

**Pols 100-002: Introduction to American Government**  
**Fall Semester 2017**

Instructor: Richard Rivard

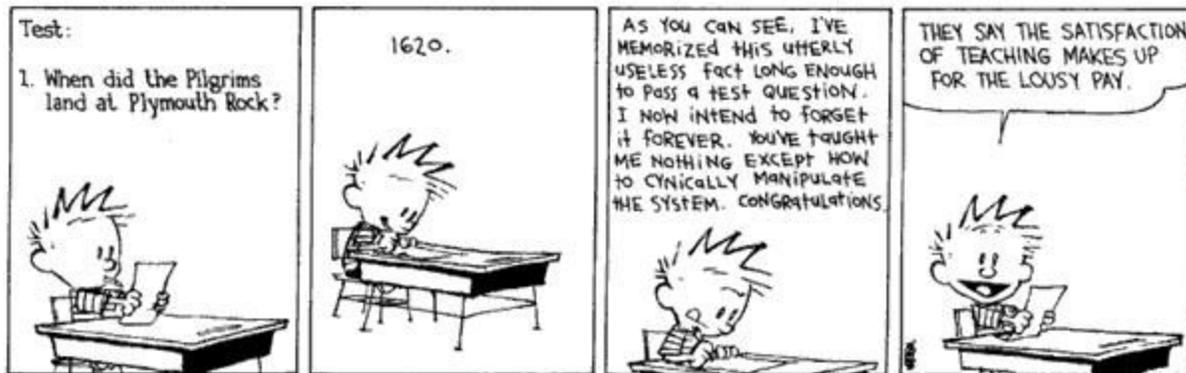
Class Time: Monday & Wednesday 2:00-3:15

Class Location: DuSable 461

Office Location: DuSable 476

Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday 12:00-1:30 and by appointment

Email: [rrivard1@niu.edu](mailto:rrivard1@niu.edu)



**Course Description:** This course offers an overview of the American political system. It examines the constitutional foundation of the system and its development over time. It analyzes the increasingly important role of campaigns and elections in contemporary American politics and how civic society and non-governmental entities, such as political parties, interest groups, and the media influence the policy-making process. It studies how the institutions of the federal government the Congress, the presidency, and the courts operate, both in theory and in practice, and how they interact with one another. Through the use of various tools, students learn to think analytically about American politics and the study of American government.

**Required Text:** Bardes, Shelley, Schmidt. American Government and Politics Today: The Essentials, 2017-2018 edition. Cengage with MindTap Online Resources.

**Course Format:** It is **EXTREMELY IMPORTANT** that you follow the instructions on the course Blackboard site and read the materials required to assist students in their learning goals. About every week we will cover a chapter from the text. The lectures alone will not sufficiently prepare you for the exams. You are responsible for all material in the text and in the classroom discussions. Readings are to be completed prior to that week's class sessions. Finally, the syllabus is a living document. This means it is likely to change, be adjusted, or altered over the

course of the semester. Dates of the exams will remain as will the dates of the assignments. However, the weekly subjects may be delayed or altered to reflect the pace and discussion the class is engaged in. I reserve the right to add or subtract readings to the syllabus.

**Assignments:** There will be 3 exams and a final this semester, for a total of FOUR EXAMS. Additionally there will be a presentation that is required to be given to the class towards the end of the semester. This assignment will be detailed further below in the syllabus. There will also be assigned online components that correspond to the week's assigned reading. The online aspect will count towards your overall participation grade.

