

# **P SC 1113-030: American Federal Government**

The University of Oklahoma

Fall 2015

Monday/Wednesday, 12:30-1:20 PM, PHSC 201

Dr. Tyler Johnson

Office location: Dale Hall Tower 209

Email: tylerjohnson@ou.edu

Office hours: Thursday 12:30-2:30 PM or by appointment

## **Course Description**

This course is an introduction to the government and politics of the United States. Over the next sixteen weeks, we will examine the major components of our political system: the constitutional foundation, the institutions built on that foundation, the role individuals, elites, and groups play in maintaining their government, and the policies that emanate from these processes.

## **Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this course, students should be able to discuss 1) the motivations behind and evolution in the form of government chosen by the Founding Fathers, 2) the processes Americans undertake to gather political information, express their views, and organize to accomplish goals, 3) the roles played by Congress, the President, and the courts and the powers utilized by these three branches, and 4) the rights, liberties, and policies that result from the choices that political actors and citizens make.

## **Required Texts**

The following text is available at local bookstores (as well as through online sources). If you have financial issues that cause you to delay purchasing the textbook, please let me know as soon as possible.

- Sidlow, Edward and Beth Henschen. 2015. *GOVT*. 7th Edition. Boston: Cengage Learning.

New copies of the textbook purchased from campus bookstores contain CourseMate, an online companion to the textbook. CourseMate provides resources to assist in understanding book content and preparing for exams. Registration materials for CourseMate can be found on an insert in the inside cover of new copies of the textbook. So I am able to monitor the extent to which CourseMate is being used, I would also ask that you take the time to enroll in our section of American Federal Government within the CourseMate system by entering the Course Key (which for this class is CM-9781285871127-0000055). More information on how register for and use CourseMate will be presented by a Cengage representative at the end of Week 1 of the class.

## **Grading and Assignments**

Your course grade will be calculated as follows:

Best Exam 20%  
Second Best Exam 20%  
Third Best Exam 20%  
"Who Represents Me?" Essay 5%  
"Contender or Pretender?" Essay 5%  
"America's Biggest Problem?" Essay 5%  
Democracy Lab Attendance 15%  
Democracy Lab Participation 10%

Monday and Wednesday class periods will typically be a mix of lecture and professor-driven discussion. I will spend class expanding in detail upon a concept or handful of concepts from the week's reading material. These class periods are not summaries of the readings, so attendance is important for exam purposes (in other words, there will be material on the exams that is not in the textbook). Monday and Wednesday content will not be publicly available following class except in cases where a student has a University-excused absence.

You will also attend weekly Democracy Labs run by Boren Teaching Fellows. In these Democracy Labs, students will take part in a variety of activities geared toward building upon the week's theme or learning skills related to research, data, and active citizenship. Democracy Labs will also be where larger class assignments (exams, essays) will be discussed in greater detail. Attendance at Democracy Labs constitutes 15 percent of your final grade (1 percent for each of the first 13 sessions, with Week 16's session worth 2 percent). The participation portion of your course grade (worth 10 percent) will be based on your level of involvement in Democracy Labs (in other words, mere attendance is not participation). Students who regularly take part in the activities in meaningful fashion can expect to receive full participation credit. Note, however, that there is such a thing as negative participation. Do not talk just for the sake of talking; have something to say (and think it through before you choose to enter the conversation). Also: remember that this is a political science course and not a politics or current events course; discussion is not the time for you to get up on your ideological soapbox. Information on the Boren Teaching Fellows assigned to this class is listed below.

