

POLS 492 – Senior Seminar in Political Science

Spring 2016 • Thursdays 3:30 – 6:00 PM

Professor: Dr. Janna Deitz
Email: JL-Deitz@wiu.edu
Phone: 298-1741

Office: 407 Morgan Hall
Hours: T/W/TH 1:30-3PM
and by appointment

Course Purpose and Approach

POLITICAL SCIENCE, POLITICS, & REFORM IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE: THEORY AND PRACTICE

This course allows graduating seniors to meet in a seminar format and critically analyze a theme or challenge for the practice of government. We begin this semester at the end of President Obama's second term, with the president recently giving his last State of the Union. "Change" was the president's campaign message in 2008 and although in 2012 the message became "Forward," moving forward and advancing the president's agenda indeed involves more change. President Obama called for change in the nature and conduct of our current politics, as well as in the areas of health care, civil rights, and gun control. Presidential candidates running right now are proposing reforms that they believe are necessary in the areas of immigration, terrorism, taxation, campaign finance, wealth inequality or social justice. Governor Rauner of Illinois has named his list of recommended reforms for this state his "Turnaround Agenda" and is currently locked in disagreement with leadership of the state legislature over the types of reform he wants to enact. Most calls for change made on the political stage are in fact calls for new public policy. Others involve more radical changes in government and politics that would fundamentally change the way our system works. To understand what brings rise to these calls for change and reform, we must understand how political character and political institutions in the US differ from those of other countries, and second, take a critical look at reforms proposed for the American democracy—reforms that are calls to change to the very rules of the game. Many of those rules, of course, are found in the US Constitution. Some of these calls for constitutional change will be familiar to you, such as the perennial call to abolish the Electoral College, while others, such as extending the term for president or implementing a national service requirement, may be new.

This semester we will critically examine the issue of reform in the public sphere and reflect on the ways that changing the rules may change the outcome of our political and policy processes. As a group, it is doubtful we will reach agreement on which proposed changes would strengthen democracy and which might weaken it. My aim is to collectively apply the knowledge learned from your individual courses of study in political science to inform each other and engage in a critical dialogue on the practices, processes and institutional aspects that best maximize the true meaning of democracy.

Required Readings and Sources for Seminar Discussion

America the Unusual by John W. Kingdon. Kendall/Hunt: 1999.

A More Perfect Constitution: Why the Constitution Must Be Revised: Ideas to Inspire a New Generation by Larry J. Sabato. Walker and Company: 2008.

Running from Office: Why Young Americans are Turned Off to Politics by Jennifer Lawless and Richard Fox. Oxford University Press: 2015.

Debating Reform: Conflicting Perspectives on How to Fix the American Political System, edited by Richard J. Ellis and Michael Nelson. CQ Press: 2011.

Additional online/full-text readings will be made available on WesternOnline.

Current international, national, and state news. (Via Radio, TV, Print, or Online Access)

Grading

All work will be assessed on a 100 point scale. Grading will follow the standard scale:

93– 100:	A
90-92:	A-
87-89:	B+
83-86:	B
08-82:	B-
....	
and <60:	F

Course grades will be calculated as follows:

Attendance/Participation/Discussion	20%
Midterm	25%
Paper/Presentation	30%
Final Exam	25%

Exams

There will be one midterm and a final exam. Each exam will be based on class lectures, discussion, and assigned readings. Exams will only be given on the dates listed on the syllabus. Any make-up exam, if approved, will be administered after the final exam. If there are any schedule conflicts, these must be handled well in advance of the exam date.

Written Assignments

Course Paper and Class Presentation

Students will complete a research paper for this course; a detailed assignment sheet for this paper will be handed out at a later date. The paper and oral presentation will account for **30%** of the course grade and will be **due either April 21st or 28th in class (depending on the group to which you are randomly assigned.)** *I will accept papers in class that day or they can be dropped off in advance of the due date at my office-- **emailed papers will not be accepted.** Late papers will be penalized 10 points (one letter grade) per day.* As a Writing in the Discipline course, so students will be given opportunities to turn in rough drafts and parts of the paper for feedback as we go through the semester.

Student Responsibilities

This is a capstone course for senior political science majors and meets only once per week. **Attendance and active participation in class discussion is required.** Please note that attendance and participation constitute **20%** of the course grade, which includes your leading of discussion. Attendance is necessary but not sufficient for a strong participation grade. This course differs from other upper-level courses, and is smaller to allow for more discussion and less lecture. The success of this seminar format, however, ultimately depends on your preparedness for class. You will need to come to each class with assigned readings completed. If it is apparent that students are not properly prepared for class, **pop quizzes** will be given.

