I. COURSE DESCRIPTION:

The main goal of this course is to familiarize students with the actors, structures, functions, and processes of American Government. Considering that the decisions carried out by the American government affect our daily lives, it is vitally important that we understand how these political decisions are formed and carried out. This course aims to provide students with critical thinking needed to assess and critique the connection (or disconnection) between the philosophic underpinnings and empirical reality of American government.

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Recognize and evaluate the basic debates and issues in American government & political history.
- Identify & describe the key functions of the three branches of government.
- Assess the causes & consequences of different forms of political participation, as well as how individuals & groups impact political outcomes in the US.
- Explain and critically assess the formal and informal political institutions and their respective roles in American politics.
- Explain how government affects our daily lives.

II. SYLLABUS CHANGES: Although I do not anticipate a need to modify the course calendar, I reserve the right to modify the calendar based on the progress of the class.
III. REQUIRED TEXTS:

Lynne E. Ford; Barbara A. Bardes; Steffen W. Schmidt; Mack C. Shelley, II.

*All other readings will be posted on Blackboard.*

IV. COURSE POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND EXPECTATIONS:

*Communication with the instructor:*
As the instructor, my job is to help each student succeed in this course. However, each student must also take responsibility for their learning and success. It is in your best interest to reach out to me to discuss course material and assignments to ensure that you know what is expected. I am always available during my office hours and by appointment. Please feel free to email me during the week and I will do my best to respond to your email within 24 hours. I will not respond to emails, texts and calls over the weekend.

*Classroom Decorum:*
Although a large portion of this class will be lecture style, there will still be a substantive portion in which the students engage the course material in an open discussion. When I open the class up to these discussions I expect all parties involved to speak in a manner that is respectful of other students. Politics can invigorate our passions but I ask that you temper your opinions and keep class discussion both civil and pertinent to the course material at hand. Considering the proliferation of electronic devices and their usefulness in education, I will allow students to bring and use laptops and tablets in class. Although I do allow these more educational electronic devices, I expect that students will use them in a manner which does not disrupt the lecture or class discussion. Failure to use your technology in an appropriate manner will result in me asking you to put the device away for the remainder of class. Repeated offenses will result in me asking that you do not use said device for the remainder of the semester and will result in a penalization of your participation grade. Cell phone use is forbidden during class (*Unless I specifically ask you to use it in class for instructional purposes*); if you are expecting an urgent phone call during class please talk to me before class and I will help accommodate you.

*Attendance & Participation:*
To properly engage the material that we cover over the length of this course your regular attendance and class preparation is required. To encourage class preparation and participation, I will ask that students submit, either on a piece of paper or notecard, the answers to a short quiz at the beginning of each class. There are twenty-nine regular class periods during the semester. This means that if you attend class prepared, the quizzes will be a great way to strengthen your overall grade at the end of the semester. You must also be a participant in class discussion which means you ask and answer questions in a manner that reflects that you have read the material for class ahead of time. Posing questions that are not related to the class discussion will not count towards this requirement. If you show up to class and consistently contribute to class discussion, then you will be awarded full points.
**Academic Integrity:**
Good academic work must be based on honesty. The attempt of any student to present as his or her own work that which he or she has not produced is regarded by the faculty and administration as a serious offense. Students are considered to have cheated if they copy the work of another during an examination or turn in a paper or an assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else. Students are responsible for plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books, magazines, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging those sources or if they paraphrase ideas from such sources without acknowledging them. Students responsible for, 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. A faculty member has original jurisdiction over any instances of academic misconduct that occur in a course which the faculty member is teaching. The student shall be given the opportunity to resolve the matter in meetings with the faculty member and the department chair. If the facts of the incident are not disputed by the student, the faculty member may elect to resolve the matter at that level by levying a sanction no greater than an F for that course. The faculty member shall notify the student in writing whenever such action is taken, and the Office of Community Standards and Student Conduct shall receive a copy of the Academic Misconduct Incident Report indicating final disposition of the case, which will be placed in the student’s judicial file. In all matters where the charge of academic misconduct is disputed by the student or if the faculty member feels a sanction greater than an F in the course is appropriate (such as repeated offenses or flagrant violations), the faculty member shall refer the matter to the Office of Community Standards and Student Conduct making use of the Academic Misconduct Incident Report. Additional sanctions greater than an F in a course can be levied only through the University Judicial System. With regards to finding the student either responsible or not responsible for his or her action, the ruling of the Judicial Hearing Board shall be binding. In cases where there is either a finding of responsibility or an admission of responsibility by the student, any recommendations by the hearing board regarding the course grade are nonbinding on the instructor, who remains solely responsible for assigning a course grade, consistent with the policies set forth in the course syllabus.

