

Introduction to American Government: POLI 2051

Spring 2014

Class Meetings: T/Th 12:00-1:20

Instructor: Ms. Gabriela Vitela

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Office Hours: TBD and by appointment

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Course Description: As an overview of American government, this course explores how the American system came to be; the forces that shaped its development, and their continuing influence; its constitution; institutions, and processes. This course is an approved general education credit for the social sciences. According to the LSU catalogue, “General education courses are not hurdles to be overcome; rather they are means by which students learn to think, describe, interpret and analyze the world. Their primary aim is to educate rather than train, and to instill a desire for life-long learning.” In the social sciences, the learning outcome sought is “an understanding of the informing factors of global interdependence, including economic forces, political dynamics, and linguistic differences.”

Course Objectives: The basic principle of this class is to help students understand and perform their role as citizens of a democratic society. Doing so will encompass the following:

1. Imparting a basic knowledge and understanding of what the American political system is, how and why it works, and how it may be changed when it is seen to fail.
2. Fostering a dynamic and safe environment for intellectual curiosity, civil discussion, and growth as a class, as a democratic people, and as individuals.
3. Increase our knowledge of our basic rights as citizens
4. Forming an awareness of the duties inherent in our role as citizens of a democracy.
5. Critically explore the ways in which our governments influence our quality of life as citizens, and how we may influence our governments for change.

Course Requirements: Class will be a mixture of lecture and *discussion*. You learn more when I don't do all the talking. Class attendance and participation are therefore very important to your success. Roll will be taken daily. Come to class with your assignments read and be prepared to ask questions and discuss the material. This course will involve lots of writing and as such, it is vital that you take good notes on both your readings and class discussions. Your grade in this course will depend on the following:

- **3 Exams**, (20% each): All exams will be cumulative, either multiple choice and short answer or essay exams.
- **Final paper** (20%): 6-8 pages. Due during the final exam period. Details on the specific nature of the paper will be furnished later in the semester.
- **Participation and Attendance** (20%): Roll will be taken every day. There will be short assignments throughout the semester based on class activities as well as discussions posted on moodle in which you will be expected to participate. During class, I will ask questions and initiate discussions in which I expect everyone to contribute. You need to speak regularly in class to earn your full participation grade.

Required Text: *We the People* by Thomas Patterson 9th edition. The bookstore has it in stock and it is available online from Amazon and other online retailers.

Attendance Policy: Roll will be taken every day. You are allowed 3 absences over the course of the semester without repercussions. After those allotted absences, each absence thereafter will result in a 1/3 letter grade deduction.

Electronics: Cell phones, laptops, and other electronic devices are expressly prohibited. If you are caught on a cell phone in class you will be asked to leave and you will be counted as absent for the day.

Academic Honesty: Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses. During an exam if you are suspected of cheating, you will be asked to leave and will have to schedule a makeup exam. If you are caught cheating, your grade for that exam will

automatically be zero and you will be referred to the Dean of Students. Plagiarism on a written assignment will also result in a zero and a referral.

I reserve the right at any point in the semester to make changes to the syllabus as necessary for the course. All changes will be announced in class and posted on the class moodle page. It is the responsibility of each student to keep up with any changes.

Course Outline:

Foundations, Federalism and Participation

Chapter 2: Constitutional Democracy: Promoting Liberty and Self-Government

Chapter 3: Federalism: Forging a Nation

Chapter 6: Public Opinion and Political Socialization: Shaping the People's Voice

Chapter 7: Political Participation: Activating the Popular Will

****Exam 1**

Elections and Congress

Chapter 8: Political Parties, Candidates and Campaigns: Defining the Voter's Choice

Chapter 9: Interest Groups: Organizing for Influence

Chapter 11: Congress: Balancing National Goals and Local Interests

****Exam 2**

The Presidency and the Media:

Chapter 12: The Presidency: Leading the Nation

Chapter 10: The New Media: Communicating Political Images

The Judiciary:

Chapter 14: The Federal Judicial System: Applying the Law

Chapter 4: Civil Liberties: Protecting Individual Rights

Chapter 5: Equal Rights: Struggling Toward Fairness

****Exam 3**

Final Exam Period: Turn in Term Paper