

PLS 1153G - Fall 2015

American Government and Constitution

3 Credit Hours

Instructor: Dr. Ryan Burge
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Class: MWF 2:00 pm - 2:50 pm in Coleman 2150
Office Hours: MWF 12:00pm - 2:00pm
and by appointment

Textbook

Keeping the Republic: The Essentials (7th Edition) by Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright ISBN : 1483352749 . The book is available through TRS.

About this Course

An introduction to the principles of the U.S. Constitution and political system, with an emphasis on the role citizens play in government and politics. Topics covered include the Constitution, civil rights and civil liberties, government institutions, political parties, voting and elections.

Thomas Jefferson once said, "If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be." He and the other Founders were adamant that in order for a democracy to function properly the electorate must be educated in the ways of government and politics. That is the aim of this course. We will be studying the history of the United States as it concerns the writing of the U.S. Constitution as well as examining how government has responded over time to a myriad of changes in American society. In addition we will be taking some time to examine current 'hot button' issues that relate to politics and government.

Learning Objectives

1. Students will complete exams or writing assignments requiring them to identify, analyze, and evaluate:
 - How major political philosophers and the Constitutions framers shaped the U.S. Constitution.
 - The articles and amendments of the Constitution, and the evolution of federalism in the U.S.
 - Trends, court rulings and laws about civil rights and civil liberties.
 - The roles political parties and interest groups play in U.S. policymaking and elections.
 - U.S. voting behavior, including public opinion, ideology, and political socialization.
 - The U.S. electoral system, including campaign finance, the presidential nomination system, and the Electoral College.
 - The institutions of government Congress, the President, the Bureaucracy, and the Judiciary.
2. Students will participate in class discussions about current problems in American government, and ideas for solving those problems. (speaking, critical thinking, citizenship).

3. Students will complete writing assignments requiring them to develop, defend, and evaluate their opinions about American government, political issues, and political problems. (critical thinking, writing, citizenship)

Course Outline and Grades

The grading breakdown for this course is as follows, I reserve the right to change the grading scheme.

- Three exams (15% each)
- Hot Topics Paper (10% each)
- Participation (10%)
- Discussion Questions (25%)

Academic Honesty

Students are expected to maintain principles of academic integrity and conduct as defined in EIUs Code of Conduct (<http://www.eiu.edu/judicial/studentconductcode.php>). Violations will be reported to the Office of Student Standards.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities- If you are a student with a documented disability in need of accommodations to fully participate in this class, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services (OSDS). All accommodations must be approved through OSDS. Please stop by Ninth Street Hall, Room 2006, or call 217-581-6583 to make an appointment.

Student Success Center

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

Examination Policy

All examinations must be taken at their scheduled time. Exams will not be given “early” for travel convenience - NO EXCEPTIONS. Make-up exams will be granted at the instructor’s discretion for exceptional circumstances only (e.g., severe illness, family emergency or family death). You must contact me before the next class period following the exam and produce documentation (e.g., a doctor’s excuse, obituary, etc.) of this event. No make-up examination will be given without meeting the above conditions. Study guides will be posted on the class web page prior to each exam to help prepare students.

Discussion Questions

Each of you will be responsible for turning in Discussion Questions throughout the semester. Each assignment will be 2-3 questions which you should answer with at least a paragraph. The key here is to use material from the textbook to inform your answer. These will be turned in at the beginning of class. These have to be turned in by you, you cannot have a fellow classmate hand them in for you. Each assignment is worth 10 points.

Class Schedule

Week 1

August 24: Pass out the syllabus/introduce the course

August 26: Politics: Who Gets What, and How? (Chapter 1) and DISCUSSION QUESTIONS #1

August 28: State of Nature Game

Week 2

August 31: American Citizens and Political Culture (Chapter 2) and DQ #2

September 2: American Citizens and Political Culture(Chapter 2) and DQ #3

September 4: Hot Topic: Tolerance - The Man Behind the Mosque - PBS Frontline

Week 3

September 7: No Class - Labor Day

September 9: Politics of the American Founding (Chapter 3) and DQ #4

September 11: Politics of the American Founding (Chapter 3) and DQ #5

Week 4

September 14: Federalism and the U.S. Constitution (Chapter 4) and DQ #6

September 16: Federalism and the U.S. Constitution (Chapter 4)

September 18: Hot Topic: Education Reform - The Education of Michelle Rhee - PBS Frontline and DQ #7

Week 5

September 21: Fundamental American Liberties (Chapter 5) and DQ #8

September 23: Fundamental American Liberties (Chapter 5) and DQ #9

September 25: EXAM 1

Week 6

September 28: The Struggle for Equal Rights (Chapter 6) and DQ #10

September 30: The Struggle for Equal Rights (Chapter 6)

October 2: Hot Topic: Gay Rights - "God Loves Uganda" (on Netflix) or Bill Moyer's on Gay Marriage and DQ #11

Week 7

October 5: Congress (Chapter 7) and DQ #12

October 7: Congress (Chapter 7) and DQ #13

October 9: NO CLASS

Week 8

October 12: The Presidency (Chapter 8)

October 14: The Presidency (Chapter 8) and DQ #14

October 16: No Class - Fall Break

Week 9

October 19: The Bureaucracy (Chapter 9) and DQ #15

October 21: The Bureaucracy (Chapter 9)

October 23: Hot Topic: Federal Disaster Response - The Storm - PBS Frontline and DQ #16

Week 10

October 26: The American Legal System and the Courts (Chapter 10) and DQ #17

October 28: The American Legal System and the Courts (Chapter 10)

October 30: EXAM 2

Week 11

November 2: Public Opinion (Chapter 11) and DQ #18

November 4: Public Opinion (Chapter 11)

November 6: Hot Topic: Health Care Reform - Sick Around the World and DQ #19

Week 12

November 9: Political Parties (Chapter 12)

November 11: Political Parties (Chapter 12) and DQ #20

November 13: Hot Topic: 2012 Presidential Election Swing State

Week 13

November 16: Interest Groups (Chapter 13)

November 18: Interest Groups (Chapter 13) and DQ #21

November 20: Hot Topic: Campaign Finance Big Sky, Big Money - PBS Frontline and DQ #22

Week 14

November 30: Voting, Campaigns, and Elections (Chapter 14)

December 2: Voting, Campaigns, and Elections (Chapter 14)

December 4: Hot Topic: Electoral Fraud Hacking Democracy and DQ #23

Week 15

December 7: The Media (Chapter 15)

December 9: The Media (Chapter 15) and DQ #24

December 11: Hot Topic: The Internet Digital Nation: Life on the Virtual Frontier - PBS Frontline and DQ #25

December 15: EXAM 3 at 12:30 PM