



POL-K111
American Government
Spring 2015
Wednesdays
6:30 – 9:15 p.m.
Room D-224

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Office Hours: In-person or on-line by
appointment

SYLLABUS

I. Course Description

The course is an extensive examination of America's system of government and its three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. We will discuss the roles and functions of each branch and the system of checks and balances. We will explore how our nation's history has influenced our system of government and modern day politics. We will examine the role of the bureaucracy, public opinion, political parties, interest groups, elections, and the media. Other issues to be examined include civil liberties, civil rights, and domestic and foreign policy. Lastly, this course seeks to inspire you to consider your own role in American democracy as a citizen, taxpayer, and voter.

II. Course Outcomes and Objectives

1. To demonstrate knowledge of the influences of our system of government.
 - a. To compare and contrast how democracy worked in Athens and Rome.
 - b. To identify the elements of the Magna Carta, Petition of Right, British Parliament, and the Habeas Corpus Act that were incorporated in America's system of government.
 - c. To explain the difference between direct and indirect democracy.
 - d. To define what government by contract means using examples.
2. To explain the checks and balances of the three branches of government: legislative, executive, and judicial.
 - a. To describe the historical events, including Shay's Rebellion that led to the U.S. Constitution being drafted and signed.
 - b. To explain the roles of Congress.
 - c. To explain the roles of the president
 - d. To explain how our federal court system is set up
 - e. To explain the Connecticut compromise.
3. To recognize the steps in the policy making process.
 - a. To differentiate the formulation of domestic policy and the formulation of foreign policy
 - b. To discuss a history of America's foreign policy.
4. To differentiate civil rights and civil liberties.
 - a. Define civil rights.
 - b. Define civil liberties.
 - c. Explain the importance of the 14th Amendment.

III. Instructional Methods

This course will utilize a variety of instructional methods, including traditional lecture, class discussions in various formats, and student presentations. Various tools will be used by the instructor, including PowerPoint slides containing text, photos, video clips, and website links.

IV. Required Text

The reading assignments are a critical element of the course and are intended to complement the topics and activities presented and discussed in class. The class participation requirements of this course cannot be fulfilled without consistent and thorough completion of all reading assignments. There is one required text, which may be acquired at the college bookstore or on-line: *American Government: Roots and Reform, 2012 Election Edition* by Karen O'Connor, Larry Sabato and Alixandra Yanus. Pearson (2014). ISBN: 978-0-205-86580-2. Additional required readings will be posted on Blackboard.

V. Course Requirements

A. Tests (40% of Final Grade)

There will be four tests conducted in-class, including multiple choice, true/false, and short answer questions. The essay portion will be take-home, and a hard copy must be submitted at the start of the in-class portion. Your total points on the in-class and take-home portions will be combined for your final test grade. Essay grades will be impacted by timeliness, grammar, spelling, organization, and citation of sources. Ten points will be deducted for each day the essays are late. Make-up tests using an alternative version of the test will be given only if the student has made arrangements with the instructor prior to the test.

The grading rubric for the take-home essays will be as follows:

Evidence of Reading, Understanding, and Critical Thinking—45%

Quality and Thoroughness of Responses to Questions—45%

Organization, Grammar, and Citations—10%

B. Class Participation (20% of Final Grade)

Participation includes two elements: frequency, relevancy and quality of contributions to class discussions (50% of Class Participation grade) and class attendance (50% of Class Participation grade). Regular in-class participation is an important element of this course and is highly valued. Not only will your attendance and participation contribute to your success in the class, but it will also contribute to the quality of the experience for you and your classmates. Completing the assigned readings is critical to your ability to participate in class.

C. Assignments (20% of Final Grade)

In preparation for each class there will be an assigned reading from the text or another source made available on Blackboard. You will be required to prepare a short essay response to a question related to the reading or complete another assignment. All assignments will be posted on Blackboard. These exercises serve to demonstrate your understanding of the concepts introduced in the readings and to prepare you for discussion of the topics in class. The grading rubric for the essays will be the same as that found above under "Tests."

D. Research Project (20% of Final Grade)

You are required to complete a research project on a current public policy issue that is being considered by the U.S. Congress. The project will consist of three components: research paper, PowerPoint presentation, and letter to Congress. Detailed instructions for each element will be distributed at a later date.

