WESTFIELD STATE UNIVERSITY
Department of Political Science

Political Science 101
AMERICAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Summer Session II, 2012
On-Line (POLS 0101-501/11077)
2 July 2012-10 August 2012

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Office: Parenzo 110
Office Hours: by appointment

Note 1: For Westfield State students, this course earns 3 of the 9 required “Social Science” credits in the Common Core of Studies, and counts as the 3 required credits in the U.S. History & Government [HSGV] area.

Note 2: Students must log onto the PLATO Course Website and e-mail the instructor to confirm their enrollment in the course no later than Wednesday of Week #1.

Course Description

This course is a college-level introduction to American national government and politics. But this is not a glorified version of your high school civics course. Yes, we will use a textbook, but there the similarity ends. The authors and publisher of our text have made it very easy for us to examine not only the history and operation of American political institutions and processes but also to comprehend elements of continuity and change in the American political system and the social, cultural, and economic contexts in which these institutions have functioned and are functioning, as well as the nature and scope of the policies generated by those institutions and processes.

Our PLATO course website contains the syllabus, instructor announcements, exam question study lists, some of the instructor’s lecture notes from his daytime course, and additional readings. Students are expected to consult PLATO several times each week for updated information and announcements. The readings on PLATO will keep you up to date on important themes in the course and are considered part of the essential readings for the course. You will also find the assigned videos on PLATO (as well as transcripts for some).

Course Requirements and Grades

1. Six (6) weekly tests on material for each week. Each test counts 10% of course grade. 60% of course grade
2. Evaluation of two (2) videos on PLATO. Choice of subjects TBA. 10% each. 20% of course grade
3. Short paper (4-5 pages): Why is American government so dysfunctional? 20% of course grade

Each test will be posted on the PLATO Course Website no later than Noon each Monday and will be due no later than Noon the following Monday. Test questions should serve as your study guide and road map through the assigned readings, videos, and instructor’s lecture notes for each week.

Textbooks

A hard (paper) copy of the following textbook can be purchased from the College Bookstore for approximately $75., or an online version can be rented for 180 days directly from the publisher for approximately $43. Publisher can be reached at the following website: www.coursesmart.com/9780205826353. The Abramowitz book can be rented on-line via the same website for $9.

Course Outline & Assignment Schedule

Week 1. American Political Institutions
   The Constitution: Separation of Powers, Judicial Review, Federalism & the Hierarchy of Law
   The Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Branches of Government
   The Federal Bureaucracy
   The Media

Week 2. Civil Liberties & Civil Rights
   The Bill of Rights (with emphasis on the 1st Amendment) and Important Supreme Court Decisions
   The Desegregation Cases
   Women’s Rights and the Rights of Minorities

Week 3. Political Behavior in the American Political System
   Political Socialization & Public Opinion
   Interest Groups & Lobbying
   Political Parties: The Two-Party System—Pro & Con

Week 4. Elections & Voting
   Elections & Campaign Finance
   The 2000 & 2004 Presidential Elections
   The 2008 Presidential & Congressional Elections
   The 2010 Midterm Congressional Elections
   The 2012 Republican Primaries, Caucuses, Debates & Issues
   The Growth of Super PACs

Week 5. Policymaking in American Politics
   Social Policy: Health Care Reform
   Economic Policy: The Financial Crisis

Week 6. American Politics & Political Culture Today & Tomorrow
   The Obama Presidency: Challenges and Accomplishments
   Is Washington Broken?: Is Congress Dysfunctional?
   Is American Ungovernable?: The Tea Party & Occupy Wall Street
   Why American Government is So Dysfunctional