**Statement Concerning 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.
**Religious Observances:**
If any course activity (e.g. classes and due dates) coincides with your religious observance, please let the instructor know as soon as possible so that the instructor has the best opportunity to provide appropriate accommodations.

V. **POLITICAL SCIENCE DEPARTMENT INFORMATION**

**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.

**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.

VI. **GRADING**

**Attendance and Participation (10% - 50 points):**
See section IV of this syllabus.

**Online Discussion Posts and Responses (10% - 50 points):**
In most respects, politics requires interaction with others. Citizens and their leaders regularly communicate their ideas through conversation, debates, blogs, op-eds published in leading news outlets, and in many other ways. Students will have numerous in-class opportunities to discuss politics with their colleagues, honing their arguments through engagement with their peers and the instructor. Simultaneously, students will have opportunities to engage with one another electronically, the increasingly preferred method of communication for many of us. Five times throughout the semester, a discussion prompt relating to the course material will be posted on Blackboard. Students will have 72 hours to respond to this prompt. After the 72 hours has lapsed, students will have an additional 48 hours to respond to at least one of their classmates’ posts. One of the goals of this exercise is to encourage students to share political
ideas outside of the traditional classroom setting, while also helping them develop their critical thinking and written communication skills. Students may earn up to 20 points total for their two responses to each prompt. Their initial post is worth up to 5 points, and their response to their classmates’ post is worth an additional 5 points. Posts should be thoughtful, meaning that they show a grasp of the material covered and an application of that material to the questions posed. Responses should incorporate clear language and proper grammar, and they should be at least 300 words in length. Any post less than 300 words will receive a zero grade. No exceptions.

**Civil Liberties Political Cartoon Assignment (10% - 50 points):**
Conversations about civil liberties occur often in our society; in the courts, the classroom, dinner table etc. Political cartoons are nothing new and they highlight important issues that are being debated at any given time in any given place. For this assignment each student will find one (1) recent political cartoons relating to civil liberties issues (2014-present). Identify and explain the cartoonists’ point of view, the symbols used in the cartoon, and the relevant event (court decision, lawsuit filed, legislation passed) that prompted the cartoon and it's significance. Do you agree with the perspective of the cartoonist? Why or why not? The length should be approximately 2-3 page double spaced (not more than 3 pages). You must provide the image, and a correct citation for the image that includes the artist and the date of publication.

**NOTE:** You may have to do a little research to be able to fully explain the relevant event and its significance.

**Policy Memo (20% - 100 Points):**
Students are required to produce a policy memo in which they propose a solution to a domestic policy problem. In this memo, which should be four to five pages in length, students must make an argument to a relevant national political official – President Trump, Senate Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Paul Ryan, etc. – about how best to solve this policy conundrum.

The structure of the paper should be as follows. First, students should briefly identify the issue and discuss the problems surrounding it. Next, students must draw upon a minimum of four academic/legitimate sources from current events-related (e.g., The Wall Street Journal, The Economist) or scholarly (e.g. The American Political Science Review, Journal of Politics) journals in order to explain at least two different potential solutions to this problem. Be sure to compare and contrast these possible solutions. Finally, students must advocate for the solution that they think is best. This is to say that they should consider the strengths and weakness of each approach, explaining why they think one is the better policy response. (The paper must also include a bibliography that lists each source used in either APA or MLA format, which does not count toward the page length requirements.)

This policy paper must be double spaced and typed in 12 pt. Times New Roman font. Use one-inch margins, and do not use four spaces between paragraphs. A draft of the policy memo is due in class on Tuesday, October 2nd. The final policy paper must be submitted in class on Tuesday, November 13th.
Exams (3) (50% - 250 Points):
There will be an exam after each of the three units. Each exam will be taken through Blackboard. These exams will not be comprehensive but will cover the readings assigned for each unit. The exams may include multiple choice, matching, and essay sections.

