Course Overview: This course is designed to introduce students to the fundamentals of American politics. In addition to covering the basic functions of the federal government, this course will also raise some more complex questions regarding American politics. In particular, we will explore: 1) the history of the American founding and its theoretical underpinnings; 2) the role of the Constitution in our politics, the ways in which the Constitution has evolved, and how/why this evolution has occurred; 3) political behavior in the United States (including that of politicians, government employees, and citizens), different explanations for this behavior, and questions regarding the type of behavior that is necessary for our political system to function properly.

General Education Requirement: This course can be applied towards completion of the General Education requirement for courses in the Social Sciences. As such, we will incorporate the learning goals of general education courses in the social sciences. LSU describes these goals as such:

The social sciences inquire systematically into the nature of human association, the bonds and interaction among human beings. The goal of the general education requirement in the social sciences is to introduce students to this systematic inquiry, so that they better appreciate the complexity of the social world and act as free and responsive citizens, able to make informed choices in governing their own lives and participating in their communities. As there is a diversity of associations—both in that everyone associates with others in various ways (for example, as members of families and as members of states), and that these associations take a variety of forms (for example, the different forms of government)—so there is a diversity of method and approach to the study of human society.

Students are encouraged to keep these goals in mind throughout this course. Many of these goals form the basis for the study of politics, and they are essential to a well-rounded education.

Grades:
1) 20% = Weekly Quizzes
2) 25% = Test I
3) 25% = Test II
4) 30% = Test III (Final) (Final date and time: TBA)
Your overall course grade will be based on a standard, 100 point scale:

A = 90—100
B = 80—89
C = 70—79
D = 60—69
F = 0 — 59

Assignments:

1) Weekly Quizzes. Each week students will take an in-class quiz that will cover the assigned reading materials for that week. Generally, these quizzes will be given on Thursdays. However, quizzes may occasionally be given on Tuesdays due to holidays or other scheduling conflicts. These will never be “pop-quizzes”; I will either tell you that a quiz will be given the next time we meet or an announcement will be sent out through Moodle.

Quizzes will be graded on a 10 point scale. At the end of the semester, the average of your weekly quizzes will be converted to the standard, 100 point scale, which will count for 20% of your final grade. (For example: if a student’s quiz average is 8.4, it will be converted to an 84, multiplied by .20, thus giving the student 16.8 points out of 20 for this portion of their overall grade.) Two quizzes will be dropped. Keep in mind that your quiz average is only 20% of your final grade; although you may receive high scores on all of your quizzes, if you do poorly on tests your overall course grade will suffer greatly.

2-3) Tests I and II will each count for 25% of your overall course grade. They will be taken in-class. I will provide more details as Test I approaches. However, keep in mind that they will cover both the assigned readings and class lectures. The best way to do well on these tests is to come to class and do all of the readings at the times that the readings are assigned. Trying to do all of the readings in the days leading up to a test will only make this course much more difficult than it is intended to be.

4) The final will count for 30% of your grade. It will differ from the other two tests in that it will be partially comprehensive. I say “partially comprehensive” because it will cover new material as well as portions, but only portions, of what has been covered throughout the semester. As the final approaches, I will tell you what you will be responsible for from previous sections of the course.

Required Texts:


Attendance, Make-up Work, etc.:

As already mentioned, the tests will cover lecture materials and readings; poor attendance will therefore have a negative impact on your grade. Also, unless a student has a legitimate and documented reason for missing a weekly quiz, make-up quizzes will not be permitted (of course, two quizzes will be dropped, which means that missing a quiz may not affect your grade, so long as you do not miss more than two and your other quiz grades are good). Make-up tests are permitted only when a student provides documentation explaining why the test is missed. If this happens, it is important to notify me before the test date; or, in case of an unexpected emergency, as soon afterwards as possible. Lap-top computers will be permitted so long as they do not become a distraction. I reserve the right to prohibit the use of lap-tops if problems emerge.