**POL SCI 2: Introduction to American Government**

**Section #: 71498 Instructor: Dr. Joshua Shurley**

**Room: 321 Email: joshua.shurley@scccd.edu**

**Day/Time: M/T/F 11:25am-12:23pm Semester: Spring 2018**

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Welcome to PolSci2! American politics has all the aspects of drama, but it also has real meaning for people’s everyday lives. Over the semester we will be reviewing some basic concepts related to the study and practice of American Government, as well as the design of the Constitution, the three branches of government, and how elections, political parties, large corporations, the news media and other features of our democracy affect the link between our government and the people.

What are the foundations of the American political system? How do our leading institutions operate? How does it all fit together? What explains America’s economic, social, and foreign policies?

If exploring these questions interests you, then this is the course for you. This course is an introduction to the US government that draws on political science and real-world cases—such as the Iraq invasion and health care reform—to explain how the system works.

More broadly, the course encourages students to *think critically* about our system of government and our rights and responsibilities as citizens, including questions such as: *How well does government represent the preferences of the people? What kind of balance is maintained between majority and minority rights? Do interest groups have too much power? Who really rules over us? Why have our politics become so polarized? What can I possibly do?*

**“A nation of sheep will beget a government of wolves.”**

**~**[**Edward R. Murrow**](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/178884.Edward_R_Murrow)

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**Course Description**

The field of American politics deals with the organization, distribution and orientation of political power in American society. This course surveys the processes and institutions of United States national, state and local politics. Among the topics discussed are individual political attitudes and values, political participation, voting, parties, interest groups, Congress, the presidency, the courts, the federal bureaucracy, civil liberties and civil rights, and domestic and foreign policy making. Attention is paid both to the present state of the American political system and to its historical roots.

**Required Text**

*We The People (Eleventh Edition)* by  [Benjamin Ginsberg](https://www.amazon.com/Benjamin-Ginsberg/e/B001H9RFC4/ref=dp_byline_cont_book_1),‎ [Theodore J. Lowi](https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_2?ie=UTF8&text=Theodore+J.+Lowi&search-alias=books&field-author=Theodore+J.+Lowi&sort=relevancerank), [Caroline J. Tolbert](https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_3?ie=UTF8&text=Caroline+J.+Tolbert&search-alias=books&field-author=Caroline+J.+Tolbert&sort=relevancerank), and [Margaret Weir](https://www.amazon.com/s/ref=dp_byline_sr_book_4?ie=UTF8&text=Margaret+Weir&search-alias=books&field-author=Margaret+Weir&sort=relevancerank)

(ISBN-13: 978-0393283624 / ISBN-10: 0393283623)

**Required Materials**

Other than a clear mind, students should come to class daily (having done the assigned reading) with a copy of the assigned text, and paper and pen for taking notes.

**Assigned Readings and Writing Tasks**

Students are expected to complete assigned readings BEFORE class in order to participate in an informed discussion of the material. Assigned readings will be from the textbook as well as from various other sources which will be posted online on Canvas. Assigned readings will be given at the end of each class period, and in the event of an absence it is the students responsibility to find out the reading assignments. Written assignments are to be already typed, printed and ready to hand in at the beginning of class.

**Prerequisites**

Eligibility for English 1A or 1AH.

**Learning Methods**

Lectures, readings (newspaper articles, internet articles, assignments, etc) and class discussions.

**Office Hours**

I do not keep official office hours, but am available to meet with students either during the class period, before class begins, directly after class, or by individual appointment.

**Communication/Email**

Communication between instructor and student outside of class will be via **email**. Additionally, the classroom technology platform Canvas will be employed during this class to facilitate learning and communication (further detailed information will be provided).

