to attempt to convince others of your political views. Rather, the goal of this class is to teach you how to think critically about politics and to understand how political scientists understand and study politics. At the end of this course, you should understand the systemic forces - the rules, structures, and procedures - that structure politics as practiced in the United States. Moreover, you should have the tools to assess critically the causal claims made by politicians and journalists, to be a conscientious consumer of political information, and to understand how political parties, the media, and interest groups interact with political institutions to affect policy change in the United States.

### LEARNING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The course seeks to enable students to:

- 1) Comprehend how America’s unique social, geographical, and political history influenced the design of the U.S. Constitution.
- 2) Explain how power is divided between federal, state, and local government.
- 3) Identify and explain the structures, functions, interactions, and development of the three branches government established by the Constitution and other extra-Constitutional political institutions (including political parties, interest groups, and the news media).
- 4) Assess the relationship between individuals and the government with regard to rights, liberties, and representation.
- 5) Analyze participation in the American electoral process including public opinion, voting, and interest groups.

## ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR

I am an associate professor in the Department of Political Science at Wright State University. I joined the department in the fall of 2015 after completing my Ph.D. in political science at Penn State University with a concentration in American politics. I grew up in Virginia and graduated from Virginia Tech with a B.A. in History and M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction. I have published research in two key areas: the adoption and development of marijuana policies in the states and how political issues diffuse into secondary education curricula and pedagogy.<sup>1</sup> It is in the field of education where I have studied how political polarization affects the behavior of teachers.

I live in Vandalia with my wife (Jillian), 2-year-old son (Henry), 4 cats (Amelia, Orville, Poppy, Tilly) and dog (June). I'm a big sports fan (NFL, NBA, CFB, and tennis), love music and guitar, and I'm a big fan of comedies and sitcoms (The Office, Parks and Rec, Arrested Development, Brooklyn Nine-Nine, etc.). And since I've received one too many emails to "Ms./Mr./Dr. Lee," please note that my first name is "Lee" and last name is "Hannah." I prefer to be called Dr. Hannah or Professor Hannah.

## COURSE DESIGN

It is likely that many of you selected an online course because you need the flexibility of an online course for your schedule. This course is designed to give you maximum flexibility. However, it is also important that we move through the material at the same time – I don't want you to get too far behind nor do I want you to get too far ahead. I expect this course to be comparable to an on-campus course, therefore you will have assignments spread out over the fifteen-week period.

The course will be laid out with new material each week. **The course material for the week will be posted on Mondays and will be due on the following Wednesday before midnight**, so you will have nine days to complete the first unit and 16 days to complete each of the additional units (16 days between having access to the material and them being due).

This also means that two units will overlap for a few days. So, you should consider your own schedule and plan accordingly. *You can neither knock out the entire course during the first week of the term nor can you blow off this course until the end of the semester and try to complete everything at the end.* You should reserve time in your schedule to work on this course on a weekly basis.

## VIDEO LECTURES

Video lectures will be recorded and posted with the corresponding unit. They serve to both synthesize and reinforce the readings and to introduce some new concepts that are not directly covered in the reading. **Students are expected to watch each video lecture before completing the assignments.**

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<sup>1</sup> If you're interested, you can access my publications on my [Google Scholar](#) page.

## EXPECTATIONS

- 1) **Engagement:** You are expected to engage with the course material in a timely manner, including viewing lectures, and to be aware of Wright State's policies regarding the course. See Wright State's Add/Drop Policy [Wright State's Add/Drop Policy](#) and [Wright State's Excused Absence Policy](#).
- 2) **Netiquette:** We are living in the midst of a very polarizing political era. On occasion, we will be discussing controversial current events in this course in the discussion forums. There will inevitably be divergent opinions, some of them very strong, amongst the class. It is important that you be respectful of your peers and their opinions, lived experiences, and beliefs.
- 3) **Do Not Suffer in Silence:** Please do not suffer in silence throughout the course if you are struggling. Instead, let me know - as soon as possible - what things are not making sense and we can work it out. **If you are having a problem of any kind in the course, please talk to me about it as soon as possible.** This is especially important in an online class.
- 4) **Academic Honesty:** All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without proper citation) will be tolerated. Please consult the [Code of Student Conduct](#) for academic integrity.
- 5) **COVID-19 Disclaimer:** Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented a number of challenges that we would have thought were unthinkable a few months ago. I understand how the pandemic may affect your ability to focus, and how it might impact you directly – either through job loss and new financial pressures or through you or a loved one getting the virus. I will do everything in my power to work with you if this happens – please just let me know so that we can devise a plan. At the same time, I or my loved ones could be impacted by the coronavirus, which may lead to some adjustments in the schedule. I think kindness and patience can go a long way during this time.

## MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE

PLS 2120 is designated as a multicultural competence (MC) course. Multicultural competence is the ability in personal and professional contexts to interact respectfully and effectively with diverse individuals and groups in a manner that recognizes, affirms, and values the worth, and protects the rights and dignity, of all. To foster multicultural competence, the curriculum needs to provide opportunities for students to be able to:

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

## READINGS

The text for the course is available in online form and integrated with Pilot. The book has been charged to your account through student fees (\$28). However, if you prefer a paper copy, you are allowed to opt out of the text. The book is available in paper and on second hand markets (“Brief” and regular editions).