Research Paper (70% of Research Project grade): The paper will be at least six pages long (typed and double-spaced), excluding the cover page and works cited. The paper is intended to demonstrate your ability to research and understand a public policy issue and to evaluate the issue in the context of the principles and concepts we will discuss in class. Papers must follow the MLA or APA standards for style, formatting, and citation of sources. If you are not proficient in these standards, you must view the Research Guides and Citation Manuals on the library website or visit the Writing Center in the Tutoring and Academic Success Centers (TASC) located next to the library.

PowerPoint Presentation (20% of Research Project grade): You must prepare a concise (about 6 slides) PowerPoint presentation of your research paper, present it to the class, and moderate the Q&A. This presentation is intended to demonstrate your capacity to reduce a public policy issue to rational and understandable parts, to communicate them effectively, and to consider and respond to comments made by others.

Letter to Congress (10% of Research Project grade): You must prepare and send a 1-2 page letter to your US Representative and/or US Senator(s) that briefly describes your chosen policy issue and proposes specific policy responses you wish Congress to pursue. The exercise is intended to give you practical experience in reducing a policy issue to its most important and compelling components and advocating for a particular policy response. A sample letter template will be available on Blackboard.

VI. Evaluation Procedures

Your final grade will be determined by a weighted combination of scores on tests, class participation, assignments, and the research project, as outlined below. A running tally of your final grade will be available in the Grade Center on Blackboard.

| | |
|-------------------------|------------|
| Tests | 40% |
| Class Participation | 20% |
| Assignments | 20% |
| <u>Research Project</u> | <u>20%</u> |
| | 100% |

VII. Grades

Grades will be posted on Blackboard. The total amount of points earned during the semester will correspond to the grade scale listed below.

| | | |
|----|---|---------|
| A | = | 94 -100 |
| A- | = | 90 - 93 |
| B+ | = | 87 - 89 |
| B | = | 83 - 86 |
| B- | = | 80 - 82 |
| C+ | = | 77 - 79 |

| | | |
|----|---|------------|
| C | = | 73 - 76 |
| C- | = | 70 - 72 |
| D+ | = | 67 - 69 |
| D | = | 63 - 66 |
| D- | = | 60 - 62 |
| F | = | 00 - 59 |
| W | = | Withdrawal |
| I | = | Incomplete |

VIII. Communication

Please email, call or meet with the instructor as needed to discuss course content or any concerns. The instructor will always find time to meet with students one-on-one, both in-person and on-line using WebEx. This course will make use of Blackboard, and you will be expected to check it regularly for announcements, course materials, grades, and syllabus updates.

IX. Use of Technology in Classroom

Cell phones, laptops and tablets may not be used in class. This policy has been observed by the instructor to result in a dramatic improvement in the quality and degree of student attentiveness and engagement and to greatly reduce distractions for the instructor and other students.

X. College Withdrawal Policy

A verbal "drop or withdrawal" from course(s) cannot be accepted by the instructor. Students must complete the required form and file it with the Registrar's Office. Refer to the academic calendar for the exact ending date for the drop period.

XI. Student Disability Policy

If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to immediately contact the Disabilities Counseling Services at 860-892-5751. I am unable to provide accommodations based upon disability until I have received an accommodation letter from the Disabilities Counselor.

XII. Attendance Policy

Consistent attendance at class meetings is crucial to success in this course. You are expected to attend all classes in order to receive full benefit from instruction. Class attendance will be reflected in your "Class Participation" grade. Students having attendance problems should speak with the instructor before taking any action.

XIII. Academic Dishonesty

Conduct which as its intent or effect leads to the false representation of a student's academic performance and/or knowingly and intentionally assisting another student to do so in any way constitutes academic dishonesty. In the event of academic dishonesty, the College's policy will be enforced.

XIV. Early Warning Policy

Students experiencing academic difficulty and/or chronic absenteeism will be notified of their class standing.

XV. Non-discrimination policy/statement

Three Rivers Community College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religious creed, age, sex, national origin, marital status, ancestry, present or past history of mental disorder, learning disability or physical disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or genetic information in its programs and activities. In addition, the College does not discriminate in employment on the basis of veteran status or criminal records. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies: Gregory Souza, Title IX Coordinator, Gsouza@threerivers.edu, Room C-131, 860-215-9486.

