

PLSC 112 – Introduction to American Government
Fall 2018

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Rationale

Political Science 112 provides a thorough grounding in American government. It also provides a strong introduction to the discipline of political science. In this course, students gain exposure to how knowledge is generated in the social sciences through the lens of one content area, that of American government. While not a course in civic education, it is designed to help students understand how they can both be good citizens and use the system to their own best benefit.

Through material covered in the course, students gain practice in asking important questions about the political world and answering them using the methods practiced in this social science discipline. Students will take a clearly defined sense of how to be an informed participant in the American political system from this class. They will learn about electoral politics, the politics of the American mass media, the politics of policy making, and get a clear picture of the underpinnings of American democracy. Moreover, students will learn about the role and practices of interest/advocacy groups in American politics. This will allow them to join or support groups intelligently and to act as informed consumers of political information. Finally, students will be exposed to their Civil Rights and Civil Liberties and get some advice on how to properly assert and use them.

COURSE THEMES AND OBJECTIVES

In this course, we will explore various themes, such as history, demographics, economic and political environment as they have an effect on and help us make sense of the complicated set of behaviors, decisions, and disagreements that make up our unique political system. We will examine in some detail the various competing ideologies and values that Americans hold as they interact with their governments in various ways. These will be set in the larger context of two major themes that have come to make up the core of the competition we call American Government. The first is the tension among the deeply held and competing values of freedom (to be able to act as one pleases), order (predictability and control), and equality (being the same). It is impossible to fill demands for each of these at the same time for everyone, even if everyone defined either the values or the preferred outcomes in the same manner, which they don't. The second major theme is the tension between two models or ideas of how a federal republic based on democratic ideal should function: via pluralism or via majoritarianism.

The most heated debates in American political life today can be better understood by applying the first major theme to the second major theme. Current disagreements about the national budget, health care, and other issues will largely be decided on how Americans apply these themes to the policy choices they care about. We will discuss how ideology frequently provides a "shortcut" to choosing to support or not policies that affect the balance of the two models.

The goals of this class are many, both from my viewpoint and, I hope, from yours. An attentive student should finish this course better prepared to be a citizen or resident of the US, to take part in politics as a citizen, to understand the basic functioning of your government at all levels and why it doesn't always

do what you (or anyone else) wants it to, and how competing values (freedom, order, equality) and democratic ideas (pluralism vs. majoritarianism) shape the national conversation about politics. I hope you will also use this opportunity to further develop your own political beliefs, and to be able to explore and articulate those beliefs as you come to see them as useful in our political system.

The course will be roughly divided into four sections, addressed in the following order:

1. The history of how and why our government was set up the way it was and how it has changed and developed over the past 230+ years.
2. The interaction between citizens and government institutions. What do parties do, and why? How do elections work? What is public opinion and how do parties, public opinion, and elections intersect?
3. The formal institutions that make up our national government. The legislative, executive, judicial, and bureaucratic institutions are supposed to get things done. How they go about doing their jobs, and why don't they always do what we think they should.
4. Finally, we'll consider civil rights and civil liberties and the differences between them, and their relationship to power. We'll look at how various groups have worked in our history to secure their rights and liberties and examine anew the current problem of how to balance the civil rights and liberties we so desire with the perceived need for order and security.

TEXTBOOK

REQUIRED:

Turner, et al: Introduction to American Government. 9th Ed. BVT Publishing. ISBN: 978-1517803568
The text can be purchased at all campus bookstores as well as online. It looks to me like the campus bookstores may even be a bit cheaper than Amazon.com. If you don't intend to keep the book I suggest that you purchase an online ebook rental for at least 6 months. That will include access to all the extras. Look online. Also, you might check cheaptextbooks.com.

RULES OF THE GAME

Class meets two days a week for 14 weeks. You are adults. I expect you to attend class and to be on time. No electronic equipment may be used during class with the exception of those needed in cases of disabilities. Cell phones must have their rings turned off. Calls must be taken outside of the classroom. If you wish to use a laptop or a smart phone to take notes, you may, with the caveat that, should I wish to see what you're doing, upon being asked you must raise your hands from the keyboard/touchpad and turn the screen so that I can see it. My experience has been that if you spend your time gazing at your cell you'll probably not get a very good grade.

Let me point out that it is my experience that students who don't take written notes do less well in terms of their final grade than those who do. I don't know what it is about taking notes on a laptop or especially a phone is, but it evidently is not as useful as hand-written notes. Recent research backs up my belief. The two acts of boiling down what I say to something you can write quickly by hand helps both in understanding the concepts and providing a "muscle memory" of your notes.

The format is lecture/discussion and enhanced online graded work, including exercises, quizzes, and discussions. In class I encourage students to raise their hand to interrupt me if you believe you have a pertinent question or point. Online please email as soon as you feel the need for assistance.

If you have any difficulties in the course, contact me right away. The end of the semester is too late.

