

American Government
CRN 20603
PLSC 112
Fall 2016
Porter Rm #203
MW 2-3:15 pm

Instructor: Barbara Patrick, Ph.D.

Office: Department of Political Science, Pray Harrold Hall

Office Hours: 12:30-4:00pm T; 12:30pm-2pm MW or by appointment

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COURSE OBJECTIVE:

This course explores the structure and undercurrents of American government by providing an introduction to the ideas and institutions that shape politics in the United States. We will focus our analysis on three major areas: the Constitution and the debates of the founding era, the institutions of modern American government, and the political behavior of the American mass public. We will study the strategies, roles, and limitations of both governmental elites and ordinary citizens, with particular emphasis on how they communicate and interact within the constitutional “rules of the game” to promote or inhibit the achievement of public goods. Ultimately, the goal of this course is to help each member of the class arrive at a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the forces that shape American government and politics, so that he or she may be both a more discerning student and critic of the system and a more informed and reflective participant in it.

TEXTBOOK:

Basics of American Politics, 14th Edition, Pearson Publishing by: Gary Wasserman

Class Attendance and Etiquette:

Class attendance is very important. You have 2 absences, after the second absence your grade will be lowered ½ letter per day you have an unexcused absences. Repetitive late arrivals can also result in an absence. If you arrive late or must leave early it is your responsibility to inform me. Also it is very important that you arrive on time on exam days. If you arrive after the first student completing the exam has left the room, you will not be allowed to complete the exam. Make-up exams are only given with adequate documentation at the end of the semester. Examples of excusable and limited circumstances under make ups are permitted include: travel to represent the University, serious documented illness, or a real family emergency. Class attendance on days that student present days is also very important. Failure to appear on present days without an excused absence will result in a grade deduction. Late arrivals on presentation days will also affect your presentation grade.

Students with Disabilities:

If you wish to be accommodated for your disability EMU Board of Regents policy #8.3 requires that you first register with the Access Services Office (ASO) in room 203 King Hall. You may contact ASO by telephone at (734) 487-2470. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with ASO promptly as you will only be accommodated from the date you register with them forward. No retroactive accommodations are possible.

Academic Integrity:

Academic dishonesty, including all forms of cheating and plagiarism, will not be tolerated. Penalties for an act of dishonesty may range from receiving a failing grade for a particular assignment to receiving a failing grade for the entire course. In addition, you may be referred to Office of Student Judicial Services for discipline that can result in either a suspension or permanent dismissal. The **Student Conduct Code** contains detailed definitions of what constitutes academic dishonesty, and it can be accessed online at www.emich.edu/sjs

GRADING SCALE:

Semester Project and Presentation: 20%

Political Engagement Assignments: 15%

Class Participation: 5%

Test One: 20%

Test Two: 20%

Test Three: 20%

Political Engagement/The Presidential Politics

In addition to reading the course material, you will be required to write two summary documents over the course of the semester that ask you to analyze, engage in, and demonstrate and understanding of presidential politics as the president elect completes his first 100 days in office. The summary discussion must incorporate pertinent policy issues essential to the American political process. The write up must be 2 to 3 paragraphs long. This will translate into 200 to 400 words. The first paragraph should summarize the issue. The second paragraph should demonstrate that you can place the issue within the context of the course material. Your write up must be checked for grammar and spelling.

Semester Project

This project requires students to serve as investigative team that examine different American government and public policy issues. They will study the issue, examine previous responses, and submit research that adequately addresses the problem. Grading is based on the ability to appropriately analyze the issue and to include relevant literature.

Students will be required to present their research to the class as well as submit a written paper to the instructor. The formal/visual presentation of your analysis will count as 10% of your grade. The finished product or written paper will account for 10% of your overall grade. The paper should present a well-established argument with documented sources. More and higher quality

citations are worthy of higher grades. Papers should highlight the long term political and administrative implications of policies. It should include the use of scholarly sources. It should be 5 to 7 pages in length per person. **Out of fairness to all students, I will not accept late assignments.** Presentation will take place in a debate type format. Students will be assigned to groups or team during the first class session and will be afforded class to work with their teammate on the assignment.

I will allow students time to work on summer projects during class.

A list of possible topics is included below.

