

WESTFIELD STATE UNIVERSITY  
Department of Political Science

## Political Science 101

# AMERICAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Fall, 2014  
Professor F. Fleron

Office: Parenzo 110  
Office Hours: by appointment only

**“A great democracy does not make it harder to vote than to buy an assault weapon.”**

**Bill Clinton on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on August 29, 2013, the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream Speech.”**

### Course Description

This course is a college-level introduction to American national government and politics. But this is not just 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 those institutions have functioned and are functioning, as well as the nature and scope of the policies generated by those institutions and processes. Your instructor has chosen to place heavy emphasis on the outputs of government and the political process in this course. As a result, we will spend considerable time and effort on attempting to comprehend the policymaking and policy implementation processes in American national government and politics.

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 campaign spending and voter suppression). 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, whether America is ungovernable, and whether the United States has lost its ability to function as a democratic nation.

Our PLATO course website contains the syllabus, instructor announcements, exam question study lists, some of the instructor’s lecture notes, videos, and additional readings on topics not adequately covered by the textbook. 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 as noted on the Reading & Video Assignment Schedule). Students should be sure that their WSU e-mail boxes are not full so that they are able to receive important notices and communications from this Instructor in a timely fashion and thereby not seriously compromise their ability to perform well in this course.

Course grades will be determined by the formula stated below. Both the midterm and final exams will consist of several essay questions. Sample essay questions will be posted on the Left Sidebar of the PLATO Course Website well in advance of each exam and should serve as your study guides for the course. All exam questions will be taken from these lists; hence, the lists should serve as your roadmaps through this course. I do not expect you to learn everything in the textbook, PLATO readings, and videos; but I do expect you to learn everything of relevance in those sources that relates to the study questions.

### Course Requirements and Grades

	<u>% of Course Grade</u>
1. Online Midterm Exam	25%
2. Online Final Exam	25%
3. Term Paper (6-8 page paper analyzing the contemporary struggle over voting rights and voter suppression)	30%
4. Participation in discussions in Student Lounge	20%
(Students will be graded on the quality & quantity of their discussions of course materials and Exam Study Questions)	

### Textbook

**Karen O’Connor, Larry Sabato & Alixandra Yanus, *Essentials of American Government: Roots and Reform***  
(2012 Election Edition only) Cost of textbook from the College Bookstore is approximately \$87.

## 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, Checks & Balances & Judicial Review; Federalism and the Hierarchy of Law
- Lesson #3: The Legislative Branch
- Lesson #4: The Executive Branch & 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), the NSA & Edward Snowden
- Lesson #8: Civil Rights I: The Desegregation Cases
- Lesson #9: Civil Rights II: Women's Rights and the Rights of Minorities

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

- Lesson #10: The Media, Political Socialization & Public Opinion
- Lesson #11: Interest Groups & Lobbying
- Lesson #12: Political Parties: The Two-Party System—Pro & Con

## **Online Midterm Exam on Topics I - III**

### TOPIC IV. ELECTIONS AND VOTING

- Lesson #13: Elections & Campaign Finance: Is Congress Dysfunctional & Preoccupied with Re-election?
- Lesson #14: The 2000 & 2004 Presidential Elections: Suppressing the Vote & Election Fraud
- Lesson #15: The 2008, 2010 & 2012 Elections; The Obama Presidency
- Lesson #16: Threats to Democracy in the 2012 Election Cycle: The Growth of Super PACs; New Jim Crow Laws, Gerrymandering & Voter Suppression

### TOPIC V. POLICYMAKING IN AMERICAN POLITICS: YOUR GOVERNMENT IN ACTION & YOUR GOVERNMENT INACTION

- Lesson #17: The Policy-making Process; Social Policy I: Public Health, Public Health Policy & Public Health Law (Medicare, Medicaid); Income Security Policy (Social Security, Unemployment & Disability Insurance, SSI, ADC, SNAP)
- Lesson #18: Social Policy II: Health Care Reform I—Problem Recognition, Agenda Setting & Policy Formulation
- Lesson #19: Social Policy III: Health Care Reform II—Policy Adoption & Policy Implementation
- Lesson #20: Social Policy IV: Health Care Reform III—Policy Evaluation; Obamacare & the Supreme Court; Rollout Problems
- Lesson #21: Economic Policy I: The Financial Crisis I—Problem Recognition: What Happened & Why Did It Happen—Inside the Meltdown, Moral Hazard vs. Systemic Risk
- Lesson #22: Economic Policy II: The Financial Crisis II—Agenda Setting, Policy Formulation & Policy Adoption: Derivatives, Fraud, Toxic Assets, Unemployment, Foreclosures & Bailouts
- Lesson #23: Economic Policy III: The Financial Crisis III— Policy Adoption, Policy Implementation, Policy Evaluation & New Problem Recognition
- Lesson #24: The Intersection of Social & Economic Policy: The Politics of Poverty & Inequality in America

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

- Lesson #25: Is Washington Broken?
- Lesson #26: Is America Ungovernable?: The Tea Party & Occupy Wall Street
- Lesson #27: Rebranding the Republican Party: The Republican Party Attempts to Reinvent Itself
- Lesson #28: Has America Lost Its Ability to Function as a Democratic Nation?

## **Term Papers Due**

## **ONLINE FINAL EXAM on Topics IV-VI**