

**Course Syllabus**  
**PLSC 110: American Politics**  
Spring 2018  
Class Time: Tue, Thu 1:00 – 2:15 PM  
Class Location: Welles Hall 26

Professor: Kenneth Miller  
millerk@geneseo.edu  
Office: Fraser Hall 105 A  
Office Hours:  
Tue 10:00 AM – 11:30 AM,  
Thu 11:30 AM – 1:00 PM

**Course Description and Objectives**

This course is an introduction to American politics and government. Broadly speaking, this course is concerned with the structure and function of federal institutions, how these institutions relate to each other and to state and local governments, and the nature of public opinion and political behavior in the United States. In some cases we will compare the American system to other western democratic systems. In other cases we will examine how the American system has changed over time. Overall, we will work to better understand how this system has developed and what it means for citizens.

The primary objective of this course is to provide a fundamental description of the American federal political system and what forces and actors drive the processes. In addition, this course will help you develop the analytical skills needed to understand a variety of complex relationships and social phenomena. Finally, this course will introduce you to the techniques of the discipline of political science.

There are no prerequisites for this course.

**Course Format**

The course will be primarily in a lecture format, but there will be times that we engage in discussions and at times I will ask questions of the class. You should feel free to ask questions if anything is unclear, or if you would like more information on a subject.

**Attendance**

The lectures parallel but do not repeat the readings, so not attending class is a bad idea. Furthermore, points for in-class quizzes and polls (see below) cannot be made up, so not attending class carries the risk of losing points.

**Evaluation**

There will be three in-class exams each worth 25% of your grade (75% total), a brief writing assignment worth 15% of your grade, and a quiz component worth 10% of your grade. There is no extra credit in this course.

	<u>Portion of Course Grade</u>
First Exam	25%
Second Exam	25%
Third Exam	25%
Analyzing Events	15%
Polls and Quizzes	10%

*Exams: 75% (3 worth 25% each)*

There will be three exams in this course. The exams cover both the readings and lecture material. The exams are not cumulative, that is, the first exam covers the foundations of the American democracy, the second exam covers formal institutions, and the third exam covers informal institutions and political behavior. The format for the exams will be multiple choice and occasional short answer. Multiple-choice questions will have five response options and short answer questions will ask for complete sentences in response. Each short answer will be graded from 0-5 where you start at 0 and work your way up to 5. For example, a basically correct answer earns a 3 while an answer that demonstrates that you can apply the concept to politics more broadly earns a 5.

Exams must be taken in class, on the day and time that they are administered. Make-up exams are only given based on the criteria outlined for make-ups in Other Policies and Procedures. Make-up exams may be in a different format depending on the circumstances of the make-up.

*Analyzing Events: 15%*

To link what we study in the classroom to political events in real time, each student will select a political news story and analyze the event in the context of our study of that institution or process. How has political science illuminated our understanding of the event? Or how has political science failed to offer an explanation for what is occurring? The assignment will be due one week following our completion of that topic. The assignment should be no longer than two double-spaced pages. Scheduling and more information about the assignment will be discussed in the opening weeks of the class.

*Polls and Quizzes: 10%*

Throughout the semester there will be numerous short quizzes or polls. Quizzes will cover material from the previous class and readings due for that class day. Polls are slightly different in that you receive full credit simply for answering. There will be no make-ups for missed quizzes and polls, but the lowest two grades will be dropped. For example, if we had 8 polls and quizzes in the semester and a student has 5 with 5/5, 1 with 3/5, and missed 2 (0/5), then the student drops the two that she missed, so the overall grade is counted as:  $(5 \times 1) + (1 \times .6) / 6 = 93\%$ . You should view the policy of dropping the two lowest scores as something like an allotment of sick days, or personal time off. Use your two drops judiciously.

### *Calculating Course Grades:*

Overall course grades are assigned according to the following scale:

93.0% - 100%	A	77.0% - 79.9%	C+
90.0% - 92.9%	A-	73.0% - 76.9%	C
87.0% - 89.9%	B+	70.0% - 72.9%	C-
83.0% - 86.9%	B	60.0% - 69.9%	D
80.0% - 82.9%	B-	0% - 59.9%	E

Final course grades are calculated based on a percentage rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent. For example, a final score of 92.95 is rounded to 93.0 and is an A, while an 82.91 is rounded to 82.9 and is a B-.

### **Course Materials**

The main text for this course is

*American Government: Power and Purpose, Brief 14<sup>th</sup> Edition* by Lowi, Ginsberg, Shepsle, and Ansolabehere. Norton Press

Additional reading, typically one additional article per week, will be provided on Canvas.

### **Other Policies and Procedures**

Classroom Environment: I will do my part to start and end class on time: we will start at 1:00 PM and end by 2:15 PM. Please do your part and do not make a habit of arriving late to class or leaving class early. I encourage you to engage in class discussions, ask questions, and respond when I ask you questions. However, side discussions during lecture are especially distracting for me and make my job a lot harder.

Technology: Laptops and tablets are welcome in class for taking notes. Using laptops and tablets in a manner that is distracting to the instructor or other students, or in an otherwise inappropriate way is not acceptable. If students report distracting behavior with laptops and tablets this policy may change and the devices may be banned from the class. Turn off all mobile phones prior to entering the classroom. Texting and messaging on laptops and tablets during class is not acceptable.