### **Boren Teaching Fellows (Civic Engagement Resource Center, Dale Hall Tower 220)**

Elizabeth Bell

- Democracy Labs: 031 (TH 4:30 PM, PHSC 114), 040 (F 2:30 PM, GIH 326)
- Email Address: bell3922@ou.edu

Dylan Billings

- Democracy Labs: 037 (F 11:30 AM, PHSC 117), 039 (F 1:30 PM, CEC 31)
- Email Address: dylan.billings@ou.edu

Miranda Canody

- Democracy Labs: 035 (F 9:30 AM, ZH 115), 038 (F 12:30 PM, SEC 207)
- Email Address: mcanody@ou.edu

Jonathan Klos

- Democracy Labs: 032 (W 3:30 PM, SEC 207), 033 (W 4:30 PM, AH 100)
- Email Address: jonathan.klos@ou.edu

Ted Rossier

- Democracy Labs: 034 (F 8:30 AM, BURT 205), 036 (F 10:30 AM, PHSC 356)
- Email Address: trossier@ou.edu

There will be 4 examinations in this class, but only your top 3 exam scores will count toward your final grade. Each exam that counts will be worth 20 percent of the final grade. The exams will contain multiple choice and short answer questions about concepts from the preceding lectures and readings. The first exam, scheduled for September 21, will cover the first four weeks of lecture content and readings. The second exam, scheduled for October 19, will cover weeks five through eight of lecture content and readings. The third exam, scheduled for November 16, will cover weeks nine through twelve of lecture content and readings. The final exam, scheduled for December 17, will cover weeks thirteen through sixteen of lecture content and readings. During the Democracy Lab session prior to each exam, there will be a review to answer questions and highlight topics that might be covered. Note that you are eligible to take a makeup exam only if the following conditions are met: 1) you have a documented emergency condition or University recognized excused absence, and 2) you make arrangements (with the Boren Teaching Fellow in charge of your Democracy Lab) for the makeup prior to the exam or within two days of the exam (depending on your situation).

Students will write three short essays, each worth 5 percent of the final grade. The first essay (“Who Represents Me?”) will require students to research who represents them (at multiple levels of government) and discuss who these individuals are, what these individuals stand for, and how well a student feels he or she is being represented. This essay is due September 14. The second essay (“Contender or Pretender?”) will require students to research a 2016 presidential candidate (assigned to students by their Boren Teaching Fellow). Students will use the essay to discuss who the candidate is, what the candidate has accomplished, what the candidate stands for, and what might (or might not) make the candidate a serious competitor for the White House. This essay is due October 26. The third essay (“America’s Biggest Problem?”) will require students to ask themselves what the biggest problem facing America today is, then research that problem in detail and form an argument (supported by said research) to back their claim. This essay is due December 2. Each of the three essays should be two to three pages, double-spaced. Detailed information on what should be covered in each of these essays and how these essays will be graded will be delivered in your Democracy Labs in the weeks before each essay is due. I require a copy of each essay submitted in person and a copy placed in the corresponding D2L dropbox folder for your Democracy Lab. Essays will not be graded until submitted in both places and will eventually be given a grade of 0 at the end of the semester if a student fails to comply with this request. Essays will only be accepted via e-mail in cases where the student has a University excused absence. Essays not handed in on time will lose one point for each twenty-four hour period they are late. Submitting an essay either in person or on D2L will prevent this penalty (but, as previously discussed, the essay will not be graded until the essay is submitted both in person and online).

Final class grades will be assigned as follows:

A = 89.5-100 B = 79.5-89.4 C = 69.5-79.4 D = 59.5-69.4 F = Less Than 59.5

Questions concerning grades should be dealt with during office hours. Neither I nor your Boren Teaching Fellow will discuss grades via e-mail.

Possibilities for extra credit may occur, but are not guaranteed.

## **Students with Disabilities**

The University of Oklahoma is committed to providing reasonable accommodation for all students with disabilities. Any student in this course who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact the instructor personally as soon as possible to discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities. Students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Disability Services prior to receiving accommodations in this course. The Office of Disability Services is located in Goddard Health Center, Suite 166, phone 405-325-3852 or TDD only 405-325-4173.

