

SYLLABUS

PSC 1113 - AMERICAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Instructor: Matthew Geras

Email: mgeras@ou.edu

Communications: Communications will be accomplished primarily by e-mail. All pertinent student emails will be answered within 24 hours of their arrival, unless prior notice of a delayed response is provided. For a quicker response please put the course prefix and number in the subject line (e.g., PSC 1113: Question about the Syllabus).

Email Account and Canvas: Students are expected to check their OU email accounts and the course site on Canvas daily for updates from the instructor. Make sure to setup your Canvas notifications.

Office hours: With advanced notice, phone or video conferencing appointments for office hours can be made when needed.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

OU Catalog Description:

American Federal Government: A study of the structure, organization and powers of the executive, legislative and judicial branches including relationships between state and national governments. Emphasis upon political processes and popular government; elections, political parties, pressure groups, voting behavior.

Course Delivery Method:

This course is delivered completely online. Assignments and activities will be listed on and will be facilitated via the [Canvas](#) course management system. Available online at: canvas.ou.edu

Course Goals:

In addition to the catalog topics above, it is our objective to increase your interest in politics and service, to develop rudimentary skills of political analysis, and to have each of you grapple with the three aspects of community engagement:

- Civic engagement—through online discussions, the youth voting paper, and the representation assignment.
- Issue engagement—through online discussions, and through the policy memo assignment.

- Information & data engagement—through online discussions about various topics (e.g. media), and perusing data from the PSC 1113 student survey.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Books/Resources:

1. MAIN COURSE TEXTBOOK

American Government

OpenStax College: Rice University.

****This is a free online textbook**** Chapters and appendices are posted as viewable/save-able/printable PDFs in the course. Each assigned chapter for each topic is linked and embedded in the topic module.

2. BRIEF READINGS

You will have several brief readings, made available as PDFs or through weblinks provided within the course.

GRADING

Elements of Course Grade:

ELEMENT	PART OF GRADE
Unit 1: Youth voting paper	15%
Unit 2: Speech code analysis	15%
Unit 3: Representation assignment	15%
Unit 4: Policy analysis/institutional design memo	20%
Response to readings (Discussions)	35%
TOTAL	100%

Grading Scale:

A = 90% - 100%

B = 80% - 89%

C = 70% - 79%

D = 60% - 69%

F = Below 60%

Criteria for Evaluation

Substantive content and the quality of the student's writing will be considered in all

written assignments, **including discussion board postings**. Substantive content includes closely following instructions for the content of the assignment. Quality of writing covers clarity of expression and organization, appropriate use of references and academic writing style, use of inclusive language, and correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Turn-around for Grades:

The turn-around time for grades is as follows. For short assignments such as discussions, 1-3 days. For medium-length assignments such as unit reflection assignments, 3-5 days

ASSIGNMENTS OVERVIEW

SHORT WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS (4 of them):

YOUTH VOTING PAPER

Instructions: write an essay that addresses the following three questions: why do young people turn out to vote at lower rates than do other age groups (e.g. seniors)? For students who move away to go to college, what unique challenges do they face with regard to voter registration and voting? What, if anything, can be done to improve the situation?

Your essay must reach a minimum of 500 words of written text in length (that's about 1 ½ pages, double-spaced depending on which font size and margin settings you use), but students may write more if they wish. Better written and more analytical essays will receive higher grades than will rambling papers that simply define terms. Between course readings on core concepts and some quick internet research undertaken on your topic at reputable (e.g. "balanced") websites, you will have plenty of material with which to write each essay.

SPEECH CODE ANALYSIS

Instructions: This link (<https://www.thefire.org/spotlight/?y=OK>) goes to the website for the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE). Read the description of FIRE's evaluation of speech codes at OU and OSU. How are the two schools evaluated? What is different, according to FIRE, in the level of speech regulation at the two schools? In your opinion, do speech codes promote, or inhibit, meaningful conversations about important subjects? Why? Your essay must reach a minimum of 500 words of written text in, but students may write more if they wish. The same standards and expectations applied to the first essay also apply to this assignment.

REPRESENTATION ASSIGNMENT

Instructions: Each student will complete an internet research assignment related to the activity and congruence between the student and his/her own elected representatives. The student should use their permanent "home" address for this assignment (which could be a different state than Oklahoma). Based on your home address, you will research who all ****10**** of your elected representatives are, including, city or town

council, mayor, school board, state House, state Senate, Governor, U.S. House, U.S. Senate (both of them), and US President. Identify who they are and two (2) of their issue positions. Then, most important, examine what your own issue positions are on these 2 issues and analyze whether or not the elected person is representing YOU well or not on those two issues. You will do this for all of the elected representatives. Bulleted points are fine for this assignment.

POLICY ANALYSIS/INSTITUTIONAL DESIGN MEMO

Instructions: Each student will write a fictitious memo to an elected leader or governmental official on a specific policy issue topic or institutional design idea of his/her choosing. The idea with this minimum 1000 word assignment will be to identify a specific policy problem in society OR institutional feature of American government that needs fixing and to consider different ways to fix the problem. Typically a student's memo will be stronger and have more punch if the topic is very specific. For example, the topic of "public health" is too broad to get your arms around, so to speak, but "childhood obesity" is a specific niche within that topic for which a memo would work well. Similarly, "reform of elections" is too broad, while "Electoral College reform" is more specific. Your policy memo must have the following sections: (1) identify the policy/institutional problem that needs solving and establish the degree of the problem; (2) consider at least 3 alternatives to fixing the problem; (3) compare and contrast those alternatives to the problem; and, (4) pick the best alternative and explain carefully why you did.