Topics:

- *Obama Care: Reform or Repeal?
- *The Flint Water Crisis: Assessing the breakdown of government
- * Race and Mistrust of Government: From Rodney King to Kanye West to Black Lives Matter- How Do We Build Trust?
- *Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind: Progressive Federalism vs. Damaging Performance Policy (Options for Students Attending Public Schools/Good or Bad?)
- *Police Office Accountability Reforms and the Use of Body Cameras (The Positives and Negatives)
- *Michigan Emergency Manager System (Effective/Efficient Administration or Curtailing Democracy)
- *Criminal Justice Reform: Rehabilitation or Strict Incarceration?
- *School Safety and Arming School Administrators and Volunteer Security (Arming Street Level Bureaucrats)
- *The Atlanta Teacher Test Scandal: Misguided Policy or Unethical Employees?
- *Downsizing the Government and Contracting Out Public Services
- *Federalism and the Government's Response to Hurricane Katrina: Understandable/vs. Inadequate
- *Immigration Policy (Path to Citizen or Stringent Policies)
- *Teaching Homosexuality in School

COURSE OUTLINE

Week One (January 4, 2017)

Wednesday- Introduction

Week Two (January 9-11, 2017)

Monday-Chapter 1 What is Politics?

Wednesday-Chapter 2 The Constitution: Rules of the Game

Week Three (January 16-18, 2017)

Monday-No Class University Holiday Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Holiday

Wednesday-Chapter 2 The Constitution: Rules of the Game...continued...

Week Four (January 23-25, 2017)

Monday-Chapter 3 The Executive Branch: The President and the Bureaucracy...continued...

Wednesday-Research Paper Presentation (Expectations)

Week Five (January 30- February 1, 2017)

Monday- Chapter 4 The Legislative Branch: Congress

Wednesday-Test One

Week Six (February 6-8, 2017)

Monday-Chapter 4 The Legislative Branch: Congress...continued...

Wednesday-Chapter 5 The Judicial Branch: The Supreme Court and Federal Court System

Week Seven (February 13-15, 2017)

Monday-Chapter 5 The Judicial Branch: The Supreme Court and Federal Court System...continued...

Wednesday-Chapter 6 Civil Rights and Liberties: Protecting the Players

Week Eight (February 20-22, 2017)

No Class-Winter Break

Week Nine (February 27-March 1, 2017)

Monday-Chapter 7 Voters and Political Parties

Wednesday-Test Two

Week Ten (March 6-8, 2017)

Monday-Chapter 7 Voters and Political Parties

Wednesday-Chapter 8 Interest Groups and the Media

Week Eleven (March 13-15, 2017)

Monday-Research Day

Wednesday-8 Interest Groups and the Media

Week Twelve (March 20-22, 2017)

Monday- Chapter 9 Who Wins, Who Loses: Pluralism vs. Elitism

Wednesday- Chapter 9 Who Wins, Who Loses: Pluralism vs. Elitism

Week Thirteen (March 27-29, 2017)

Monday-Presentation

Wednesday- Presentation Day

Week Fourteen (April 3-5, 2017)

Monday-Presentation Day

Wednesday-Presentation Day

Week Fifteen (April 10-12, 2017)

Monday-Presentation Day

Wednesday-Presentation Day

Week Sixteen (April 17, 2017)

Monday-Review Day

The instructor reserves the right to amend the syllabus.

American Government Topics
Debate Topics
Winter 2017

**Federalism and the Government Response to Hurricane Katrina:
Understandable/Adequate v. Inadequate**

Hurricane Katrina was one of the worst natural disasters in American history. After the storm, hundreds of American citizens were left to cope with financial, emotional, and physical devastation. In the state of Louisiana, these problems were compounded as many citizens' fear and devastation turned to outrage due to government's response to the victims of the storm. Although elected officials and bureaucrats have attempted to rationalize their response many citizen across the country still harbor resentment and angrier. Given the magnitude of the storm was the government's immediate response adequate? Or was there a lack of accountability, leadership, and coordination that could or should have been avoided? Did race and social class play a role in the response? Were there positive and negative elements of the government's response? Should the federal, state, and local levels of government all share equal blame? Are there other events in history which may be compared to Katrina (as it related to the government's response)?

Police Office Accountability Reforms and the Use of Body Cameras (The Positives and Negatives)

In recent times many advocates and scholars have raised concerns about interactions between the police and citizens. Several high profile cases such as the Freddie Gray Case in Baltimore and Eric Garner Case in New York have caused some citizens and advocacy groups to argue that stricter accountability mechanisms are necessary for police officers and that in order to hold them more accountable body cameras may serve as an effective mechanism. How might body cameras impact the way police officers and citizens interact with each other? What are some the positive benefits of instituting the use of body cameras? What are some of the negative impacts? What might be their impact on accountability? Are there cities that currently use body cameras that might help support your argument? Are body cameras worth the financial investment? Does this place information or security at risk or does it help to ensure information is safeguarded?

