

POLS 101: American National Government

Washington State University, Fall 2004
Monday, Wednesday, Friday 11:10 a.m. – 12 noon, Room 216 Todd

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Introduction

This course is designed to acquaint you with the American political system. But you will do more than just memorize the branches of government or how a bill becomes a law; rather, my focus will be on helping you understand how citizens working through extra-governmental actors (political parties, the news media, interest groups) interact with the institutions of government (Congress, the judiciary, the president, the bureaucracy) in the pursuit of their goals. In other words, this is a course more about politics than government.

There are two books available for purchase and from which all course readings are taken:

- Lowi, Theodore, Benjamin Ginsberg and Kenneth A. Shepsle. 2004. *American Government: Power and Purpose*. Core Eighth Edition. W.W. Norton.
- Canon, David T., John J. Coleman and Kenneth R. Mayer (Eds.). 2004. *Faultlines: Debating the Issues in American Politics*. W.W. Norton.

The Lowi book offers a broad overview of American government and politics, while the Canon reader offers the perspectives of several different authors on important contemporary political debates.

Grading

There are 1000 points available for this course. Your final grade in this course will depend on your success in three areas:

1. Two Midterm Examinations (250 points each) – SEPT 27, OCT 27. On each exam I will ask you to answer several multiple choice questions and identify key terms discussed in class.
2. Final Examination (350 points) – DECEMBER 15, 3:10 p.m. This exam will have the same format as the midterm.

3. Three Short Assignments (50 points each). Please choose three (3) of the following assignments to complete. If you turn in a fourth assignment, I will not grade it. Write up your answers to the questions in 1-2 pages.

1. Visit www.politicalcompass.org, where you will find a test designed to measure your political ideology. Take the test. In which category did you place (e.g., left-authoritarian, right-libertarian)? Read the descriptions of each of the categories. Are you surprised by where the quiz placed you? Do you think this quiz result correctly describes your political thinking? Why or why not? DUE AUG 27.

2. Look up your U.S. House representative (or Pullman's representative George Nethercutt) at Project Vote Smart (www.vote-smart.org). Once you find your representative, examine how some interest groups rated your member of Congress on the issues they are concerned about. What groups, if any, agreed with your representative's voting history 100 percent of the time? Which groups, if any, disagreed with him or her 100 percent of the time? Do these ratings surprise you? Overall, do you think these interest group ratings are helpful in evaluating the record of a member of Congress? Why? Does what you learned from this exercise make you any more or any less likely to vote for this person in the future? Why? DUE OCT 6.

3. Visit the website www.opensecrets.org, which tracks all campaign contributions to federal candidates. Spend some time familiarizing yourself with the website. Look up the U.S. House representative from your home town (or Pullman's current representative George Nethercutt) and examine the contributions that person received in the 2002 campaign. Where does most of his or her money come from, individual contributors, political action committees (PACs), political parties or self-financing? Now click on the "Who Gives" tab and the "donor look-up" link. Type in the zip code of your home town or some other interesting place (e.g., Beverly Hills 90210). Look to see who in that zip code gave money. Which candidate, party or interest group received the most money? Do you know any of the donors? Are your findings consistent with your beliefs about the political leanings of this zip code? Why or why not? DUE NOV 8.

4. Walk around your neighborhood (or your dorm's parking lot) and look for bumper stickers on the parked cars. Copy down what at least 10 of them say. Are you able to find a political meaning in each message or are some completely non-political? (Think hard about how a bumper sticker saying, for instance, "Visit Glacier National Park" might be political.) What broader conclusions, if any, can you draw about the political thinking of people living in your neighborhood? DUE NOV 15.

GRADING SCALE:

930-1000	A
900-929	A-
870-899	B+
830-869	B
800-829	B-

770-799	C+
730-769	C
700-729	C-
670-699	D+
600-669	D
0-599	F

It is possible, though certainly not guaranteed, that I may lower these thresholds (e.g., 910-1000 becomes an A, 880-909 becomes an A- and so on) to achieve a better distribution of grades. I promise you that I will not raise the thresholds.

