

**Mesa Community College
Political Science 110
American National Government
Spring 2002 Syllabus**

Lecture: 11:00 - 12:00 MWF, SC 12N
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Office Hours: MWF 1:00 – 2:00; Thursday 1:00 – 2:00; or by appointment

Course Description

What does it mean to be a citizen of the United States of America? What rights and responsibilities are inherent to being a citizen? How can ordinary citizens make a difference? This course presents students with an introduction to American government. In doing so, we will attempt to answer these and other questions. We will examine the theoretical foundations of our system of government, explore the workings of its myriad actors and agencies, and highlight the many ways and means to both create and block change in policy that affects every one of us. The goal of this course is to help you gain the tools necessary for civically responsible action in directing and shaping this public policy.

Required Texts

Knowledge of current events and their context is essential to understanding public policy decisions. **Daily reading of respectable newspapers is therefore required.** You are required to read a local paper during this class. In addition, you should be reading a national paper to get a broader picture of what is happening, such as the *The New York Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, or the *Washington Post*. Your instructor will provide subscription options to these and other media sources. Most of these papers are available on the internet and at the library if you do not wish to subscribe to the paper edition, but a subscription to at least one of them is highly recommended.

The following texts are required and are available in the bookstore:

Burns, Peltason, Cronin, and Magleby, *Government By The People, Brief Third Edition*. Prentice Hall.

Paul Rogat Loeb. *Soul of a Citizen: Living with Conviction in a Cynical Time*. St. Martin's Griffin.

Course Requirements

Attendance

As the focus of the course is on active participation, regular attendance is crucial to the quality of the class for both yourself and your classmates. You begin the semester with 50 points for attendance. Ten of these points will be deducted for every absence you incur. These will be the easiest points you earn all semester. Be aware, if you miss more than five days you could be dropped from the course.

Quizzes

Because we will be relating theoretical concepts to real-world events, it is critical that students be informed of the issues and events occurring during the course. To encourage this, several short quizzes will be given. These quizzes will cover current world, national, and local events and should be easily passed by the attentive, informed student. There will be 90 points given through quizzes.

Class Presentation

You will be required to present one chapter's topic to the class, either alone or as part of a group, in a ten to fifteen minute presentation. Students are free to utilize whichever format they wish, so long as it achieves the objective of adequately covering the breadth of the material of that chapter. Past presentations have included homemade videos, short lectures, interactive games, and even an action drama using Star Wars action figures. In their presentations, students should hand out a study guide for that chapter, and answer three questions: "HOW does this topic apply to me, WHY would anyone care about it, and HOW does this topic relate to civic responsibility?" This is your chance to explore a topic in some depth, and tell a captive audience all about it. You are allowed to advocate a particular position on the topic if you want, so long as you answer the two questions in the process and demonstrate knowledge of the chapter's contents. Thirty points will be given for the presentation, with emphasis being placed on the amount of preparation made as evidenced by the quality of the presentation and study guide.

Book Report

We will be reading and referencing Paul Loeb's book throughout the semester, so it is important that you read it. It is an insightful account of the obstacles and opportunities for citizen activism in modern America. To encourage a thoughtful reading, you will turn in a book report that is three to five double-spaced pages in length. In the report, tell me 1) what is Loeb's main point in this book? 2) what is his motivation to make this point? 3) Is he correct, or has he misread the political landscape? The book report should not simply be a summary of Loeb's argument, but a critical analysis of his argument. It is due April 1.

Applied Citizenship

The best way of learning is doing. This assignment is to put into practice what you are learning by actively participating in a politically oriented service learning experience. The service learning site will

be chosen by you from a list provided by the instructor. I recommend that you match your service learning exercise with your political action plan topic described below. If you wish to do service learning at a site not included in the pre-approved list, see me. Do something you are interested in. To complete the assignment, approve the activity with me, do the activity, then write a three-page double-spaced response paper telling 1) why you chose that activity, 2) what happened, and 3) what concept from the course was illustrated. The report is worth 80 points. This assignment can be completed at any time prior to April 19, but I recommend you do it during the first half as it will probably help you get ideas and information for your action plan assignment.

