

**POLITICAL SCIENCE 201  
AMERICAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT**

**BULLETIN INFORMATION**

**POLI 201** - American National Government (3 credit hours)

**Course Description:**

The formation and development of the national government, its organization and powers

**SAMPLE COURSE OVERVIEW**

This course is an introduction to the formation and development of U.S. national government, its politics, organization, powers, and citizenship practices. We will apply basic political science methodology as we survey and analyze many of the fundamental ideals, institutions, and outcomes of the American national government towards the end of assessing the health of American democracy and citizenship. We will examine elements of American politics including the founding era, federalism and separation of powers, civil rights and civil liberties, elections, voting, and political participation, various mediating groups (i.e. interest groups, political parties, the media), the main political institutions (Congress, the courts, the president) and public opinion. Students will be expected to learn various descriptive facts about American politics; to employ theoretical frameworks from political science and related disciplines such as economics and psychology to explain political phenomena; and to consider alternative interpretations of the ways politics works in practice as well as the influence of cultural diversity on contemporary political issues. Moreover, students will consider the source and relevance of values in decision making with respect to the resolution of political conflict and controversies.

**ITEMIZED LEARNING OUTCOMES**

**Upon successful completion of Political Science 201, students will be able to:**

1. Express an informed opinion about the health of the American democracy and citizenship based the upon the various social and political science theories and analytical methodologies we examine in class;
2. Define and explain not only the broad principles, ideals, and ethical values, but also the debates and compromises that accompanied the founding of the American republic and that still often animate its politics, including the role of cultural diversity;
3. Explain and analyze the logic of the American constitutional system, as envisioned by its framers, as well as the tensions and shortcomings of that system, and its relationship to social well-being and the resolution of conflict;
4. Explain and analyze the internal dynamics and interplay of the three main branches of the U.S. government and the questions of separated authority, check-and-balance, and accountability that still exist;

5. Demonstrate understanding of what shapes American citizenship and participation and the various processes, barriers, opportunities, institutions, and mediating groups that have helped or hindered equity and democratic responsiveness.

### **SAMPLE REQUIRED TEXTS/SUGGESTED READINGS/MATERIALS**

1. Textbook: The required textbook for this course is *We the People: An Introduction to American Politics*, shorter eighth edition, by Benjamin Ginsberg, Ted Lowi, and Margaret Weir. It can be purchased through the Russell House Book Store. Ask them for assistance because they have various pricing options including an on-line edition.
2. On-Line Readings: Outside of the course textbook there are additional required readings found under our class Blackboard section entitled "Required On-Line Readings."
3. i-clicker: To facilitate in-class participation, quizzes, simulations, and other learning exercises, students also need to purchase a "clicker" or "i-clicker" (electronic response card), which is available through the Russell House bookstore.

### **SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS AND/OR EXAMS**

1. **Participation Assignments:** Although this is a lecture course, we will use the i-clicker for frequent in-class participation assignments so as to spark discussion and to better convey course concepts. Among other class participation assignments, there are four official **Class Debates**. You must sign-up to write a **paper** for one (1) of these debates. On the designated day (see 'Schedule'), you must submit a 2 page (double-spaced) typewritten response where you:
  - a. Summarize the thesis and conclusions of the two authors assigned
  - b. Further demonstrate your command of the readings by responding to a specific debate question posed for that debate. (All work must be your original work – see the Academic Integrity policy below.)
  - c. For the last 15 minutes of the class, the professor will call on volunteers (on both sides of the debate question) to quickly state their responses; and the class will take an i-clicker vote to register our opinions on the debate question. Debates, along with ongoing reading assignments and class discussion, comprise a substantial component of the course's attention to critical thinking about local and global political issues – and their social and ethical implications in particular – as well as providing an assessment of student mastery of the various ways in which cultural diversity impacts political issues and behavior.
2. **Quizzes:** There will be at several quizzes; the exact number is up to the discretion of the instructor. These quizzes are not listed on the syllabus because the professor needs the flexibility to determine the best time for each. At the end of the semester, the professor will drop the lowest quiz grade. There are no make-up quizzes.
3. **Exams:** The First and Second Exams are in-class and closed-book exams. The Third Exam is the same format and is scheduled on the final exam date according to the University final exam schedule. Each of the three will be comprised of several multiple choice questions and short-answer essays with the latter sometimes based on the on-line readings. Although the lectures and the texts are the basis for the exams, the lectures

