

WESTFIELD STATE UNIVERSITY  
Department of Political Science

# Political Science 101

## AMERICAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Fall, 2013  
Parenzo 109  
M&W 1:40-2:55 PM (POLS 0101- 005/10070)

Professor F. Fleron  
Office: Parenzo 110  
Office Hours: M&W 3:00-4:00  
& by appointment

### 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.

The overarching theme of the course will be the question: Who Governs? During the first two months of the course we will focus on American political institutions, political behavior, and voting and elections (with special attention to the 2012 Presidential & Congressional elections). Then we will examine the policymaking process and attempts by the Obama administration to deal with the current financial crisis and the reform of health care. Finally, we will consider the questions of broken government in the United States and whether America is governable.

Students must write a 6-8 page term paper analyzing the contemporary struggle over voting rights in the United States.

Our PLATO course website contains the syllabus, instructor announcements, exam question study lists, some of the instructor's lecture notes, and additional readings. Students are expected to consult PLATO at least twice a 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 many assigned Videos on PLATO (and transcripts for some).

Course grades will be determined by the formula stated below. Both the midterm and final exams will be a combination of short answer identifications (IDs) and short essays. Sample essay topics and lists of IDs will be distributed in class well in advance of each exam and will serve as your study guides for the course. All exam questions will be taken from these lists; hence, these lists should serve as your roadmaps through this course.

### Course Requirements and Grades

	<u>% of Course Grade</u>
1. Two Midterm Exams (10% each)	20%
2. Two Video Analysis Papers (3-4 pages each) (10% each)	20%
3. Term Paper (6-8 pages)	20%
4. Final Exam	20%
5. Class Attendance (Class Attendance grade lowered by ½ letter grade for each unexcused absence)	20%
6. Participation in class discussions will be rewarded with extra credit that will substantially increase course grade	

### Textbooks

Cost of textbook from the College Bookstore is approximately \$87.

Karen O'Connor, Larry Sabato & Alixandra Yanus, *Essentials of American Government: Roots and Reform* (2012 Election Edition only).

# Course Outline

## TOPIC I. AMERICAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Lesson #1: Introduction to the Course; The Political and Economic Landscape

Lesson #2: The United States Constitution: Separation of Powers & Judicial Review; Federalism and the Hierarchy of Law

Lesson #3: The Legislative Branch

Lesson #4: The Presidency; The Executive Branch & the Federal Bureaucracy

Lesson #5: The Judicial Branch

## TOPIC II. CIVIL LIBERTIES & CIVIL RIGHTS

Lesson #6: Civil Liberties I: The Bill of Rights (with emphasis on the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment) and Important Supreme Court Decisions

Lesson #7: Civil Liberties II: Habeas Corpus, The Patriot Act & The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)

Lesson #8: Civil Rights I: The Desegregation Cases

Lesson #9: Civil Rights II: Women's Rights and the Rights of Minorities

Exam #1 on Topics I & II

## TOPIC III. POLITICAL BEHAVIOR IN THE AMERICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

Lesson #10: The Fourth Branch of Government: The Media; Political Socialization & Public Opinion

Lesson #11: Interest Groups & Lobbying

Lesson #12: Political Parties in American Politics; The Two-Party System—Pro & Con

## TOPIC IV. ELECTIONS AND VOTING

Lesson #13: Elections & Campaign Finance; Is Congress Dysfunctional & Pre-occupied with Re-election?

Lesson #14: The 2000 & 2004 Presidential Elections: Suppressing the Vote & Election Fraud; The 2008 Presidential & Congressional Elections

Lesson #15: The 2010 Midterm Congressional Elections;

Lesson #16: The Obama Presidency, 2009-2012; The 2012 Presidential Election Campaign & Election; The Growth of Super PACs

Lesson #17: Threats to Democracy in the 2012 Election Cycle; The 2013 Struggle Over Voting Rights; Rebranding the Republican Party

Exam #2 on Topics III & IV

## TOPIC V. POLICYMAKING IN AMERICAN POLITICS

Lesson #18: The Policy-making Process & Social Policy I: Health Care Reform I—Problem Recognition

Lesson #19: Social Policy II: Health Care Reform II—Agenda Setting & Policy Formulation

Lesson #20: Social Policy III: Health Care Reform III—Policy Adoption; Policy Implementation & Evaluation: Obamacare & the Supreme Court

Lesson #21: Economic Policy I: The Financial Crisis—Problem Recognition I: What Happened and Why Did It Happen?; Agenda Setting

Lesson #22: Economic Policy II: The Financial Crisis—Policy Formulation: FRAUD

Lesson #23: Economic Policy III: The Financial Crisis—Policy Formulation, Policy Adoption, Policy Implementation & Policy Evaluation

## TOPIC VI. AMERICAN POLITICS & POLITICAL CULTURE TODAY & TOMORROW

Lesson #24: Is Washington Broken; Is America Ungovernable?: The Rich Get Richer *Because* the Poor Get Poorer

Lesson #25: Has America Lost Its Ability to Function as a Democratic Nation?: The Unstable State in a Time of Unraveling