

PLSC 112 – American Government

Political Science Department
College of Arts & Sciences
Eastern Michigan University
Winter 2016

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Class Time: 12:30 to 1:45 PM, MW
420 Pray-Harrold
Office Hours: 2 to 3:20 PM, MW (P-H, 601M)
1 to 3:30 PM, T (P-H, 601M)
and by appointment

Course Description

Governments across the world seek to discourage certain behaviors in their citizens and to encourage other behaviors. In the United States, our national government tries to discourage illicit drug use and to encourage homeownership, to cite just two examples. How are decisions made about what to discourage and what to encourage? That is the focus of this course, and to answer the question we will examine the following:

- How our government is designed;
- How individuals form and act on their political preferences;
- How individuals transmit political preferences to government;
- And, how government acts (and does not act) on what its citizens appear to want.

Together we will ask and answer many important questions about the political world. As part of that examination you will learn to grapple with complex ideas and information to construct your own understanding of American Government. Along the way you will learn about the discipline of political science and how it is that political scientists have sought to improve our understanding of government.

General Education, Major/Minor Requirements

If you have not yet satisfied the General Education Knowledge of the Disciplines requirement of two social science courses (GEKS), you may use PLSC 112 to meet one of the two courses required. Students majoring or minoring in political science are encouraged to take PLSC 112. This course can be used to satisfy the Political Science Department's prerequisite that six credit hours be taken below the 300-level before any upper-division courses (300- or 400-level) can be taken.

Course Objectives

Students will learn to do the following:

- ...think critically about democratic forms of government;
- ...think critically about language used to discuss politics and political issues;
- ...explore and understand power relationships and the effect of social change on different groups and on society in general;
- ...analyze the advantages (and disadvantages) of federalist systems;
- ...identify and reflect on the various types of political actors in a democracy;

- ...understand and compare formal and informal social and political structures, organizations, and institutions;
- ...reflect on scarce resources and the complexities involved in allocating them;
- ...develop an appreciation of different interpretations of contemporary issues, institutions, or structures.

Course Resources

Required

- Sidlow, Edward, and Beth Henschen. 2016. *GOVT* (7th Edition). Boston: Cengage Learning.
- Additional readings will be provided in Adobe Acrobat (PDF) format on the course shell in Canvas, the university's learning management system (LMS). Access to Canvas is available at <http://canvas.emich.edu> using your EMU NetID and password.

Course Activities to Meet Objectives

I have organized readings, discussions, lectures, exercises and exams to guide you toward the objectives stated above. You are expected to *read assigned material prior to the class when it will be covered*. This helps facilitate discussion and give you some context in which to consider lecture material. In the event that I fall behind on material, you should continue reading as assigned. Reading before and after class sessions will provide you with a deeper understanding of the material. Students are encouraged to read strategically and with time constraints in mind. I'll explain what I mean by this in class.

Course discussions and lectures have been designed to simplify and illustrate ideas covered in the readings. The activities of reading, listening and speaking are purposefully coordinated to help you internalize the ideas being presented. Students who skip readings and count on me for the highlights are less likely to learn the material. Students who skip class and rely on the readings will miss elaboration, discussion and examples that will be useful to demonstrating competency through writing and exams. *You are expected to read, attend and participate in class*. If you believe your personal circumstance warrants an exception to this expectation, you should see me at the start of the semester to discuss your situation.

I need to assess your progress toward the stated objectives of the course, and to do this I will use exams and short writing assignments. All students begin the course with a zero. I assume that you are entering with no knowledge of the subject being covered. Your final grade will reflect your ability to demonstrate understanding of the material presented.

Exams

There will be three exams. All will be the same format. They will be given in class on specific days and require you to do one of the following: identify the correct answer from among several choices; fill in the blank; or give the correct answer in a few sentences. The second and third exams will not cover material from previous exams. All exams will be closed book (notebook and phone, included) and will require the use of paper, pen or pencil. Students will not receive credit for any answers that I cannot read. I will take time in class before each exam to answer questions you may have about the material. Any questions posed after that must be raised either in a threaded discussion in Canvas or posed directly to me during office hours or during an appointment. I will not answer questions via e-mail. I want all questions posed electronically to be done by threaded discussion so you can learn from one another. You are welcome to stop by my office any time. I will meet with you if I can at that moment.

Exercises

There will be two exercises for you to complete this semester. Each is designed to deepen your understanding of some part of the field. American Government is such a vast field that there are dozens of potential exercises that you could complete that would be meaningful (in my humble opinion) to your education. We will focus on only two.