**Student Learning Outcomes**

Students will have achieved course objective if they complete all course work and/or assignments with a cumulative average grade of C or better. Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

* Recognize the Constitutional processes and principles as they occur in modern U.S. and California politics
* Relate the structures, roles and powers of the national, state and local governments
* Recognize the impact of various 'policy inputs' on the development of public policy in the United States and in California.
* Identify the categories of policies made by government within the United States, and relate the questions underlying these policies

**Course Objectives**

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| In the process of completing this course, students will: |
| 1. Study both the theory and practice of “democracy.” 2. Research the forces and political philosophies that influenced the founding fathers of the United States and the framers of the Constitution. 3. Compare and contrast the Articles of Confederation with the Constitution of the United States of America, including a discussion of the Federalist and Anti-Federalist factions. 4. Review the role played by the US Constitution in (a) creating our federal system of government, with its subsequent divided responsibilities, and (b) establishing the separation of powers and checks and balances principles at the national level, as well as the implications of such. 5. Examine the federal system as a practical device to accommodate—within one government—national and local needs unique to the United States. 6. Evaluate the relationship between the Bill of Rights, the government, and the concept of “civil liberty,” noting that liberty is both the absence of governmental intrusion and the result of a set of guarantees that protect the individual against the excesses of government. 7. Assess the idea of civil rights as the rights of all citizens to equal protection of the law, as provided in the 14th Amendment of the Constitution. Students will also explore the development of civil rights, using the evolving civil rights of African-Americans and other groups as examples. 8. Consider his/her role as a voter in the United States political system, and survey the varying forms and systems of elections used in the United States, including primary elections, general elections, California referendum and initiative elections, California recall elections, and the electoral college. 9. Gain an understanding of the characteristics of the American political party system and the functions parties serve in the process of governing. 10. Analyze the issues surrounding the development of public opinion, and its influence on the formation of public policy. 11. Examine the influence of different means of mass communication (media)—both news-based and entertainment-based—on the development of public policy, and the techniques employed by each. 12. Evaluate the positive and negative effects of the countervailing influences of interest groups in American politics, the tactics of interest groups, and the means employed for keeping them honest. 13. Appraise the powers and limitations of the office of the President of the United States, and examine the roles he/she plays as a ceremonial, political, administrative, military, and legislative leader. 14. Examine the various powers/roles of Congress, different theories of representation, and the strengths and weaknesses of the legislative, or lawmaking, process. 15. Study the role of the national courts in interpreting the Constitution, shaping individual rights, and determining the distribution of governmental power. Students will also consider the subtleties of constitutional interpretation, noting that the Constitution is a living document that adapts to changing needs. 16. Explore the vastness and complexity of the bureaucracy. Students will investigate the different national departments and agencies, the characteristics of their growth and evolution and the mechanics of reorganization and reform; and to comprehend the difficulties of effective reform. 17. Examine the programs in the area of domestic policy intended to promote “the general welfare.” 18. Investigate the forces that shape American foreign and defense policy. 19. Study the structure, major functions, and significant powers of both the State of California and local governmental entities. Additionally, students will examine the relationship of state and local institutional powers to the concept of Federalism and survey various examples of direct and indirect democracy at the state and local levels. |

**Evaluation and Grading**

In this course, a total of 200 points is possible. Course grades will be based on the total number of points obtained by an individual student as a percent of the total points possible. Grades are base on the following:

*Class Participation*: Participation is worth 30 points (15% of total grade). Participating in class includes attending class, asking questions, responding to questions (both verbally and non-verbally), and participating in and reacting to class discussion, (both verbally and non-verbally). This is a requirement of this class and will be recorded on a daily basis. Points will only be earned for days in which you are physically present and active in the class.

*Weekly Assignments*: Throughout the course, short writing assignments will be assigned and due the following week. This is designed to supplement the lectures and class discussions to ensure students are grasping the concepts and material along the way. The totality of these short assignments is worth 30 points (15% of your grade) and will be calculated at the end of the course. For example, if fifteen such assignments end up being given, each will be worth approximately 2 points. Also, the use of discussion boards on Canvas may be used to supplement these assignments as we proceed.

*Examinations (x3)*: The course is divided up into three units (roughly 5-6 weeks each), with an exam at the end which covers that unit's material. These exams will include multiple choice, matching definitions, and short-answer essay questions, and are worth 30 points each (or 15% of your grade for each of these three exams). The third of these exams will be the Final Exam (also worth 15% / 30 points).

*Book Review*: One of the graded assignments is a written book review aimed at developing your reading, writing and critical thinking skills. The book review is worth 30 points (15% of your grade). This must be turned in both as a paper copy in class and through Canvas in order to receive credit. Further details will be provided in a separate handout.

