

PLSC 112: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

Fall 2013

Instructor: Peter Freedman-Doan

Time: Monday 6:00-8:40 p.m.

Phone: 615-0210

Place: Room 420 Pray-Harrold

Office Hours: Monday 4:30-5:45 p.m. or by appointment.

Location: Main floor lounge, Pray-Harrold

E-mail: pdoan@umich.edu

Course Description and Purpose: This course is designed as a challenging, college-level, introduction to American politics and government. America is a democracy. When you ask most people what they think democracy means they mention concepts such as “majority rules” or activities such as elections. The central theme of the course is that democratic government in America depends on a complex set of social arrangements and a complex set of institutional arrangements for its success. Thus, while voting and "the majority rules" are part of what democracy is about, there is much more to American democracy and government. Just how much more--that's the subject of the course!

This course is designed to meet the General Education requirements for Social Science (see <http://www.umich.edu/gened/index.html>). As such, students will

- Acquire an understanding of social science methods and of how they are used to engage in the systematic study of society and culture including survey research and polling.
 - Understand and compare formal and informal social and political structures, organizations, and institutions, especially ideas concerning constitutionalism, formal social arrangements and informal social practices that promote liberty and equality.
 - Explore and understand power relationships and the impact of social change on different groups and on society in general, especially impacts related to race, gender, and religion.
 - Develop an appreciation of and an ability to make judgments about different interpretations of contemporary issues, institutions, or structures.
 - Use social science methods to interpret and analyze data and reports in the media and to make informed decisions regarding local, national, and international issues especially concerning the design, execution, and interpretation of polling and voting data.
 - Use basic social scientific research techniques to examine and present information in a clear and concise manner.
 - Understand the relation between qualitative and quantitative research.
- **Required Text:** Ginsberg, Lowi, and Weir, [We the People: An Introduction to American Politics](#), (9th edition, shorter). This book is published by WW Norton (Hereafter, WTP). This text will certainly be available at the bookstore in the Student Union. The ISBN for the version I have selected is ISBN 978-0-393-12439-2. This book is also available (at a much lower price!) in an on-

line version (access for 180 days only, ISBN: 978-0-393-90456-7) or a download version (ISBN: 978-0-393-90455-0). If you decide to use the on-line or download option, I would hope that you are computer savvy and able to bring a laptop to class. During a typical class session, I make frequent reference to tables and charts in the text. You will need them in front of you to understand those parts of the lecture. To examine the electronic book options visit the WW Norton website:

<http://books.wwnorton.com/books/detail-formats.aspx?ID=4294969517>

In addition to the textbook, I have assigned two (out of 85) of the Federalist Papers. Federalist #2 and #10 are public domain documents available from many on-line sources. I will make them available via the course website (see below). Alternatively, you may Google search on the words “Federalist Papers” and you will find many sources for Federalist Papers #2 and #10. I will also, from time to time make other optional reading available via the course website.

Student Responsibilities: I use the EMU Web-enhancements system, EMU-Online, to provide class information and to post lecture slides and class handouts in the Doc Sharing folder. You may print the lecture slides if you wish. They are a handy way to organize notes from the lectures. You will be required to print and to bring to class the handouts posted on the EMU-Online course website. Instructions will be provided. **All students will be required to log into the course site prior to the first class session.** I will also send out emails through the EMU system regularly. Make sure you empty your trash folder, as that folder tends to use space and block incoming email when full. **Check the course site and your email regularly.**

Attendance and Reading

Students are responsible for all materials presented both in lecture and in the readings. About 60% of the tested material in the course will come from the lectures. Thus, students are expected to attend all lectures. I will take attendance weekly, but I do not “count” attendance. It is simply difficult, if not impossible, to pass this course without regular attendance. The required reading for this course is limited. Students are expected to read the required material prior to each class meeting. Students are required to bring, or have electronic access to their textbook, during all class meetings.

Tests, Presentations, and Papers

All students are required to take quizzes and examinations on the dates provided in the schedule. No exceptions will be made, unless I am notified (and given a valid reason) in advance. Alternate date examinations may differ significantly from the regularly scheduled exams in both form and content. **All alternate date examinations must be taken prior to the next class meeting.** Usually, this will mean students will come to my office hours prior to class and take the make-up exam. All students are also required to turn in papers at the beginning of the class meeting on the dates listed in the syllabus. Students may turn-in papers electronically via email. The time stamp on the email should also be before the beginning of the class meeting time on the date listed in the syllabus. Late papers will be penalized 1/3 a grade per day (ex. B+ becomes B). Each student is required to present one oral presentation. Dates for individual presentations will be assigned during our second class session. Presentations must be made on the assigned date. No exceptions will be made, unless I am notified (and given a valid reason) in advance. Late presentations (without valid excuse) will be penalized 1 full letter grade.

Academic Integrity: Ideas are the main currency of academic life. Thus, if you copy other students' tests or materials, or present someone else's ideas as your own you are, in effect, stealing. I take academic integrity very seriously. At a minimum cheating will result in a grade of failure on the specific assignment. The university can and will take stronger measures. All students are expected to comply with conditions of Section V, part A of the Eastern Michigan University (EMU) Student Conduct Code governing Academic Honesty. The Student Code of Conduct can be seen at <http://www.emich.edu/sjs/conductcode.html>.