There will be one short paper required. It will be discussed in class. It must be at least 4 full pages in length or at least 1200 words or it will not be accepted. That means it will earn no points.

You will in all likelihood get a better grade if you are in class to hear how I want the papers written. The papers are due the exact second class starts. One second late is the same as one day late. One-third of a letter grade is deducted for each day late. Papers later than one week late will not be accepted except at the sole decision of the instructor. Papers must be emailed to my emich.edu account. Please see the course homepage more information on how I expect you to format and write the paper and how to properly email me. For those of you who are Freshmen or who are not totally sure of your writing skills, taking the paper to the Writing Center in Pray-Harold [and I believe in Halle Library] prior to turning it in may well improve your grade. They're very good.

You will be expected to keep up on current events. You can most easily do this by reading a major newspaper (NY Times, Washington Post or Wall Street Journal), by reading weekly news magazines, by listening to or watching national news reporting programs, or by web-surfing and reading a variety of blogs. You might subscribe to one of the newspapers or read most of what they publish online at their websites. The EMU library also has copies of these papers. Most national papers offer low-priced student subscriptions online.

Politics is sometimes tough. And the last election was especially contentious. Hillary Clinton would represent at least some continuation of the policies of President Obama while Donald Trump promised to change many, if not most of them. To this point, President Trump appears to be on track to rolling back most of the important parts of President Obama. On the other hand, the economy is booming. Both of those facts undoubtedly influence the thinking of many, if not most, American voters.

The shock of Trump being elected has led to unprecedented reactions that continue nearly two years after the election. What this portends for the Republic remains to be seen.

I expect various students to have very different viewpoints about what the important arguments are, which party or candidate has more 'right' answers, and who 'should' be in charge. That is fine, since it is one of the main reason our government is set up the way it is. I would not be surprised if some heated discussions occur. I will try to keep the discussions civil.

If there are any issues you are concerned about, or anything that makes learning difficult for you in this class, I strongly encourage you to talk with me privately, either in my office or by email. If you perceive that I have not been treating you as you believe I should, please have the courtesy to point it out to me at once.

On the other hand, humor and give-and-take lighten the load. I tend to tell a lot of bad jokes (Dad Jokes as it were). Just remember, simply because you (or I) think something is humorous does not make it so. Please remember that we are part of a large and disparate group while we are in class.

Arrangements will be made to the extent possible for students with special needs, religious observations, or in some other circumstances. If you feel that there is an ongoing or temporary situation in which you need an accommodation, please stop by my office or email me with the facts as soon as possible. In some cases, supporting material may be requested. While I will obviously follow both the law and university policy, in cases which fall outside those lines, I will be the final arbiter. I will make every effort to work with you to provide an environment which makes it possible for you to maximize your learning experience in this class.

PAPERS

I have rules for writing the paper that is required. These rules are [or will be] posted on the course homepage. Please read them carefully, since failure to do so may well affect your grade. I am very serious about how I want the paper to be formatted and written. Violate the rules at the risk of your grade.

GRADES

As a student, you are responsible for your own grade. Grades do not come from out of the blue, and I don't "give" grades. You earn them. I have found that those who sit in the front rows, come to class regularly and on time, pay attention and take notes seem to get more A's and B's than others. Think about it. I will try to help you out by going over the material in class and during office hours, but I will not merely be condensing "the important parts" of the book so you don't have to. Read the book. If you are having difficulty or think you might be having trouble understanding the material, it is your responsibility to contact me immediately. I'm here to help, but I don't read minds, there is one of me and there are about 70 of you.

Components* of the final grade:

1 short paper @ 50 points each 50 points

4 tests @ 50 points each 200 points

5 discussions @ 15 points each 75

5 exercises @ 15 point each 75

Total: 400 points

*These may be changed or adjusted as events during the semester demand.

Grades will be based, roughly, on a scale of 90% = lowest A, 80% = lowest B, 70% = lowest C, 60% = lowest D. I reserve the right to increase any grade by 1/3 of a letter grade for especially good participation in class. Good participation doesn't, however, merely mean talking a lot. It means asking and answering questions, making points, suggesting alternatives and so on that help your classmates understand the material better.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Cheating and plagiarism are unacceptable events in the learning experience. Any student found guilty of an act of academic dishonesty will receive a grade of 0 (zero, not an E) for the work in question as well as possibly an E for the course in cases of gross dishonesty. In addition, students found guilty of such acts will be referred to the university system for possible further disciplinary action. Consult your student handbook for definitions, procedures, and punishments. If you have any doubts about what constitutes academic dishonesty, see me.

Plagiarism is presenting the work, words, or thought of others as your own. Books, articles, newspaper stories, interviews, conversations, videos, and so on should all be properly cited if you use material from them even if you paraphrase them. The easy rule is, if in doubt, cite. Using material from online sources without proper citation is plagiarism. While the paper I assign probably will need little or no outside source material, if you do use outside material [including the text] it is essential that you cite it properly. Otherwise I will drastically reduce the grade and make you re-write the paper. Do it right the first time.