*Research Paper*: This will be a longer and more thorough writing assignment than the weekly short papers. The research paper is intended to expand on an appropriate and relevant topic to the course material, and is designed to further develop your reading, writing and critical thinking skills. The research paper is worth 30 points (15% of your grade). This must be turned in both as a paper copy in class and through Canvas in order to receive credit. Further details will be provided in a separate handout.

*Extra Credit*: In some cases, the instructor *may* include an opportunity for a reasonable amount of extra credit points to become available (which will be related to course material). This is up to the discretion of the instructor.

NOTE: Any exams or assignments turned in with no names on them will not be graded!

**Graded Assignments**:

Participation 10% 20 pts

Exam I 15% 30 pts

Exam II 15% 30 pts

Exam III (Final) 15% 30 pts

Weekly Assignments 15% 30 pts

Book Review 15% 30 pts

Research Paper 15% 30 pts

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Total 100% **200 points**

**Grading Scale:**

180-200 points (90-100%) = **A**

160-179 points (80-89%) = **B**

140-159 points (70-79%) = **C**

120-139 points (60-69%) = **D**

0-119 points (0-59%) = **F**

**Important Dates**

Fri, Jan 19 Last day to drop class with a refund

Fri, Jan 27 Last day to drop class in person and receive a "W"

Sun, Jan 28 Last day to drop class on WebAdvisor and avoid a "W" on your transcript

Fri, Mar 9 Last Day to drop a full-term class (letter grades assigned after this date)

Mar 26-30 No Class - Spring Break

Week of May 14-18 Final Exam

NOTE:

* Anyone absent on the first day of class will automatically be dropped to make room for waitlisted students.
* Anyone absent without notice during the first two weeks of class without notice will be dropped.
* Anyone who misses two full weeks of class (four class periods) will automatically be dropped (until March 10) or unless arrangements with instructor are made, may be failed (if after March 10).

**Students with Disabilities**

If you have a verified need for an academic accommodation or materials in alternate media (i.e. Braille, large print, electronic text, etc.) per the Americans with Disabilities Act or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, please contact me as soon as possible and reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate your needs. For more information, contact the Disabled Students’ Programs and Services office at (559) 325-5235.

**In-Class Behavior**

Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated in this class. This may include but is not limited to rude or inappropriate behavior, talking out of turn, or the inappropriate use of cell phones or the unapproved use of electronic devices. After one warning, if the disruption continues, you will be dealt with in accordance with the policies and procedures of Sanger High School. This will result in loss of participation points and if it becomes a problem may lead to further disciplinary action. Unless otherwise stated by the instructor, there are to be **NO CELL PHONES** or unauthorized electronic devices on or out during class. Also, there are to be **NO HEADPHONES or EARBUDS** worn during class time. Another issue I have is students habitually walking out of class during lecture. Class is 58 minutes long and other than extreme circumstances there is to be **NO** **WALKING OUT OF CLASS.**  Just getting up and leaving class is a disruption and is grounds for an absence and loss of participation points, especially if it occurs more than once. I generally dislike students using tablets or laptops during class. If it is the primary method for note-taking, this may be allowed on an individual basis and is subject to special criteria. See instructor for further clarification or to discuss exigent circumstances. Also, unless otherwise discussed, **NO FOOD OR DRINKS PERMITTED** in class (other than water) as this can be a source of distraction for others.

**"*It is the mark of an*educated mind*to be able to*entertain*a*thought *without accepting it*." (~Aristotle)**

This class deals with politics, and sensitive issues will be discussed. Lively discussion and debate on these topics is expected. Critically engaging with controversial ideas is inherent in the college experience and is not only tolerated, but encouraged! However, classroom discussion should always be civilized and respectful to everyone and relevant to the topic being discussed. Everyone is entitled to their opinions, and classroom discussion is meant to allow us to hear a variety of viewpoints. ***This can only happen if we respect each other and our differences***.

