

PSCI 216: AMERICAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

LEARNING COMMUNITY: Identity, Community, and the Struggle for Meaningful Democracy

Fall 2000
MWF 9:00-9:50 AM
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DESCRIPTION: This course introduces you to the history and to the institutions, processes, and group actors of American national government and politics. Following the lead of our main textbook authors, we will organize our exploration around the theme of democracy, especially the ongoing debate between elite democracy and popular democracy. What kind of “democracy” does the U.S. currently have? What kind of “democracy” would you like it to have? While we learn many important facts and concepts during this course, we will also have the opportunity to think about and form our own philosophy of government and politics.

Besides the main textbook, this course includes two other important texts. Barbara Kingsolver's *HOLDING THE LINE* will broaden our understanding of American politics by showing us the kinds of political battles, far from the frontlines of Washington, that have shaped our country and our communities. Focusing on a labor strike and the role of women, Kingsolver might also offer us some ideas about how we might be more active participants in the ongoing “struggle for meaningful democracy.” Also, the Crosstabs computer software exercises that we will use at several points in the course will expand our understanding of American society and government through basic data analysis of public opinion and Congressional voting.

The goals of this course include, first, providing a broad foundation for understanding and participating in American politics and, second, strengthening your competencies in essay writing and data analysis. As we work our way through this course, I hope that we all will come to be more knowledgeable (rather than overwhelmed), more intellectually critical (rather than cynical), and more empowered (rather than apathetic). Good luck to all of us.

LEARNING COMMUNITY: This course is one of three courses (the other two are ACAD DEV 103: University Seminar and ENGL 101: Writing I) that make up a new “learning community” called “Identity, Community, and the Struggle for Meaningful Democracy.” The purpose of this learning community is to increase interaction and coordination among students and professors so as to enhance overall learning. For example, we hope that the study skills you work on in your University Seminar will help you to better tackle assignments in American National Government and that the issues of community, identity, and struggle that you deal with in American National Government will give you insight for your discussion and writing on those general and related topics in Writing I. And so on. Also, because the three courses in our learning community run back-to-back in the same classroom, we expect that there will be a few occasions where a special event (e.g. a guest speaker, a video, or a field trip) will run for more than one class period and a few days that we will switch the order of classes. In addition, you will see that 25% of your final grade in all three classes (10% for WebBoard writing and 15% for your final paper) is the same for all three classes. This reduces your overall workload in this

learning community.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: In addition to the readings and WebBoard assignments listed below, PSCI 216 features three written non-cumulative exams, two essays (the second one will count for all three courses), and a few short computer data assignments. Due dates are listed on the course calendar. You should always expect to spend at least ten hours per week working on this class (including class time). Any changes in the course schedule will be announced in advance. The penalty for lateness on any assignment is one letter grade PER DAY of lateness. In addition, perfect class attendance is required; more than five absences or frequent tardiness will result in a failing grade for the participation portion of your course grade. If you have trouble keeping up with course work, please come and talk! I want to help you to succeed.

TEXTBOOKS: There are two texts to buy for this class. Please purchase them immediately.

Bruce Miroff, Raymond Seidelman, and Todd Swanstrom, The Democratic Debate: An Introduction to American Politics.

Barbara Kingsolver, Holding the Line: Women in the Great Arizona Mine Strike of 1983.

WRITTEN EXAMS: Each of the three exams, consisting of short answer and short essay questions, will cover five chapters of the main textbook (chs. 1-5, 6-10, and 11-14, 16). There will also be a few questions from the Kingsolver book. Exam dates are listed on the calendar.

ESSAYS: You are lucky to be taking American National Government during a major election year! Essay #1 will engage you with election year 2000 by matching you with a specific candidate who is campaigning for national office. You will be expected to research the political background, three distinctive policy positions, and electoral prospects for your candidate. You will then present your findings in a 3-4 page essay, typed and double-spaced. Essay #2 will be your thoughtful and personal response to Holding the Line (see the list of “questions to consider” in the appendix on the final page of this syllabus), Push by Sapphire, and other course readings and discussions. Essay #2, which counts as the final essay for all three courses, will be typewritten, double-spaced, 5-7 pages, and will go through a first draft and revised final draft.

WEB BOARD AND E-MAILING LIST: One of the goals of this learning community is to give you lots of opportunities to write informally and to discuss course topics with each other. To make that possible, we will all be subscribed to an e-mail list and to a threaded discussion called WebBoard. You will be expected to check your e-mail regularly for announcements and to participate in small group interactive discussions on the WebBoard that deal with course and learning community topics. You will generally receive your WebBoard question on Monday. Half of you will be expected to respond to the question by Wednesday and the other half of you will respond to your classmates’ responses by Friday. The next week the discussion roles will be reversed. The WebBoard, your weekly computer “journal”, can be accessed through Professor Leaman’s home page: www.neiu.edu/~dleaman. Please go there and subscribe right away.

CROSSTABS EXERCISES: You will be expected to complete four computer data exercises to build your data analysis skills and to broaden your understanding of American politics. See the course calendar for specific assignments. More information will be provided early in the term.

GRADING: The various components of your grade have the “weights” listed below. Your final grade is calculated according to the standard percentages listed in the college catalogue (A = 90-100%; B = 80-89%; C = 70-79%; D = 60-69%; F = Below 60%).

Three written exams	150 points (50 points each)	37.5%
Essay #1	40 points	10%
Essay #2*	60 points	15%
Crosstabs exercises	40 points (10 points each)	10%
WebBoard writing*	40 points	10%
Responses to HOLDING THE LINE	30 points	7.5%
Attendance/participation	<u>40</u> points	<u>10%</u>
TOTAL	400 points	100%

*These assignments and grades are common to all three classes -- and will count for all three!