Lecturer Responsibilities: I will prepare lectures that elucidate and expand upon the readings. I will prepare for and lead class discussions. I will prepare small group activities. I will provide a variety of evaluation tools. No extra credit will be available. A typical class session will consist of a lecture portion, a brief break, student presentations and/or small group activities, and yet more lecture. I will make all slides shown during the lecture available to students. I will be available during posted office hours to provide additional help to any and all students. I will also be available on a limited basis by appointment. I will be available via e-mail. However, you should note that my e-mail is my University of Michigan office e-mail. I will not be at my office on weekends.

Evaluations and Grades

1) Three in-class tests	3 X 10% = 30%
2) Practice Intro/thesis statement (Pass/Fail)	5%
3) Practice paragraphs	2 X 5% = 10%
3) Reaction Essay (4-5 pages)	20%
4) Oral presentation	15%
5) Final examination (cumulative)	20%

In-class tests and the final examination will be graded on a straight percentage scale: 100%-94%=A, 93%-90%=A-, 89%-87%=B+, etc. Exams will include a limited number of multiple-choice items, but will largely consist of short answer questions based on lecture materials. A significant portion of the final exam will be cumulative. The written assignment will be available on the dates shown on the syllabus (see below). The first three assignments will be one paragraph each. These short assignments are opportunities to practice the skills necessary for completing the 4-5 page Reaction Essay later in the semester. All pertinent materials (topics, format, and grading criteria) will be in the Written Assignments folder of the course website. The oral presentation will be a brief, 3-5-minute presentation in response to topics I assign (see syllabus listings) that are pertinent to the evening's subject matter. Students will have the opportunity to participate in the selection of their topic during the second class meeting. Details will be available in the Oral Presentation folder of the course website.

Observance of Religious Holidays: University Policy: Eastern Michigan University recognizes the rights of students to observe religious holidays without penalty to the student.

University Practice: Students will provide advance notice to their instructors in order to make up work, including examinations that they miss as a result of their absence from class due to observance of religious holidays. If satisfactory arrangements cannot be made with the appropriate instructor(s), students may appeal to the head(s) of the department(s) in which the course(s) is/are offered.

Students with Special Learning Needs: The EMU Students with Disabilities Office (SWD) provides accommodations for students with disabilities and assists faculty and staff with the implementation of those accommodations. I will be more than willing to work with students who present me with materials from the SWD office.

Privacy: The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a Federal law designated to protect the privacy of a student's education records and academic work. The law applies to all schools and universities, which receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education, and is applicable to students at EMU. All files, records, and academic work completed within this course are considered educational records and are protected under FERPA. It is your right, as a student in this course, to expect that any materials you submit in this course, as well as your name and other identifying information, will not be viewable by guests or other individuals permitted access to the course. The exception will be only when you have given explicit, written, signed consent. Verbal consent or email is insufficient.

CLASS SCHEDULE

- | | |
|--------|--|
| 9-Sep | <p><u>Introduction</u></p> <p>Go to the Doc Sharing section of the course website. Open the folder entitled Introduction. Download and print the items entitled Syllabus and Key Terms</p> |
| 16-Sep | <p><u>American Political Culture, WTP, chap 1, Federalist #2</u></p> <p>Practice Intro/Thesis Statement Assigned</p> <p>Oral Presentations Assigned</p> |
| 23-Sep | <p><u>The Constitution and Federalism, WTP, chaps. 2 and 3</u></p> <p>Practice Intro/Thesis Statement Due</p> |
| 30-Sep | <p><u>Public Opinion, WTP chap. 6</u></p> <p><i>Oral Presentation #1: Should gay marriage be legal?</i></p> |
| 7-Oct | <p><u>The Media, WTP, chap. 7</u></p> <p>EXAM 1 (covering <u>sessions 1, 2, 3, and 4</u>)</p> <p>Practice Paragraph 1 Assigned</p> |
| 14-Oct | <p><u>Political Participation and Voting, WTP, chap. 8</u></p> <p>Practice Paragraph 1 Due</p> |
| 21-Oct | <p><u>Political Parties and Elections, WTP, chaps. 9 and 10</u></p> <p><i>Oral Presentation #2: Is the Electoral College justified?</i></p> <p>Practice Paragraph 2 Assigned</p> |
| 28-Oct | <p><u>Groups and Interests, WTP, chap. 11, Federalist #10</u></p> <p><i>Oral Presentation #3: Should we further control campaign contributions?</i></p> <p>Practice Paragraph 2 Due</p> |

- 4-Nov The Congress, WTP, chap. 12
EXAM 2 (covering sessions 5, 6, 7, and 8)
- 11-Nov The Presidency, WTP, chap. 13
Oral Presentation #4: Have modern Presidents taken too much war making power from Congress?
Reaction Essay Assigned: Students A-M
- 18-Nov The Bureaucracy, WTP, chap. 14
Reaction Essay Due: Students A-M
- 25-Nov Federal Courts, WTP, chap. 15
Oral Presentation #5: Should abortion remain legal?
EXAM 3 (covering sessions 9, 10, and 11)
Reaction Essay Assigned: Students N-Z
- 2-Dec Civil Liberties, WTP, chap. 4
Reaction Essay Due: Students N-Z
- 9-Dec Civil Rights WTP, chap. 5
Oral Presentation #6: Should affirmative action programs be discontinued?
- 16-Dec **Final Exam: 6:00**
Part 1: sessions 12, 13 and 14; Part 2: sessions 1-11