**Missed or Late Assignments**

Passing all assignments is necessary to doing well in this class. Make-up exams are generally not permitted unless either arranged beforehand or due to verifiably extreme circumstances. Make-ups will be different from the regular exam (and likely more difficult). I recommend avoiding that route. If for any reason, an exam must be missed, it is the student's responsibility to consult with the instructor ***prior*** to the exam date to make alternative arrangements. Writing assignments and homework are due on the due dates, and any work handed in late will be for half credit up to one week late (for example, if an essay would have received an 80%, it will be scored at 40% once past the due date). After an assignment is over a week late, the student will receive a zero. Elaborate stories at the end of semester will not make up for missed work. Bottom line: Complete work on time, show up for class and exams, and if issues arise, communicate with the instructor!

**Attendance and Tardiness**

Daily attendance is expected. Attendance will be taken daily and it is your responsibility to be in class and be noted as present. Anyone absent for two full weeks of class (FOUR class sessions) prior to March 9th will be dropped from the course. This means you will be dropped from the course upon the sixth absence unless there has been a previous consultation with the instructor about an “emergency” situation. This is for your benefit, since poor attendance during the first half of the course means you will likely not do well, and a receiving a 'W' grade is preferable to an 'F'.

Failure to attend class on a regular basis will adversely affect your performance in this course, your participation points, and your grade. If you leave the class before the end of the period without prior notice, you will be counted absent for the day. Additionally, being on-time to class is an important part of student success. Tardiness is disrespectful to the instructor and to fellow students and is strongly discouraged. Habitual tardiness will result in a significant loss of participation points.

**Academic Honesty Statement**

Plagiarism or cheating of any kind may result in a grade of “F” on the assignment/test, which could result in a failing grade for the course as well as further disciplinary procedures. ***Plagiarism*** is a specific form of cheating: the use of another’s words or ideas without identifying them as such or giving credit to the source. I will run papers through Turnitin.com to check for plagiarism. ***Cheating*** is the act or attempted act of taking an examination or performing assigned, evaluated tasks in a fraudulent or deceptive manner, such as having improper access to answers, in an attempt to gain an unearned academic advantage. Cheating may include, but is not limited to, copying from another’s work, supplying one’s work to another, giving or receiving copies of examinations without an instructor’s permission, using or displaying notes or devices inappropriate to the conditions of the examination, allowing someone other than the officially enrolled student to represent the student, or failing to disclose research results completely. The use of any electronic device that is not pertinent to the exam is an act of cheating. Bottom line: Don't do it!

**Final Note**

If anything is unclear about any aspect of this syllabus or what is expected in this class, please raise the issue in class or contact me for clarification. Furthermore, please remember that your instructor, Sanger High School, and Reedley College want you to succeed in this class and beyond. Resources are available. If you are struggling with any of the material or something is not clear, ask for assistance!

**Spring 2018 Course Schedule (Subject to Minor Changes)**

Week 1 Jan 8-12 Introduction, Syllabus, Foundations of Democracy

Week 2 Jan 15-19 The US Constitution

Week 3 Jan 22-26 Federalism and Anti-Federalism

Week 4 Jan 29-Feb 2 Civil Liberties, Civil Rights

Week 5 Feb 5-9 Civil Rights, Social Movements

Week 6 Feb 12-16 Social Movements, Review, **EXAM # 1**

Week 7 Feb 19-23 Congress & The Presidency

Week 8 Feb 26-Mar 2 The Presidency & The Bureaucracy

Week 9 Mar 5-9 The Bureaucracy & The Courts

Week 10 Mar 12-16 California Government, Interest Groups

Week 11 Mar 19-23 Interest Groups, Review, **EXAM # 2**

N/A Mar 26-30 **NO CLASS** (SPRING BREAK)

Week 12 Apr 2-6 Public Opinion, Media and Politics

Week 13 Apr 9-13 Media, Propaganda, & Political Ideology

Week 14 Apr 16-20 Ideology & Political Parties

Week 15 Apr 23-27 Campaigns and Elections

Week 16 Apr 30-May 4 Domestic Policy & Foreign Policy

Week 17 May 7-11 Domestic Policy & Foreign Policy

Finals Week May 14-18 Review, **FINAL EXAM** (exact date & time to be announced)