Michigan Emergency Manager System (Effective/Efficient Administration or Curtailing Democracy)

What is the EM system? Should the state intervene in local matters and siege all political control? What political and financial missteps led to the appointment of an emergency manager? What impact has the emergency manager had on the budget and city's financial stability? How have budgetary shortfalls and cuts impacted daily operations? What actors have been involved in this process? How have city administrators and residents treated or addressed? Was their

treatment appropriate? How does a better job at leading the cities that have received EMs- the EM or city officials? Has democracy been curtailed?

Immigration Policy

One of the leading issues for the country is illegal immigration at the US/Mexico border. Advocates on both sides of the issue have taken a position on how best to address the issue. Some advocates have argued that amnesty should be granted to illegal Mexican immigrants already in the US. Other advocates have argued that amnesty should not be granted and illegal immigrants should be sent back across the border. How has illegal immigration affected the American economic and political systems? Are there benefits/positive arguments to granting amnesty to illegal immigrants already in the country? Are there cost and negative consequences associated with granting amnesty? Has Congress recently debated the issue? If so, what policy options were presented? What are the long term cost and benefits associated with granting amnesty? How could or should the country best address the issue.

No Child Left Behind Act and Race to the Top

The NCLB Act seeks to revolutionize the public education system by holding educators accountable for performance. One technique used to accomplish this goal is a transfer provisions that allows students to transfer out of schools that fail to meet performance expectations. Other techniques provided for the dismissal of teachers and closure of failing schools. The spirit of these provisions has found continued support in current Race to Top legislation. Will these policies lead to meaningful reforms in the public education system or will they do more harm than good? Which demographics have been the most impact, either positively or negatively? What have been some of the barriers to implementation? How would you reform the policies?

Teaching Homosexuality in Schools

The question of whether homosexuality should be taught in public schools is a very controversial topic. Advocates have argued that teaching homosexuality helps children to become more tolerant and informed citizens. Opponents, such as those supporting Tennessee's ban on teaching homosexuality, argue that such discussions are immoral and open the door for controversy. Should homosexuality be taught in public school? Why or why not? What are the positives and negatives implications of such discussions? What the legal and social implications? How should policymakers respond to the issue?

Downsizing the Government and Contracting Out Public Services

Public employees work to serve the public. Over time the public workforce and spending has drastically increased in an effort to better meet the needs of the public. Citizens have often expressed concerns over the rising cost of government. Private sector advocates argue that one avenue to address their concerns is contract out public services to the private sector. Should public services be contracted out to the private sector? What are the positives and negatives? Are there current examples positive or negative where the government contracted public services? What are the implications for citizens and public employees?

School Safety and Arming School Administrators and Volunteer Security (Arming Street Level Bureaucrats)

Following the school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut the debate over protecting America's schools and other public institutions ensued. A spokesperson for the National Rifle Association (NRA) and other critics proposed that the solution to school safety might be found in arming educators, administrators, and volunteer security workers. Are there benefits and drawbacks of arming street level bureaucrats in public institution? Are there accountability issues that are associated with the proposal? What are the positives and negatives of such a proposal? What policy reforms would you suggest?

The Atlanta Teacher Test Scandal

The No Child Left Behind Act attempted to enhance educational outcomes by implementing an accountability system that held educators more accountable for student outcomes. Under the legislation educators were rewarded for meeting and exceeding outcomes and punished for failure to achieve expected performance goals or targets. This accountability model significantly altered traditional education accountability models where teachers were held accountable for following rules and professional standards. In the State of Georgia, several school teachers and administrators were charged and convicted of manipulating education outcomes in order to avoid sanctions and receive rewards. Debate has surfaced across the country about the accountability model and punishments that educators received for violating or manipulating the policy. Did the actions of educators warrant the punishment received by those who received prison terms? Are the educators' victims of unfair policy reforms or were they self-interested actors who attempted to manipulate the system for financial gain? Should educators be held accountable for student outcomes or test scores? If no, who should be held accountable and in what manner? What should be the role of teachers in the education process?

Race and Mistrust of Government: From Rodney King to Kanye West to Black Lives Matter-How Do We Build Trust?

African Americans lack of trust and confidence in government administrators has been duly noted. Throughout history events and notable figures have highlighted the distrust. What are some of the sources of contention? Are claims presented by minorities that elected officials and administrators are insensitive to their needs and desires valid or invalid? How might this be addressed? Is there a one size fits all model that can be applied across government entities? Are there current strategies in place to address the issue? What administrative reforms would you implement to make advancements and bridge the gap between minority citizens and the government that seeks to serve them?