**Grade Breakdown:**

Grade breakdown is as follows:

Exam 1 - 10%

Midterm - 25%

Exam 2 - 10%

Final - 25%

Speech & Paper - 20%

Participation - 10%

**Grading Scale:**

93-100 - A

90-93 - A-

87-90 - B+

83-87 - B

80-83 - B-

77-80 - C+

70-77 - C

60-69 - D

0-59 - F

**Classroom Etiquette:** Students are to arrive to class on time. Students are to remain for the entire session unless excused by the professor beforehand or confronted with a serious personal emergency. For instance, it is not acceptable for students to walk into and out of class to answer cell phones, take casual bathroom and smoking breaks, or attend to other personal matters. Cell phones, pagers, or any electronic devices that make noise must be turned off during class unless the instructor has been notified beforehand of a special circumstance (e.g., sick family member, pregnant wife, special childcare situation, etc.). No one should talk while someone else is talking; this includes comments meant for a classmate rather than the entire group. What may seem like a whisper or harmless remark to one person may be a distraction to someone else, particularly in a small room. Overall, classroom dialogue and behavior should always be courteous, respectful of others and consistent with the expectations set forth by the university.

**Academic Dishonesty:** Regarding plagiarism, the NIU Undergraduate Catalog states: "Students are guilty of plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books, magazines, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging them. Students guilty of, or assisting others in, either cheating or plagiarism on an assignment, quiz, or examination may

receive a grade of F for the course involved and may be suspended or dismissed from the university.” The above statement encompasses a paper written in whole or in part by another; a paper copied word-for-word or with only minor changes from another source; a paper copied in part from one or more sources without proper identification and acknowledgment of the sources; a paper that is merely a paraphrase of one or more sources, using ideas and/or logic without credit even though the actual words may be changed; and a paper that quotes, summarizes or paraphrases, or cuts and pastes words, phrases, or images from an internet source without identification and the address of the web site.

**Students with Disabilities:** Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, NIU is committed to making reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities. Those students with disabilities that may have an impact on their coursework must register with the Center for Access-Ability Resources (CAAR) on the fourth floor of the Health Services Building (753-1303). CAAR will assist students in making appropriate instructional and/or examination accommodations with course instructors. It is important that CAAR and instructors be informed of any disability-related needs during the first two weeks of the semester.

**Department of Political Science Web Site:** Undergraduates are strongly encouraged to consult the Department of Political Science web site on a regular basis. This up-to-date, central source of information will assist students in contacting faculty and staff, reviewing course requirements and syllabi, exploring graduate study, researching career options, tracking department events, and accessing important details related to undergraduate programs and activities. To reach the site, go to [polisci.niu.edu](http://polisci.niu.edu).

**Undergraduate Writing Awards:** The Department of Political Science will recognize, on an annual basis, outstanding undergraduate papers written in conjunction with 300-400 level political science courses or directed studies. Authors do not have to be political science majors or have a particular class standing. Winners are expected to attend the Department’s spring graduation ceremony, where they will receive a certificate and \$100.00. Papers, which can be submitted by students or faculty, must be supplied in triplicate to a department secretary by the end of March. All copies should have two cover pages - one with the student’s name and one without the student’s name. Only papers written in the previous calendar year can be considered for the award. However, papers completed in the current spring semester are eligible for the following year’s competition even if the student has graduated.

**Dondelinger:** Welcome to Remedial Science 1A. My wife recently passed away. I thought that maybe teaching would ease my loneliness.

**Homer:** Will this be on the test?

**Dondelinger:** No!

**Homer:** Ohhh. (erases note from his cheat sheet)

**Exams:** The exams will cover the material on the syllabus and in the course lectures from assigned chapters. For example the first exam will cover everything from the first chapter through the exam date. The Midterm will cover everything from the date of the beginning of the semester until the date of the exam. The third exam follows the same pattern everything from exam 2 through the date of the third exam. The Final will be comprehensive. This means material from the entire semester is fair game to appear on the Final exam. All exams will be online assessments and you will have a period of time to complete the exams. On the date of the exam the test will appear in Blackboard and you can complete at your leisure. There will be no class session on the date of the Midterm and the Final. I will not offer make up exams for students unless there is a proper emergency and I have been notified prior to the test date. There are computers throughout campus where the exam can be taken so the loss of a personal device does not constitute an emergency.

