

# **American Federal Government PSC 1113-900**

**Spring 2012**

**Wednesday, 6:30-9:30 PM**

**Dale Hall 128**

## **SYLLABUS**

### **Instructor**

Mr. David Stroup

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Dale Hall Tower, Room 220

Office Hours: M and Th., 2-4 P.M.; W. 12 to 1 P.M., **or** by appointment

## **CLASS OVERVIEW**

**Course Description:** This class will be an introduction to the American system of government. Our primary objective will be to develop a basic knowledge of political and governmental processes and institutions in the United States. Over the course of the semester we will examine many different aspects of politics in the United States including: the foundations of American political culture, the basic theoretical and philosophical concepts underlining the American system of government, the structure of American political institutions and the relationships among them, the fundamental political and governmental processes, and the formation of domestic and foreign policy. In addition, we will attempt to relate these topics to current events and happenings in American politics, and discuss the way that political actions impact the daily lives of citizens in this country. This course will encourage students to reflect upon, and engage these issues critically and analytically. Together we will examine the ideas and concerns at the roots of the American political system, and gain a greater understanding of the continually evolving system that is the American government.

**Course Objectives:** By the completion of the semester students will be able to:

- Explain the origins of the American system of governance, and discuss the ideas underlying the founding of the nation.
- Define the concept of federalism and its various interpretations, and discuss the relationship between the national and state governments.
- Describe each of the three branches of the federal government and their respective responsibilities, as well as the relationships to other two branches.
- Describe the processes that facilitate and sustain representative government (campaigns, elections, lawmaking, policy making), as well as the entities that participate in this process (parties, interest groups, the bureaucracy, etc.).

- Discuss the range of political beliefs and ideologies active in American politics, and describe how these measured and recorded in public opinion.
- Assess the ways in which politics influences our daily lives and the course of current events.
- Speak, think and write critically and analytically about all of these subjects.

**Required Texts:** Lectures and discussions will concentrate largely on the textbook for the course:

- Christine Barbour and Gerald Wright. 2011. *Keeping the Republic*. Fourth Brief Edition. DC: CQ Press., ISBN: 978-1-60871-274-8

In addition, students will be asked to do short readings from works of historical political importance or from contemporary sources of political commentary (e.g. *The Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, *The Economist*, et al.). These readings are listed on the class schedule, and are linked directly on the electronic version of this syllabus. Links to these readings will also be posted on [D2L](#).

Students are also highly encouraged, though not required, to follow current events and keep track of political developments throughout the semester (See D2L for a list of links to reputable sources for political news).

## **GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS**

This class will use a variety of different types of assessment to gauge students' performance. Grades for the semester will be proportioned as follows:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Value</u>
2 Unit Exams (100 points each)	200 points
1 Final Exam	150 points
1 Paper	100 points
5 Quizzes (10 points each)	50 points
Class Participation	50 points
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Total Grade	550 points

**Exams:** Three exams will be given over the course of the semester: 2 unit exams worth 100 points each, and one final exam worth 150 points. Unit exams will cover all material covered in the specified units (see Class Schedule). Questions will draw both from course readings, and subjects touched upon in lecture and discussion. These exams will be in multiple-choice format, and the instructor will provide scantron sheets. Unit exams will be given during the second half of class on the week they are assigned, and students will have 90 minutes to complete them.

The final exam will contain 2 sections: 1) a multiple-choice section that will cover Unit 3 (100 points); and 2) a short-essay section that will address themes and key points covered throughout the course (50 points). The final exam will be given during normal class hours on **December 5, 2012**.

**Paper:** A course paper of 3-5 pages in length will be assigned. The subject of the paper will deal with one of the topics we have discussed in class. Further details on the topic of the paper will be given by the instructor later in the semester. **Papers must be turned into the Drop Box on D2L by the beginning of class on the assigned day.** All papers turned in after this point will be considered late.

**Quizzes:** Five short quizzes worth ten points each will be given at random throughout the semester at the instructor's discretion. Students may not make-up quizzes; so being in class is critical. Quizzes will be a mixture of either multiple-choice questions or a single short-answer response paragraph.

**Participation:** Student participation is essential for making this class interesting and for fully engaging the issues we will study. Throughout the semester, we will have a number of activities designed to encourage student participation (class discussions, debates, simulations, group work, etc.). In order to incentivize students to take an active part in these classroom activities points will be awarded based on their level of active participation. A student's class attendance record will also be considered.

**Readings:** The readings for each session are listed on the course schedule. The readings listed for each week are to be completed for that day. Please make sure you have read the listed material before class, and are familiar enough with the material to engage in class discussions and activities.

## **CLASS POLICIES**

**Attendance:** The material we cover in lectures and discussions is just as important as the material that will be covered in the textbook and questions concerning topics addressed in lecture will be covered on the exams. Attending class is crucial to your success in this course. I will take attendance at the beginning of each lecture, and track absences. Students with more than five absences (approximately 1/3 of the class) will drop one letter grade on their final grade. Every additional absence above five will drop the student's final grade by an additional letter.

**Late Work:** All assignments must be turned in at the beginning of class. Work turned in after the start of class will be considered late. The policy of this class will be to accept late work, at an initial penalty of 1 letter grade, with an additional letter grade penalty assigned for every subsequent day the work is late. If you are having personal or scholastic problems that will lead to you having trouble turning work in on time, please come see me *before* the work is due.

**Class Communication:** Please check your OU email account daily. I will use email to communicate with you individually and collectively from time to time. Please also check “Desire to Learn (D2L)” (<http://learn.ou.edu>) often to download course content and other materials, to see course announcements.

