

Wright State University

Syllabus for PLS 2120, Sections 01 and 02 American National Government

Fall 2017

Section 01: T 5:00-7:40 PM, 112 Oelman Hall

Section 02: TR 2:00-3:20 PM, 401 Millett Hall

Instructor: Dr. Lee Hannah

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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 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 systematic forces - the rules, structures, and procedures - that structure politics as practiced in the United States. Moreover, you should have the tools to assess critically 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 is organized around several motivating questions. By the conclusion of the course you will be able to answer the following:

1. What does the Constitution mean and why do we have multiple layers of government?
2. How do decisions made by the Founders affect the current state of politics?
3. How does Washington operate?
4. How are citizen preferences represented by different government actors and agencies?
5. How do citizens think about and influence politics?
6. How do outside organizations, such as interest groups and the media influence politics?

Methods for Learning and Teaching: This course will contain a mix of lecture, class discussion, group assignments, and student exercises. It is vital for your own comprehension of the course material that you come to class prepared to discuss the readings.

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.

Expectations

Attendance: Your attendance in class is always expected. See [Wright State's Add/Drop Policy](#) and [Wright State's Excused Absence Policy](#).

Preparation and Participation: I expect you to read the assigned material before class and be able to discuss what you read in class.

Index cards: Please bring 3x5 index cards to class. You will turn in a reflection notecard at the end of each class.

Respectful Discussion: We all just went through a very polarizing and negative campaign season. We will be discussing controversial current events in this course. 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.

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.

Be Flexible: While the syllabus represents an agreement between us, I reserve the right to revise and modify it throughout the course if it is necessary to achieve our goals. Situations beyond either of our control can also emerge that require changes to the course. I will notify you of any changes made throughout the course and will try to announce any weather-related cancellations at least 2 hours in advance.

Cell Phones and Laptops: Please be respectful of your fellow students and me by silencing your cell phone during class and limiting laptop use to only class-related activity.

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.

Readings

The following book is required for the course:

Kollman, Ken. 2017. *The American Political System, 3rd Ed.*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Assignments

You have a number of assignments in order to allow you multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning. I will try to grade and return each assignment within a week. If you are finding any assignment challenging, please take advantage of my office hours to get further guidance.

Chapter Exercises (20% of final grade) I have posted an exercise that corresponds to each chapter of the text. You must complete two exercises of your choice on Chapters 2 through 7 (due October 17) and two exercises of your choice on Chapters 8 through 14 (due November 14).

Reading Forms (15% of final grade) There will be a [Google Form](#) posted on Pilot (and linked here in the syllabus) that asks a few basic questions about the readings. You will complete these once a week. I will use these to prepare the lectures and activities. These are due at 11:59PM each Monday night.¹

Exams (45% of final grade) You will have 3 exams over the course of the semester. The first two will be taken in in class period and the third and final exam (noncumulative) will be taken during exam week. The exam will include multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions.

Attendance and In-Class Exercises (20% of final grade) It is very important that you make every effort to attend class and participate in activities and assignments.

Grading

Course assignments, the percentage of your grade it makes up, and due date (also marked on course calendar) are listed below,

Assignment	Due Date	% of Grade
Exam #1	October 3	15%
Chapter Exercise #1	October 17	10%
Exam #2	October 31	15%
Chapter Exercise #2	November 14	10%
Exam #3	Exam Week	15%
Reading Forms	Weekly	15%
Attendance and Exercises	Weekly	20%

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 class, please contact me before the absence to make arrangements for completing the work. If you are absent for an unexpected reason, please check in with me as soon as possible. You will have one week from the day of your return to class to make up a missed assignment.

Late Work Policy: Assignments turned in late will be penalized 10% per day.

¹Starts in Week 2.

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.

Course Schedule²

We will attempt to follow this schedule as closely as possible, but we may take more time on some concepts and less time on others. All changes to the schedule will be announced in class or via e-mail. The chapter references are from the Kollman text, I recommend reading the chapters prior to Monday's class.

Unit I: Foundations of American Government: The Nationalization of Politics

Week of August 29 - 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.]

Week of September 5 - Understanding American Politics

Reading: Kollman Ch. 1

Week of September 12 - Constitutional Foundations

Reading: Kollman Ch. 2

Week of September 19 - Federalism

Reading: Kollman Ch. 3

Week of September 26 - Civil Rights and Liberties

Reading: Kollman Ch. 4

Tuesday October 3: Unit I Exam³

Unit II: Institutions of American Government

Week of October 3 - Congress

Reading: Kollman Ch. 5

Week of October 10 - The Presidency

Reading: Kollman Ch. 6

²Students are responsible for knowing both university and course schedules.

The academic calendar is available at: <https://www.wright.edu/registrar/academic-calendar>.

³Exam 1 covers Chapters 1-4. In Tuesday/Thursday class, we will take the exam during class on Tuesday. In class that only meets on Tuesday, we will move on to the next unit's material for the first half of class and take the exam during the second half.

Week of October 17 - The Bureaucracy

Reading: Kollman Ch. 7

Chapter Exercise #1 due⁴

Week of October 24 - The Judiciary

Reading: Kollman Ch. 8

Unit III: Political Behavior, Parties, Elections,

Week of October 31 -Public Opinion

Reading: Kollman Ch. 9

Tuesday, October 31: Unit II Exam⁵

Week of November 7 -Political Participation, Interest Groups and Social Movements

Reading: Kollman Ch. 10 and 11

Week of November 14 - Political Parties

Reading: Kollman Ch. 12

Chapter Exercise #2 due⁶

Week of November 21 -Elections and Campaigns

Reading: Kollman Ch. 13

Thursday, November 23: Thanksgiving Holiday

Week of November 28 - Mass Media and the Press

Reading: Kollman Ch. 14

Week of December 5 - Mass Media and the Press

Final Exam⁷

Section 01 Tuesday, December 12: 5:45-7:45 PM

Section 02 Thursday, December 14: 2:45-4:45 PM

⁴Submit to Dropbox by 11:59PM on October 17

⁵Exam II covers Chapters 5-8. In class that only meets on Tuesday, we will move on to the next unit's material for the first half of class and take the exam during the second half.

⁶Submit to Dropbox by 11:59PM on November 14

⁷Exam covers Unit III only and are held in the same classroom where the class meets