POLS 114-950
Introduction to American Politics
Spring 2013
Department of Political Science
Southern Illinois University

1 Instructor Information

J. Tobin Grant, Professor
Phone: 618.453.3167
Email: grant@siu.edu

Office: Faner 3124
Office Hours: 10:00-12:00 M,T,Tr

2 Course Description

This course is a college level introduction to American government. Students will begin to develop the body of knowledge necessary for informed civic participation. More specifically, students will learn about democratic principles, the structure and institutions of government, the role that ethnicity, race, gender, class, culture and the economy play in shaping the political landscape in America.

3 How the Online Course Works

This online course is designed to closely follow a traditional course on American politics. It has the same requirements as a traditional course with one exception: students use online technology to “attend” lectures.

3.1 SIU Online/Desire2Learn “D2L”

The course uses SIU Online’s program “Desire2Learn” or “D2L” to provide you with everything you need for this course. I will provide all of the quizzes, exams, instructions for assignments, and links to outside websites through D2L. If you can’t find the material, email me. I’ll be happy to help you find it.

3.2 Modules

The course is divided into four modules. Even though this is an online course that allows you to work at your own pace there are deadlines. Each module covers four weeks of material. You have four weeks to watch all of the lectures, read the textbook chapters, pass the reading quizzes, complete the observation project, and take the exam for each module. In other words, you have a lot of freedom during each module on when you do what, but you have a deadline to complete all of the work for each module.
3.3 Lectures

During the Fall 2012 semester, I recorded all of my lectures from a traditional, on-campus, large-lecture American politics course. Each video recorded the audio for the lecture (bloopers, jokes, and class comments included) and the visuals from the lecture slides. You see what students saw on the projection screen and hear exactly what they heard. It’s as close to being in an in-person lecture as you can get without coming to campus.

3.4 Textbook

The textbook for this course is:


I encourage you to use the e-book edition of the textbook ([You can access the ebook information at this website]), but you can use any version of the textbook that you want.

You should consider purchasing a version that gives you access to MyPoliSciLab (www.mypoliscilab.com). MyPoliSciLab includes practice tests, multimedia activities, and more to reinforce your understanding of the textbook. This is not required for the course.

3.5 Reading Quizzes

To help you learn the material in the text, you will take reading quizzes after you read each chapter. After reading each chapter, you must take the quiz for the chapter on D2L. You must receive a grade of 80 percent to receive credit. You may take this quiz more than once. Only your highest grade will be recorded. The grade for each chapter test is pass-fail (pass = a grade of 80 percent or higher; fail = grade of less than 80 percent).

3.6 Exams

The most important assessment of your learning in the course is the exam. There are four exams. Each are timed, multiple-choice exams. Each exam covers only the material from its module. There is no final exam in the course.

3.7 Observing Politics First-hand

One of the best parts of a course on American politics is that it is something you can see and experience first-hand. In each module, there is an observation project. Instructions for each project are located on the course site on D2L. You will watch politics in action. For three of the projects you will watch videos online; for one (the local government project) you can either watch a meeting online or in-person. There are four projects:

• The 1963 March on Washington: Watch footage from the historic March on Washington that included Martin Luther King Jr’s “I Have a Dream” speech. The footage is presented without commentary. Who attended the march? What happened there? What would it be like to be a participant?
• Local Government Meeting: Most of Americans’ interaction with government occurs at the local level. To see American democracy in action, you will go to a local government meeting (or watch one online). Who from the community came to the meeting? What issues were discussed? How were problems discussed?

• 2012 Party Platform Committees: Every four years the national political parties put together their platforms as a way of saying what they stand for. You’re going to peek in on the Republican and Democratic Parties as they discuss their platforms. But more important than the platforms, what can you learn about the parties from how they put their platforms together? How are the parties different? In what ways are they similar?

• House and Senate Deliberations: The Congress is not one but two legislatures: The House and the Senate. Each chamber has its own rules and its own way of doing business. You will watch each chamber in action. How would you characterize each chamber’s deliberations? In what ways are they the same? In what ways are they different? What did you learn from watching lawmaking in action?

4 Student Learning and Assessment

4.1 Learning Objectives

1. To know the basic features of American politics and government.

2. To assess the U.S. political system as a representative democracy.

3. To prepare to effectively use this knowledge as thoughtful citizens participating in civil society.

4.2 Assessment, i.e. how you’ll be graded and why

Exams: 60% (or 15% per exam)

There will be four exams. Each exam will be an online, open-book, open-notes, timed, multiple-choice exam. Each exam is equally weighted. Exams are not cumulative; each exam covers material just from its module.

There is one exam per module. Each exam must be completed by noon on the deadline for the module.

The exams will be used to evaluate Objectives 1, 2, and 3.

Reading Quizzes: 20%

To help you learn the material in the text, you will take reading quizzes after you read each chapter. After reading each chapter, you must take the quiz for the chapter on D2L. You must receive a grade of 80 percent to receive credit. You may take this quiz more than once. Only your highest grade will be recorded. The grade for each chapter test is pass-fail (pass = a grade of 80 percent
or higher; fail = grade of less than 80 percent)

There is one quiz for each chapter in a module. All quizzes for each module must be completed by noon on the deadline for the module.