Grading Breakdown:

- Attendance & Participation- 10% (50 points)
  - Beginning of class questions- 10% (50 points)
  - In class participation- 10% (25 points)
- Online Discussion Posts- 10% (50 points)
  - (5 @ 10 points each = 100 total points)
- Civil Liberties Political Cartoon Assignment 10% (50 Points)
- Policy Memo 20% (100 points)
- Exam 1- 10% (50 points)
- Exam 2- 20% (100 points)
- Exam 3 (FINAL) - 20% (100 points)

TOTAL- 100% (500 points)

Grading Scale:

A = 93-100% (465-500 points) C+ = 77-79% (385-399 points)
A- = 90-92% (450-464 points) C = 70-76% (350-384 points)
B+ = 87-89% (435-449 points) D = 60-69% (300-349 points)
B = 83-86% (415-434 points) F > 60% (under 300 points)
B- = 80-82% (400-414 points)

Late Assignment Policy:
I understand that life can be chaotic and emergencies are prone to happen at inopportune times. That being stated, I will not excuse any late submissions for the reaction papers or makeup exams without proper documentation of an emergency (funeral, hospitalization, car accident, etc.). Even with proper documentation, you must contact me via email, phone, or in person before the reaction paper is due or the exam begins for me to grant an extension unless you are not able to contact me ahead of time in which case contact me as soon as
possible to better facilitate you making up the exam or receiving an extension on the paper. Failure to promptly notify me will result in me denying the extension. If you submit an assignment late or miss an exam without a documented excuse then you will not receive any credit for it. You know when the assignments are due and will have sufficient time to complete them, so excuses such as your internet not working or forgetting to attach the file will not be accepted.

Extra Credit:
Extra credit will not be offered in this course, unless a unique learning opportunity to presents itself. Do not count on extra credit to raise your grade. I will not offer individual extra credit to raise your grade for the course.

VII. COURSE CALENDAR:
The following calendar lists the order of the topics and the date that we will cover them. Please note, we do not read the chapters in chronological order.

I. Unit One: Foundation of (American) Government & Politics

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<th>Week 1:</th>
<th>8/28 and 8/30</th>
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<td>Course Overview</td>
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<td>Democracy and American Politics</td>
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<td>Reading: Chapter 1</td>
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<th>Week 2:</th>
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<td>The Constitution</td>
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<td>Reading:</td>
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<td>Chapter 2</td>
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<td>Appendix: A: The Declaration of Independence p. 651-652</td>
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<td>Appendix B: The Constitution of the United States p. 653-661</td>
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<td>Appendix C: Federalist 10 and 51 p. 669-674</td>
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<th>Week 4:</th>
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<td>Federalism: States and Nation</td>
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<td>Reading: Chapter 3</td>
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<th>Week 5:</th>
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<td>Civil Liberties &amp; Civil Rights</td>
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<td>Reading:</td>
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<td>Chapter 4 (all)</td>
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<td>Chapter 5 p. 107-119</td>
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<td>Appendix B: The Bill of Rights p. 662-663</td>
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Week 6: 10/2 and 10/4
Civil Rights continued
Reading: Chapter 5 (all)

***Policy Memo Draft Due on Tuesday October 2nd***

***Exam 1 – Thursday 10/4. Available on Blackboard from 9a to 11:59p***

II. Unit Two: Politics & Governance in America

Week 7: 10/9 and 10/11
Public Opinion and Political Socialization
Reading: Chapter 6

***Civil Liberties Political Cartoon Assignment Due on Thursday Oct. 11th***

Week 8: 10/16 and 10/18
Interest Groups
Reading: Chapter 7

Week 9: 10/23 and 10/25
Political Parties
Reading: Chapter 8

Weeks 10: 10/30 and 11/1
Campaigns, Voting and Elections / The Media & Politics
Reading: Chapter 9 & Chapter 10 p. 355-364

Week 12: 11/6 and 11/8
The Media & Politics continued
Reading: Chapter 10


III. Unit Three: The Institutions of American Government

Week 13: 11/13 and 11/15
The Congress – Representation, Organization and Lawmaking
Reading: Chapter 11

***Policy Memo Due on Tuesday November 13th***
**Week 14:** 11/20 and 11/22 (No Class - Thanksgiving)
The Bureaucracy
Final Exam Review
**Reading:** Chapter 13

**Week 15:** 11/27 and 11/29
The President
**Reading:** Chapter 12

**Week 16:** 12/4 and 12/6
The Courts
**Reading:** Chapter 14

**Week 17:** ***Exam 3*** (Final Exam)