will not strictly follow the texts. So it is important to take good notes in lecture, read, and participate in class discussion and reviews. In addition to the subject-specific material of the course, the exams are the primary means of assessing student achievement with respect to the application of social science theories and analytical methodologies, as covered throughout the course.

- 4. Debate Ground rules:** As you know, various debates are at the heart of American politics and we can expand our understanding by engaging in and analyzing some of these debates. But we need common ground rules to ensure our debates are both open and civil. Everyone must abide by these rules:
- a. **Speak and then Listen:** If you disagree or even strongly disagree with a point of view that is just fine (and to be expected in a democracy); speak when you have your turn. But in turn fully listen to others to ensure you really understand the facts and the view they present.
  - b. **Challenge Ideas but not Persons:** You are free to challenge ideas or claims of others, but not to attack or to use sharp words against individuals or groups. Avoid phrases like, “They are just lazy” or “See, the problem with you conservatives...” Make an argument based on logic and evidence and not just rhetoric.

## **SAMPLE COURSE OUTLINE WITH TIMELINE OF TOPICS, READINGS/ASSIGNMENTS, EXAMS/PROJECTS**

Class 1      GSS 1, 3: Introduction to the Course  
Discussion of some of the key problems and issues of American politics, and how they relate to theories for analyzing and interpreting them; putting the U.S. political system in comparative (global) perspective

### **Section I: The Foundations of Citizenship**

Class 2 & 3      GSS 1, 2, & 3: Politics & American Political Culture  
Introduction to political issues of “who gets what, when, and how”, among others; discussion of the diversity of American polity and culture; discussion of the role of immigration in shaping the development and nature of American politics in relation to other nations.  
We the People, chap 1.

Class 4 & 5      GSS 1, 2, & 3: The Founding & the U.S. Constitution  
Political, sociological, and economic theories for understanding the founding and constitution-drafting era; the manner in which the Constitution addresses cultural diversity historically; the U.S. Constitution in comparison to state and national constitutions.  
We the People, chap. 2

Class 5      GSS 1, 2, & 3  
Debate Topic 1: “Was the Constitution flawed or flexible from the start?”

This debate activity and associated paper asks students to apply social science theories to define the issues and challenges embodied in the Constitution and the problems it was designed to address; students will draw from geographic variation in constitutional design to address the question as well. On-Line readings: Marshall vs. Reynolds – papers due.

Class 6 & 7 GSS 1, 2, & 3: Federalism and Separation of Powers  
Federalism is a constitutional structure that is midway between a unitary system (e.g., Great Britain) and a confederal system (e.g., Articles of Confederation) and has been adopted by other nations (e.g., Germany). Some of the questions addressed in this class include: What are the advantages and disadvantages of federalism? How does it afford flexibility in addressing social and cultural diversity? The separation of powers invites challenges to collective action, a common social phenomenon with which theorists have grappled since highlighted by economist Mancur Olson.  
We the People, chap. 3

Class 8 & 9 GSS 2 Civil Liberties & Civil Rights  
This unit focuses in particular on the incorporation of the various liberties identified in the Bill of Rights and the struggle for civil rights by African Americans. Contemporary controversies involving immigration, gender, sexuality, and expression are also highlighted.  
We the People, chaps. 4, 5

Class 10 GSS 1, 2, & 3  
EXAM # 1 (Covering Section I)  
Exam will cover the substantive core theoretical issues described above, and ask students to demonstrate their understanding of the ways that the Constitution has dealt with social differences (including gender, race, class, etc.). Students will also be asked to draw comparisons between American national government and national governments around the world.