## **Religious Holidays**

It is the policy of the University to excuse the absences of students that result from religious observances and to provide without penalty for the rescheduling of examinations and additional required classwork that may fall on religious holidays. Please see the instructor immediately if you will need to miss class any time during this semester.

## **Course Materials/Copyright and Plagiarism**

The handouts used in this course are copyrighted. By “handouts,” I mean all products generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, web pages, multimedia files, presentations, quizzes, exams, written assignments, and in-class material review sheets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission.

Academic misconduct includes plagiarism, cheating on exams, improper collaboration, and fraud (such as submitting the same assignment for different classes or fabricating sources). See <http://www.ou.edu/provost/integrity> for academic misconduct policies and <http://www.ou.edu/provost/integrity-rights> for information on student rights with regards to misconduct.

As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one’s own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of the person. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues without which research cannot be safely communicated.

Plagiarized assignments will automatically be given a zero.

## **Adjustments for Pregnancy/Childbirth Related Issues**

Should you need modifications or adjustments to your course requirements because of documented pregnancy-related or childbirth-related issues, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss. Generally, modifications will be made where medically necessary and similar in scope to accommodations based on temporary disability. Please see [www.ou.edu/content/eoo/faqs/pregnancy-faqs.html](http://www.ou.edu/content/eoo/faqs/pregnancy-faqs.html) for commonly asked questions.

## **Title IX Resources**

For any concerns regarding gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, stalking, or intimate partner violence, the University offers a variety of resources, including advocates on-call 24-7, counseling services, mutual no contact orders, scheduling adjustments, and disciplinary sanctions against the

perpetrator. Please contact the Sexual Misconduct Office at 405-325-2215 (8-5, M-F) or the Sexual Assault Response Team at 405-615-0013 (24-7) to learn more or to report an incident.

## Course Calendar

*Please note that I reserve the right to change the following calendar in order to ensure that we spend adequate time on each topic. Of course, if such changes become necessary, I will make an announcement in class. Also, note that I reserve the right to add and subtract readings as I see fit.*

Students are expected to have read the week's assigned readings before class on Monday.

### **Week 1 August 24, 26: America in the 21st Century**

- *GOVT* ch. 1

### **Week 2 August 31, September 2: The Constitution and Federalism**

- *GOVT* ch. 2-3

### **Week 3 September 9: Civil Liberties**

- *GOVT* ch. 4

### **Week 4 September 14, 16: Civil Rights**

- "Who Represents Me?" essay due September 14
- *GOVT* ch. 5

### **Week 5 September 21, 23: Exam; Interest Groups**

- Exam One held September 21
- *GOVT* ch. 6

### **Week 6 September 28, 30: Political Parties**

- *GOVT* ch. 7

### **Week 7 October 5, 7: Politics and the Media**

- *GOVT* ch. 10
- Note: No Democracy Labs This Week

### **Week 8 October 12, 14: Campaigns and Elections**

- *GOVT* ch. 9

**Week 9   October 19, 21: Exam; Voting**

- Exam Two held October 19
- *GOVT* ch. 8

**Week 10   October 26, 28: Public Opinion**

- “Contender or Pretender?” essay due October 26

**Week 11   November 2, 4: The Congress**

- *GOVT* ch. 11

**Week 12   November 9, 11: The Presidency, part 1**

- *GOVT* ch. 12

**Week 13   November 16, 18: Exam; The Presidency, part 2**

- Exam Three held November 16

**Week 14   November 23: The Bureaucracy**

- *GOVT* ch. 13
- Note: No Democracy Labs This Week

**Week 15   November 30, December 2: The Judiciary**

- *GOVT* ch. 14
- “America’s Biggest Problem” essay due December 2

**Week 16   December 7, 9: Domestic Policy and Foreign Policy**

- *GOVT* ch. 15-16
- Note: Week 16 Democracy Lab attendance is worth 2 points

**Final Exam:** Thursday, December 17, 1:30-3:30 PM