

**Political Science 111-J
American Government
Elon University
Fall 2007**

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Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:20 – 4:00 p.m.
Koury Business Center, Room 242
Office Hours: Tuesdays/Thursdays 12:00 to 2:00 p.m.
and by appointment

Course Description

Understanding American government and the larger political system is of the utmost importance. Virtually every aspect of an individual's life is impacted by the actions of government. Therefore, it is critical to develop a broader knowledge of government. Deeper knowledge and understanding is essential for all citizens to keep a democracy flourishing.

The primary aim of this course is to acquire a better understanding of the complexities of American government and politics and to be introduced to the discipline of political science. This course is intended for those who are interested in a systematic examination of the American political system as part of their general education as well as those who may be interested in a political science major/minor or a public administration major/minor.

Accordingly, this course will survey the institutions and processes of American government and politics. While focusing on the American system, the course will provide a general introduction to the study of government. The course will cover the Constitution and the federal system, public opinion and political behavior, parties, interest groups, the role of the media, Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy, the courts, and the major elements of American public policy.

Course Goals

The key element of a democracy is its citizens and citizens must have knowledge of their government to participate more fully in society. The goals of this course are based on this premise. In particular, this course will:

- Provide background information on the origins and development of American government;
- Explore the roles of the different institutions in the American political landscape;
- Engage in current debates surrounding government action or inaction;
- Promote civic engagement; and
- Foster curiosity and inquisitiveness in citizens towards their government.

Course Expectations

While it goes without saying that students get out of a course what they put into it, it is important to emphasize several key expectations.

Class Participation and Discussion – The goal of this course is to learn about American government and politics and that can only be accomplished by engaging the material. This means that class participation is a must. Everyone, students and the instructor, can and should learn from one another. Learning is a process and is enhanced by dialogue. Additionally, engaging the material requires that students come to class having read the assignments so that they are prepared to thoughtfully and productively contribute to the class discussion. Success in this course requires engagement of the material both inside and outside of class.

Because class participation and discussion are vital to this class, it is imperative that class discussions be conducted in an appropriate manner that befits the larger institutional environment. Therefore, debate is encouraged as long as it is conducted with respect and civility. Courtesy in class discussion extends to making sure cell phones and pagers are off or in silent modes.

Attendance – Attendance is crucial; students who are not in class do not have the opportunity to learn from the rest of the class and the class does not have the opportunity to benefit from an absent student. It is understandable that circumstances, however, will warrant an occasional absence; if such is the case, please make every effort to inform the instructor in advance of an absence. Each student is allotted two absences for the semester. Upon a third absence and any additional absence thereafter, the student will be required to submit to the instructor a two-page paper reflecting on the assigned reading for each absence.

Tardiness – Being late to a class is problematic for the student who is tardy, fellow students, and the instructor. A student who arrives to class late is disruptive to everyone. Students are expected to get to class on time and stay for the duration of the class. Excessive tardiness will negatively impact a student's grade.

Current Events – Studying American government cannot and should not be done without an awareness of current events because government and politics are constantly changing. Accordingly, students will be expected to stay informed of current events through reading newspapers, magazines, and online news services. Frequently, current events will be part of class discussion.

Course Textbook

The following text is required for this course:

Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore J. Lowi, and Margaret Weir. 2007. *We the people: An introduction to American politics*. 6th ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Additional supplemental readings will be assigned periodically and posted on Blackboard.

Course Requirements

The requirements of this course fall into the following categories: reflection papers, quizzes, exams, and a term paper.

Reflection Papers – Throughout the semester, five reflection papers will be required. These papers have two purposes: first, to have students critically engage a particular topic and present a succinct

discussion of the topic(s); and second, to hone students' writing abilities. Reflection papers should be two to three pages, double-spaced. Additionally, each reflection paper should have a thesis statement. Please underline the thesis statement for each paper prior to submitting it to the instructor.

The due dates are as follows:

Reflection Paper #1 – due Class 2

What do you think of American government? If someone stopped you on the street and asked you for your thoughts about American government, what would you say?

Reflection Paper #2 – due Class 6

Reflection Paper #3 – due Class 14

Reflection Paper #4 – due Class 17

Reflection Paper #5 – due Class 26

Additional topics will be given during class.

Quizzes – Quizzes will be administered at the discretion of the instructor as a way to ascertain whether students are reading the assigned material and to what degree the material is being comprehended; accordingly, quizzes will be unannounced.

Exams - There will be three exams throughout the semester. The exams will consist of a combination of multiple choice questions and essay questions. Exams should not be missed; however, in the unlikely event that one is missed, arrangements must be made with the instructor prior to the exam date to make up the exam.

Term Paper – Given the nature of the course calendar, the course will emphasize the structures and processes involved in American government. As a result, there will not be as much time devoted to substantive policy areas. Therefore, the term paper will require each student to select a particular policy area and then choose a more specific policy issue in that area to explore. The paper should provide background on a particular policy issue, examine different sides of the debate on that issue, and then conclude with an argument for one position. Each paper should have a succinct thesis statement.

For example, in the realm of environmental policy, a student may wish to explore air pollution and air pollution from mobile sources, namely cars. The paper would, therefore, provide background on the government's involvement in regulating pollution from cars and the current debate on air pollution. Then the paper would investigate different policy options being discussed and conclude with an argument in support of one policy option over others.

