

Fall 2007  
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American National Government  
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This course is designed to **introduce** you to the field of American politics. You will receive a more thorough investigation into each of the sub fields of American politics if you decide to take other classes in the political science department. For example, if you choose to learn more about Congress, you may take "The Legislative Process." This course will prepare you to take that course and many other courses that cover different aspects of how the American national government operates.

This Introduction to American National Government will cover each of the areas of American National Government. Although we will not delve as deeply as the upper level courses, I hope that you will come away with an understanding of the government that we have. In particular, I hope that you can understand *how* it functions and *why* it functions the way that it does. It may sometimes seem as if we live in a country that is very different from the one created, but the reality is that many of the issues that we deal with are very similar to the ones that were prevalent at the time of its creation.

American politics is constantly changing and being challenged through those mechanisms that were created early in American history. Although change seems to come slowly, it has been a constant. The most recent incidents with elections the elections demonstrate the durability of the system, yet caution us that some critical changes may be necessary. In addition, the ongoing debates surrounding the issues of personal liberty, troops abroad, minority rights, inner city problems, and hurricane Katrina (at the least), indicate the possibility of very serious changes in the political climate of the near future. The upcoming election is sure to create an interesting dialog regarding most of these issues. After you have taken this course, you should have an understanding of the American political system and some legitimate speculations about its future. You should also be able to engage in a dialog about American National government with support from what you have learned in this class.

The following are the goals of this class:

- 1) Teach the basics of American government i.e. Constitution, Institutions, Elections, etc
- 2) Introduce different perspectives and controversies of American government
- 3) Help to develop as critical thinkers and writers
- 4) Help to develop better writers

You are expected to read the material before coming to class. You are expected to participate in class discussions and complete homework assignments. When relevant, films may be used to illustrate different points. You are also expected to read the *New York Times* daily.

1) **Critical Essays:** You will be required to complete 2 critical papers over the semester. When completing these papers, you must have at least two sources that fall outside of the class readings. Critical essays are papers that you write over the material that was assigned. The paper should be approximately 4 pages (1000-1250 words) long and should cover some aspect of the readings. Papers that do not fit within this guideline may be penalized. In other words, if you turn in a paper that is shorter or longer than stated, it will probably be penalized. This paper is a critical essay regarding topics in this course. It is not a summary of the material.

In order to prepare for writing such a paper, I suggest that you read the material, and then THINK about the theme of what you have read. Focus on one or two themes for writing the paper. Be sure to be critical! (i.e. discuss the contributions and flaws, discuss how the works further our understanding of the subject matter, etc.) Your paper MUST have a thesis. If you are unsure about how to write this paper, please make an appointment so that we can discuss some options for the paper.

The number of pages that include tables, charts, bibliography, and figures are in addition to the 3-4 pages for the critical essay. You must use two sources in addition to the assigned readings. Be VERY careful not to plagiarize when writing these papers. Please read the student's handbook for the policy regarding plagiarism. I will report any cases of plagiarism to the appropriate officials at the University. You should also be aware that **papers that have grammatical errors are graded harshly**. I would expect you to let others (such as the DePauw Writing Center) read your papers before turning them in. Although I will not monitor peer evaluation, it usually leads to a better paper. Please place all critical essays.

2. **Tests:** You will have two **TESTS** in this class. No makeup tests will be given so make it your top priority to be present when tests are scheduled.

3. **Quizzes, and Miscellaneous projects:** You will be expected to complete a variety of miscellaneous assignments during the semester. You MUST bring these assignments to class on the day that they are due. They must be placed on my desk BEFORE class begins. Do not put them on Blackboard or send them via email. I will NOT accept late papers, so do not ask to turn these assignments in late. Because my generosity has been taken advantage of, I will not make accommodations for broken printers or any other last minute problems that you encounter. If you are not in class, you CANNOT hand in a homework assignment. Please do not ask.

4. **Attendance and participation:** Although I will not take attendance everyday, you are expected to be present for all class sessions. Moreover, you are expected to participate in class discussions. This is primarily a discussion class on American politics. I am the professor, but I expect you to participate in discussions with each other about the material. I will facilitate and monitor the discussions and lecture when necessary, but I want you to learn through your experiences in this class. I want you to be active learners in this class because I want you to get as much out of this course as you can. As a result, I want you to question the statements that are made about politics in America. When you finish this course you should have a new understanding of what it means to study American politics and how politics in America are constantly changing. In addition, you should have an appreciation for opinions and thoughts that are different from your own, but be able to separate what appears to be the truth from the truth that evidence supports. Of course, if you are not in class, you cannot participate. Before you come to class, you should have read the daily assignment and the *New York Times*. Some readings are not listed, but will be included during the semester. Please see the discussion grade criteria attached to this syllabus.

Class Policies:

No late papers will be accepted for full credit. If you find that one of your papers will be late, you must let me know as far in advance as possible. If your paper is accepted late due to an emergency, your grade will be penalized a half letter grade for every day that the paper is late.

It is YOUR responsibility to show that your work was done and was done on time. If there is ever any discrepancy pertaining to when your work was turned in, you must provide evidence of the time and date that the work was completed and turned in. This evidence may be an electronic file that includes a time and date stamp. It is not acceptable to resubmit the paper, without the evidence of the date and time that it was first submitted. Since this is the case, I strongly suggest you make sure that your work has been adequately placed on Blackboard and that you keep an electronic copy of your work (with the time and date of the last time that it was modified) until your final grade is in.