- In the Language in Politics Exercise you will be asked to think about four different types of statements that can be used to evaluate the words used by everyday citizens, members of the media and political actors to influence thinking about public issues. The purpose of this exercise is to help you develop your ability to discern and evaluate different types of information so you can become a more reflective citizen.
- In the Tragic Choices Exercise you will be asked to consider pleas for medical assistance from a variety of individuals and to prioritize the cases. The purpose of this exercise is to introduce you to an important problem in the provision of public services: There is rarely, if ever, adequate resources to help everyone who requests assistance.

Weights and Assigned/Due Dates

1. Exercise 1: Language in Politics (10 percent)
 - Assigned: Jan. 25; Due: Feb. 1
2. Exam 1 (20 percent)
 - Feb. 8
3. Exercise 2: Tragic Choices (15 percent)
 - Assigned: Feb. 8; Due: Mar. 2
4. Exam 2 (25 percent)
 - Mar. 21
5. Exam 3 (25 percent)
 - Apr. 22 (11:30 a.m.)
6. Best Grade (5 percent)
 - Your highest grade from the three exams and two assignments will be applied toward your final grade at the weight of five percent.

Course Grades

Grading is on a letter scale from "A" to "F" for writing assignments Exams are graded on a numeric scale.

Course Assessments

- A Exceptionally High Order 97/100
- A- 92/100
- B+ 88/100
- B Distinctly Above Average 85/100
- B- 82/100
- C+ 78/100
- C Average 75/100
- C- 72/100
- D+ 68/100
- D Below Average 65/100
- D- 62/100
- F Unsatisfactory (denoting failure) 55/100

Overall Course Grades

- A Exceptionally High Order 93+
- A- 90-92
- B+ 88-89
- B Distinctly Above Average 83-87
- B- 80-82
- C+ 78-79
- C Average 73-77
- C- 70-72
- D+ 68-69
- D Below Average 63-67
- D- 60-62
- F Unsatisfactory (denoting failure) Below 60

Students who track their performance throughout the semester and wish to compute various possible final outcomes will find the following formula for Microsoft Excel helpful:

- Final Grade = (Exercise1 * 0.10) + (Exam1 * .20) + (Exercise2 * 0.15) + (Exam2 * 0.25) + (Exam3 * 0.25) + (Best Grade * 0.05)

Course Policies*Classroom Conduct*

Any successful learning experience requires mutual respect. Neither instructor nor student should be subject to behavior that is rude, disruptive, intimidating, or demeaning. Views may differ on what counts as rudeness or courtesy. If you are not sure what constitutes good conduct in this classroom, ask me. The instructor has primary responsibility for and control over classroom behavior and maintenance of academic integrity.

Class Attendance

Regular class attendance and active participation in classes are important elements in the learning process. Students are at the university primarily for the sake of their intellectual growth and development. Each student is personally responsible for the satisfactory completion of the coursework required. This means specifically that you are expected to attend classes regularly, and that you are responsible for the work assigned in class, the material covered in class and for participation in class activities (including discussion and listening) designed as part of the learning experience. Students who miss class regularly may have their final grade lowered by one or two full letter grades as a penalty for not being part of the learning experience in the classroom.

University practice, as per the Ombuds Office, is as follows:

1. Students are responsible for notifying and communicating directly with their instructor(s) if they miss class(es) for any reason, even in a crisis.
2. Students must work directly with their instructor(s) if they miss class for any reason and need to discuss implications of their absence(s).
3. Students are advised to email instructor(s) immediately in cases of long-term medical illness/hospitalization or the death of a loved one. Email communication will suffice until the student and their instructor(s) can meet to discuss a plan forward.

4. Excused absences, exceptions and/or academic accommodations related to absences rests at the discretion of the instructor.
5. In urgent absentee circumstances, faculty may request and/or receive University verification of a death or long-term medical illness/hospitalization. In such cases, where faculty are seeking University verification from a student, they must refer students to the Office of Student Well-Being (SWB).
6. If a student's personal circumstances and/or nonattendance issues present so significant a problem that instructors are unable to address them within the context of the course, students should be referred to the Office of the Ombuds for options related to appropriate policies and resources that can assist the student.

Class Participation and the Expression of Ideas

Class participation is expected and will add significantly to the learning environment. Please feel free to ask questions or express ideas in class that are related to course content. I ask that you be respectful of your classmates or me when disagreeing with their or my views. I also ask that you be respectful of the learning objectives for the course when raising topics not obviously related. Please do not be offended if I feel the need to draw our attention back to the course material as outlined for the semester.

