POS 2041: Introduction to American Government
Fall Semester 2017 – Room 709
Miami Beach Senior High School
Dual Enrollment course with Florida International University

CONTACT INFORMATION
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COURSE DESCRIPTION
This class provides students with an understanding of American politics and governmental structure. Special attention will be placed on political history, rights and freedoms, and the Constitution. The bulk of this class will be on the different branches of government, the interaction between them, and their interaction with state and local government. We will also explore the forces that influence the behavior of individuals and institutions while decisions are made about the allocation of things that we value.

COURSE OBJECTIVES & LEARNING OUTCOMES
By the end of the course my objectives are for you to be able to:
1) Understand the basic features of the American political system.
2) Apply important political science concepts to understanding the dynamics of American politics.
3) Demonstrate an ability to think critically and write clearly about American politics.

The overarching goal of the course is to build the skills necessary for careful and insightful political analysis. Because of the powerful myths, partisan predispositions, and biases that shape our perceptions and assessments, this is a lofty goal. However, a steadfast focus on the importance of theory and evidence will help us reach a better understanding of political behaviors, practices, and institutions.

POLICIES AND RULES

Decorum
I expect all classroom discussion to be respectful.

Electronic Devices Policy
Electronic devices, in particular laptop computers, may only be used for note taking. Using computers for purposes other than note taking can be a major distraction to you, your fellow students, and me (e.g. http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360131512002254). Please be considerate. If I feel that electronic devices are interfering with the learning environment, I will ask you to turn them off and expect you to comply.
Missed or Late Course Requirements Policies

Tests
You can take a make-up test for any reason. However, because of the difficulty of producing exams, you may be required to take a different exam than the original. As a consequence, it will likely be more difficult than the original. I would recommend avoiding this option. If you need to take a make-up test, please contact me as soon as you know.

Final
There is no make-up final. You must take the final at the scheduled day and time.

Term Paper
You can turn in the paper late, but it will be subject to a late penalty of one letter grade per day (10 points). For example, a paper that would have received an “A-” (say 90/100) would receive a “B-” (80/100) if turned in one day late. Days are calculated as 24-hour periods that begin at the start of the class period when the essay is due (0-24 hours = 1 day late penalty, etc.). This penalty will only be removed in the case of documented illness or serious extenuating circumstances. Papers will be considered late until both hard and electronic copies (through Blackboard) are submitted.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Cheating and other forms of misconduct can result in severe penalties, which can include a failing grade.

The FIU library website has some interactive tools to help you understand how to avoid plagiarism (http://libguides.fiu.edu/plagiarism). Any time that you are using someone else’s ideas – whether in a direct quotation or paraphrase – you need to cite and reference them properly. All direct quotations must be placed in quotation marks.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

Assignments (% of final grade)

Tests (in class) (30%) – Date: at the end of each Unit

These tests are designed to encourage students to complete all reading and digest the information by the end of each Unit. If you do the reading, understand the main points, and come to class, you should find this to be a straightforward 30% of your grade (no tricks). There will be six of these throughout the semester.

Term paper (20%) – three deadlines
1. Proposed section of the Constitution and brief summary of topic (Oct. 12)
   - This should include why you selected this section and a preliminary thesis statement of your main argument.
2. An annotated bibliography (Nov. 15)
   - This would be the list of the academic sources that you would cite in your term paper. See below for the reference source to use for style.
3. The final term paper (Dec. 20)
The grade will be based on the final term paper. The earlier deadlines are to make sure that you are working on this throughout the course of the semester and not leaving it until the end. As such, failure to meet one of the first two deadlines will result in a late penalty of ½ letter grade (5 points). Failure to meet both of the first two deadlines will result in a late penalty of one full letter grade (10 points).

**Prompt.** Choose one section or clause in the Constitution (from Articles 1-7). **Make an argument for why the Framers constructed the section or clause as they did and explain their theoretical motivations for including it in the Constitution.** Make sure to provide plenty of evidence to support your claim. You should use Madison's theory found in Federalist 10 and 51 as the heart of your explanation. And, you should include a few other scholarly sources to buttress your argument. In your conclusion provide an alternative version of the clause that would improve it, OR defend it in its current state.

**Submission.** You will need to turn in a hard copy of your paper in class and an electronic copy (via the course's Blackboard site) one hour prior to the start of class. Further details on how to submit your paper will be provided. Failure to submit both copies of your paper will result in late penalties.

**General paper requirements:** Approximately 4 pages (excluding title page and references), double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, and 1” margins. Students will use the Chicago Manual of Style’s “author-date” system for their citations and references (see [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)).

**Suggested organization**
- **Cover page** (not included in page count)
- **Section I – Introduction** (roughly 1/2 of a page)
  - Hook your reader by communicating the importance of your topic and provide a strong thesis statement that communicates your main argument (AND, serves as a road-map for the rest of your paper).
- **Section II – Clause Overview** (roughly 1/2 of a page)
  - A very brief overview of the clause’s importance / development in US politics.
- **Section III – Central Arguments** (roughly 2 pages)
  - Your main arguments connecting the clause with Fed 10 / 51 and any other evidence you may have found. Constantly connect your evidence back to your thesis statement.
- **Section IV – Conclusion** (roughly 3/4 of a page)
  - Quickly summarize your main argument and provide an alternative or defense.
- **References page** (not included in page count)

**Class participation (10%)**

Students should come to class prepared and participate actively in discussions. This should include displaying knowledge of the material in the readings and also the ability to identify current events that provide examples of the concepts we are reviewing.

