

## **PSC 101 – Introduction to American Government**

Instructor: Nathan Kelly  
Office: 420 Park Hall  
Phone: 645-2251 x420  
Email: nkelly@buffalo.edu  
Office Hours: T: 11-12; R: 11-12; 1-3  
Course Website: Available via <http://ublearns.buffalo.edu>

### **Introduction**

This course is designed to cultivate three types of knowledge. First, this class will provide an overview of the United States governing system, including government institutions, the policymaking process, public opinion, and elections. Second, the course will introduce current and past theoretical debates in political science about how American politics works. In this way the course will move beyond the basics of American government to the complexities of developing and testing social scientific explanations of politics. Finally, the course provides an opportunity to think critically about contemporary political issues and the functioning of the U.S. governing system. Thus, this class is about much more than facts. It is about learning to evaluate information and arguments in a rigorous and honest way.

### **General Objectives**

As in every introductory course I teach, the general objectives for students are:

- 1) To develop the ability to interact with and process information with a high degree of sophistication
- 2) To develop the ability to learn independently
- 3) To make continual improvement during the course

### **Specific Objectives**

Some of the learning objectives specific to this course are:

- 1) To understand the development of the United States as an independent and sovereign state
- 2) To understand the Constitutional framework of government in the United States
- 3) To understand the rights of citizens in the United States and their development
- 4) To understand the representational mechanisms active in American politics
- 5) To understand the importance of information and participation in democratic systems
- 6) To understand the functioning of elections in the United States, including some of the most determinants of election outcomes
- 7) To understand the interaction between and the role of each Constitutional branch of government
- 8) To understand how the various parts of the U.S. governing system interact to produce national policy

## Required Text

*American Government: Power and Purpose*, core 8<sup>th</sup> edition with 2004 election update. By Theodore Lowi, Benjamin Ginsburg, and Kenneth Shepsle. Available in the campus bookstore. Referred to as LGS in the course outline.

Other short readings available on the text website (<http://www.wwnorton.com/lowi/>) may also be assigned through the semester.

## Assignments and Grading

Grades in the course are determined based on performance on three exams. The lowest exam score for each student will contribute 20% of the grade, the remaining two exams will be weighted at 40% each. There will be no final exam.

Letter grades will be assigned as follows:

|            |            |                 |
|------------|------------|-----------------|
| A = 92-100 | A- = 90-91 | B+ = 88-89      |
| B = 82-87  | B- = 80-81 | C+ = 78-79      |
| C = 72-77  | C- = 70-71 | D+ = 68-69      |
| D = 62-67  | D- = 60-61 | F = 59 or below |

## Policies and Procedures

**Make-up Exams.** It is imperative that students plan on taking each exam at its scheduled time. Makeup exams will *not* be given except under extreme circumstances in which prior notice is given to the professor, accompanied by appropriate documentation. The availability and format of makeup exams or other arrangements, and the acceptability of documentation provided, is solely at the professor's discretion. Should a medical or family emergency arise, or if participation in a university-sanctioned event is planned, it is the student's responsibility to inform the professor as soon as possible. For scheduled events, official notification must be provided early in the semester, and for unexpected/emergency situations, certainly prior to the exam.

**Course Information.** You are required to check the UBLearns course site regularly to check for announcements and other information pertinent to the course. Not knowing of an announcement made via the website will not be an excuse.

**Grading Disputes.** Grades will be regularly updated via UBLearns. An announcement on UBLearns will be made when new grades are posted. If you notice an inaccuracy in your grade or have questions about the grade, you must bring it to my attention within 7 days of the posting of grades. No changes will be made after 7 days elapse from posting to UBLearns.

**Academic Integrity, Etiquette, Other Policies.** Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated and will be sanctioned to the fullest extent possible under UB policy. Also, students are expected to conduct themselves in a professional and civil manner. This means arriving to class on time, turning off cell phones, putting away newspapers, etc. These and other expectations are discussed in more detail in the Student Rights and Responsibilities section of the Undergraduate Catalog at: <http://undergrad-catalog.buffalo.edu/undergraduateeducation/studentrights.shtml>.

Students with special needs that require accommodation should meet personally with the professor as soon as possible at the beginning of the semester.

## Course Outline

| Date  | Topic  | Readings             |
|---|--|----------------------|
| <b>Part 1: Foundations of U.S. Politics</b> |  |                      |
| 1/18  | Course Introduction; What is Government? Is it Necessary?                            | LGS Preface, pp 2-12 |
| 1/20  | The Five Principles of Politics  | LGS pp 13-31         |
| 1/25  | Precursors to the U.S. Constitution  | LGS Chapter 2        |
| 1/27  | The U.S. Constitution  | LGS Chapter 2        |
| 2/1   | Federalism   | LGS Chapter 3        |
| 2/3   | Separation of Powers   | LGS Chapter 3        |
| 2/8   | Civil Liberties and Civil Rights   | LGS Chapter 4        |
| <b>2/10</b>                                 | <b>Exam 1</b>  |                      |
| <b>Part 2: Institutions</b>                 |  |                      |
| 2/15  | Review Exam 1; Congress: Representation and Organization                             | LGS Chapter 5        |
| 2/17  | Congress: The Official Legislative Process and Influences on Decision-making         | LGS Chapter 5        |
| 2/22  | President: Evolving Role of the President and Parliamentary vs. Presidential Systems | LGS Chapter 6        |
| 2/24  | Bureaucracy: Purpose and Organization  | LGS Chapter 7        |
| 3/1   | Judiciary: Organization and Function   | LGS Chapter 8        |
| 3/3   | Judiciary: Power and Judicial Decision-making  | LGS Chapter 8        |
| <b>3/8</b>                                  | <b>Exam 2</b>  |                      |
| <b>Part 3: Politics</b>                     |  |                      |
| 3/10  | Review Exam 2: Introduction to Public Opinion  | LGS Chapter 9        |
| 3/12-3/20                                   | Spring Break   |                      |
| 3/22  | Public Opinion: Formation and Measurement  | LGS Chapter 9        |
| 3/24  | Public Opinion: The Opinion-Policy Connection  | LGS Chapter 9        |
| 3/29  | Elections: Mechanics, Competitiveness, and Democracy                                 | LGS Chapter 10       |
| 3/31  | Elections: Individual Voting Behavior, 2004 Presidential Election                    | LGS Chapter 10       |
| 4/5   | Elections: Campaign Finance, Turnout   | LGS Chapter 10       |
| 4/7   | <b>Class Cancelled: Midwest Political Science Association Conference</b>             |                      |
| 4/12  | Parties: Formation and Functions   | LGS Chapter 11       |
| 4/14  | Parties: U.S. Systems and Contemporary Parties                                       | LGS Chapter 11       |
| 4/19  | Interest Groups: Characteristics and Formation                                       | LGS Chapter 12       |
| 4/21  | Interest Groups: Strategy and Influence  | LGS Chapter 12       |
| 4/26  | The Media  | LGS Chapter 13       |
| <b>4/28</b>                                 | <b>Exam 3</b>  |                      |