

American National Government
Summer II 2010, July 6-August 16
Section POLS0101-501 DGCE Online

Course URL: TBD

Instructor: Amanda Kirk

Office Hours: By Appointment

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This course will provide a basic introduction to the design and organization of the government of the United States, how our government obtains power and legitimacy, why there is so much emphasis on democracy as an ideal form of government, what forms of political participation exist today, and why so few citizens take advantage of them. In the process, you will learn how political scientists approach the study of politics and how you can apply what you are learning to your life as a citizen in one of the world's major democratic regimes. At the completion of this course, you should have a basic understanding of the roles of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches of our federal government and how they interact and overlap, as well as significant insight into the powers and functions of the bureaucracy, political parties, interest groups, and the media. This course will cover the history and origins of our governmental system, but we will also keep an eye on current political events, especially the changes wrought by the last presidential election.

Requirements and Grading:

1) Weekly participation 20%

Your final participation grade will be based on your contributions to the weekly online discussion threads. Each week you must, at a *minimum*, post once in each thread. Posts must be substantive – “I agree” and “me, too”-type comments *do not count* as participation. You may respond to questions that I pose, respond to questions that other students pose, make comments, post links to relevant news articles, and pose questions of your own. Doing only the minimum one-substantive-post-per-thread will earn you a passing grade for participation; it will not earn you an “A.”

2) Current Events Articles 5% (2 x 2.5% each)

Although this class will take a historical and theoretical approach to the study of politics, we will endeavor to connect general concepts with real world examples and current events. To this end, it is expected that you will begin to peruse, if you are not doing so already, a number of newspapers, political blogs, journals, and other sources of information on U.S. and world politics and the workings of governments. I will post a list of websites online that cross the political spectrum. It is by no means exhaustive. You can Google as well as I can, so do not consider yourselves limited to these sites. I encourage you to read analyses of current events from a variety of sources and perspectives.

At least *twice* during the term, you must post a link to an article that you can relate to course material. You will post a link to the article, plus a written statement of at least one double-spaced page relating it to course content. This statement should not merely summarize the article, but analyze it in light of what we are learning about the workings of American national government. You are encouraged to find two pieces on the same issue or event written from different ideological perspectives, but note that they will count together as one article for grading purposes. I will provide an “Articles” thread in the Discussion section for this assignment. Discussion of articles posted by other students will count toward your participation grade, so please read the thread. Do not post your two articles and then ignore the thread for the rest of the semester. In order to encourage early posting of articles, I am imposing two rules: 1) one article must be posted before the midterm and one after; and, 2) no articles can be posted the last week of class. Do not procrastinate!

3) Writing assignments 50% (5 x 10% each)

These 2-3 page assignments will give you an opportunity to improve your academic writing skills and to demonstrate your comprehension of the weekly readings. Assignments will be graded on both substance and form, so prepare to learn the expectations of formal writing and proofreading. You will also be expected to develop and exhibit proper citation habits.

4) Midterm 10%

The midterm will consist of essay questions to be answered in 2-3 pages each. It will be posted one week prior to the due date. You may use all of your course materials but you will not find the answers in the textbook as the questions will be designed to assess your understanding and synthesis of the readings, not merely your ability to mine them for facts or definitions.

5) Final exam 15%

The final exam will contain one major essay question that will test your comprehension of the course materials and ability to apply the concepts that we have covered.

Course Policies:

- Each weekly module will be posted by 9am on Monday.
- Weekly assignments and participation in discussions that count towards your weekly participation grade are due by 9am the following Monday.
- Plagiarism will result in an automatic F for the assignment. If you are not sure what constitutes plagiarism, look it up or ask me or someone at the Writing Center. Ignorance will not be accepted as an excuse. The official WSC policy on academic honesty can be found here: http://www.wsc.ma.edu/Current_Students/Student_Handbook/Academic_Life/Academic_Honesty_Policy.html
- If you are entitled to accommodations for any special needs, let me know in advance. I am willing to accommodate all reasonable requests, but I will not grant accommodations retroactively or without prior communication to me that a special need exists.

Materials:

The textbook listed below is available for purchase at the WSC campus bookstore. It is available for purchase much less expensively online. Be sure to check the edition if you buy a used copy.

Patterson, Thomas E., *We the People: A Concise Introduction to American Politics, Eighth Edition* (New York: McGraw Hill, December 2008) ISBN: 978-0-07-337896-1

Other reading, viewing, and listening materials not listed on the syllabus will be assigned and posted/linked on Plato.

Course Outline and Readings

Week 1: July 6-11

- Introduction
- Taking it from the top: *Declaration of Independence* (Patterson: Appendix A-1)
- Patterson, Preface & Chapter 1
- Writing Assignment #1
- Patterson, Chapter 2

- The Constitution of the United States (Patterson: Appendix A-5)

Week 2: July 12-18

- Patterson, Chapter 3: Federalism
- Federalist No. 10 & Federalist No. 51 (in Patterson Appendix)
- Writing Assignment #2
- Patterson, Chapter 4: Civil Liberties

Week 3: July 19-25

- Patterson, Chapter 5: Civil Rights
- Writing Assignment #3
- Patterson, Chapter 6: Public Opinion

Week 4: July 26-August 1

- Patterson, Chapter 7: Individual Political Participation
- Midterm distributed
- Patterson, Chapter 8: Political Parties
- **AUGUST 1: Midterm due**

Week 5: August 2-8

- Patterson, Chapter 9: Interest Groups and Lobbying
- Patterson, Chapter 10: Politics filtered through the Media
- Writing Assignment #4
- Patterson, Chapter 11: Legislative Branch

Week 6: August 9-15

- Patterson, Chapter 12: Executive Branch
- Writing Assignment #5
- Patterson, Chapter 13: Bureaucracy
- Patterson, Chapter 14: Judicial Branch
- Final Exam Review
- Final Exam: Posted on August 16 and due August 22