

**PLS 1153-007: American Government & the US Constitution**  
**MWF 11-11:50 am, Coleman 2140**

**Spring 2009**

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**Phone: 581-3022 (office); 345-4240 (home; before 9 pm)**  
**Office hours: MWF 10-10:50 am, T 8:30-10:30 am, and by appointment**

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**Course Goals & Learning Objectives:** Why vote? Why pay attention to politics? *Why care?* In the U.S., we can participate in government by voting, volunteering, running for office, and complaining about (or praising) the government as loudly (or quietly) as we like. Still, many Americans did not vote in the last presidential election. So what? The problem is that once we stop participating, others make decisions for us—and we may not agree with them. So, the goal of this course is to inform you about how the U.S. government works, how you can participate in the political process, and how your participation matters.

**Learning objectives:** This course satisfies a Social and Behavior Sciences Requirement segment of Eastern's general education program. Your grade in this course will be based on your ability to identify, analyze, discuss and evaluate the following:

- The factors and people that shaped the U.S. Constitution, and the content and evolution of the Constitution,
- The development and evolution of civil liberties and civil rights in the U.S.,
- The institutions of the federal government, and the relations between the federal government and the states.
- How people develop their views about and participate in politics and government,
- The roles political parties, interest groups, and the media play in policy-making and elections,
- The electoral system, including campaign finance, presidential nominations and elections.

This course fulfills a core requirement for Political Science majors and minors, and Social Science Teacher Certification majors with Political Science options.

**Readings:** One textbook is required: Losco & Baker's *AMGOV 2008*. I may also assign readings/activities from the textbook website (<http://policecentral.mcgraw-hill.com/policecentral/html/home.html>). You must keep up-to-date on political news—you should peruse the morning news before each class meeting.

**Grades:** Your grade will be based on the following activities/assignments:

- Three exams, worth 100 points each
  - Exams will include multiple choice and definitions
  - You will build your own study guide through your notes, quizzes, the *AMGOV 2008* text and website, and other class activities and assignments.
- Three homework assignments, worth 30 points each.
- 12 unannounced quizzes, worth 5 points each
  - We will have 15 quizzes, allowing for absences or poor performance.
  - Quizzes will include 5 multiple choice questions, or 2 definitions, and cover required readings, activities, or films.
- Grading scale:     A 405-450     B 360-404     C 315-359     D 270-314     F 0-269

**Disabilities:** Any student with disabilities who require special accommodations should contact me as soon as possible. If you have any questions about University policy, contact the Office of Disabilities Services, at 581-6583.

**Student Assistance:** If you are struggling with your classes or with the college experience in general, please seek help. Come to talk with me, or see the Academic Success Center (581-6696) for academic help, and the Counseling Center (581-3413) for personal problems.

**Late Policy:**

- Except for University approved excused absences, any homework assignment turned in on the day that it is due, but after I have collected the assignment at the beginning of class, will lose two points. Thereafter, you will lose an additional 3 points per day.
- Do not submit your homework assignments via email. Plan ahead in terms of paper, flash drives, ink cartridges, and computer labs.
- If you miss an exam due to a University-approved absence, contact me immediately to schedule a make-up. If you miss more than three quizzes due to an approved absence, meet with me to work out an alternative assignment.
- If you miss class due to an academic or athletic commitment, bring your note from your professor, advisor, or coach, and turn in homework assignments or take exams/quizzes early.
- Questions? See me—I'm happy to discuss these policies.

**Academic Honesty:** Become familiar with Eastern's Student Conduct Code. Academic violations of this code include, but are not limited to:

- Cheating on examinations, plagiarism, collusion, misrepresentation or falsification of data.
- Theft or the unauthorized possession of examinations; alteration, theft, or destruction of the academic work of others.
- Submitting work previously presented in another course unless specifically permitted by the instructor.
- Conduct which disrupts the academic environment; disruption in classes.
- Complicity with others in violations of this standard.

Instructors are obligated to report all instances of academic dishonesty. The University's recommended penalty for academic dishonesty is an F in the course. If you have any questions, please see me or contact the Judicial Affairs Office.