The reading quizzes will be used to evaluate Objective 1.

**Observation Projects - 20%**

To understand American politics, you need to experience it in action. To do this, you will have four observation projects. For each observation project, you will:

- Watch politics in action,
- Take detailed notes on worksheets (and then typed into an online worksheet on D2L), and
- Write a two page (single-spaced) essay based on your observations.

Your grade will depend on the detail in your notes and an essay evaluating the meeting in a way that incorporates themes from the course with your observations.

There is one observation project per module. The project must be completed by noon on the deadline for the module. Instructions for each project are located on the course site on D2L.

The observation projects will be used to evaluate Objectives 2 and 3.

**Deadlines and Grace Periods**

Emergencies, technological issues, and other life events sometimes make it impossible to complete tasks by the deadline. Here is how I deal with these:

- All students have a deadline to complete all tasks for the module. The exam, quizzes, and project are due at noon of the last day of the module.
- If an emergency arises before the deadline, I will work with the student and find an appropriate accommodation. In most cases, a little more time is all that is required.
- Because many delays are minor, I give all students a grace period. The grace period extends from the deadline until noon on the Monday after the module ends. Any tasks completed during the grace period are not considered late.
- The grace period is a grace period. It is a time after the deadline. As such, any emergencies that occur during the grace period are not excused. I will only consider emergencies that occur before the deadline. If you wait until after the deadline to complete your work, and an emergency occurs, then the consequence will be that your tasks will receive zero credit.

**5 General Policies**

Academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Any case of misconduct will result in a severe penalty, from zero credit for the assignment to failure for the course and a recommendation for university
punishment.

If you have a disability or other issue that will affect how you learn, you must tell me at the start of class so that I can make appropriate accommodations.

As the instructor, I reserve the right to change the details of the class as necessary.
6  Modules

Module 1: January 14 - February 8

1. American Democracy
   - Watch Introductory Lecture Video
   - Read Chapter 1 and Take Chapter Quiz

2. U.S. Constitution
   - Watch Constitution Lecture 1
   - Watch Constitution Lecture 2
   - Read Chapter 2 and Take Chapter Quiz

3. Federalism
   - Watch Federalism Lecture 1
   - Watch Federalism Lecture 2
   - Read Chapter 3 and Take Chapter Quiz

4. Civil Liberties
   - Watch Civil Liberties Lecture
   - Read Chapter 16 and Take Chapter Quiz

5. Civil Rights
   - Watch Civil Rights Lecture
   - Read Chapter 17 and Take Chapter Quiz

6. Observation Project 1: The 1963 March on Washington

7. Exam 1

Exam, Observation Project, and all quizzes must be completed before February 8, 12:01pm CT
Module 2: February 11 - March 8

1. Public Opinion
   - Watch Public Opinion Lecture
   - Read Chapter 5 and Take Chapter Quiz

2. Political Participation
   - Watch Political Participation Lecture
   - Read Chapter 6 and Take Chapter Quiz

3. Electing the President
   - Watch Electing the President Lecture 1
   - Watch Electing the President Lecture 2
   - Read Chapter 10 and Take Chapter Quiz

4. Electing the Congress
   - Watch Electing the Congress Lecture 1
   - Watch Electing the Congress Lecture 2
   - Read Chapter 11 and Take Chapter Quiz

5. Observation Project 2: Local Government Meeting

6. Exam 2

Exam, Observation Project, and all quizzes must be completed before March 8, 12:01pm CT
Module 3: March 11 - April 5

1. Media
   - Watch Media Lecture
   - Read Chapter 9 and Take Chapter Quiz

2. Interest Groups
   - Watch Interest Groups Lecture 1
   - Watch Interest Groups Lecture 2
   - Read Chapter 7 and Take Chapter Quiz

3. Political Parties
   - Watch Political Parties Lecture 1
   - Watch Political Parties Lecture 2
   - Read Chapter 8 and Take Chapter Quiz


5. Exam 3

Exam, Observation Project, and all quizzes must be completed before April 5, 12:01pm CT
Module 4: April 8 - May 3

1. Congress
   - Watch Congress Lecture 1
   - Watch Congress Lecture 2
   - Read Chapter 12 and Take Chapter Quiz

2. Presidency
   - Watch Presidency Lecture 1
   - Watch Presidency Lecture 2
   - Read Chapter 13 and Take Chapter Quiz

3. Bureaucracy
   - Watch Bureaucracy Lecture
   - Read Chapter 14 and Take Chapter Quiz

4. Courts
   - Watch Courts Lecture
   - Read Chapter 15 and Take Chapter Quiz

5. Observation Project 4: House and Senate Deliberations

6. Exam 4

Exam, Observation Project, and all quizzes must be completed before May 3, 12:01pm CT