MAKEUP EXAMS AND REGRADES

Anyone who wishes to take a makeup exam missed for any reason must inform me BEFORE the exam is given. Anyone who believes they missed an exam for reasons beyond their control and without their prior knowledge may petition the instructor for a makeup. However, in both cases, the instructor may ask for supporting evidence of the justification for missing the exam and is the sole authority in the question of the adequacy of both the reason for missing the exam and the evidence. Makeups will be given only at the discretion of the instructor under these rules and according to University rules and policies. Minor mishaps of one kind and another rarely qualify for a makeup exam. It is your duty to know what the exam date is and to show up on time to take it. I will announce the dates of exams in class several times.

READING SCHEDULE

We will progress through the text at the rate of approximately 1 chapter per week. Tests will occur on the class day immediately after we finish the above four sections. Thus, you can expect the first exam to happen at the end of week 2 or the beginning of week 3. We will not be doing some of the last chapters. The divisions in this class will not match, exactly, the divisions of the book. I highly encourage you to read ahead.

The following is the calendar for the course, allowing for any changes that may be necessary due to currently unforeseen evidence.

The paper will be due approximately the 9th week of class. We will discuss this as a firm date in class. You will be given at least two week notice of when the paper is due. It will be announced in class. As you can see, we're going to bang through the first 3 chapters pretty rapidly, so I advise that you read them thoroughly and come to class prepared.

****Please remember that the schedule for the class may be altered due to unanticipated events. I will attempt to give you at least a week's notice should that happen.****

Week 1 Chapter 1-2

Week 2 Chapters 2-3

Week 3 Chapter 3 and Test 1

Week 4 Chapter 4

Week 5 Chapter 5-6

Week 6 Chapter 6-7

Week 7 Chapter 7 and Test 2

Week 8 Chapter 8-9

Week 9 Chapter 9-10

Week 10 Chapter 10-11

Week 11 Chapter 11 Test 3

Week 12 Chapter 12

Week 13 Review

Week 14 Final

Academic Dishonesty

Cheating and plagiarism will be punished to the full extent allowed by University rules and regulations. Plagiarism is generally defined in your student handbook as presenting as your own work that done by someone else, even if only an idea and/or not quoted directly. Cutting and pasting from the web is absolutely forbidden, under any and all circumstances. Cite, quote, and when in doubt, ask the instructor. Those caught cheating will be given a zero for the work in which the cheating occurred. Possible plagiarism will be dealt with on a case by case basis. In addition, you may be referred to the 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. More on this in the classroom.

THE USE OF ELECTRONIC DEVICES IN THE CLASSROOM

Laptop computers and smart phones may be used in the classroom to take notes, under the following conditions: when asked, a student must immediately raise her/his hands from the computer or phone and then allow the instructor to see the screen. That is, it is expected that the laptop (or netbook) will be used solely for classroom purposes and not for IMing, emailing or reading email, SMSing friends, Social Networking, playing games, or other use deemed frivolous by the instructor. Should this occur, a first warning will be given. A second offense will result in the use of the device being banned for the student for the rest of the semester.

Communications devices of all types cannot be used in the classroom with the exception that cell phones may be set to vibrate, for students who can demonstrate to the instructor a need to receive incoming communications. This would include emergency personnel and those who can otherwise demonstrate the need. The final decision belongs to the instructor alone.

Texting may not happen in the classroom. That is, students may neither text out nor read messages coming in. No headsets or ear buds may be worn in the classroom. No ipods nor similar devices may be used in the classroom.

In short, with the exception of laptops or netbooks and smart phones for notes, no electronic devices may be used at any time by any student that can't provide proof of their need.

Classroom Management Issues: Students are expected to abide by the Student Conduct Code and assist in creating an environment that is conducive to learning and protects the rights of all members of the University community. Lack of civility and disruptive behavior will not be tolerated and may result in a request to leave class and referral to the Office of Student Services (SJS) for discipline. Examples of inappropriate classroom conduct include repeatedly arriving late to class, using a cellular phone, or talking while others are speaking.

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.

In addition to the articulated course specific policies and expectations, students are responsible for understanding all applicable University guidelines, policies, and procedures. The EMU Student Handbook is the primary resource provided to students to ensure that they have access to all university policies, support resources, and student's rights and responsibilities. Changes may be made to the EMU Student Handbook whenever necessary, and shall be effective immediately, and/or as of the date on which a policy is formally adopted, and/or on the date specified in the amendment. Please note: Electing not to access the link provided below does not absolve a student of responsibility. For questions about any university policy, procedure, practice, or resource, please contact the Office of the Ombuds: 248 Student Center, 734.487.0074, emu_ombuds@emich.edu, or visit the website: www.emich.edu/ombuds