

Syllabus – Online Augsburg Course, Fall, 2009

POL 121 American Government and Politics

Contact Information

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Learning Goals

Through successful completion of this course, you will:

- 1. Explain how the constitutional structure shapes American politics**
- 2. Understand key institutions of American government**
- 3. Understand pathways of participation in the American political process**
- 4. Analyze prospects for American democracy and your linkage to the larger political system**

Book List

- Watts, Understanding American Government and Politics, second edition**
- Wayne, The Road to the White House 2008: The Politics of Presidential Elections, 2008 edition.**

Overview on Class Activity:

This is an online course which is somewhat different from courses you may have known in Weekend College or the Rochester program. It is open to students from WEC/Rochester during the academic year and open to students from WEC/Rochester and Day students during the summer.

The value of this course to you will depend first upon your reading the materials with care. In addition the value of the course will depend upon your engagement with the instructor and with your fellow students in active use of on-line discussion,

For this reason, you are asked to regularly post your reading reports and to comment on the reading reports of others. The instructor's on-line comments and questions will help to deepen and extend your understanding of the reading and the points that are introduced by the on-line reports and the commentaries.

Further Information on Class Activity

1. All chapter assignments for reading reports will be made during the first week of class. That will tell you when your chapter reports are due. The Final Paper Project will ask you to draw on class readings and anything else you have read you believe is relevant. Therefore it should be clear that all students are asked to read all of the assignments even though you will have specific responsibility for reporting on a given chapter. Each student will also have responsibility to post two reply commentaries each week to the reading reports of others..

2. Each student will be responsible for preparing and submitting reports and response commentary to the class on specific readings or parts of specific readings. You will be expected to prepare three such reports as a short two to three page paper to be submitted to the class discussion space. Everyone will do some summarizing and submitting and everyone will be expected to have read the material on time. The course units posted in Moodle will identify specific reading assignments for each student and when you would be expected to post a reading report on that assignment. These reading assignments will begin with the second week of class.

3. You should expect to read and post your reading reports by the middle of the assignment week (Tuesday to Wednesday) and to post your reply commentary to two of the reports by the end of the assignment week (Friday to Sunday). Therefore, at a minimum you should expect to log in twice a week to participate in the class. Each student should read the reports that have been posted and each student should post two replies to the weekly reports of others. If you wish to

post commentary but new material is slow to post, feel free to post your own comments on relevant material. Students are welcome to post more frequently than the required minimum postings of reading reports and weekly commentary. More frequent postings will be taken into account in final grading.

4. You are welcome to initiate discussion and exchanges--apart from the required postings--with each other on ideas or views that relate to the subject matter. This should show some real differences of opinion and viewpoint among you. The ground rules are the usual courtesies of the Internet and a recollection that we intending to learn together which means listening to differing viewpoints. You are also welcome to post references to articles or blogs or sites or other media that you think others in the class would want to know about.

5. You may want to know how to prepare reading reports and response commentaries. The reading reports should give an understandable summary of the main points and arguments of the reading, as you understood them. In addition to the summary of the reading you are asked to reflect on what you have read in the chapter. What especially interested you? What was newly informative to you? Were there any points difficult to understand? Response commentaries should identify your evaluation of the main points presented by a particular reading report and pose questions to the reporter if you have any.

6. Prof. Hedblom will be guiding the work in the class, reading the reports in mid week and providing commentary on them, participating in the weekly postings, responding in a timely way to individual questions or observations and providing a mid term evaluation to each student about their work to date in the class.

7. The Final Paper Project will be posted to the classroom site near the middle of the course and your final paper will be able to be posted to a secure web site.

8. This course satisfies the Social and Behavioral Sciences LAF requirement.

“Reality unrefined by theory is too chaotic for us to absorb.” W. Phillips Shively (2002)

“Social Science Liberal Arts Foundation (LAF) courses seek to show how our understandings of social reality, with all of its complexities and diversity, can be improved and clarified through systematic and critical analysis. The social sciences offer a variety of methods for systematically analyzing social systems and reality. Economics, political science, psychology and sociology each utilize different theoretical frameworks and research methods to analyze and better understand various aspects of social systems. Moreover, the social sciences offer ways of gaining knowledge that are different from other intellectual disciplines (eg. the natural sciences; the fine arts) by focusing on a diverse array of social realms. Economics focuses on the economy, political science focuses on the polity, psychology focuses on the individual in social situations, and sociology focuses on social groups.

9. Class Requirements and Grading

Evaluation of online student online participation will be based on several criteria including the following:

A. Participation Requirements (60% of the grade with 20% for each reading report, required logins and response commentaries)

(1) Twice weekly log in to the class room site

(2) Log in weekly to read the reports posted based on the assignments for the week

(3) Post three reading reports as assigned. The criteria for a 4.0 reading report include

- whether you have provided an understandable summary of the main points in the chapter**
- whether you identified problems or issues that especially interested you**
- whether you identified something that was newly informative to you**
- whether there any points difficult to understand**

(4) Log in to post a response commentary to at least two reports for the week. A 4.0 response commentary will provide evaluation of the main points presented by a particular reading report and pose questions to the reporter if you have any. Additional commentary postings and postings of references, articles, relevant web sites and blogs will be taken into account in this portion of the final grade.

Evaluation of the Final Paper Project will be based on several criteria including the following:

- (1) shows clear thinking (10 points)**
- (2) presents coherent and organized writing (10 points)**
- (3) addresses the main problem set out in the paper assignment (10 points)**
- (4) analyzes all the main discussion points identified in the assigned problem (10 points).**

A 4.0 papers will show clear thought patterns from beginning to end, will be coherently written, will correctly identify and discuss the main problem in the assignment and provide reasonable and well supported analysis of the related discussion points. A 2.0 paper will be comparatively less clear, the writing less organized, the main problem not fully or correctly understood and some discussion points partially considered or not considered at all.

Reading reports/response commentaries/class participation	60% (20% each)
Final Paper Project	40%