Pols 100-003: Introduction to American Government
Fall Semester 2018

Instructor: Richard Rivard
Class Time: Monday & Wednesday 12:30-1:45
Class Location: DuSable 461
Office Location: DuSable 476
Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday 10:45-12:15 and by appointment
Email: rrvard1@niu.edu

“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 winemaking course and I forgot how to drive?” - Homer Simpson

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.


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 2 exams and a final this semester, for a total of THREE EXAMS. Additionally there will be a presentation that is required to be given to the class in October.
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 - 20%
- Exam 2 - 20%
- Final - 25%
- Speech & Paper - 25%
- 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 child care 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:** If you need an accommodation for this class, please contact the Disability Resource Center as soon as possible. The DRC coordinates accommodations for students with disabilities. It is located on the 4th floor of the Health Services Building, and can be reached at 815-753-1303 or drc@niu.edu.

Also, please contact me privately as soon as possible so we can discuss your accommodations. Please note that you will not be required to disclose your disability, only your accommodations. The sooner you let me know your needs, the sooner I can assist you in achieving your learning goals in this course.

**Department of Political Science Website:** Undergraduates are strongly encouraged to consult the Department of Political Science website 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.

**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.

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 second exam will cover everything from the date of the first exam until the date of the second 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 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.

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)
**Candidate Research and Presentation:** This semester happens to coincide with the midterm elections. In light of this the assignment for the semester will reflect the opportunity to take American government during an election cycle. Students will sign up to research and present on a candidate in one of the congressional districts or gubernatorial races on Blackboard. Students will write a researched paper that covers background information of the candidate, THEIR position on ISSUES (2-3), endorsements, AND if you would vote for this candidate in the upcoming election or NOT.

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.*

“...I am able to go bing, bing, bing and I take care of it” - Donald Trump

**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.
Class Schedule:

**Week 1** - 8/27 & 8/29 - Reading Chapter 1
Course Overview and Introduction
The Democratic Republic

**Week 2** - 9/3 & 9/5 - Reading Chapter 2
NO CLASS 9/3 - Labor day
The Constitution
Candidate Research and Presentation guidelines and sign up to be distributed to class via Blackboard

**Week 3** - 9/10 & 9/12 - Reading Chapter 3
Federalism

**Week 4** - 9/17 & 9/19 - Reading Chapter 4
Civil Liberties

**Week 5** - 9/24 & 9/26 - Chapter 5 - EXAM 1 9/26 (2:00-midnight)
Civil Rights

**Week 6** - 10/1 & 10/3 - Reading Chapter 6
Public Opinion and Political Socialization

**Week 7** - 10/8 & 10/10 - Reading Chapter 7
Interest Groups

**Week 8** - 10/15 & 10/17 - Reading Chapter 8
Political Parties

**Week 9 - 10/22 & 10/24 - Reading Chapter 9**
Campaigns and Elections

**Week 10 - 10/29 & 10/31 - Paper and Presentations**
Paper are due at beginning of class 10/29 - Presentations will begin on Monday and continue into Wednesday.

**Week 11 - 11/5 & 11/7 - Reading Chapter 10**
Exam 2 **11/7 (2:00-midnight)**
The Media

**Week 12 - 11/12 & 11/14 - Reading Chapter 11**
The Congress

**Week 13 - 11/19 - Reading Chapter 14***
The Courts
11/21 - NO CLASS

**Week 14 - 11/27 & 11/29 - Reading Chapter 12**
The President

**Week 15 - 12/4 & 12/6 - Reading Chapter 13**
The Bureaucracy

**FINAL EXAM: Monday December 10, 2018**