

POL 120
American National
Government and Politics
Fall 2025
TH 3 – 4:15 pm

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Office Hours: In person or via Zoom (contact me for Zoom invite)

Monday: 12 pm – 3:30 pm electronic only unless via appointment
Wednesday: 12 pm and 3:30 pm in office and electronic
Tuesday and Thursday: 11 am – 12:30 pm in office and electronic
Or by appointment outside these hours

TEXT:

Gateway to Democracy by J.G. Greer, W.J. Schiller, R. Herrera and J. Segal, 6th edition

Electronic textbook is paid for when you paid your bill for the semester. See Textbook on class D2L website for more on access to the textbook and other materials online.

GRADES:

Grades will be based on worksheet assignments, one online quiz and 3 in class exams. The worksheets and the quiz make up 25 percent of the course grade. The exams are worth 25 percent each. Individual extra credit is not available. Grades will be curved only if the class average is below 75 percent. This determination is made for each exam and for the total of all the quiz and assignment grades. **This course will not use +/- grading. The letter grades for the course will correspond to the following number grades: A=90-100%; B=80-89%; C=70-79%; D=60-69%; F=59% and below.**

Course Content

This course will examine both modern and historical American political life from a variety of perspectives. Students will be expected to learn why the United States was formed, what its founders hoped to achieve, and what they wrote into the blueprint for American politics—the US Constitution—as well as how those ideals have been changed and adapted over time to fit a more

complex and diverse society. Students will learn about the complex relationship between the states and the federal government in our federalist system and contrast that system with other forms of government throughout the world. We will learn about the four major American political institutions—Congress, the presidency, the courts, and the bureaucracy and discuss how ordinary citizens can influence their government through interest group participation, campaigns, elections, voting, and membership in political parties. Finally, we will assess current American policies in such areas as education, the economy, foreign affairs, and students will learn how public opinion is measured, how surveys are conducted, and how policy is formed, implemented, and assessed. Questions of race, gender, and economic equality are considered in context of all relevant discussions throughout the semester.

LASC and Dragon Core Competency Areas

Goal 5: History And The Social And Behavioral Sciences

To increase students' knowledge of how historians and social and behavioral scientists discover, describe, and explain the behaviors and interactions among individuals, groups, institutions, events, and ideas. Such knowledge will better equip students to understand themselves and the roles they play in addressing the issues facing humanity.

Students will be able to:

- Employ the methods and data that historians and social and behavioral scientists use to investigate the human condition.
- Examine social institutions and processes across a range of historical periods and cultures.
- Use and critique alternative explanatory systems or theories.
- Develop and communicate alternative explanations or solutions for contemporary social issues.

Goal 9: Ethical and Civic Responsibility

To develop students' capacity to identify, discuss, and reflect upon the ethical dimensions of political, social, and personal life and to understand the ways in which they can exercise responsible and productive citizenship. While there are diverse views of social justice or the common good in a pluralistic society, students should learn that responsible citizenship requires them to develop skills to understand their own and others' positions, be part of the free exchange of ideas, and function as public-minded citizens.

Students will be able to:

- Examine, articulate, and apply their own ethical views.
- Understand and apply core concepts (e.g. politics, rights and obligations, justice, liberty) to specific issues.
- Analyze and reflect on the ethical dimensions of legal, social, and scientific issues.
- Recognize the diversity of political motivations and interests of others.
- Identify ways to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Course Learning Outcomes

1. Students should have a basic understanding of the institutions, influences and processes that make up American government and politics.
2. Students should have a basic understanding of the vital role of citizen participation in American politics.
3. Students should have a basic understanding of the influence of the electoral system of American institutions and policies.

Attendance Policy

It is the responsibility of each student to attend classes and be on time. Attendance is not taken in this class and plays no part in your grade. **You do not need to contact me that you cannot attend a class unless an exam is scheduled or an in class assignment is due. If you are ill or have a personal or family emergency that requires you to miss an exam, you can request a make-up. If you know in advance (even 10 minutes before class) that you will miss the exam, it is expected you will contact my office or the Political Science Department office and provide appropriate information and an email or phone number. If you cannot contact me before class, do so as soon as possible.** University excused events will, of course, be accommodated, but please see me about this before the date of the exam. When you miss any class in which lecture is included, it is your responsibility to get notes from that class from a classmate. I will answer any question you have on any material, but I do not provide my notes to students.

Policy on Academic Honesty quoted from MSUM Student Handbook

The University expects all students to represent themselves in an honest fashion. In academic work, students are expected to present original ideas and give credit for their ideas of others. The value of a college degree depends on the integrity of the work completed by the student. When an instructor has convincing evidence of cheating or plagiarism, the following actions may be taken: assign a failing grade to the assignment in question, or assign a failing grade for the course in which the student cheated. For informational purposes, instructors may choose to report the offense, the evidence, and their action to the Dean of their college, or the Vice President for Academic Affairs. If the instructor (or any other person) feels the seriousness of the offense warrants a different or additional penalty, the incident may be reported to the Student Conduct Committee through the Student Support Services Office. The Student Conduct Committee will follow procedures set out in the Student Conduct Code. After its review of the case, and fair and unbiased hearing, the Student Conduct Committee may take disciplinary action if the student is found responsible (see Student Conduct Code for details). A student who has a course grade reduced by an instructor because of cheating or plagiarism, and who disputes the instructor's finding, may appeal the grade, but only by using the Course Grade Appeal Policy, which states that the student must prove the grade was arbitrary, prejudicial, or in error.

MSUM Sexual Violence Prevention Statement

Acts of sexual violence are intolerable. MSUM expects all members of the campus community to act in a manner that does not infringe on the rights of others. We are committed to eliminating all acts of sexual violence.