Political Action Plan

At the end of the semester, you will make a presentation to the class proposing a plan of political action. This presentation is an opportunity to engage the conversation of politics by developing an original plan of action on an important contemporary topic. You will choose the topic of the project and clear it with the instructor by March 1. The ability to create this presentation is one of the major goals of the course, so it is worth one hundred points.

This will be a group project, and may pertain to a local, state, or national issue, although national issues will need to be approached in their local context. You are not required to link this assignment with your service learning assignment, but doing so will save time and effort. The proposal should contain four parts. First, provide background information on the topic and a brief explanation of why it is important to your group. Second, describe existing alternate policies to deal with the problem. Third, propose a public policy to deal with the problem. Finally, present a detailed plan of action on how you personally could promote or block policy change related to this topic, including a discussion of the obstacles or help you may encounter while engaged in this plan of action. Most of the points for the presentation will be awarded on how well the third and fourth parts are done. More details regarding this plan will be given as the course progresses.

Mid-term and Final Exams

Each exam will be worth one hundred points. The exams will consist of multiple choice, short answer, and short essay questions. They will cover material from the text and lectures, important points brought up in class discussions, episodes from class games and simulations, and some current events.

Late assignments and make-ups

The deadlines set for course assignments are very real. Assignments turned in late will automatically be dropped one full letter grade for every class held between the time they are due and the time they are turned in. For example, an assignment due Friday would be dropped one grade if turned in on the following Monday or Tuesday, two grades on Wednesday or Thursday, and three grades on Friday. Only a medical emergency accompanied by a doctor's note will exempt you from this penalty, and then only for the duration of the emergency. Similarly, missed exams can only be made up if arrangements are made with the instructor PRIOR to the exam date, except with proof of medical emergency. Missed pop quizzes, due to their nature, cannot be made up.

Point Summary

Attendance	50 pts
Current Events Quizzes (9 @ 10 pts)	90 pts

Class Presentation	30 pts
Book Report	50 pts
Service Learning Activity	80 pts
Action Plan Presentation	100 pts
Mid-term Exam	100 pts
Final Exam	<u>100 pts</u>
Total	600 pts

Grade Breakdown

A	540 - 600 pts
B	480 - 539 pts
C	420 - 479 pts
D	360 - 419 pts
F	0 - 359 pts

Course Schedule

All chapter references are Burns et al. *Government by the People*.

Section 1: Theoretical Foundations

Week 1: Course overview and introduction to politics and civic responsibility

Week 2: Understanding the Constitution - Ch. 1; Declaration of Independence; The Constitution of the United States; Federalist Papers 10 and 51.

Week 3: Federalism and the division of power - Ch. 2.

Section 2: Checks and Balances in the Branches of Government

Week 4: Congress: Who they are and what they do - Ch. 10.

Week 5: The Presidency: The office and policy - Ch. 11.

Week 6: The Courts: Final arbiters of policy? - Ch. 12, Federalist papers 78.

Week 7: The Federal Bureaucracy: Myths and realities - Ch. 13.

**** MID-TERM EXAM WEDNESDAY MARCH 8 ****

Section 3: Vote for Me: Elections, Public Participation, and the Political process

Week 8: Political socialization and ideology - Ch. 5 and 6.

Week 9: The role of parties and interest groups in government - Ch. 7.

Week 10: How to be president: Voting behavior and campaigns - Ch. 8.

Week 11: All politics, all the time: The media and its impact - Ch. 9.

Section 4: Topics of contention: The issues of American politics

Week 13: The struggle to guarantee civil liberties and rights - Chs. 3 and 4.

Week 14: Who pays what to whom: Economic policymaking - Chs. 14.

Week 15: Our role in the world: Foreign policymaking - Ch. 15.

Section 6: Putting it to work: Political Action Plan reports

**** FINAL EXAM 9:00 A.M. WEDNESDAY MAY 8 ****

Important Dates

Jan 14	Course introduction
Jan 21	MLK Day, no class
Feb. 18	President's Day, no class
Mar 1	Deadline to have action plan topic approved
Mar 8	Midterm Exam
Mar 11 - 15	Spring Break, no class
April 1	Loeb Book report due
April 19	Applied citizenship report due
Apr. 29 - May 3	Political Action Plan presentations
May 8	Final Exam, 9:00 a.m.