BRIEF RESPONSE ITEMS TO READING (DISCUSSIONS)

The class consists of four Units, each of which has individual topics. Each topic will have a question to which students will respond in the Discussion Board. Students must give an answer to all such questions. These responses should be well-conceived (e.g. not be rambling like a text message), but are not required to be especially lengthy. The idea is for crisp writing, which others can then easily read and understand, and then respond to what you wrote.

Students are expected to engage each other's reading responses. Students do not have to respond to every other student's response item, but **a minimum number of replies per student on a given topic question is 2** (that is, each student should comment on two other students' comments for each topic). This will be included in your discussion grade.

COURSE POLICIES

Late Work: Except in cases of documented serious illness or documented emergency no late work will be accepted. Technical difficulties do not qualify as an emergency unless the problem is severe, prolonged, and on the server end (the problem is with Canvas). In such cases, the due date will be modified and a new due date specified. Expect technical difficulties on your own end and make arrangements for a secondary location from which to post and/or an alternative Internet Service Provider.

Posting Difficulties: Files which do not post correctly in the assignments area or responses which do not correctly post on the discussion board will not be accepted for a grade. If your file does not post (you are timed out, for example), becomes corrupted, contains a virus, or if your response is blank/partial, you should re-post prior to the deadline so that you may receive a grade. Always check to see that your response or file has correctly posted before you exit Canvas. Be sure to post in advance so that you have enough time to correct for any posting difficulties.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity: Cheating on exams, plagiarism on written assignments, working together on individual written assignments, any nonsense with using multiple clickers so your buddy can be counted present when they are not in class, forging another student's name on the lab attendance sheet, or forging documentation that excuses an absence will result in penalties in accordance with university policies. If you haven't already, I encourage each of you to peruse the Provost's website via the link/URL below. You may be surprised to see how many things constitute academic dishonesty.

http://integrity.ou.edu/students_guide.html. *Please be aware that we will enter all of your written assignments into TurnItIn.com (plagiarism software).*

Special Accommodations: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact OU's DRC as soon as possible so we can ensure your full participation and facilitate your educational opportunities. (405) 325-3852 or TDD: (405) 325-4173. For more information please see the Disability Resource Center website <http://www.ou.edu/drc/home.html>.

Religious Holidays: 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.

Since online courses allow students to complete course work around their unique schedules, and because you are given assignments well in advance of their due dates, most religious holidays should not conflict with the class schedule for this course. However, if you do have plans to observe a religious holiday, please notify your instructor as soon as possible in order to make appropriate arrangements for class work or rescheduling of assignments.

Adjustments for Pregnancy/Childbirth Related Issues: Should you need modifications or adjustments to your course requirements because of documented pregnancy-related or childbirth-related issues, please contact me as soon as possible to

discuss. Generally, modifications will be made where medically necessary and similar in scope to accommodations based on temporary disability. Please see www.ou.edu/content/eoo/faqs/pregnancy-faqs.html for commonly asked questions.

Title IX Resources: For any concerns regarding gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, stalking, or intimate partner violence, the University offers a variety of resources, including advocates on-call 24.7, counseling services, mutual no contact orders, scheduling adjustments and disciplinary sanctions against the perpetrator. Please contact the Sexual Misconduct Office 405-325-2215 (8-5, M-F) or OU Advocates 405-615-0013 (24.7) to learn more or to report an incident.

Incompletes: The OU College of Arts and Sciences advises its faculty to be very strict about the conditions under which a student is allowed to take an incomplete in a regularly scheduled, letter-graded course. A grade of Incomplete (I) will be given only for a justifiable reason (due to unavoidable circumstances, not lack of planning on the student's part) and only if the student is passing the course. It is the responsibility of the student to request a grade of "I" and to meet with the instructor as early as possible to determine requirements for completing the course. Any incomplete granted must be removed by the deadline specified by the instructor. The time limit set for removal of an incomplete will take into account the circumstances of the situation but may not exceed one calendar year.

Final Exam Preparation Period: Pre-finals week will be defined as the seven calendar days before the first day of finals. Faculty may cover new course material throughout this week. For specific provisions of the policy please refer to OU's Final Exam Preparation Period policy (<https://apps.hr.ou.edu/FacultyHandbook#4.10>).

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Below is a list of resources OU provides to you to help you succeed in your studies. If you are not familiar with any of these services, make sure to click each link below so will have a knowledge of what is available to you.

OU WRITING CENTER

Most universities have a writing center, a place for students, faculty, and staff to meet and talk about writing. The Writing Center here at OU is a resource I encourage you to use. As a writer you will want to seek feedback from many different readers. The writing consultants at the writing center are able to talk with you about your writing--at any stage in the process and for any course you are taking. The Writing Center is helpful for all levels of writing. I used the Writing Center at my alma mater when I was in college and I encourage you to do the same while you are at OU.

You can make an appointment (online or by phone) and you can drop in whenever they are open. I urge you to visit the web site for more information: www.write.ou.edu.

OTHER RESOURCES

- **Library:** [OU Libraries](#)
- **Tutoring:** [List of Available Tutors](#)
- **Technical Assistance:** [OU IT Service Desk](#)