Other information

If there are things I talk about in class that you do not understand, do not hesitate to talk to me about them. I am here to help you learn the course material. And if there are other matters that you think should be brought to my attention, let me know.

Please feel free to ask questions during lecture. Although large lectures like this one are not as conducive to discussion as smaller seminars are, it is my hope that we can engage in some back and forth. I do not want to lecture for 50 minutes straight without interruption!

MAKE-UP EXAMS. I will give make-up exams only in extraordinary circumstances. These are limited to 1) absences due to membership in an official university group or athletic team that will be out of town on the day of the exam 2) serious illness or injury and 3) family emergencies. In all instances, I will ask for documentation. Students who will miss an exam due to membership in an official university group or athletic team must notify me at least FIVE days in advance, and I will have you take the exam before you leave town.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS. Assignments must be at my office by 5 p.m. on the due date or they will be considered late. For each day an assignment is late, I will subtract 10 percent of the assignment's total point value from your score.

ACADEMIC ETIQUETTE. Do not carry on side conversations or read the newspaper during class. Doing so is disrespectful to your classmates, and I will ask you to leave the room if you are disturbing others. Turn off all cellular phones during class.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT. I do not tolerate plagiarizing or cheating of any kind. Such behavior will result in **failing the course** and other disciplinary action. Please see the Student Handbook at the Division of Student Affairs website at www.studentaffairs.wsu.edu for a full description of the types of academic misconduct. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, see me immediately.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION. Reasonable accommodations are available for students who have a documented disability. Please notify the instructor during the first week of class of any accommodations needed for the course. Late notification may cause the requested accommodations to be unavailable. All accommodations must be approved through the

Disability Resource Center, which is located in the Administration Annex room 205 or call 335-3417 to make an appointment with a disability counselor.

EXTRA CREDIT. I do not plan to give extra-credit assignments in this course, though in rare circumstances I may offer extra credit for participation in special events (such as taking part in an out-of-class experiment).

Course Outline

Introduction (Aug 23, 25)

Lowi – Chapter 1
Canon – Chapter 1

The Constitution (Aug 27, 30, Sept 1)

Lowi – Chapter 2
Canon – Chapter 2

Federalism (Sept 3, 8, 10)

Lowi – Chapter 3
Canon – Chapter 3

Civil Liberties and Rights (Sept 13, 15, 17, 20, 22)

Lowi – Chapter 4
Canon – Chapter 4-5

MAKE-UP DAY/MIDTERM EXAM REVIEW (Sept 24)

MIDTERM EXAM 1 (Sept 27)

Congress (Sept 29, Oct 1, 4)

Lowi – Chapter 5
Canon – Chapter 6

Presidency (Oct 6, 8, 11)

Lowi – Chapter 6
Canon – Chapter 7

Bureaucracy (Oct 13, 15)

Lowi – Chapter 7
Canon – Chapter 8

Courts (Oct 18, 20, 22)

Lowi – Chapter 8
Canon – Chapter 9

MAKE-UP DAY/MIDTERM EXAM REVIEW (Oct 25)

MIDTERM EXAM 2 (Oct 27)

Elections (Oct 29, Nov 1, 3,5)

Lowi – Chapter 10

Canon – Chapter 11

Public Opinion (Nov 8, 10, 12)

Lowi – Chapter 9

Canon – Chapter 10

Parties (Nov 15, 17, 19)

Lowi – Chapter 11

Canon – Chapter 12

Interest Groups (Nov 29, Dec 1, 3)

Lowi – Chapter 12

Canon – Chapter 13

Media (Dec 6,8)

Lowi – Chapter 13

Canon – Chapter 14

MAKE-UP DAY/FINAL EXAM REVIEW (Dec 10)

Final EXAM (Monday, Dec 13, 3:10-5:10 p.m.)