

**PLSC 113: American Government–Honors**  
**Fall 2017**  
**(T/R, 3:30-4:45, Pray-Harrold 421, CRN 16822)**

Instructor

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Office Hours

Tuesday and Thursday, 12:45-1:45  
Thursday, 4:45-5:30  
and appointments (Wednesdays preferred)

**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, with additional emphasis on Michigan. Second, it encourages you to evaluate the practice of democracy in the United States and to sharpen your ability to think critically. We will cover the foundations of U.S. politics, citizen participation, political institutions, and domestic and foreign policy.

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 to #1 and #5. The remaining learning outcomes will be treated in passing.

**Evaluation**

Your final grade is a weighted average:

midterm exam	15%
final exam	25%
Supreme Court case	10%
election analysis paper	30%
participation	15%
bonus: paper or highest exam	5%

All grading is on a 0-100 scale: A = 94%, A- = 90, B+ = 87, B = 84, B- = 80, C+ = 77, C = 74, C- = 70, D+ = 67, D = 64, D- = 60, F < 60. Grades for individual work will be converted to course points to reflect the weight for each task. Final grades just below a cutoff can get the higher grade with significant progress over the semester.

## **The Work**

There are five keys to success in this course: assigned reading, lectures, class discussion, exams, and writing assignments. To do well, you must keep up with the reading, which means having it done before the class when it is covered. Any changes in reading, assignments, tests, deadlines, and the like will be announced and posted electronically.

**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, usually posted to CANVAS.

**Exams.** You will be given a list of possible essay questions before each test. Three from the list will appear on the midterm, and you will answer one. There will be two sets of questions for the final exam, one on material since the midterm and another set covering the course as a whole. 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?

**Supreme Court Case.** This assignment is covered in CANVAS.

**Election Analysis.** This assignment is covered in CANVAS.

**Participation.** This has two components.

- **Discussion** (10%). 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** (5%). 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 assigned reading. They 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. You are expected to do your own work in this class, which includes following guidelines on plagiarism, which means you cannot pass off another’s words or ideas as your own and must give attribution of source materials in your work on the 2016 election. Tests 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 both cheating on tests and quizzes, as well as plagiarism, the lowest possible penalty will be a “zero” on the assignment.

### **Other Support & Policies:**

Students with Disabilities. Anyone wishing accommodation must register with the Disabilities Resource Center (DRC) in 246 Student Center: <http://www.emich.edu/drc/> or (734) 487-2470. Register with the DRC promptly because no retroactive accommodations are possible.

University Writing Center. There are multiple services here, including individual consulting, in Pray-Harrold 211 and other locations. <http://www.emich.edu/uwc/>.

International Students. Pay attention to enrollment and academic status, because some changes if not reported can result in loss of visa status and deportation. For assistance, see the Office of International Students in 240 Student Center: <http://www.emich.edu/oiss/> or (734) 487-3116.

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## **Schedule**

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

September 7	Introduction & Overview	
September 12	The Setting for American Politics	Barbour & Wright: chap. 1.
September 14	The Constitution: Preliminaries	Barbour & Wright: pp. 41-55; Appendix 2 (pp. A7-A9).
September 19	The Constitution: Final Document	Barbour & Wright: pp. 55-73, Appendix 3 (pp. A10-A16); <i>The Federalist Papers</i> #10, #51 (CANVAS).
September 21	Federalism	Barbour & Wright: chap. 3.
September 26, 28	Civil Rights	Barbour & Wright: chap. 5; Appendix 3 (pp. A18-A19 only).

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## Part 2: Political Participation

October 3	Overview of Participation Public Opinion	Barbour & Wright: chap. 10.
October 5, 10	Elections	Barbour & Wright: chap. 12.
October 12	in-class work on election paper	
October 17	Political Parties & Interest Groups	Barbour & Wright: chap. 11.
<b>October 19</b>	<b>Midterm Exam</b>	

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## Part 3: Political Institutions

October 24, 26	Congress	Barbour & Wright: chap. 6.
Oct. 31, Nov. 2	The Executive	Barbour & Wright: chaps. 7, 8.
November 7, 9	The Legal System	Barbour & Wright: chap. 9.
<b>November 13</b>		<b>Election: State Overview due by 5:00 pm</b>
November 14, 16	Rights of the Accused	Barbour & Wright: pp. 99-108, 125-130.
November 16		Presentations: <i>Earls</i> and <i>Kennedy</i> cases.

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## Part 4: Domestic & Foreign Policy

November 21	Policy Making	Barbour & Wright: pp. 453-463.
November 28, 30	1 <sup>st</sup> Amendment, Privacy	Barbour & Wright: pp. 108-123, 130-137. Presentations: <i>Barnette</i> , <i>Santa Fe</i> , <i>R.A.V.</i> , <i>Gonzales</i> , and <i>Obergefell</i> cases
<b>December 4</b>		<b>Election: Final Report due by 5:00 pm.</b>
December 5, 7	Domestic Policy	Barbour & Wright: pp. 463-485.
December 12	Foreign Policy	Barbour & Wright: pp. 486-498.
<b>December 14</b>	<b>Final Exam (3:00-4:30)</b>	