

POLI 100

Introduction to Government in the United States

General Description

Overview POLI 100 is designed to give you a broad introduction to the study and workings of the American national government. When you have completed this course you will:

- understand how scholars study our government
- have enhanced your own ability to comprehend and analyze the often confusing world of politics
- be better qualified for more advanced political science courses
- be a more informed and engaged citizen.

The readings for this course, coupled with the discussions in this manual, are intended to give you the basic information you need to better understand our government and the politics that surround it. You will find that political science is much more than just learning how a bill becomes a law or memorizing the names of our elected representatives. You will encounter ideas and arguments that are provocative and contestable. The purpose of this course is for you to gain the basic knowledge you need to become well informed and more fully engaged in American politics. Therefore, I wish to remind you right at the beginning that *it is your responsibility to evaluate and analyze important political questions and to develop your own conclusions about our political system.*

Required Texts

Two texts are required for this course:

- Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore J. Lowi, and Margaret Weir. *We the People: An Introduction to American Politics*, Shorter 5th edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.
- Canon, David T., John J. Coleman, and Kenneth R. Mayer, eds. *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*, 5th edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 2008.

We the People is a well-written and thorough introduction to American government. The course is designed around this text, so you should rely most heavily on it. The second text (we will refer to it as the “Canon reader” throughout the course) is a collection of articles, court cases, and historical documents including *The Federalist Papers*. These articles often provide a slightly different perspective, an elaboration, or sometimes even a bold challenge to the chapters from the textbook. Throughout the course, these articles will often form the basis for essay questions asking you to consider an important political question. It is critical to remember that a primary goal of this course is for you to develop the ability to evaluate and analyze the merit of competing political claims. To do this well, you will need to be aware that all authors sometimes inject their own ideology and beliefs into their arguments. As a consequence, your job is not to accept passively what others say, but rather to reflect, evaluate, and analyze their ideas and arguments so that you can decide what *you* think.

Both *We the People* and the Canon reader can be purchased from Friday Center Books & Gifts at the Friday Center using the book order form in this manual, or online at <https://s4.its.unc.edu/HigherGrounds/>.

Course Plan

The course is divided into three sections. In the first section we will examine the foundations of the American political system.

In the second section we will study American political institutions.

Finally, in the third section, we will study American political behavior. This is a different order than that of the textbook, which places the study of institutions at the end of the course of study.

Study Suggestions

Because this is a correspondence course, you will not have the benefit of face-to-face classroom contact with your instructor. As a result, your instructor's judgment of the degree to which you have mastered the material must be based upon a series of written assignments and a final examination. You will be asked to answer several essay questions in each assignment.

The best way for you to begin each lesson may be to start with the lesson objectives and the discussion section. The discussion is meant to be similar to a classroom lecture. It is also meant to give you some context for the required readings and to highlight especially important sections of the texts. After reading the discussion, quickly read through the written assignment (the essay questions) to orient your thinking toward the goals of the lesson as you study the material. Then do the required reading assignment from the text and re-read the discussion. By this time, the topics will be clearer and more meaningful.

Before you begin to develop responses to the essay questions, you should take the practice quiz found at the end of the assigned chapter in *We the People*. (The answer key to the quizzes is found after the appendices in the back of the text.) While the quiz is *not* to be turned in for grading, it will give you a good idea of whether you have mastered the basic factual material. If you find the practice quiz difficult, you should spend more time studying and reviewing the written material. After you have carefully studied all of the reading assignments and have completed the practice quiz, you should begin work on the essay questions for the written assignment.

NOTE: With the exception of the final examination, this is an open-book course. That is, you are completely free to review the reading materials while writing your essays. The essay questions generally will be broad in nature, and usually cannot be answered by mere reiteration of the material you have read. I want you to formulate your own thoughts, opinions, and arguments. In doing

so, you will be expected to *base these opinions and arguments on the factual evidence that is available*. While I want to know what you think, I also expect your responses to demonstrate a clear familiarity with the course materials. I highly encourage you to read a daily newspaper throughout this course so that you can provide current illustrations in your responses.

In formulating your responses to each essay question, you will want to draw from the discussion section and your readings. Specifically, you should consider the question carefully, reflect on your readings, and then create a *complete essay* in response. Your essay should include an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. A good introduction reformulates the question, gives some indication of how you will answer it, and shows enthusiasm for the subject at hand. The body of the essay is the “meat” of your answer and should include well-articulated points in favor of your thesis. The conclusion tells the reader what has been accomplished in the essay and provides closure.

Please do not feel that in doing the written assignments you must echo the opinions of either the readings or my comments in the discussions. It is important that you think seriously about the issues that are raised in the course, not that you agree with the opinions expressed by the authors of your materials.

In doing your written assignment, I recommend that you outline your ideas, write a rough draft of your essay, and then revise that draft so that it clearly reflects your understanding of the material and your ability to evaluate and analyze political questions. You should type your assignments. If you cannot type them, *be sure that your handwriting is legible*. Nothing obscures the strength of an essay like bad handwriting. And lastly, be sure that your essays have been checked for spelling and grammar.

If at any time you would like additional information or advice from your instructor, please feel free to ask for assistance, just as you would in a classroom situation. Write questions for your instructor on the assignment submission sheet. We will work together to make this course a valuable learning experience for you.

Final Examination

The final examination will constitute 30 percent of your course grade and you must pass the final exam in order to pass the course. Consequently, it is important for you to prepare carefully for the exam.

The examination will be in essay form. The questions will be comprehensive and may come from *any* portion of the course and readings. Your answers to assignment questions should serve as a general guide for studying for the final examination, but you should review all of the readings and practice quizzes assigned for the course. The final exam is closed-book.

A Final Word

Your instructor and the Self-paced Courses staff look forward to working together with you. Please let us know if you need assistance or have questions as you proceed. Good luck!