Late (or Missed) Assignments and Make-Up Examinations

An important part of the university experience is professional socialization. In the professional world, employees who fail to show up are often penalized financially or in other substantive ways. You should expect the same treatment here. Therefore, exams are to be taken, and assignments are due, on the dates announced in the syllabus. Any exception to these dates is to be agreed upon by me *in advance*. The opportunity to make up an exam or to turn in a late paper will depend on the circumstances, and students should be prepared to provide documentation, if asked, that substantiates the reason for the absence or late paper. I reserve the right not to offer a make-up exam or to lower the exam grade of a student who is offered one. Likewise, I reserve the right not to accept late assignments or to lower the grade of a student whose assignment is accepted late.

Penalties for Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism occurs when a writer deliberately passes off another's words or ideas without acknowledging the source. For example, turning in another's work as your own is plagiarism. If you plagiarize in this class, you will receive a zero on the assignment on which you are working and your case may be referred to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards (SCCS) for additional disciplinary action. Please be aware that plagiarism can result in suspension or permanent dismissal from the university.

Plagiarism is different from misuse of sources, occasions when a writer does not properly cite a source, misuses quotations, includes too much of an original source in a paraphrase or summary, or commits similar unintentional violations of academic protocol. If you misuse sources, we will work together on appropriately incorporating and/or citing the sources. The misuse of sources may result in work being repeated, and a penalty for late work may be imposed.

University Services to Assist You in Learning

Disability Resource Center

It is my goal that this class be an accessible and welcoming experience for all students, including those with disabilities that may impact learning in this class. Students who believe they may have trouble

participating or effectively demonstrating learning in this course should meet with me (with or without a Disability Resource Center (DRC) accommodation letter) to discuss reasonable options or adjustments. During our discussion I may suggest you contact the DRC (240K Student Center; 734-487-2470; drc@emich.edu) to talk about academic accommodations and the need for an accommodation letter. You are welcome to talk to me anytime during the semester about such issues, but it is always best if we can talk at least one week prior to the need for any modifications so that I can plan accordingly.

Writing Support

Depending on your needs, there are several options to help you develop your writing skills. Some are available online, and some offer in-person consultation based on sample writing that you take with you.

If you have minor problems with punctuation or organizing paragraphs, or if you just want to write cleaner, more concise text, my favorite book to help with this is now offered free online at <http://www.bartleby.com/141/>. Alternatively, you can find a copy at your local library or for sale in the usual places for books. The citation is as follows: Strunk Jr., William and E.B. White. 1918. *The Elements of Style*. Ithaca, N.Y.: W.P. Humphrey. Newer editions are available than the 1918 edition. Any will work nicely for you. The book is short and cheap.

If you require more serious help, or just want to work with a human being, please consider turning to The University Writing Center, The Academic Projects Center or The Holman Success Center.

- The University Writing Center (115 Halle Library; 487-0694) accepts appointments or you may drop in during regular hours, which can be found at <http://www.emich.edu/uwc/>. The UWC also has several satellite locations across campus (in Owen, Marshall, Pray-Harrold, and Mark Jefferson).
 - The UWC can help you with the writing process, but it does not proof papers for grammar and usage errors.
- The Academic Projects Center (116 Halle Library) also offers one-to-one writing consulting for students, in addition to consulting on research and technology-related issues. Students can make appointments or drop in during regular hours, which can be found at <http://www.emich.edu/apc/>.
- The Holman Success Center offers a variety of programs to help you develop academically. Their offerings and hours can be found at <http://www.emich.edu/hsc/>.
 - The HSC will help you with proofing papers for grammar and usage errors.

Course Outline

Week One – Jan. 6

Course Overview

America in the 21st Century

Required Reading

- None

Week Two – Jan. 11 and 13

America in the 21st Century

What Is Political Science?

Required Reading

- Sidlow and Henschen, Ch. 1
- Nyhan, Brendan. 2015. "It's Easy to Overestimate the Effect of Paris Attacks on 2016 Race." *The New York Times*, Nov. 16.

Lecture Resources

- American Political Science Association. 2015. "What is Political Science?" Accessed July 15. <http://www.apsanet.org/RESOURCES/For-the-Public/What-is-Political-Science>.

Week Three – Jan. 20

The Constitution

Required Reading

- Sidlow and Henschen, Ch. 2
- Sidlow and Henschen, Appendix A (The Declaration of Independence)
- Sidlow and Henschen, Appendix B (The Constitution of the United States)
- Sidlow and Henschen, Appendix C (Federalist Papers No. 10 and No. 51)

Week Four – Jan. 25 and 27

Language in Politics

Federalism

Required Reading

- Sidlow and Henschen, Ch. 3
- Scott, Dylan. 2012. "Over-the-Counter Culture." *Governing*. August, 24-30.
- Southall, Ashley, and Jack Healy. 2013. "U.S. Won't Sue to Reverse States' Legalization of Marijuana." *The New York Times*, August 30.