MSUM faculty and staff are concerned about the well-being and development of our students. We are obligated to share information with the MSUM Title IX Coordinator in certain situations to help ensure that the students' safety and welfare is being addressed, consistent with the requirements of the law. These disclosures include but are not limited to reports of sexual assault, relationship violence, and stalking.

If you have experienced or know someone who has experienced sexual violence, services and resources are available. You may also choose to file a report. For further information, contact Kara Gravley-Stack, Dean of Students and Title IX Coordinator, in Flora Frick 153 at kara.gravleystack@mnstate.edu or by calling (218) 477-4222. Additional information is available at: <http://www.mnstate.edu/titleix>

Bias Incident Statement

A bias incident is an act of bigotry, harassment, or intimidation that is motivated in whole or in part by bias based on an individual's or group's actual or perceived race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, or familial status.

If you are a student who has experienced or witnessed a hate or bias incident, we want to address the incident and provide you with resources. Contact the Campus Diversity Officer, Jered Pigeon, at jered.pigeon@mnstate.edu, 218-477-2047, 114 CMU or the Dean of Students, Kara Gravley-Stack, at kara.gravleystack@mnstate.edu, 218-477-4222, 153 Flora Frick Hall. Additional information is available at: <https://www2.mnstate.edu/oscar/>

Emergency Information for MSUM Buildings

Building emergency floor plans showing exit routes, severe weather safe areas, shelter in place locations and areas of refuge are conspicuously located in classrooms, labs, conference rooms, departmental main offices, and residence halls. The Emergency Preparedness Guides (flip style booklets) are located in the same areas and available on the [MSUM Public Safety Website](#). Please review the emergency plans and guide so you know how to respond in an emergency to help protect yourself and others. If you have questions, please contact Ryan Nelson, Director of Public Safety, at ryan.nelson@mnstate.edu or 218-477-5869. <https://www.mnstate.edu/public-safety/>

Accessibility Resources

Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM) is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students and strives to make courses inclusive and accessible in accordance with sections 504 and 508 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The University will make reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

Accessibility Resources (AR) is available to facilitate a range of academic support services and accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability, you can request assistance by contacting AR at 218-477-2167 (voice), 218-477-2420 (fax) or accessibility@mnstate.edu (email). Once eligibility has been determined, students register with AR every semester to activate their

approved accommodations. Although a student may request an accommodation at any time, it is best to initiate the application process at least four weeks before a student wishes to receive an accommodation.

Students may begin the accommodation process by submitting a Request for Accommodations form online at <https://www.mnstate.edu/student-life/student-services/accessibility/request-accommodations/form/> or by contacting Accessibility Resources. The Director of Accessibility Resources, Chuck Eade, serves as MSUM's ADA Coordinator. He can be reached at Charles.Eade@mnstate.edu. Additional information is available on the AR website: <http://www.mnstate.edu/accessibility>.

If you have any accessibility with online materials, please contact Dr. Headrick as soon as possible and she will direct you to help to the best of her ability and as quickly as she is able.

Reading Assignments (subject to change):

Numbers in [] represent pages when reading textbook via Cengage Read app

Aug. 26 General Introduction

Aug. 28 – Sept. 4 The Constitution

Gateway to Democracy, Chapter 2

Chapter 10 in Section 10.1a [353 – 355] on Electoral College including Figure 10.2 [353] on “How Electoral College Work.” Stop at “Electoral College Reform”

Recommended Chapter 4 Section 4.1 and Chapter 5, Sections 5.1 and 5.3 on constitution and civil liberties and civil rights

Sept. 4 - 9 Federalism

Gateway to Democracy, Chapter 3

Worksheet #1 due September 9 by 11:59 pm

Sept. 11 – 18 Congress, Powers, and Basics on Lawmaking and other Policymaking Powers

Gateway to Democracy, Chapter 12

Chapter 3 supplement linked in Section 3.3a - Supreme Court Cases:

Exam 1 September 23

Sept. 25 – Oct. 2 The Presidency – How Much Power?

Gateway to Democracy, Chapter 13
Chapter 16 Section 16.4 on “Foreign Policy” [631]

Oct. 7 - 9 The Bureaucracy – Who Directs the Unelected Bureaucrats Needed to Get Things Done?

Gateway to Democracy, Chapter 14

Worksheet #2 due by 11:59 pm on Oct. 9

Oct. 14 – 23 The Judiciary and Power to Interpret Laws and the Constitution

Gateway to Democracy, Chapter 15 Stop at end of Section 5.5 [ends on 560]
Chapter 2 (in Section 2.3c) supplement on Supreme Court Cases:
Marbury v Madison [53]
Chapter 4 Sections 4.1, 4.3, 4.4, 4.6a, 4.7a, and 4.7b on Civil Liberties
Chapter 5 Sections 5.1 – 5.4 on role of courts in Civil Rights

Exam 2 October 28

Oct. 30 – Nov. 4 Role of Media

Gateway to Democracy, Chapter 7

Nov. 6 – 13 Interest Groups

Gateway to Democracy, Chapter 8

No Classes on November 11 – Veteran’s Day

Worksheet #3 due by 11:59 pm on Nov. 13

Nov. 13 – 20 Parties and Elections

Gateway to Democracy, Chapters 9 and 10

Online Quiz due by 6 pm on November 25

No Classes November 25 and 27 Fall Break

Dec. 2 – 9 Ideology, Public Opinion, Voting and Do We Get the Government the “Deserve?”

Gateway to Democracy, Chapters 6 and 11

Optional Worksheet due by 11:59 pm on Dec. 9

Exam 3 is Monday, December 15th @ 2:15 pm in BR 162
Exam 3 will focus on new material covered since Exam 2
including what is covered in the online quiz.