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American National Government

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Every person uses a unique lens to observe the world. Many times we make the mistake of thinking that our les is **the only** way of looking at phenomena. Moreover, we often say that the lenses used by others are biased and unjustified. We should all know that EVERY lens anyone ever uses carries its own biases. As such, let me take this opportunity to identify the lens that we will use to observe and explain American government. Race will serve as our device thru which we will read, discuss, and critique the American government. To this end, we will seek to understand the role that race has played in American government and its implications. American government and race have been inextricably linked throughout the American experience. This does not mean that this course will only talk about race. You will be **introduced** to the field of American politics. Race is only the lens that we will use to view the field. This course will prepare you to take future courses that cover American politics such as “The Legislative Process” and “The Presidency”.

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 the mechanisms that were created early in American history. Although change seems to come slowly, it has been a constant. Just looking at the most recent elections shows how far we have come, yet reminds us of our static nature in American politics. In addition to the many other current events, the election of a Black man to the presidency demonstrates the durability of the system, yet cautions us that some critical changes may be necessary. The ongoing debates surrounding the issues of personal liberty, troops abroad, minority rights, and government’s role in the economy (at the least), indicate the possibility of very serious changes in the political climate of the near future. 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.

There is also a nontraditional quantitative reasoning component of this course. This second component of the course will be used to introduce you to statistics that are commonly used by many social scientists. You will use real data to examine various research questions. Several class sessions will be used to make you familiar with using data to answer political phenomena and you will be expected to bring your laptop with you to these class sessions. You will have hands on experience with computers and data from the American National Election Studies distributed by the ICPSR. If you pass the course with a C, you will receive Q credit for the course.

The goals of the class are…

1. Teach the basics of American government i.e. Constitution, Institutions, Elections, etc

2) Introduce different perspectives and controversies of American government

3) Develop critical thinking and writing skills

4) Develop quantitative reasoning skills

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)** Short papers: You are required to write two short papers. Each literature review must explore the research in a specific area of American politics. Although you may use the topics in this syllabus, you must use more than the sources listed in the syllabus. You must use 3 **additional scholarly** sources. Each of these papers MUST also use data analysis. The reference librarian will be able to help you with this. You may use the Internet, but it will not count as one of the 3 additional sources. If you would like to count an internet source as one of your 3 sources, please consult with me. In order to write this paper, you should think about the topic and then find an area of the research that you would like to explore. The review will begin with a research question and end with a thesis.  Each article that you review must at least include the research questions addressed by the scholars, the hypotheses, the variables and how they are defined, the data, and their findings. A successful review must also include how the articles are related to each other. You may include the thesis early in the paper, but make sure that you restate it at the end of the paper.

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 with grammatical errors are graded harshly**. I would expect you to let others (such as tutors at 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. I will be available to answer questions about your paper until one week before the paper is due. After that time, I will only provide you with basic information about the paper. I have developed this policy to encourage you to begin your paper early. A well planned and revised paper will lead to better results than a paper that begins 2 days before it is due. Please place all critical essays on Moodle.

**2. Quizzes, and Miscellaneous projects**: You will be expected to complete a variety of miscellaneous assignments during the semester. Some, or all, of these assignments will be used in the calculation of your grade. You MUST put these assignments on Moodle. 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 last minute problems that you encounter.

**3. Attendance and participation:** Although I will not take attendance every day, 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 be active learners so that you can get more out of this course. 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.

**4. Exams:** One Midterm and one Final Exam will be given in this course. The exams may be written or oral. (Midterm 25%/Final 20%)

**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 Moodle 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.

Unless we are having a computer session, your lap top must be **stored** during the class session. It should not be open or on your desk during class time.

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 book will be used this semester…

McClain and Tauber. *American Government in Black and White*

Several other readings on voting behavior and research methods will be assigned.

The breakdown of the grade is as follows...

Participation 10%

Quizzes and Miscellaneous 10%

Essays 35%

Exams 45%

***Preliminary Class Schedule***

January 29 Introduction

January 31 Reading on Moodle

February 5 M&T Chapter 1

February 7 US Constitution and Federalism

M&T Chapter 2

February 12-21

Research Methods and data \*\*\*\*\*\*bring lap top to class

Online Reading

Research Methods

Exercises 5-8

February 26-March 5

Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

M&T Chapter 3-4

Additional readings online

March 7 Jeopardy

March 12 midterm exam

\***I will not review any theses after March 7.**

March 14 Away at conference paper due

Institutions

March 19-21

Congress M&T Chapter 5

Additional readings online

April 2-4 Presidency M&T Chapter 6

Additional readings online

April 9 Bureaucracy M&T Chapter 7

Additional readings online

April 11-16 Judiciary M&T Chapter 8

Additional readings online

**I will not review any theses or paper ideas for second paper after April18!**

April 18 **Social Movements**

M&T Chapters 11

April 23  **Interest Groups**

M&T Chapter 12

Additional readings online

April 25 **Political Parties**

M&T Chapter 13

April 25 **Paper #2 due**

April 30 **Public Opinion**

M&T Chapters 9

Additional readings online

May 2 **Media**

M&T Chapters 10

May 4  **Voting and Elections**

M&T Chapter 14

Additional readings online

May 7 Unfinished business

May 9 Jeopardy

**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