## **Section II: Exercising Citizenship**

Class 11 & 12 GSS 1, 2, 3: Elections and Participation  
Social and behavioral theories of why voters choose to cast a ballot; how participation varies across demographic groups; why voter turnout is much lower in the U.S. than many other advanced democracies.  
We the People, chaps. 8, 10

Class 12 GSS 1, 2  
Debate Topic 2: “Will recent Voter Photo-ID laws prevent fraud or disenfranchise legitimate voters?”

This debate and associated paper asks students to link theories about voting behavior to a contemporary cultural issue arising from the diversity of the American electorate.

On-line readings: Davidson vs. von Spakovsky – papers due.

Class 13 & 14 GSS 1, 2, & 3: Ideology & Public Opinion  
Defines political science theories and methods for assessing ideology; the behavioral process of political socialization; perspectives the public holds on political and social questions; how these opinions vary demographically; public opinion and ideology in the U.S. compared to global politics.  
We the People, chap. 6

Class 15 & 16 GSS 1, 2, & 3: Political Parties  
Theories of the formation and conduct of political parties; American two-party system contrasted with party systems historically and globally; party identification as an example of cultural diversity.  
We the People, chap. 9

Class 16 GSS 1, 2  
Debate Topic 3: “Are ordinary American citizens as deeply divided as are political party leaders? Does division confuse or clarify politics?”  
This debate and associated paper asks students to define political polarization, interpret how polarization as a concept is measured, and analyze the relationship between polarization and social differences.  
On-line readings: Fiorina vs. Abramowitz and Saunders – papers due.

Class 17 & 18 GSS 1, 2: Interest Groups & the Media  
Examines the nature and diversity of the interest group world; the challenges to collective action and the resulting bias toward particular classes and groups; the role of the media  
We the People, chap. 11, 7

Class 19 GSS 1, 2, & 3  
EXAM # 2 (Covering Section II)  
Exam will cover the substantive core theoretical issues described above, ask students to demonstrate their understanding of the ways that political behavior is conditioned on certain cultural differences, and draw comparisons between American politics and political behavior in other nations.

### **Section III: Representing Citizenship**

Class 20 & 21 GSS 1, 2, & 3: The Congress  
Economic (rational choice) theories of legislative organization; examination of diversity in Congress related to the diversity of the American public (underrepresentation of women, racial/ethnic minorities, the disadvantages,

etc.) and discussion of implications; comparison of the U.S. Congress to subnational and other national-level legislatures.

We the People, chap. 12

Class 22 & 23 GSS 1, 3: The Presidency

Theories of presidential politics and management; evolution of the executive branch over time, and comparison to executive offices worldwide.

We the People, chap. 13

Class 24 & 25 GSS 1, 2: The Bureaucracy

Analytical perspectives on bureaucratic function and management drawn; proposals for bureaucratic reform; discussion of apolitical bureaucratic (technocratic) mechanisms for addressing cultural and social issues

We the People, chap. 14

Class 25 GSS 1, 2, 3

Debate Topic 4: "Should we repeal the new healthcare law? Will more government spending spur job growth?"

This debate and associated paper asks students to consider economic perspectives on health care reform, address the long-standing social and inequalities and disparities embodied in the pre-reform health care system; consider the ramifications of competing policies for reform, and contrast the U.S. health care system (in delivery and spending) with those of other advanced democracies.

Class 26 & 27 GSS 1, 2, & 3: The Judiciary

Role and evolution of the federal courts; theories of decision making; relevance of the courts as mediators of social and cultural conflict; comparison of the American judiciary with judicial functions in other nations

We the People, chap. 15

Class 28 Conclusion

**Final Exam according to University exam schedule**

GSS 1, 2, & 3 EXAM # 3 (Covering Section III)

Exam will cover the substantive core theoretical issues described above, ask students to demonstrate their understanding of the ways that political institutions are impacted by cultural differences and societal diversity, and draw comparisons between American politics and the nature and function of political institutions in other nations.