

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

Professor F. Fleron  
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

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|--|---------------------|
| 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 **on-line 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](http://www.coursesmart.com/9780205826353). The Abramowitz book can be rented on-line via the same website for \$9.

Karen O'Connor, Larry Sabato & Alixandra Yanus, *Essentials of American Government: Roots and Reform* (2011 ed. only).  
Alan I. Abramowitz, *The Polarized Public? Why American Government is So Dysfunctional*.

## **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 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment) and Important Supreme Court Decisions  
Habeas Corpus, The Patriot Act & The National Defense Authorization Act  
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