Some of the dominant policy areas include: education policy, health care, social and welfare policy, environmental policy, foreign policy, economic and tax policy, and civil rights policy.

The papers should range from seven to ten pages and utilize at least five scholarly sources. Internet sources should be kept to a minimum, particularly given the nature of the paper. Much of the information found on the Internet will be slanted in favor of one position or another and may not provide accurate information for the purposes of the paper.

Initial paper topic statement due Thursday, 20 September 2007

Revised paper proposal due Tuesday, 2 October 2007

Revised proposal should include a thesis statement and short outline

Rough draft due Tuesday, 30 October 2007

Final paper due Thursday, 15 November 2007

Grading

Grades will be computed in the following manner:

Class Participation/Attendance/Quizzes	20%
Reflection Papers (5)	20%
Exams (3)	30%
Term Paper	30%

Grading Scale

A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	59 and below

Honor Code

Students are expected to abide by the Elon University Honor Code.

Cheating and Plagiarism – Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Any student suspected of either cheating or plagiarism will be referred to appropriate administrative proceedings at Elon University. Additionally, the student will receive a zero for the assignment.

Guidelines for Assignments

All written assignments should meet the following criteria:

1. All work must be typed, double-spaced, 12 point font, and one inch margins.
2. Citations should follow one of the following guidelines: Turabian/Chicago Manual of Style, MLA, or APA.
3. Assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on their appointed due date according to the syllabus (or any change made during the course). Late assignments will not

be accepted. If a student is absent on the day an assignment is due, he/she should make arrangements to turn in the assignment ahead of time.

4. All assignments must be turned in to the instructor in hard copy, unless other arrangements are made.
5. Written work will be evaluated both in terms of content and writing/grammar.

Course Schedule

The chapters indicate the material that should be read prior to coming to class (please note the schedule is tentative and may be amended).

Class 1 – Tuesday, August 28
Course Introduction & Overview

The Context of American Government

Class 2 – Thursday, August 30
Chapter 1 – American Political Culture
Reflection Paper #1 due

Class 3 – Tuesday, September 4
Chapter 6 – Public Opinion and Political Socialization

Class 4 – Thursday, September 6
Chapter 2 – The Constitution

Class 5 – Tuesday, September 11
Chapter 2 – The Constitution
Federalist 10 (pp. A4-A7)

Class 6 – Thursday, September 13
Chapter 3 – Federalism
Reflection Paper #2 due

Class 7 – Tuesday, September 18
Chapter 4 – Civil Liberties

Class 8 – Thursday, September 20
Chapter 5 – Civil Rights
Initial Paper Topics due

Class 9 – Tuesday, September 25
Exam #1

Political Institutions

Class 10 – Thursday, September 27
Class Cancelled – Instructor presenting a paper at the Southeastern Conference on
Public Administration in Nashville, TN

Class 11 – Tuesday, October 2
Library Session – please meet in the library computer lab

Class 12 – Thursday, October 4
Chapter 12 – The Congress

Class 13 – Tuesday, October 9
Chapter 12 – The Congress
Revised Topics/Paper Proposals due

Class 14 – Thursday, October 11
Chapter 15 – The Courts
Reflection Paper #3 due

Fall “Break” October 13 – 16

Class 15 – Thursday, October 18
Chapter 13 – The President

Class 16 – Tuesday, October 23
Chapter 13 – The President

Class 17 – Thursday, October 25
Chapter 14 – The Bureaucracy
“Street-Level Bureaucrats” from Michael Lipsky’s *Street-Level Bureaucracy*
Reflection Paper #4 due

Class 18 – Tuesday, October 30
Chapter 14 – The Bureaucracy
“Street-Level Bureaucrats” from Michael Lipsky’s *Street-Level Bureaucracy*
Rough Draft due

Class 19 – Thursday, November 1
Exam #2

Public Policy, People, and Politics

Class 20 – Tuesday, November 6
Chapter 3, “The Policymaking Process” from Thomas Dye’s *Understanding Public
Policy*, pp. 31-59

Class 21 – Thursday, November 8
Chapter 3, “The Policymaking Process” from Thomas Dye’s *Understanding Public
Policy*, pp. 31-59

Class 22 – Tuesday, November 13
Chapter 11 – Interest Groups

Class 23 – Thursday, November 15
Chapter 9 – Political Parties
Final Paper due

Class 25 – Tuesday, November 20
Chapter 8 – Political Participation and Voting

Thanksgiving “Break,” November 21 – 25

Class 26 – Tuesday, November 27
Chapter 10 – Campaigns and Elections, and
Chapter 7 – the Media
Reflection Paper #5 due

Class 27 – Thursday, November 29
Chapter 10 – Campaigns and Elections, and
Chapter 7 – the Media

Class 28 – Tuesday, December 4
Exam #3

Some concluding thoughts...

“The great virtue of our Government is that people can do something about it.”

- Earl Warren (1891-1974)

“Learning is not attained by chance, it must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence.”

- Abigail Adams (1744-1818)

“All who have meditated on the art of governing mankind have been convinced that the fate of empires depends on the education of youth.”

- Aristotle (384 BCE-322 BCE)

“A nation of sheep will beget a government of wolves.”

- Edward R. Murrow (1908-1965)