

**PLSC 112: American Government**  
**Summer 2017**  
**(T/R, 9:00-11:40, Pray-Harrold 419, CRN 53041)**

Instructor

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Office Hours

T/R, noon-2:00 PM  
and by appointment

**Focus of the Course**

This course has two general goals. First, it aims to help you understand the basic institutions and processes of American politics. Second, it encourages you to evaluate the practice of democracy in the United States and to sharpen your ability to think critically. We cover four topics: the foundations of U.S. politics, citizen participation, political institutions, and public policy (both domestic and foreign).

This course also satisfies EMU's General Education requirements for Area IV: Social Science. Students are expected to accomplish the following in these classes:

1. Acquire an understanding of social science methods and of how they are used to engage in the systematic study of society and culture.
2. Understand and compare formal and informal social and political structures, organizations, and institutions.
3. Explore and understand power relationships and the impact of social change on different groups and on society in general.
4. Develop an appreciation of different interpretations of contemporary issues, institutions, or structures.
5. Use social science methods and content to interpret and analyze data and reports in the media and to make informed decisions regarding local, national, and international issues.
6. Use basic social scientific research techniques to examine and present information in a clear and concise manner.
7. Understand the relation between qualitative and quantitative research.

A 100-level course cannot address all of these goals in depth. Our primary focus will be on #2 and #3, with slightly less attention given to #5. The remaining learning outcomes will be treated in passing.

**Evaluation**

Your final grade is a weighted average:

- 80% 4 tests @ 20% (100 points)
- 5% discussion
- 5% quizzes
- 5% attendance
- 5% "bubble" factor: highest test

Grades are as follows: A = 94%, A- = 90, B+ = 87, B = 84, B- = 80, C+ = 77, C = 74, C- = 70, D+ = 67, D = 64, D- = 60, F < 60. Borderline final averages can get a higher grade with significant improvement.

## The Work

There are five keys to success in this course: assigned reading, lectures, class discussion, quizzes, and tests. To do well, you must keep up with the reading, which means having it done before the class when it is covered. This is especially critical on days with quizzes. The added challenge for summer is the fast pace – we squeeze an entire semester’s work into 14 sessions covering just over seven weeks. That means that each class is like one week’s work with a potty break halfway through class.

**Assigned Reading.** The material below is required for the course:

- Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright, Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics, 7<sup>th</sup> brief edition (CQ Press, 2017). ISBN 978-1-5063-4995-4.
- A daily newspaper, preferably the New York Times or Wall Street Journal, although the Detroit Free Press and news magazines provide decent coverage of national politics.
- Additional readings assigned during the semester and posted to CANVAS.

**Quizzes.** There will be 8 quizzes during the semester on the days listed in the syllabus. The quizzes will be either at the start of class and brief (10 to 15 minutes) or distributed as homework one class ahead of the date for the assigned reading. Each will be worth 20 points and consist of some combination of multiple choice questions, fill-in items, and short answers. The emphasis will be on definitions, patterns, characteristics of institutions, and court cases. Your overall quiz grade will be the percentage of possible points that you earn for your five best quizzes. Quizzes missed for any reason will earn a zero.

**Tests.** There is one test for each part of the course, but no cumulative final exam. Each test lasts 75 minutes and includes some combination of multiple choice and fill-in items, plus one essay. You will be given a list of five possible essay questions before each test. Three will appear on the test, and you will answer one, which is half of your test grade. Make-up tests require a verifiable medical excuse and are given at my discretion.

Your performance on essays is critical. The most important thing to remember is that good description is “C” work. A strong performance requires analysis, which is not the same as stating your opinion. Rather, your aim is to explain. Another way to think about analyzing is to pose a few questions: What causes this, or how does it work? How does it compare to other things? What are its effects?

**Discussion.** You may be called on at any time and will be evaluated based on the quality (not quantity) of your comments. You earn a "C" for basic description or summary of assigned material. A "B" is awarded for demonstrating that you understand arguments and their implications. An "A" requires critically analyzing material on a regular basis.

**Attendance.** You start with a grade of 100 and lose 5 points for each absence for which you do not have a verifiable medical excuse.

