PSCI 216 (15344) Ryan C. Maness

Fall 2012 LWH 3020

Northeastern Illinois University T/R 12:15-1:30

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**American National Government**

**Course Description**

Many students begin this course with the assumption that they have studied the subject already, because periodically during elementary and secondary education they were exposed to material dealing with American political institutions. However, what I expect to do in this course is actually different in a number of ways from the standard "high school civics" that virtually all American students are exposed, or subjected to. I encourage you at the start to set aside your preconceived notions and approach the course with the same open mind you would bring to any new subject, rather than assuming you have "heard that, been there," already, because you haven't. The most significant difference between this course and what you may have learned in high school is in the perspectives we bring to the subject.

This course is intended to accomplish several objectives. One is to provide you with information. A second is to help you develop your critical and analytical thinking abilities. The third is to help you develop your own view of American politics and government.

Regarding the first objective, you will see that the course materials present a great deal of information about American government and politics. This includes a recounting of how our basic institutions of government were founded and how they have evolved over the last two hundred years. By "institutions," I mean not just Congress, the executive branch, and the courts, but federalism, separation of powers, constitutional government, limited government, civil liberties and rights, popular sovereignty, and other institutions involved in the public policy process. These institutions are social and conceptual rather than concrete, and they depend upon mutual understandings among people in order to function. I do not expect you simply to memorize vast quantities of information about these institutions, but you do need to know certain things in order to participate in society as a citizen, and even to make an informed decision not to participate any more than absolutely necessary. And your employers will certainly expect you to have some comprehension of how the government functions, because every aspect of our economy is affected by the activities of government. The American government is deeply involved in the lives of every person who lives in this country, not to mention other countries, and unless you have some comprehension of how that government works, you may spend much of your life feeling bewildered by the things that happen to you.

This leads to the second course objective: developing understanding, or critical thinking abilities. Here I am speaking not just of understanding this subject, but developing your ability to understand in general. This is consistent with the general mission of the liberal arts and sciences to encourage you to develop the capacity for independent thought, for reflection, for comparing things as they are with things as they might be, and, in an important way, to become a different kind of person than you were when you entered this university. There are some significant differences between people with a college education, particularly in the liberal arts and sciences, and those without. Perhaps the most important is the development of this critical thinking ability, which will serve you well for a lifetime once you acquire it. This will lead to you developing more of an understanding of what your own values are, and how you view the American system of government and politics.

So, you will see that the materials I use in this course challenge you to think critically about American government and politics, while providing you with substantial information to fuel the critique. Keep in mind that this course can generate controversy. In fact, it is one of my main objectives to get past the "don't talk about politics" taboo that afflicts Americans in general. We can only do this if we all show respect for each other’s opinions, whether or not we agree with them. Everybody in the course should feel free to express or analyze any point of view without fear of ridicule or retribution. You are not being graded on the basis of whether you agree or disagree with anybody else's opinions, but on what you learn and how effectively you express it.

**Course requirements**

Please be advised that I will not accept late papers or other assignments, and I will not administer makeup exams, except in cases of documented emergencies or if you talk to me about a conflict you may have. I understand that many of you have lives outside of NEIU, all I ask is that you make sure you talk to me before the date of the exams or due dates for assignments.

Here is a summary of how your grade will be calculated:

**Grading Scale**

A   90% and above      B   80-89%      C   70-79%      D   60-69%      F   59% and below

**Two midterms (20% each) and non-cumulative Final (30%)**

**Media journal (20%)** The idea is to record your general understandings of government and politics before, during, and at the end of the course, and to track events happening in the nation and around the world that you find interesting. You must have at least two entries per week, starting the first week of classes until Thanksgiving break (which means your last entry is due November 25), and you cannot backdate the entries or make up missed entries.  The week starts Monday at 12:01 am and runs through Sunday at midnight. Each entry should include (1) a description of news coverage of significant events in American politics and government, along with a citation of the source, and (2) your reaction to the event and the way it was covered.

**You must email me your journal entries by midnight Sunday every week!**

I highly recommend that you use sources of different outlooks/ideologies that cover the same topic. An example of this is Fox News’ coverage of President Obama’s health care law and then comparing it to the coverage of msnbc. Fox is known to have a conservative outlook on American politics, while msnbc is known to be more liberal. Other pairs might be the Washington Times/Washington Post, Weekly Standard/Nation, among others. Using these news agencies’ websites is perfectly fine. Please let me know if you are unsure which point of view a particular source takes. The purpose of this assignment is to show you that the American media has become more polarized, and that where Americans get their news may shape their political ideologies and vice versa.