XVI. Sexual Misconduct Policy/Statement

Three Rivers Community College strongly encourages all students to report any incidents of sexual misconduct, which includes, but is not limited to, sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, and sexual assault. Students have the right to the prompt and fair resolution of all claims, and the College will preserve the confidentiality of all who report to the fullest extent possible and allowed by law. College employees will explain the limits of confidentiality before information about the incident is revealed. To report sexual misconduct, or to learn more about your options, please contact the Title IX Coordinator noted in the previous section. If you need immediate, confidential assistance, please call the Sexual Assault Crisis Center of Eastern Connecticut hotline at 860-437-7766.

XVII. Digication Statement

All students are required to maintain an online learning portfolio in Digication that uses the college template. Through this electronic tool students will have the opportunity to monitor their own growth in college-wide learning. The student will keep his/her learning portfolio and may continue to use the Digication account after graduation. A Three Rivers General Education Assessment Team will select and review random works to improve the college experience for all. Student work reviewed for assessment purposes will not include names and all student work will remain private and anonymous for college improvement purposes. Students will have the ability to integrate learning from the classroom, college, and life in general, which will provide additional learning opportunities. If desired, students will have the option to create multiple portfolios. More information on Digication is located at http://www.trcc.comnet.edu/Div_IT/EducationalTechnology/Digication.shtml

XVIII. Course Outline

The preliminary course outline is attached. Please note that the version on Blackboard will always reflect the most up-to-date information. Always note the version date on the top left of the syllabus. "BB" in the course outline indicates that the document may be found on Blackboard.

| COURSE OUTLINE | | |
|---|--------------|--|
| Foundations of American Democracy | | |
| 1 | Wed. Jan. 28 | Course Introduction Ideals and Elements of Democracy What is politics? Read: BB: Syllabus BB (not the text): Ch. 1—Approaching Democracy BB: Vaclav Havel’s Address to Congress |
| 2 | Wed. Feb. 4 | Revolution and Early Governance Declaration of Independence Read: Text: Ch. 2—The Constitution BB: Declaration of Independence Due: Short Essay Assign: Essays for Test #1 |
| 3 | Wed. Feb. 11 | U.S. Constitution Read: BB: “English Origins of American Constitutionalism” BB: U.S. Constitution Due: Short Essay; SOPCAB Exercise |
| 4 | Wed. Feb. 18 | TEST #1 (Weeks 1-3) Federalism Read: Text: Ch. 3—The Federal System Due: Essays for Test #1 |
| 5 | Wed. Feb. 25 | Civil Rights Civil Liberties Read: Text: Ch. 4—Civil Liberties Text: Ch. 5—Civil Rights Due: Short Essay |
| Institutions of American Democracy | | |
| 6 | Wed. Mar. 4 | Congress Read: Text: Ch. 6—Congress Due: Short Essay |
| 7 | Wed. Mar. 11 | Presidency Read: Text: Ch. 7—The Presidency BB: “Who Decides Whether the U.S. Should Wage War?” Due: Short Essay Assign: Essays for Test #2 |
| | Wed. Mar. 18 | No Class—Spring Break |
| 8 | Wed. Mar. 25 | TEST #2 (Weeks 4-7) Public Opinion Media Read: Text: Ch. 10—Public Opinion and Political Socialization Due: Essays for Test #2 Assign: “Who Represents Me?” Assignment |

| Participation in American Democracy | | |
|--|--------------|---|
| 9 | Wed. Apr. 1 | Bureaucracy Judiciary Read: Text: Ch. 8—The Executive Branch and the Federal Bureaucracy Text: Ch. 9—The Judiciary Due: “Who Represents Me?” Assignment |
| 10 | Wed. Apr. 8 | Political Parties Read: Text: Ch. 11—Political Parties Due: “My Political Ideology” Assignment Assign: Essays for Test #3 |
| 11 | Wed. Apr. 15 | Elections and Voting Read: Text: Ch. 12—Elections and Voting Read: BB: Pros and Cons of Electoral College System Due: Research Paper |
| 12 | Wed. Apr. 22 | TEST #3 (8-11) Interest Groups Read: Text: Ch. 15—Interest Groups Due: Essays for Test #3 |
| Policy Making in American Democracy | | |
| 13 | Wed. Apr. 29 | Domestic Policy Read: Text: Ch. 16—Domestic Policy Due: Letter to Congress Assign: Essays for Test #4 |
| 14 | Wed. May 6 | Economic Policy Foreign Policy PowerPoint Presentations Read: Text: Ch. 17—Economic Policy Due: PowerPoint Presentation |
| 15 | Wed. May 13 | TEST #4 (12-14) PowerPoint Presentations Due: Essays for Test #4 |