Abernathy, Scott. 2019. *American Government: Stories of a Nation*. Washington, D.C.: Sage CQ Press.

## ASSIGNMENTS

You have a number of assignments in order to allow you multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning. The assignments within each category are weighted equally.

- 1) **Reading Quizzes** (20% of final grade): You will complete a short multiple-choice quiz based on each chapter reading. The quizzes will be posted on Pilot and are open book and open notes - there is no time limit. The two lowest scores will be dropped.
- 2) **Lecture and Reading Responses** (30% of final grade): You will be asked to respond to lectures and readings – both within the interactive lectures and with short answer questions. These will be weighted evenly over the term. The two lowest scores will be dropped. During some weeks, you will have separate Word files with essays that you must complete. In other weeks, the reading responses are embedded within the lecture videos.
- 3) **Article Review** (20% of final grade): This assignment requires you to take an article from a valid news source and relate it to the course material. In this assignment, you will have an opportunity to apply the concepts that we are learning in class to the real-life political arena. (2 single-spaced pages. More specific directions and a rubric will be available on Pilot).
- 4) **Discussion Forums** (10% of final grade) – You will be asked to participate in a discussion forum a few times over the course of the semester. Directions will be provided in the prompt.
- 5) **Constitutional Amendment Project** (20% of final grade) - For your final project, you will take on the role of a member of the United States Congress who is proposing an amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Your goal in doing so is to explain to the American people what changes to the Constitution you are proposing, and why they should support ratification of this amendment.

**Make-Up Grades:** You are allowed to make up academic work only in the case of excused absences. These absences may include missing class for a University-sanctioned activity (with proper documentation), illness, religious observance, or family emergency. If you know in advance that you are going to miss a deadline, please contact me before the absence to make

arrangements to complete the work. If you get behind for an unexpected reason, please check in with me as soon as possible.

**Late Work Policy:** Assignments turned in late will be penalized 5% per day.

### **MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES**

Wright State University is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. We acknowledge that a variety of issues, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety and stress, substance abuse problems, and depression, directly impacts students' academic performance. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, contact the Counseling and Wellness Services at Wright State located in Student Union 053: <https://www.wright.edu/student-affairs/health-and-wellness/counseling-and-wellness>

### **DISABILITY**

Students with disabilities that have been certified by the Office of Disability Services will be appropriately accommodated. It is your responsibility to notify me during the first week of the semester if such accommodations are needed. If you have questions about this, contact the Office of Disability Services at 937-775-5680 or [disability\\_services@wright.edu](mailto:disability_services@wright.edu).

**COURSE SCHEDULE:** The following pages include information about each week of class.<sup>2</sup> The course materials will be posted on the corresponding Monday and will be due the following Wednesday. **All corresponding due dates are posted on Pilot.**

## **Unit I: Foundations of American Government**

### **August 24 – Course Introduction and Public Policy Problems**

Reading: Mills, C. Wright. 1959. "The Promise." Ch. 1 of *The Sociological Imagination* (pp.3-11), New York: Oxford University Press. [Posted on Pilot.]

Lecture: Public Policy Problems and the Role of Government

### **August 31 – Political Ideology**

Reading: Marietta, Morgan. (2012). *A Citizen's Guide to American Ideology: Conservatism and Liberalism in Contemporary Politics*. Introduction, Chapters 1, 4, 5, 8, and 9. [Posted on Pilot.]

Lecture: Political Ideology

### **September 7 - Understanding American Politics**

Reading: Abernathy Ch. 1

Lecture: Early American Politics

### **September 14 – Constitutional Foundations**

Reading: Abernathy Ch. 2

Lecture: American Constitutional Foundations

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<sup>2</sup> Students are responsible for knowing both university and course schedules. The academic calendar is available [here](#).

### **September 21 – Federalism**

Reading: Abernathy Ch. 3

Lecture: Federalism (Two Parts)

### **September 28 – Civil Rights and Liberties**

Reading: Abernathy Ch. 4

Lecture: Civil Rights and Liberties

## **Unit II: Institutions and Public Policy**

### **October 5 – Congress**

Reading: Abernathy Ch. 9

Lecture: The Structure of Congress, Congressional Elections

### **October 12 – The Presidency**

Reading: Abernathy Ch. 10

Lecture: The Presidency

**Article Review #1 due (see Pilot for due date)**

### **October 19 – The Federal Bureaucracy**

Reading: Abernathy Ch. 11

Lecture: The Federal Bureaucracy

### **October 26 – The Federal Judiciary**

Reading: Abernathy Ch. 12

Lecture: Federal Judiciary

## **Unit III: Political Behavior and Mass Politics**

### **November 2 – Public Opinion**

Reading: Abernathy Ch. 5

Lecture: Public Opinion, Results of Public Opinion Survey

### **November 9 – The Media**

Reading: Abernathy Ch. 6

Lecture: The Media

**Constitutional Amendment Project due (see Pilot for due date)**

### **November 16 – Parties, Elections, and Political Participation**

Reading: Abernathy Ch. 7

Lecture: Parties, Elections, and Participation

### **November 23 – Thanksgiving Week**

No new materials this week

## **November 30 - Interest Groups and Social Movements**

Reading: Abernathy Ch. 8

Lecture: Interest Groups and Social Movements