**Participation (10%)**  Participation is simply showing up **and** contributing to class. Either asking questions, bringing up news articles, following up on lecture points, or private conversations with the instructor (if you are more comfortable with that) all count towards your participation grade. I do not take attendance and feel that missing class will be reflected on your final grade because you will miss important material.

**Required Text:** Lowi, Ginsberg, Shepsle, and Ansolabehere: *American Government: Power and Purpose.* Brief 11th edition. Norton, ISBN 978-0-393-93299-7

Available at NEIU Bookstore or Online at Amazon.com, Half.com, etc.

**Plagiarism:**

When you write, you must do your own work and use a system of footnotes and references.  If you do not do this, or if you copy material from the internet or other sources without attribution, you may be committing plagiarism.  The NEIU Student Code of Conduct defines plagiarism as “Appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and thoughts of another author and representation of them as one’s original work. This includes (1) paraphrasing another’s ideas or conclusions without acknowledgement; (2) lifting of entire paragraphs, chapters, etc. from another’s work; and (3) submission as one’s own work, any work prepared by another person or agency.”  Plagiarism is SERIOUS.  Punishments include a failing grade on the paper or exam, or a failing grade in the course.  Students can also be referred to the Dean of Students for a hearing to decide additional punishments.  Plagiarism is also easy to avoid.  If you find a paper or article that says exactly what you wanted to say, then use it, but cite it.   We will discuss this again when the first paper assignment is distributed.

**Acts of Misconduct**(“University Student Conduct Code” can be found at <http://www.neiu.edu/DOCUMENTS/Dean_of_Students%20-%20Docs/uscc.pdf>): A student is subject to University discipline for participating or conspiring in the following acts of misconduct.  Academic misconduct is an offense against the University. Acts of academic misconduct include but are not limited to:

1. **Cheating**. Use or attempted use of any unauthorized assistance in taking an exam, test, quiz, or other assignment.
2. **Encouraging Academic Dishonesty**. Intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to persuade and/or influence another to violate the University’s rules, policies, and regulations governing academic integrity.
3. **Fabrication**. Deliberate falsification or design of any material or excerpt in an academic assignment or exercise.
4. **Plagiarism**. Appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and thoughts of another author and representation of them as one’s original work. This includes (1) paraphrasing another’s ideas or conclusions without acknowledgement; (2) lifting of entire paragraphs, chapters, etc. from another’s work; and (3) submission as one’s own work, any work prepared by another person or agency.

If the student’s observed conduct or apparent behavior is such as to lead to suspicion of academic misconduct, the faculty member in whose course the alleged infraction occurred may adjust the grade downward (including F - failure) for the test, paper, or course, or other course related activity in question. In such instances the faculty member shall notify the student, the Department/Unit Head, the Dean of the College and the Office of the Dean of Students of the reason for such action in writing.

**Web Link to Emergency Information:**

It is recognized that a safe university environment is a shared responsibility of faculty, staff, and students, all of whom are expected to familiarize themselves with and cooperate with emergency procedures.  Web links to Campus Safety: Emergency Procedures and Safety Information can be found on NEIUport on the MyNEIU tab or as follows:

For the Main campus:

<http://www.neiu.edu/~neiutemp/Emergency_Procedures/MainCampus/>

**Course Schedule**

Week 1: Aug 28-30: Introductions, Making Sense of Government and Politics

Read: Chapter 1

Week 2: Sept 4-6: The Founding and the Constitution

Read: Chapter 2

Week 3: Sept 11-13: Federalism and the Separation of Powers

Read: Chapter 3

Week 4: Sept 18-20: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Read: Chapter 4

Week 5: Sept 25: **First Midterm during class**

 Sept 27: Midterm review and begin Congress

Week 6: Oct 2-4: Congress (cont.)

Read: Chapter 5

Week 7: Oct 9-11: The Presidency

Read: Chapter 6

Week 8: Oct 16-18: The Executive Branch/Bureaucracy

Read: Chapter 7

Week 9: Oct 23-25: The Federal Courts

Read: Chapter 8

Week 10: Oct 30: **Second Midterm during class**

Nov 1: Midterm review and begin Public Opinion and Media

Week 11: Nov 6-8: Public Opinion and Media/Elections

Read: Chapters 9-10

Week 12: Nov 13-15: Political Parties

Read: Chapter 11

Week 13: Nov 20: Interest Groups

Read: Chapter 12

 Nov 22: **No Class, Thanksgiving, Last Media Journal Entry due Nov 25**

Week 14: Nov 27-29: Finish Interest Groups/ Public Policy

Read: Chapter 13

Week 15: Dec 4-6: Foreign Policy

Read: Chapter 14

Week 16: Dec 10-14: **Final: December 11, 10:00-11:50 am, In classroom**