If you have any problems with the course, you should see me as soon as possible. Do not wait until the end of the semester to voice your concerns about the class. Often it is too late in the semester to have an impact on the way the class is developing.

**I reserve the right to modify the schedule from time to time to accommodate the unanticipated things that may come up during the semester.**

The following books will be used this semester and can be found at Fine Print Book

O'Connor, Karen and Larry Sabato. 2008. *The Essentials of American Government: Continuity and Change*.

Woll, Peter. 2008. *American Government: Readings and Cases*.

**\*I will often give additional reading assignments.**

The breakdown of the grade is as follows...

Participation	15%
Quizzes and Miscellaneous	15%
Essays	30%
Tests	40%

Class Schedule...Additional homework and assignments will be given in class.

August 23 Introduction

August 28-30 **The Political Landscape**

O'Connor and Sabato, Chapter 1

Woll, Readings 1-3

Additional Reading

*Assignment for this class: Go to the census website ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)). Find the demographics of your hometown and home state. Compare those demographics to the national demographics.*

September 4-6 **Constitution**

O&S Chapter 2

Woll Readings 2-3

Additional Readings

September 11-13     **Federalism**  
O&S Chapter 3  
Woll, Readings 11-16

*Assignment for this class: Evaluate the following statement, “ Federalism, the separation of powers, and checks and balances are all institutional arrangements designed to make government move in a slow and cumbersome manner. If we had an efficient government, our liberties would be greatly reduced.”*

September 18-25     **Civil Liberties**  
O&S Chapter 4  
Woll, Readings 17, 19, 20, 21, 25-28  
Additional Readings

*Assignment for this class: Under Chief Justice Rehnquist, the Court has reduced many of the due process rights granted under the Warren and Burger Courts. Find examples of how these rights have changed and why. What has the role of public and political opinion been in these changes?*

**\* September 20 First Critical Essay Due**

October 2-9     **Civil Rights**  
O&S Chapter 5  
Woll, Readings 22-24, 29  
Additional Readings

*Assignment for this class: What is the role of the executive branch when it comes to civil rights? How do they exercise this role? What issues does the executive consider to be important in civil rights? What is their position in issues such as affirmative action, equal pay, and any other issues that you find interesting?*

October 11     **Jeopardy**

October 15-19 Fall Break

**October 23 TEST #1**

**American Institutions**

October 25-30 **A. Judiciary**  
O&S Chapter 9  
Woll, Readings selected readings

November 1-6 **B. Congress**  
O&S Chapter 6  
Woll, selected readings

## Additional Readings

*Assignment for this class: How representative is Congress? What proposals exist to address any perceived deficiencies in representations? What are the limitations of incumbency advantage? Is it waning?*

### November 8-13 **C. The Executive**

O&S Chapter 7, 8

Woll, selected readings

Additional Readings

*Assignment for this class: President Bush was elected without a majority of the popular vote in 2000. Discuss the impact of this situation on his presidency. Include discussions of the appointment process, relations with Congress, and the effectiveness of the presidential bully pulpit, veto and pardoning powers, foreign policy powers, and other presidential prerogatives*

### **\*November 15 Second Critical Essay Due**

### November 15 **Political Parties and Interest Groups**

O&S Chapter 11

Woll, selected readings

Additional Readings

*Assignment: Find copies of the most recent national platforms for the two major parties. Compare them on a variety of issues. Then look at public opinion polls to see how the party positions correspond to those of average Americans. What do you find? Why do you think that is the case?*

### November 20 **Voting, Elections, and Campaigns**

O&S selected pages from Chapter 12

Woll, selected readings

Additional Readings

*You will be assigned a group. Imagine that your candidate is running in the next presidential election (either in the primary or in the general election). Create a TV commercial using what you have learned so far about elections, campaigns, and voting behavior. Your group will be expected to perform the less than 2 minute commercial in front of the class.*

### **November 22 Thanksgiving**

### November 27 Public Policy

O&S Chapter 13

Woll, selected readings

### November 29 Test #2

December 4 Jeopardy (your group's performance counts as part of your misc projects grade, not the participation or test grade)

December 6 Jeopardy (your group's performance counts as part of your misc projects grade, not the participation or test grade)

**Criteria for Discussion Grade:**

You get an F for discussion if you miss lots of classes, rarely speak when you are there, and show no evidence of having done the reading.

You get a D for discussion if you come irregularly and rarely show signs of having done or thought much about the readings.

You get a C for discussion if you come to class regularly, but rarely speak, or if you are active in discussion but irregular in attendance, or if you participate in discussion in a way that shows little evidence of having done or thought much about the readings.

You get a B for discussion if you are always in class and take a thoughtful part in our discussions: participate actively and well, engaging in texts, themes, and others with some depth: and occasionally take leadership for the direction of the discussion

You get an A for discussion if you are always in class: show evidence of having read and thought about the reading with some depth: listen well to others: help focus our discussions with thoughtful comments and questions about the broader implications and comparative possibilities of the readings: and generally offer creative, imaginative ways of engaging the texts, the themes, and other students.

Adapted from Peter Frederick