POLS 111-02
Introduction to U.S. Government
Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00 – 3:15 PM
Instructor: Dr. Kevin Parsneau
Office: Morris Hall 204 B
Office Hours: Mon. and Wed. 12:00-3:00 PM
Or by appointment
E-mail: kevin.parsneau@mnsu.edu
Telephone: (507) 389-5232
http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/parsnk

Course Description:
This course introduces students to U.S. politics and institutions, including the legislative, executive and judicial branches, as well as parties, interest groups, the media and public opinion. A recurring theme of the course will be challenging the “civics class” version of U.S. politics that is often taught in high schools and reinforced in popular culture. While the “civics class” version gets many basic facts correct, it oversimplifies major aspects of the U.S. system and ignores important issues. The goal of this class is not to discard the “civics class” version, but to build upon it and raise challenging questions about it with the expectation that students develop their own sophisticated opinions about the U.S. system.

In addition to raising questions that students may have never considered, this course will emphasize basic understanding of ongoing issues in U.S. politics, as well as familiarity with different ways of understanding politics. Along the way, the course will also provide context to current debates, trends and events, which will figure prominently in course readings, class discussions and short assignments.

Text Book:

Other readings will be available via the course website or handed out in class. Students will be held responsible for all listed or distributed course readings.

Grades:
Exams and quizzes for this class are done online through D2L. Because they are online, students have the option of taking them at times convenient to their schedules. Students can take them on their own computers but should note that unless they take the assignments on a university computer and can provide acceptable documentation of the problem, computer problems are not an acceptable excuse for failure to do or complete the assignment. Students are encouraged to use university computers, save their answers as they do the assignment, and do assignments as early as possible to allow for any unforeseen problems. If students are uncomfortable with the on-line format, they can arrange to take paper versions of exams or quizzes at scheduled times.
There will be 4 options to take exams (3 mid-terms covering approximately a third of the course content each and one comprehensive exam). There will be 7 options to take the quizzes (approximately every two weeks). Each student’s grade will be based upon their best 3 exam scores, their best 5 quiz scores, 5 in-class assignments and one other assignment.

**Individual assignment grades are weighted as follows:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First mid-term Exam</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second mid-term</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class Assignments</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grades are not based upon a curve, but rather upon reasonable expectations for learning and a standard of the understanding that each student should have after taking this course. As of the first day of class, I would give everyone in the class an A, provided each person earned one. That said, students should recognize that a C represents an average score that meets basic requirements. To receive an A, students must have achievement that is “outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.” Do not assume that you will get an A unless you are willing to put in the work necessary to reach that standard. This course uses the following grade scale:

**Grade Scale:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>83-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80-83</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>77-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>below 60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>67-69</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>63-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-63</td>
<td>D-</td>
<td>below 60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Class policies:**  
Class attendance is expected. Students are not specifically graded on attendance, but there will be information presented in the class that is not available elsewhere and it will be on the exams. I am willing to discuss and clarify the contents of class lectures, but not as a substitute for attendance. Furthermore, there will be some in-class activities designed to demonstrate interesting issues in politics, measure students’ understanding, and prepare students for tests. Students who find that they must miss class should arrange to get notes from another student.

Students are expected to come prepared for class. Readings are listed on the syllabus and you are expected to read the material prior to class so that you can participate in class discussions. I will not cover everything in course lectures but anything in the assigned readings is fair game for the tests.

Students are expected to take the exams during the times listed on the syllabus. On-line exams allow a great deal of flexibility in exam times, and the grading criteria allow students to discard their lowest exam scores. Thus, if students must miss an exam, then they can treat that exam as their lowest exam and discard it. I do not give make up exams except under extraordinary circumstances.
No cheating or plagiarism will be tolerated, and such acts of academic misconduct will be punished according to established university rules. If you have any questions regarding cheating or plagiarism, please discuss them with me or consult university rules.

**Contact:**
I enjoy most of my interactions with students and try my best to be available to assist them and answer questions, but I have a lot of students and can not accommodate many student requests. I have provided various means to contact me including my office hours, website, email and office telephone number.

If possible, I prefer to meet with students either immediately after class for short questions or during scheduled office hours for longer questions that require more discussion. If you know in advance that you intend to stop by my office, please email so that I can be sure to be there because sometimes other job requirements or emergencies interrupt my office hours. If you absolutely can not reach my office during normal hours, I am willing to schedule another time to meet.

Before coming by my office, you should also check the course website. All assignments and readings in addition to the textbook will be posted on it and most if not all handouts will be available there.

