

MINNESOTA STATE UNIVERSITY MOORHEAD
POL 120--AMERICAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS
FALL SEMESTER 2016

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PLEASE NOTE: STUDY GUIDES AND SYLLABI ARE ON THE ABOVE WEBPAGE ONLY, NOT ON D2L. I DO NOT USE D2L. YOU CAN FIND ALL THE MATERIAL FOR THIS COURSE ON THE ABOVE PAGE.

Course Catalog Description: This course is designed to help the citizens of modern society understand the recurring principles, practices, and patterns of politics. Having learned how politics affects our lives every day, students can become informed participants at the local, national, and global levels. Course offered: Fall and Spring Semesters, all years.

LASC/Minnesota Transfer Curriculum Goals:

Goal Area 5: History and Social Sciences

Goal Area 9: Ethical and Civic Responsibility

Course Content: This course will examine both modern and historical American political life from a variety of perspectives. Students will be expected to learn why the United States was formed, what its founders hoped to achieve, and what they wrote into the blueprint for American politics—the US Constitution—as well as how those ideals have been changed and adapted over time to fit a more complex and diverse society. Students will learn about the complex relationship between the states and the federal government in our federalist system and contrast that system with other forms of government throughout the world. We will learn about the four major American political institutions—Congress, the Presidency, the Courts, and the Bureaucracy, and also discuss how ordinary citizens can influence their government through interest group participation, campaigns, elections, voting, and membership in political parties. Finally, we will assess current American policies in such areas as the federal budget process, education, and foreign affairs. Students will also learn how public opinion is measured, how surveys are conducted, and how policy is formed, implemented, and assessed. Questions of race, gender, and economic equality will also be considered in context of all relevant discussions throughout the semester. Format is primarily lecture with class discussion.

Outline of Major Course Content Areas:

1. US Constitution
2. Federalism
3. Civil Liberties
4. Civil Rights
5. Ideology and Public Opinion
6. Political Participation
7. Interest Groups
8. Parties and Elections
9. Media
10. Congress and Domestic Policy

11. Presidency and Foreign Policy

12. Judiciary

13. Bureaucracy

Course Learning Objectives:

1. Students should have a basic understanding of the institutions, influences and processes that make up American government and politics.
2. Students should have a basic understanding of the vital role of citizen participation in American politics.
3. Students should have a basic understanding of the influence of the electoral system of American institutions and policies.

Text: (Required)

Govt 8, Sidlow and Henschen (Cengage Press).

Earlier editions should be fine if you can find a cheaper version, perhaps Govt 7. Truthfully any major US Government textbook would likely serve you well. I test primarily on my lectures. The book is to supplement and explain in more depth what I cover in class. If you attend regularly, the book is of less importance than if you are an infrequent attendee.

Course Assignments: 4 Examinations each worth 100 points for a total of 400 points. Examinations will be multiple-choice questions and will cover both the assigned readings and the lectures. Exams will be “closed book.”

Grading:

Grades will be determined by the use of a class comparison rubric or “curve” where students’ overall scores will be placed in rank order with deviations between grades determined in part by the overall distribution of scores within a given class. The +/- grading scale in assigning final grades may be utilized at the instructor’s discretion. Periodic estimates of the grading curve will be provided to students throughout the semester after each examination.

Missed Examinations Policy: If you miss a regularly scheduled examination, you have two options:

- 1) Accept a zero for the exam.
- 2) Take a make-up exam scheduled just prior to the last two weeks of the semester. Your grade on that examination will replace the missing test in your overall grade computation.

Make-up exams will consist of an alternate form of the exam regularly given to the class for a given section of the course and will probably consist of different multiple choice questions on similar topics, and may contain some essay/short answer questions at the instructor’s discretion. Because I am providing this option for those who miss a regularly scheduled examination, there will be no opportunity to “make up” a regular exam other than this alternative. If a student must miss a regularly scheduled exam for a school sponsored event, alternate arrangements must be made as far in advance as possible and the instructor should be made aware of potential conflicts within the first two weeks of the semester. As a consequence of this arrangement, any student missing two or more regularly scheduled examinations will accept a zero for the second and all subsequent examinations missed, irrespective of the reason cited for the absence. There will be no accepted excuses for missing the final examination. Students may appeal to make-up a missed final examination after the semester ends. Any such make-up examination will be administered at the sole discretion of the instructor and at a time convenient to said instructor. To even be considered for a makeup examination, I need DOCUMENTATION

of your absence. Illness, child care emergency, family emergency or significant family commitment are the ONLY reasons I will accept for excusing an absence from an examination and I will require some form of written proof of why you were not in class to take the test.