**Homework Assignments (10%)**

There will be take home assignments throughout the course of the semester. These are intended to serve as basic tools to help students gather facts and knowledge. These should be very straightforward.
Final exam (30%) – January 18, 2018 in class

The final exam will focus heavily on the lectures, classroom discussions, and reading assignments throughout the semester. We will discuss the format of the final in class prior to the exam. The exam will include multiple choice, short answers and one essay.

Grading Breakdown

Tests (30%)
Term paper (20%)
Class Participation (10%)
Homework (10%)
Final exam (30%)

How to interpret your grade / grading standards
Grades in the A range (90-92 = A-; 93 or greater = A) indicate that you have done an excellent job in the course. Obtaining this grade generally requires you to go beyond what is required for a given assignment, demonstrating particular creativity, diligence, or thoughtfulness. Grades in the B range (80-82 = B-; 83-86 = B; 87-89 = B+) are indicators of satisfactory completion of all required components of an assignment. I’d consider an 80-89 to be “good” to “very good,” but not “excellent.” Grades in the C range (70-76 = C; 77-79 = C+) indicate that some components of an assignment were not adequately or appropriately completed, but that the overall effort is nevertheless of passing quality. Grades in the D (60-69 = D) or F (59 and below = F) range indicate work that does not meet the requirements of the assignment or that is not of passing quality.

Material Requirements-
1. Blue/black ink. Do not write in any other color.
2. Organized notebook

Textbook
Lowi, Theodore, Ginsberg, Benjamin, Shepsle, Kenneth and Ansolabehere, Stephen; American Government: Power and Purpose; Brief 14th Edition

Additional Readings-
The Constitution of the United States
The Declaration of Independence
Federalist Papers Nos. 10 & 51
Other readings will be made available throughout the term by unit or chapter.

Additional Resources-
www.whitehouse.gov
www.senate.gov
www.house.gov
www.supremecourt.gov
Course Content Outline

This will give you an idea of what we are going to be covering and an ESTIMATION of when things are going to be due. I will always give you absolute dates in writing whenever something major is due. Keep this as a planning guide for yourself.

Remember- due to unforeseen changes and activities, some things may be altered.

Unit 1- Constitutional Underpinnings of United States Government

A. Considerations that influenced the formulation and adoption of the Constitution
B. Separation of Powers
C. Federalism
D. Theories of democratic governments
Readings: Chapters-1-3
The Constitution (Appendix)
Federalist Papers 10 & 51 (Appendix)
Approx. Length- 3 weeks
Possible Test Date- Week of Sept. 4

Unit 2- Institutions of National Government-the three branches and bureaucracy

A. Arrangements of power
B. Relationship among the branches
C. Links between the institutions and the following
  1. Public Opinion
  2. Interest Groups
  3. Political Parties
  4. Subnational Governments
Readings: Chapters-5-8
Approx. Length- 4 weeks
Possible Test Date- Week of Oct. 2

Unit 3- Public Beliefs and Behaviors

A. Beliefs that citizens hold about their government and leaders
B. Processes by which citizens learn about politics
C. The nature, source, and consequences of public opinions
D. The way in which citizens vote and otherwise participate in political life
E. Factors that influence citizens to differ from one another in terms of political beliefs and behaviors
Readings: Chapters-9-10
Approx. Length- 3 weeks
Possible Test Date- Week of Oct. 23

Unit 4- Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Mass Media

A. Political parties and elections
  * Functions
  * Organization
  * Development
  * Effects on political process
  * Electoral laws and systems
B. Interest groups and PACs
   • Range of people represented
   • Activities of interest groups
   • Effects of interest groups on the political process
   • Unique characteristics and rules of PACs in the political process

C. The mass media-
   1. Functions and structures of the media
   2. Impacts of media on politics

Readings: Chapters-11-12
Approx. Length- 3 Weeks
Possible Test Date- Week of Nov. 13

Unit 5- Public Policy

A. Policy making in a federal system
B. The formation of policy agendas
C. The role of institutions in the enactment of policy
D. The role of bureaucracy and the courts in policy implementation and interpretation
E. Linkages between policy processes and the following:
   1. Political institutions and federalism
   2. Political parties
   3. Elections
   4. Public opinion
   5. Policy networks

Readings: Chapters-13-14
Approx. Length- 3 weeks
Possible Test Date- Week of Dec 4

Unit 6- Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

A. The development of civil liberties and civil rights by judicial interpretation
B. Knowledge of substantive rights and liberties
C. Impact of the 14th Amendment on the constitutional development of rights and liberties

Readings: Chapter-4
The Bill of Rights (Appendix)

Approx. Length- 3 weeks
Possible Test Date-Week of January 8