Power Point Slides: Power Point slides will be posted to the class Canvas page. However, note that these slides will not include the recaps described in "Exam Review," below.

Readings: You should perform the readings listed on the syllabus in preparation for the week on which they are listed. In other words, the reading assigned for the week of January 23 and 25 should be done before attending class on January 23. Lectures and readings are parallel but not identical, so it is necessary to do the reading to be fully prepared for exams.

Exam Review: I will *not* post a review sheet before exams. However, at the conclusion of each major topic I offer students a recap of the current questions in this area of politics

and list the key terms and concepts. Combined, these recaps serve as a review for the exams (though they are not necessarily comprehensive, and students should not rely on them exclusively).

Communication: The best way to communicate with me is during office hours. I encourage you to visit me in office hours for any reason: you are having trouble with something, you have questions, you just want to talk politics, or most anything else. Email correspondence is also welcome. Please format your emails as business correspondence, with a greeting and signature. I will try to get to your emails within 24 hours or, at the latest, during my next scheduled office hours, unless the answer to a question is in the syllabus or was discussed in class (in which case you should consult a classmate). I may also answer through a general email to the class, rather than writing you back personally, if your question reflects a general concern. I am also available by appointment if you cannot make my office hours.

Make-ups: Make-ups for exams are only offered for the following circumstances: (1) University sanctioned events (verification required); (2) extreme emergencies (and I am the sole arbiter of what constitutes an extreme emergency); or (3) religious observations. If you intend to miss class for a religious holiday, you must notify me of your pending absence at least 14 days in advance. **NB:** Some things that do not qualify for make-ups are: vacation travel, weddings, light illness (i.e. a common cold). This is not an exhaustive list of things that do not qualify for a makeup. Only reasons meeting at least one of the three criteria specified above qualify for make-ups.

Procedures for Dealing with Grade/Evaluation Concerns: Grade/evaluation concerns will only be considered if the following procedure is followed: All grade complaints must be typed and must clearly express the student's specific concerns. These written statements must be accompanied by citations of support from course materials, i.e. readings, textbook, and/or lecture notes, in order to ensure accuracy. Written statements will not be considered until one week after the assignment is returned to students. This allows the student time to reread his/her answers and think carefully about what improvements could have been made. Grievances will not be considered once two weeks have passed. For example, if I return a graded assignment on Monday, the student must submit a complaint before the Friday of the following week. Once class is over on that Friday, no complaints will be considered for that assignment. In other words, there is a one-week window to submit a written statement. Since class time is limited, I will only deal with questions or concerns during scheduled office hours. Finally, submitting a grade grievance will result in a complete re-grade of the assignment.

Disability Accommodations: Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Office of Disability Services:  
[https://www.geneseo.edu/dean\\_office/disability\\_services](https://www.geneseo.edu/dean_office/disability_services) If you require accommodation, it is your responsibility to bring your note to me EARLY in the semester (2<sup>nd</sup> week of class) so we can work out our arrangements.

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism, cheating, and other academic misconduct are serious violations of your contract as a student. Plagiarism is using someone else’s language without quotations and attribution or using someone else’s idea (even in different language) without attribution. Incidents of cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty will be treated per the university guidelines. For more information about academic standards of conduct please see Academic Dishonesty page on the Dean of Students’ site: [https://www.geneseo.edu/dean\\_office/dishonesty](https://www.geneseo.edu/dean_office/dishonesty)

Emergency Evacuation Policy: In the event of a fire or other emergency, it may be necessary to evacuate a building rapidly. Students should familiarize themselves with all the exit doors of each room and building they occupy at the university, and should remember that the nearest exit routes may not be the same as the way they typically enter buildings. Students requiring assistance in evacuation should inform me during the first week of class.

**Course Schedule**

I may need to make changes to this schedule. Any changes will be announced in class. All readings listed below are in *American Government: Power and Purpose* textbook. Additional readings will be announced in class and will be posted to Canvas.

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>
1/16	Introduction	
1/18	Defining Government and Democracy...	Ch. 1
1/23 & 1/25	The Founding and Constitution(s).....	Ch. 2
1/30 & 2/1	Federalism .....	Ch. 3
2/6 & 2/8	Civil Rights and Civil Liberties.....	Ch. 4
<b>Tue 2/6</b>	<b>Analyzing Events Topic Due</b>	
<b>Tue 2/13</b>	<b>First Exam</b>	
2/15 & 2/20	Congress.....	Ch. 5
2/22 & 2/27	The Presidency and Bureaucracy.....	Chs. 6 & 7
3/1 & 3/6	The Judiciary.....	Ch. 8
<b>Thu 3/8</b>	<b>Second Exam</b>	
3/20 & 3/22	Public Opinion and Mass Media.....	Ch. 9
3/27 & 3/29	Voting Behavior and Participation.....	Ch. 10 (pp. 333 – 339)
4/3 & 4/5	Interest Groups and Social Movements	Ch. 12
4/10 & 4/12	Political Parties.....	Ch. 11
4/19 & 4/24	Campaigns and Elections.....	Ch. 10 (all)
4/26 & 5/1	Review and Catch-up	
<b>Wed 5/9</b>	<b>Final Exam 12:00 PM – 2:30 PM</b>	