Introduction to U.S. Government
Tuesday and Thursday 11:00 A.M.-12:15 P.M.
Dr. Kevin Parsneau
Office Hours: Mon. and Tues. 1:00 -4:00 PM
or by appointment (MH 204B)
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Telephone: (507) 389-5232
http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/parsnk

Course Description:
This course is intended to introduce 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 American politics that is commonly 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 new issues that students may have never considered, this course will emphasize basic understanding of the issues concerning American 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:
Thomas E. Patterson. 2015. We the People. 11th ed. McGraw Hill Co.

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 through D2L and the textbook website. Because they are on line, students can take them at convenient times in their schedules, although all assignments are due during the scheduled time periods. Students are encouraged to use university computers, save their answers as they proceed, and do assignments as early as possible to allow for any unforeseen problems. Students can take them on their own computers but 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 who are uncomfortable with the on-line format can arrange to take paper versions of exams at scheduled times.

There will be 4 options to take exams, including 3 mid-terms covering approximately one-third of the course content each and one comprehensive exam. There will be 15 options to take the quizzes. Each student’s grade will be based upon their best 3 exam scores, their 10 chapter quizzes, 5 in-class assignments and one other assignment.
Individual assignment grades are weighted as follows:

- First Exam: 23%
- Second Exam: 23%
- Third Exam: 23%
- Quizzes: 20%
- In-class Assignments: 10%
- On-line Intro Quiz: 1%

Grades are not based upon a curve, but upon reasonable expectations for learning that each student should have after taking this course. As of the first day, 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>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80-83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77-79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70-73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>67-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>63-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>60-63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</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 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 available on the course website (available at [http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/parsnk](http://mavdisk.mnsu.edu/parsnk)), and students are expected to read them prior to class so that they can participate in class discussions. I will not cover everything in class and anything in the assigned readings is fair game for the tests.

Students can find abbreviated versions of the course Power Point slides on the course Mavdisk website. These slides are not a substitute for class attendance, and students should be warned that the slides will help them organize their note-taking, but much of the material on the exams is not on the slides themselves.

Students are expected to take the exams during the times listed on the syllabus. On-line exams allow a great deal of flexibility and the grading criteria allow students to discard their lowest exam score. 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 will be tolerated, and acts of academic misconduct will be punished according to established university rules. While students may share notes prior to quizzes and exams, they may not have any other person help them while they take the exam. If you have any questions regarding cheating or plagiarism, please discuss them with me or consult university rules.
**Computers/ Electronic Devices in the Classroom:**
I allow computers and other electronic devices in the classroom under the assumption that students use them as study and note-taking devices, but I have conditions and reserve the authority to prohibit their use on an individual or class level.

My classroom is an inappropriate location to access the internet or check email. In my experience, no one can pay adequate attention while on line. Students on the internet distract other students. Any student who uses a computer in class must sit in the front rows and shall not to access the internet or email.

Any student on the internet during class is risking all other students’ use. If any student uses any electronic device in a manner that I deem inappropriate, then I reserve the right to restrict that student’s use or all students’ use. I prefer not to impose this group penalty, but my experience is that it is impossible for me to enforce this policy on an individual level.

**In-Class Discussions:**
Given the nature of the topic, I encourage 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 any in-class discussions or comments, please bring them to me after class or during my office hours.

**Contact:**
I enjoy most of my interactions with students and try my best to be available to assist 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.

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, I warn you that I get a great number of emails and can not always respond. While email is an easy form of communication, it is almost too easy and becomes a default action for students. Email becomes an excessive burden to professors and does not provide the students with the best answers.

I have the following rules concerning email. (1) First, check other resources such as the syllabus, the course website, D2L, fellow students, the textbook, etc. before emailing me questions that can be answered elsewhere. (2) Second, think before emailing me with unreasonable requests. For example, I can answer short questions, but complex questions require long answers that are impractical to answer via email. It is also difficult to gauge whether students understand or are only getting more confused over email. Please see me in person about important questions. (3) Third, if you email, then write a concise email with full sentences and do not assume that I know all the relevant details. A simple question can turn into multiple emails when details are omitted from the original message. (4) Fourth, please allow at least 24 hours for me to respond and longer
on weekends. Students too often expect an immediate response, but I do not monitor my email and respond often enough to meet that unreasonable expectation. It is not that I do not want to help students, but please use email only after exhausting other possibilities.

**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 assignments as clear as possible. If students have attended each class and done the assigned readings, then 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 and my test and quiz 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 course subject for your development as a student, citizen and scholar.

**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 contact me as soon as possible.

All other university policies also apply to this course.

**Week 1 (January 11-15): Introduction and American Political Culture**
Patterson. *We the People*, Chapter 1.

The Declaration of Independence


**Week 2 (January 19-22): Ratification of the Constitution**
Patterson. *We the People*, Chapter 2.

The Articles of Confederation, in *We the People*, Appendix
The Constitution of the United States, in *We the People*, Appendix
Federalist Papers 10 and 51, in *We the People*, Appendix

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 (January 25-29): Federalism
Patterson. We the People, Chapter 3.

Week 4 (February 1-5): Civil Liberties
Patterson. We the People, Chapter 4.


Week 5 (February 8-12): Civil Rights
Patterson. We the People, Chapter 5.

Martin Luther King, Jr. August 28, 1963, “I Have a Dream”
(All available at: http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/treatise/king/mlk01.htm )

“The Alabama Literacy Test”

First Midterm Exam: Take on line through D2L

Week 6 (February 15-19): Congress and the Legislative Branch
Patterson. We the People, Chapter 11.


Week 7 (February 22-26): President and the Presidency
Patterson. We the People, Chapter 12.

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


Excerpts from Richard Neustadt, “Presidential Power and the Modern President.”

“War Powers Resolution.” November 7, 1973
(Available at: http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/warpower.htm)

Week 8 (February 29-March 4): Executive Branch and Bureaucracy
Patterson. We the People, Chapter 13.

“Cracking Down on For-Profit Colleges,” The Week, September 23, 2011.

Week 9: (March 14-18): Courts and the Judiciary
Patterson. We the People, Chapter 14.

Week 10 (March 21-25): Political Participation and Voting
Patterson. *We the People*, Chapter 7.

National Humanities Center. “Plunkitt of Tammany Hall” (excerpted).


*Second Midterm Exam: Take on line through D2L*

Week 11 (March 28-April 1): Public Opinion and the Media
Patterson. *We the People*, Chapters 6 and 10.

George Orwell. 1954. “Politics and the English Language.”


Week 12 (April 4-8): Political Parties and Elections
Patterson. *We the People*, Chapters 8.

Week 13 (April 11-15): Interest Groups
Patterson. *We the People*, Chapter 9.


Week 14 (April 18-22): Domestic and Foreign Policy
Patterson. *We the People*, Chapters 15 and 17 (depending upon course progress)


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

Week 15 (April 25-29): To be announced

*Third Midterm Exam: Take on line through D2L*

Official Final Exam Schedule: Wednesday, May 4, 8:00-10:00 A.M

*I reserve the right to amend this syllabus as necessary.*