I also encourage students to contact me either during office hours or by appointment to discuss any questions or concerns they may encounter during the course of the semester. Do not wait until after the midterm to seek help if you need it. I will try my best to be available to students when it is convenient for them. I would also encourage students to make good use of email contacts. I will reply to questions as promptly as possible within reason.

The University Writing Center is available to assist you with general and specific questions on writing assigned in any discipline and at any academic level. The one-on-one assistance available at the University Writing Center is valuable for generating ideas, talking about global-level issues such as organization, and even working through grammatical problems. The University Writing Center is located in Malpass Library (3rd floor, west side). Call for an appointment (298-2815) and be sure to bring a copy of your assignment.

Policy Statements

Academic Integrity Statement

Receiving unauthorized assistance on any written work (exams, papers, etc.) constitutes cheating as described in the *WIU Student Handbook*. Please see the *WIU Student Handbook* for a complete statement of the Policy on Academic Dishonesty or view the online statement at <http://www.wiu.edu/policies/acintegrity.php>. Academic dishonesty does include using sections or the entirety of a paper from one class towards an assignment in another class without the explicit consent of both instructors.

Students with Disabilities

In accordance with University values and disability law, students with disabilities may request academic accommodations where there are aspects of a course that result in barriers to inclusion or accurate assessment of achievement. To file an official request for disability-related accommodations, please contact the Disability Resource Center at 309-298-2512, disability@wiu.edu or in 143 Memorial Hall. Please notify the instructor as soon as possible to ensure that this course is accessible to you in a timely manner.

Lecture and Readings Schedule

Students are responsible for all of the reading listed below, even if the material is not covered in class. Additional readings, not on this syllabus may also be assigned. Please note that the following schedule is tentative and subject to change. The instructor reserves the right to alter assignments and dates if necessary; adequate advance notice of any such changes will be given to students.

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| 1/21 | Course Introduction
<i>Ten Things Political Scientists Know that You Don't</i> (Noel) |
| 1/28 | A Comparative Perspective:
<i>America the Unusual</i> (Chapters 1, 2, and 3) |
| 2/4 | A Comparative Perspective:
<i>America the Unusual</i> (Chapters 4 and 5) |
| 2/11 | A "Dysfunctional" Politics?
<i>Western Online Readings</i> |
| 2/18 | Rethinking Congress I: Issues of Representation
Sabato-Preamble and Chapter 1
Ellis and Nelson – Chapters 11 and 13 |
| 2/25 | Rethinking Congress II: Legislative Process Reform
Sabato-Chapter 1
Ellis and Nelson – Chapters 10 and 14 |
| 3/3 | Rethinking the Presidency: Eligibility, Powers, and Length of Term
Sabato-Chapter 2
Ellis and Nelson – Chapter 16 |

Rethinking the Judiciary: Ideology and Tenure
Sabato-Chapter 3
Ellis and Nelson – Chapter 18

3/10

MIDTERM DUE

Reforming the Practice of Politics I: The Electoral College, Redistricting & Other Reforms
Sabato-Chapter 4
Ellis and Nelson – Chapters 12 and 15

3/11

NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

3/24

Reforming the Practice of Politics II : Campaign Finance, Media, and Parties
Ellis and Nelson Chapters 3, 7-9
Western Online Readings

3/31

Political Engagement of Young People/Millennials
Fox and Lawless (chapters 1-3)

4/7

Political Engagement of Young People/Millennials Continued:
Fox and Lawless (chapters 4-6)
Renewing an Interest in the Duties of Citizenship
Sabato-Chapter 5
Ellis and Nelson – Chapters 4-6

4/14

Public Opinion on Political Change and Reform Efforts
Sabato-Chapter 6
Ellis and Nelson –Chapters 19 and 20
Calling a New Constitutional Convention
Sabato-Chapter 7 and Conclusion
Ellis and Nelson – Chapter 1

4/21

PAPER PRESENTATIONS – GROUP 1 (Papers Due)

4/28

PAPER PRESENTATIONS – GROUP 2 (Papers Due)

5/5

Course Conclusion

5/12

FINAL EXAM: THURSDAY MAY 12TH AT 3PM