**“I know words, I have the best words.” - Donald J Trump 45th President of the United States**

**Speech & Paper Assignment:** Members of Congress deliver one minute speeches into the Congressional record. These range from honoring little league teams to reading names into the congressional record. This assignment derives its foundation from this practice. You will choose a topic of your own desire and deliver a short speech to the class on your findings. The speeches will be presented toward the end of the semester as reflected on the course calendar. **ALL TOPICS NEED INSTRUCTOR APPROVAL.** This means prior to researching and writing your speech your topic must be approved by yours truly. This is in order to keep a focus on topics related to American Government. If you need help choosing a topic I can offer assistance in this area as well.

In addition to the speech before the class, a written transcript must be submitted to the instructor. This will be the paper aspect of the assignment. 2-3 pages of well researched and sourced material should enable you to deliver a short speech to the class. There will be a minute

for questions after the speech. More details on this assignment will be distributed to the class in the coming weeks.

**Extra Credit:** During the semester I will likely provide opportunities for students to earn extra credit. *If* and when such opportunities arise I will make the extra credit available to all students in the class. *If* and when these opportunities become available I will provide guidelines for the extra credit in class (adding more incentive to attend class consistently). *I will not offer individual extra credit to raise your grade for the course.*

**Participation:** In order to earn participation points you must participate in the discussion in the classroom. That means you must attend class. While in class constructive dialogue on the subject at hand will be required to gain in class participation points. This ranges from thoughtful questions on the subject to engaging remarks and comments on questions posed by the instructor or your fellow students. In class participation will be augmented with online participation for those of you who are not comfortable with public speaking. However, only doing the online portion or the in class portion while neglecting the other will not receive full participation credit. The online portion of the course is just as valuable as the in class portion of the course. And as stated before you are responsible for all the material for exams.

“Oh, and how is ‘education’ supposed to make me feel smarter? Besides, every time I learn something new, it pushes some old stuff out of my brain. Remember when I took that home wine-making course and I forgot how to drive?” - Homer Simpson

**Class Schedule:**

**Week 1 - 8/28 & 8/30 - Reading Chapter 1**

Course Overview and Introduction

The Democratic Republic

**Week 2 - 9/4 & 9/6 - Reading Chapter 2**

**NO CLASS 9/4 - Labor day**

The Constitution

**Week 3 - 9/11 & 9/13 - Reading Chapter 3**

Federalism

**EXAM 1 -9/13 (3:15-midnight)**

**Week 4 - 9/18 & 9/20 - Reading Chapter 4 & 5**

Civil Liberties & Civil Rights

**Week 5 - 9/25 & 9/27 - Chapter 6**  
Public Opinion and Political Socialization  
**Final Speech and Paper instructions dispersed to class**

**Week 6 - 10/2 & 10/4 - Reading Chapter 7**  
Interest Groups

**Week 7 - 10/9 & 10/11 - Reading Chapter 8**  
Political Parties  
**Topics for Speech and Paper to be submitted - 10/9**

**Week 8 - 10/16 & 10/18 - Reading Chapter 9**  
**MIDTERM - 10/16 - No Class**  
Campaigns and Elections

**Week 9 - 10/23 & 10/25 - Reading Chapter 10**  
The Media

**Week 10 - 10/30 & 11/1 - Reading Chapter 11**  
The Congress

**Week 11 - 11/6 & 11/8 - Reading Chapter 12**  
The President  
**Exam 3 11/8 (3:15-Midnight)**

**Week 12 - 11/13 & 11/15 - Reading Chapter 13**  
The Courts

**Week 13 - 11/20 - Reading Chapter 14**  
The Bureaucracy  
11/22 - NO CLASS

**Week 14 - 11/27 & 11/29 - Reading Chapter 15 & 16**  
Domestic, Economic and Foreign Policy

**Week 15 - 12/4 & 12/6**  
**Paper portion of Speech due 12/4**  
**Speeches 12/4 & 12/6**

**FINAL EXAM: MONDAY DECEMBER 11 - Online.**