**Office Hours:** My office hours are listed at the top of the syllabus. I will hold them in the Graduate Teaching Assistant’s Office in Dale Hall Tower. I strongly encourage you to take advantage of them. If you are unable to attend at any of the listed times, please see me to arrange a time which will be more amenable to both of us.

**Cell Phone/Laptop Policy:** Cell phones and MP3 players must be silenced and put away during class. Students observed using these items during class will be counted as absent for the session and lose participation points.

Laptops/Tablets are permitted for note taking. Students observed using these devices for extracurricular purposes in class, or causing a distraction with them in class will be docked participation points. **Repeated abuse in this regard will result in the student’s loss of laptop privileges for the remainder of the semester.**

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

**Academic Integrity:** All work which is submitted for grading in this course must be accompanied by a statement that the student has not received nor given inappropriate assistance in conjunction with the assignment (“On my honor I affirm that I have neither given nor received inappropriate aid in the completion of this exercise.”); **the statement**

**must be signed and dated** by the student. **Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated**, and students who engage in those practices will be sanctioned according to university policy. You are also, of course, expected to abide by the University of Oklahoma's standards of academic integrity. For details about the University's policies, please see: <http://integrity.ou.edu/>

## **SOME GENERAL ADVICE**

Here are a few suggestions for how to get the most out of this course:

1. Give yourself ample time to do in-class readings and writing assignments, and come to class prepared.
2. Read actively and take good notes in class and on readings. Engaging the material critically will help you to better understand the subject.
3. Participate in class discussions and activities.
4. Ask questions. If there's something you don't understand, don't hesitate to ask for clarification.
5. Ask for help. Come to office hours or schedule an appointment to meet with me if you find yourself having trouble.

Also remember to take advantage of the resources the University offers you. Services are available for students, particular with regard to questions about writing assignments. Visit the OU Learning Resource Center on the second floor of Lissa and Cy Wagner Hall in Room 280 (At the top of the main staircase), or online at [http://www.ou.edu/univcoll/home/Departments/learning\\_center.html](http://www.ou.edu/univcoll/home/Departments/learning_center.html)  
For the Writing Center visit: <http://www.ou.edu/content/writingcenter/Students.html>.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

*(Note: This schedule is subject to changes which may be required by unforeseen circumstances. )*

*All reading assignments are to be completed before the day on which they are listed.*

### UNIT #1: Foundations and Origins of American Politics

August 22, 2012 (Week 1): Foundations of American Political Culture

-Chapter 1 (Barbour and Wright)

-Thomas Jefferson, "The Declaration of Independence" (Appendix)

August 29, 2012 (Week 2): The Constitution

-Chapter 2 (Barbour and Wright)

-The Constitution of the United States (Appendix)

- James Madison, "Federalist no. 51" (Appendix)

September 5, 2012 (Week 3): The American system of Federalism

-Chapter 3 (Barbour and Wright)

September 12, 2012 (Week 4): Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

-Chapter 4, 5 (Barbour and Wright)

September 19, 2012 (Week 5): Civil Rights (cont.)

-[Martin Luther King, Jr., excerpts from "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"](#)

**Second Half of Class: EXAM: UNIT #1 (Covers Chapters 1-5)**

### UNIT #2: Institutions in American Politics

September 26, 2012 (Week 6): Congress and the Legislative Branch

-Chapter 6, (Barbour and Wright)

-[Mann and Ornstein, excerpt from \*The Broken Branch\*, "Introduction" \(pp. 1-13\)](#)

October 3, 2012 (Week 7): The President and the Executive Branch

-Chapter 7 (Barbour and Wright)

October 10, 2012 (Week 8): The Judiciary

-Chapter 9 (Barbour and Wright)

- Editorial: "[Why Marbury v. Madison Still Matters,](#)" *Newsweek Magazine*,  
[February 20, 2009](#)

- [Jeffrey Rosen, "Book Review: Packing the Court, by James MacGregor Burns"](#)  
[The Washington Post, July 5, 2009](#)

October 17, 2012 (Week 9): The Bureaucracy

-Chapter 8 (Barbour and Wright)

## **Second Half of Class: EXAM: UNIT #2 (Covers Chapters 6-9)**

### **UNIT #3: Political Processes and Issues in Contemporary Politics**

October 24, 2012 (Week 10): Public Opinion and the Media

-Chapters 10, 13 (Barbour and Wright)

October 31, 2012 (Week 11): Campaigns and Elections: Election 2012 Special Edition

-Chapter 12 (Barbour and Wright)

-[Alan Abramowitz, "It Don't Mean a Thing if it Ain't Got That Swing: In Search of the Elusive Swing Voter," \*Sabato's Crystal Ball\*, July 19, 2012](#)

November 7, 2012 (Week 12): Parties and Interest Groups

-Chapter 11 (Barbour and Wright)

-[Jon Meacham, "The Myth of Partisanship" \*Time Magazine\*, June 4, 2012](#)

-[Chris Cillizza, "Partisanship doesn't seem worse. It is worse." \*The Washington Post\*, June 4, 2012](#)

### **PAPERS DUE AT THE START OF CLASS**

November 14, 2012 (Week 13): Policy and the Economy

-Chapter 14, Sections on Domestic, Economic Policy (Barbour and Wright)

-[Ezra Klein, "The Ridiculous Things Presidential Candidates Want You to Believe About Jobs," \*The Washington Post\*, January 13, 2012](#)

November 21, 2012 (Week 14): NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING BREAK

November 28, 2012 (Week 15): Foreign Policy: The United States and the World

-Chapter 14, Sections on Foreign Policy

-["Into Libya: The Birth of an Obama Doctrine," \*The Economist\*, March 28, 2011](#)

December 5, 2012: **FINAL EXAM (Multiple choice section covers Unit #3, Chapters 10-14; Short answer section is comprehensive)**