Lecture Resource

- "Issues to Watch: 10 of the Biggest Policies and Problems Legislatures Will Confront in 2015." 2015. *Governing*. January, 30-39.

Assessment

- Exercise One: Language in Politics Assigned

Week Five – Feb. 1 and 3

Civil Liberties

Civil Rights

Required Reading

- Sidlow and Henschen, Chs. 4 & 5
- Liptak, Adam. 2015. "Supreme Court Says Kentucky Clerk Must Let Gay Couples Marry." *The New York Times*, Aug. 31.
- Liptak, Adam. 2015. "Limits on Church Signs Ruled Unconstitutional." *The New York Times*, June 18.
- Liptak, Adam. 2015. "Supreme Court to Weigh Race in College Admissions." *The New York Times*, June 29.

Lecture Resources

- The Oyez Project. 2002. "Gratz v. Bollinger." Accessed Sept. 2, 2015. http://www.oyez.org/cases/2000-2009/2002/2002_02_516.
- The Oyez Project. 2002. "Grutter v. Bollinger." Accessed Sept. 2, 2015. http://www.oyez.org/cases/2000-2009/2002/2002_02_241/.

Assessment

- Exercise One: Language in Politics Due

Week Six – Feb. 8 and 10

Exam 1

Public Policy

Required Reading

- Sidlow and Henschen, Ch. 15
- "Issues to Watch: 10 of the Biggest Policies and Problems Legislatures Will Confront in 2015." 2015. *Governing*. January, 30-39.
- Dynarski, Susan. 2015. "Why Students with the Smallest Debts Have the Larger Problem." *The New York Times*, Aug. 31.

Lecture Resource

- Akers, Elizabeth J., and Matthew M. Chingos. 2014. "Are College Students Borrowing Blindly?" *Brookings Institution*, December.

Week Seven – Feb. 15 and 17

Public Policy, continued

Required Reading

- Sidlow and Henschen, Ch. 15

Lecture Resources

- Shafritz, Jay M., and Christopher P. Borick. 2011. *Cases in Public Policy and Administration*. Boston: Logman. Ch. 6.
- Calabresi, G. and P. Bobbitt. 1978. *Tragic Choices: The Conflicts Society Confronts in the Allocation of Tragically Scarce Resources*. New York; W.W. Norton.
- Scheuenemann, Leslie P., and Douglas B. White. 2011. "The Ethics and Reality of Rationing Medicine." *Chest* 140(6):1625-32.

Assessment

- Exercise Two: Tragic Choices Assigned

Week Eight – Feb. 22 and 24

Winter Recess – No Class

Week Nine – Feb. 29 and Mar. 2

Interest Groups

Political Parties

Required Reading

- Sidlow and Henschen, Chs. 6 & 7
- Sidlow and Henschen, Appendix C (Federalist Papers No. 10 and No. 51)
 - Read No. 10 only

Assessment

- Exercise Two: Tragic Choices Due

Week Ten – Mar. 7 and 9

Public Opinion and Voting

Required Reading

- Sidlow and Henschen, Ch. 8

Lecture Resources

- Stimson, James A. 1999. *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings*. Boulder, Colo.; Westview Press.

Week Eleven – Mar. 14 and 16

Campaigns and Elections

Required Reading

- Sidlow and Henschen, Ch. 9

Week Twelve – Mar. 21 and 23

Exam 2

Politics and the Media

Required Reading

- Sidlow and Henschen, Ch. 10

Week Thirteen – Mar. 28 and 30

The Congress

Required Reading

- Sidlow and Henschen, Ch. 11
- Sidlow and Henschen, Appendix C (Federalist Papers No. 10 and No. 51)
 - Read No. 51 only

Week Fourteen – Apr. 4 and 6

The Presidency

Required Reading

- Sidlow and Henschen, Ch. 12

Week Fifteen – Apr. 11 and 13

The Bureaucracy

Required Reading

- Sidlow and Henschen, Ch. 13
- McFadden, Robert D. 2015. "Frances Oldham Kelsey, Who Saved U.S. Babies from Thalidomide, Dies at 101." *The New York Times*, Aug. 8.
- Fournier, Rob. 2013. "The Outsiders: How Can Millenials Change Washington If They Hate It?" *The Atlantic*, Aug. 26.

Week Sixteen – Apr. 18

The Judiciary

Required Reading

- Sidlow and Henschen, Ch. 14

Exam 3

11:30 p.m., Friday, Apr. 22

Pray-Harrold, Room 420