Concerning other questions and contact via email, you can email me, but I warn you that I get a great number of emails and do not always respond. I generally answer short questions but please check your syllabus, the course website or ask fellow students before emailing me. Furthermore, complex questions require long answers that are impractical to provide via email, and it is impossible to gauge whether students understand my answer or are only getting more confused. Please see me in person about important questions.

You can also contact me through my office telephone although I also warn that I generally do not answer the telephone while I am talking to someone in my office. I have also experienced losing some messages. Use it as a last resort, but do not assume that I received the message.

**Questions about Grading:**
I do not use surprises on tests to measure students’ knowledge of the course materials. I make the contents of the tests and the requirements for papers as clear as possible. If students have attended each class and done the assigned readings, they should do well on the test. If you have any questions about expectations, please ask as soon as possible.

Because I am clear about the contents of tests and my test questions are straightforward, I am confident in the fairness of my exams and assigned grades. However, if you feel that you have been treated unfairly in my course, please let me know as soon as possible and while there is time to address any problems.

Remember, the most important result of any class at is the knowledge gained from the class and not the grade received. Even if you are disappointed in a grade, it is most important to learn the material and understand the subject of the course for your development as a student, citizen and scholar.
In-Class Discussions:
Given the nature of the topic of politics, I encourage in-class questions and discussion, but require courtesy. Be civil and respectful to your classmates and recognize that often people must agree to disagree. Sometimes, I may have to end a discussion for the sake of time. If you have concerns about in-class discussions, please bring them to me after class or during my office hours.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:
I encourage and appreciate the contribution of students with disabilities in my courses. I also encourage you to take advantage of support from the university. Minnesota State University provides students with disabilities reasonable accommodation to participate in educational programs, activities or services. Students with disabilities requiring accommodation to participate in class activities or meet course requirements should first register with the Office of Disability Services, (Memorial Library 132, telephone 289-2825, TDD 711) to establish an accommodation plan and then contact me as soon as possible.

All other university policies also apply to this course.

Week 1 (August 24 – 28): Introduction and American Political Culture
The Declaration of Independence (Coleman et al. Appendix p. 683-684.)
The Constitution of the United States (Coleman et al. Appendix p. 691-704)


Week 2 (August 31 – September 4): Ratification of the Constitution
Federalist Papers 10 and 51. (Coleman et al. Appendix p. 685-690.)

Other readings:
Excerpt from “Centinel” by Samuel Bryant (probably) 1787
Excerpt from “John DeWitt” (Unknown)
Excerpt from Melancton Speech 1788
Excerpt from “A Farmer and Planter” 1788
Excerpt from “A Farmer” by John Francis Mercer (Unknown)

Week 3 (September 8 – 11): Federalism

Week 4 (September 14 – 18): Congress and the Legislative Branch

Week 5 (September 21 – 25): President and the Presidency

Other readings:
Federalist No. 67, 68, and 70
(All available at: http://www.law.ou.edu/hist/federalist/)


**Week 5 (September 28 – October 2): Executive Branch and Bureaucracy**

**First Midterm Exam: Available October 2 - 18**

**Week 6: (October 5 – 9): Courts and the Judiciary**

*Other Readings:*

**Week 7 (October 12 – 16): Public Opinion and the Media**

*Other readings:*
George Orwell “Politics and the English Language.” 1954.


**Week 8 (October 19 – 22): Political Participation**

**Week 9 (October 26 – 30): Political Parties**

*Other readings:*

**Week 10 (November 2 – 6): Interest Groups**

*Other readings:*

Mancur Olson “The Logic of Collective Action” (excerpted)

**Second Midterm Exam: Available November 6 - 15**
**Week 11 (November 9 – 13): Elections**

**Week 12 (November 16 – 20): Civil Liberties**

**Week 13 (November 23 - 25): Civil Rights**

*Other readings:*
“I Have A Dream” Martin Luther King, Jr., August 28, 1963
[http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/treatise/king/mlk01.htm](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/treatise/king/mlk01.htm)

“The Alabama Literacy Test”

**Week 14 (November 30 – December 4): Domestic and Foreign Policy**

Go to National Priorities Project Website: [http://www.nationalpriorities.org/](http://www.nationalpriorities.org/)

*Other readings:*
“War Powers Resolution” November 7, 1973: [http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/warpower.htm](http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/warpower.htm)

**Third Midterm Exam: Available December 4 - 12**

**Final Exam: Available December 4 - 12**

I reserve the right to amend this syllabus as necessary.