Attendance: Attendance is required at lectures but roll will not be taken.

Weather Emergencies: We live in a cold and snowy climate. Many of us drive in to work/school every day. This creates the potential for problems with course attendance. For the record, you should note that MSUM's weather policies are not very forgiving for the commuter. Classes are rarely cancelled even in the harshest conditions. As a result, I am expected to be here to teach when the University deems it possible to have classes. Therefore, if the University is open, you can virtually guarantee (though it is not an absolute certainty) that I will be here for class. I understand that there are times when weather conditions will make it legitimately impossible or impractical for you to attend class. You must use your own judgment in these situations. I will never penalize a student for missing class due to weather related contingencies, including missing an examination due to weather. Your life and well-being are more important than this class. I trust you will not abuse the privilege.

Special Accommodations: Students with disabilities who believe they may need an accommodation in this class are encouraged to contact Greg Toutges, Director of Disability Services at 477-4318 (Voice) or 1-800-627-3529 (MRS/TTY), Flora Frick 154 as soon as possible to ensure that accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

Academic Honesty: Students are expected to conform with the requirements of the MSUM student Academic Honesty Policy as documented in the Student Handbook.

Study Guides: Study guides providing key terms and concepts that may appear on examinations will be posted on my website and can be printed out at your convenience. Additional copies of this syllabus may also be obtained at that site.

Make-Up Work and Reasonable Accommodations:

Generally, I intend to discourage the practice of "make-up" work or examinations. If, however, you have a documented family emergency or long term illness, I will accommodate in rescheduling an examination. In no circumstances, however, will I give an examination BEFORE a scheduled date.

Reading Assignments/Semester Schedule of Lectures/Discussion: Generally I will cover a chapter in approximately one to one and one-half days of lecture throughout the term.

Tuesday, August 23--Introduction to the Course Syllabus and Policies

Section 1: Constitutional Foundations—Rights and Liberties

(6 classes---August 25 through September 13)

The U.S. Constitution (Ch. 2)

Federalism: States vs. Federal Government (Ch. 3)

Civil Liberties (Ch. 4)

Civil Rights (Ch. 5)

EXAM 1—Thursday, September 15.

Section 2: American Political Institutions

(6 classes---September 20 through October 6)

Presidency (Ch. 12)
Congress (Ch. 11)
Judiciary (Ch. 14)
Bureaucracy (Ch. 13)

EXAM 2—Tuesday, October 11

Section 3: Participation in American Politics

(6 classes---October 13 through November 1)

Public Opinion/ (Ch. 6)
Voting (Ch. 11)
Campaigns and Elections (Ch. 10)
Political Parties (Ch. 9)
Interest Groups (Ch. 8)

EXAM 3—Thursday, November 3.

Section 4: Public Policy

(6 classes---November 8 through December 1)

NOTE: NO REGULAR CLASS TUESDAY NOVEMBER 22----MAKE UP EXAM DAY (NO LECTURE)

NOTE: NO SCHOOL THURSDAY NOVEMBER 24-- THANKSGIVING BREAK

Domestic Policy (Ch. 15)
Foreign Policy (Ch. 16).

December 6 will be held in reserve in case we fall behind during the semester.

Exam 4 is the “Final Examination” which will be held at the time/place indicated in the Fall 2016 MSUM Final Examination Schedule. This is the fourth unit exam of the course and is NOT a comprehensive final examination. As of this writing, the date I have recorded for the fourth POL 120 exam is Monday, December 12, 2016 at 11:30 a.m.

STUDENTS ARE SOLELY RESPONSIBLE FOR CHECKING THIS DATE AND COMPLYING WITH THE DATE AND TIME ASSIGNED BY THE UNIVERSITY IN THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE, AND MAY NOT RELY ON THIS SYLLABUS FOR THE DEFINITIVE WORD ON THE TIMING OF THE FOURTH (FINAL) EXAM.

***Please Note: This syllabus is NOT an enforceable “contract” between student and professor. The professor reserves the right to alter this syllabus at any time in the semester by writing or via in-class notification.