POLITICS CLUB: Class members are invited to participate in Politics Club activities. Such activities generally take place every other Tuesday during the Activity Hour, 1:40-2:40 PM.

COURSE CALENDAR

Week 1 The Declaration and the Constitution: Origins of the Democratic Debate
August 28 and 30; September 1

READ: Miroff, et al., chapters 1 and 2

Week 2 Public Opinion and Political Culture
Labor Day holiday; September 6 and 8

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 3
Kingsolver, Introduction and pp.1-18

Begin Essay #1 research on political candidate.

Computer Day on Friday, Sept. 8: Learning WebBoard and Researching Political Candidates

Week 3 The American Political Economy
September 11, 13, and 15

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 4
Kingsolver, pp.18-48

WebBoard Entries due on Wednesday, Sept. 13 and Responses due on Friday, Sept. 15

Week 4 Voting, Non-Voting, and Elections
September 18, 20, and 22

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 5
Crosstabs Exercise #1

WebBoard Entries due on Wednesday, Sept. 20 and Responses due on Friday, Sept. 22

Exam #1 on September 29

Week 5 The Politics of Corporate Mass Media -- and the Alternatives
September 25, 27, and 29

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 6
Kingsolver, pp.49-78

WebBoard Entries due on Wednesday, Sept. 27 and Responses due on Friday, Sept. 29

Week 6 Political Parties and Political Party Systems
October 2, 4, and 6

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 7
Kingsolver, pp.78-107

WebBoard Entries due on Wednesday, Oct. 4 and Responses due on Friday, Oct. 6

Week 7 Campaigns: Organized Money Versus Organized People
October 9, 11, and 13

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 8
Crosstabs exercise #2

WebBoard Entries due on Wednesday, Oct. 11 and Responses due on Friday, Oct. 13

Week 8 Interest Groups and the Interest Group System
October 16, 18, and 20

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 9
Kingsolver, pp. 107-133

Essay #1 due on October 27

Week 9 Popular Social Movements in American History
October 23, 25, and 27

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 10
Kingsolver, pp. 134-162

Computer Day on Friday, October 27, 10:00-11:50 AM

Exam #2 on November 3

Week 10 Congress and Types of Representation
October 30; November 1 and 3

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 11
Kingsolver, pp. 163-196

Guest speakers to discuss HOLDING THE LINE and local labor issues on October 30 (tentative)

First Draft of Essay #2 due on November 10 (Final Draft due on December 1)

Week 11 The Presidency and Elite Democracy
November 6, 8, and 10

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 12
Crosstabs exercise #3

WebBoard Entries due on Wednesday, Nov. 8 and Responses due on Friday, Nov. 10

Computer Day on November 10, 10:00-11:50 AM

Field trip to prison on November 13 (tentative)

Week 12 Bureaucracy: Myths and Realities
November 13, 15, and 17

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 13
Crosstabs exercise #4

WebBoard Entries due on Wednesday, Nov. 15 and Responses due on Friday, Nov. 17

Week 13 The Supreme Court and the Judicial System
November 20 and 22; Thanksgiving holiday

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 14

Week 14 Civil Liberties and Civil Rights
November 27 and 29; December 1

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 16

Guest Lecturer from the JOURNAL OF ORDINARY THOUGHT on November 29 (tentative)

Week 15+ Summing Up: Identity, Community, and the Struggle for Meaningful Democracy
December 4, 6, 8, and 11

READ: Finish up any missed readings and review for final exam

(Final) Exam #3: Wednesday, December 13, 10:00-11:50 AM

APPENDIX: Questions to consider while reading HOLDING THE LINE, by B. Kingsolver
Fall 2000, Professor Leaman

1. As text chapter 3 points out, American political culture is one of the most individualistic anywhere. Yet we are also “a country of joiners.” What does Kingsolver’s book tell us about the differences between individual and collective identity and action? What is the purpose and what are the advantages or disadvantages of collective (“union”) action? Why did these women believe in it so strongly?
2. Some social scientists have argued that women tend to have different methods and goals than men when it comes to politics and organizing. Do you agree? In this strike, why do you think women took the lead? How would you describe their methods and goals? How was their “holding the line” connected to their personal lives and their personal empowerment?
3. Thinking about the debate between elite democracy and popular democracy, what does this story suggest about the type and quality of U.S. “democracy” in the following areas --
 - a. Protection of civil liberties? (see text chapter 16)
 - b. Information from mass media? (see text chapter 6)
 - c. Treatment by law enforcement? (see text chapter 16)
 - d. Competition of political parties? (see text chapter 7 and Kingsolver, pp. 184-185)
4. As discussed in text chapter 2, the Framers (18th century republicans) elevated private property rights above other political and human rights. What does the story of this strike suggest about the current relationship between human rights and property rights? Do you think the “right to organize” and the “right to strike” ought to be protected? Why or why not?

5. As discussed in text chapters 4 and 8-10, one major battle in interest group politics is the struggle between business (employers) and labor (employees), between “organized money” and “organized people”. What does this story suggest about the relative powers of business and labor? What are the sources of power of each group?

6. As discussed in text chapter 4, corporate globalization is a major characteristic of our early 21st century world. How does the story of this strike in Arizona relate to the theme of globalization? How were these workers affected by the global economy and how did their struggle become global (pp. 187-189)? Can labor unions control global corporate power?

7. Was this strike about money? If not, what **was** it about? Given the power of global corporations, do you think these women were on a “fool’s mission”? Why or why not? What rights do you think are worth fighting for? In the current American political system and in our globalized economy, what do you think are the best ways to protect or acquire those rights?