**Class Meetings.** Lectures are not designed to repeat or replace the textbook or other material. Lectures will highlight certain themes, discuss more important or difficult parts of the reading, fill in detail, and raise issues for you to think about. That sometimes means that I will play devils advocate, including making an argument that is not my own opinion. Questions are welcome during class.

A key part of useful class meetings is basic courtesy and professionalism in the workplace. You are expected to behave in ways that do not distract or insult others. Personal attacks as you debate or discuss matters have no place in class – you should be able to win an argument based on logic and evidence. One rule here is rather simple: the use of electronic devices, including laptops, is banned except on occasions when they are explicitly authorized. A first violation converts your participation grade to 60; a second violation changes the grade to zero – in effect costing you a full letter grade in your course average.

**Academic Honesty.** The Department of Political Science follows EMU policy regarding academic honesty. Tests and quizzes are administered “closed book” with no material around your seat and the only thing on your desk being a pen. I will refer cases of academic dishonesty to the Office of Student Conduct. For cheating on tests and quizzes, the lowest possible penalty will be a zero..

**Other Support & Policies:**

[Disabilities Resource Center](#) (DRC) is in 246 Student Center (734.487.2470). Students must register with the DRC before any accommodations are possible.

[Holman Success Center](#) is in Halle Library, Room G04, and offers study tables, tutoring, and other support. They have not yet provided any specific services for PLSC 112.

[Office of International Students & Scholars](#) is in 240 Student Center (734.487.3116) and assists international students, who must pay attention to enrollment and academic status because some changes can result in loss of visa status and deportation.

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## Schedule

### **Part 1: The Foundations of American Politics (The “Rules of the Game”)**

June 22	Introduction & Overview	
June 27	The Setting for American Politics	Barbour & Wright: chap. 1.
June 27-29	The Constitution	Barbour & Wright: chap. 2, Appendix 2 (pp. A7-A9), Appendix 3 (pp. A10-A16); <i>The Federalist Papers</i> #10, #51 (CANVAS).
June 29	<b>Quiz 1: chap. 2</b> The Constitution (conclusion) Federalism	Barbour & Wright: chap. 3.
July 6 July 6	<b>Quiz 2: chap. 5</b> Civil Rights	Barbour & Wright: chap. 5, Appendix 3 (pp. A18-A19 only).
<b>July 11</b>	<b>Test #1 (9:00-10:15)</b>	

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## Part 2: Political Participation

July 11	Overview of Participation (begin @ 10:30)	
July 11-13	Public Opinion	Barbour & Wright: chap. 10.
July 13	<b>Quiz 3: chap. 12</b>	
July 13-18	Elections	Barbour & Wright: chap. 12.
July 18	<b>Quiz 4: parties (pp. 341-361)</b>	
	Political Parties & Interest Groups	Barbour & Wright: chap. 11.
<b>July 20</b>	<b>Test #2 (9:00-10:15)</b>	

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## Part 3: Political Institutions

July 25	<b>Quiz 5: chap. 6</b>	
	Congress	Barbour & Wright: chap. 6.
July 27	The Executive	Barbour & Wright: chaps. 7, 8.
August 1	<b>Quiz 6: chap. 9</b>	
	The Legal System	Barbour & Wright: chap. 9.
	Rights of the Accused	Barbour & Wright: pp. 99-103, 125-130.
<b>August 3</b>	<b>Test #3 (9:00-10:15)</b>	

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## Part 4: Domestic & Foreign Policy

August 3	Policy Making (begin @ 10:30)	Barbour & Wright: pp. 453-463.
August 8	<b>Quiz 7: 1<sup>st</sup> Amdt. (pp. 108-123)</b>	
	1 <sup>st</sup> Amendment, Privacy	Barbour & Wright: pp. 108-123, 130-137.
August 10	<b>Quiz 8: domestic policy (pp. 463-485)</b>	
	Domestic & Foreign Policy (and Aug. 10 @ 9:00 if needed)	Barbour & Wright: chap. 14.
<b>August 15</b>	<b>Test #4 (10:25-11:40)</b>	