**Classroom Courtesy:**

- Please turn off all electronic devices before class begins. I prefer that you not use laptops in class, but may make exceptions on a case by case basis.
- Bring your textbook, notebook, pen/pencil, syllabus, and any other assigned readings with you to class.
- Quizzes will be held in the first five minutes of class. If you arrive late, you will not be allowed to make up the quiz.
- Announcements are made in the first few minutes of class—missing them can be very detrimental to your class progress. It is your responsibility to be in class on time.
- During exams, use the restroom before the exam begins; no one may leave the classroom and return to the exam.
- Class discussion will not be a political talk show where people with different political views insult one another. The goal here is to respectfully learn from one another, even when we disagree.

**Course Outline:** Readings and assignments listed for each day are due that day. Any changes to the syllabus will be announced in class. Students should also check their EIU email accounts on a regular basis for announcements.

January 12      Introductions

- Review syllabus and assignments

January 14      What Makes an American Citizen? What is American democracy?

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 1

January 16      Film: Generation Next (part one)

January 21      Film: Generation Next (part two)

- Be prepared to share your reaction in class. What did you like about the film? What were its weaknesses or biases?

January 23      Moving Toward a New Constitution

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 2, pp. 15-23

January 26      Basic Principles of the U.S. Constitution

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 2, pp. 23-35

January 28      Understanding Federalism

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 3

January 30 Freedom of Religion

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 4, pp. 59-68

February 2 Freedom of Speech, Press, & Association

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 4, pp. 68-76

February 4 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment Rights & Accused Criminal Rights

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 4, pp. 76-81

February 6 Privacy Rights

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 4, pp. 81-83
- Homework Assignment #1 due

February 9 The Evolution of Civil Rights for African-Americans

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 5, pp. 85-94

February 11 Civil Rights Today for Racial & Ethnic Minorities

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 5, pp. 94-104

February 16 Women's Civil Rights

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 5, pp. 104-111

February 18 Catch up & review

February 20 Exam 1

February 23 How Do We Learn About Politics?

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 6, pp. 113-122

February 25 Measuring and Evaluating Public Opinion

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 6, pp. 122-134

February 27 Understanding Political Activism

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 7, pp. 137-146

March 2 Voting & Voter Turnout

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 7, pp. 146-155

March 4 Evaluating Interest Groups

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 8, pp. 157-166

March 6 What Do Groups Do?

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 8, pp. 166-178

March 9 Political Parties & U.S. Politics

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 9, pp. 181-189

March 11 The Evolution of the U.S. Party System

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 9, pp. 190-194

March 13 The Modern Political Party

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 9, pp. 194-208

March 23 The Evolution of the Modern Media

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 10, pp. 211-223

March 25 Media & Politics

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 10, pp. 223-235
- Homework Assignment #2 due

March 27 Film: Frontline/News War: What's Happening in the News?

March 30 Film: Frontline/News War: What's Happening in the News?

- Be prepared to share your reaction with the class. What were the strengths and weaknesses of this documentary?
- Catch up and review

April 1 Exam 2

April 3 The Evolution of the Modern Congress

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 11, pp. 237-242

April 6 Congressional Elections & Organization

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 11, pp. 242-252

April 8 Congressional Powers

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 11, pp. 252-267

April 10 Presidential Elections

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 12, pp. 269-278

April 13 Presidential Powers & Resources

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 12, pp. 278-289

April 15 Evaluating the Presidency

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 12, pp. 289-293

April 17 The Evolution of the U.S. Bureaucracy

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 13, pp. 295-301
- Homework Assignment #3 due

April 20 Bureaucratic Power & Problems

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 13, pp. 301-312

April 22 The U.S. Judicial System

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 14, pp. 315-321

April 24 The U.S. Supreme Court

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 14, pp. 321-334

April 27 Public Policy in America

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 15

April 29 Foreign Policy in America

- Losco & Baker, Chapter 16 (not included in the text: will be emailed to you at your EIU address)

May 1 Catch up and review

May 7 Final exam, 10:15-12:15 am