

PSCI 216: AMERICAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

Learning Community Theme: *Democracy and Education*

Fall 2003

Tuesday and Thursday 9:25-10:40am

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Office Hours: T & R 8:15-9:15am;

4:30-5:30 PM; W 2:00-3:00 PM;

or by appointment with instructor.

Website: neiu.blackboard.com

DESCRIPTION: This course introduces you to 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? How does education relate to democracy? While we will 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, politics, and education.

Besides the main textbook, this course includes another important book. *Harvest of Empire* examines the history and diversity of the fastest growing cultural group in the United States, Latinos. It shows how “American” politics and economics is inextricably linked with the history of all of the Americas and how immigrants from many different places have helped to define what America is. Regarding our learning community theme of “democracy and education”, *Harvest* raises questions about American history, culture, language, and democracy.

The goals of this course include: 1) providing a broad foundation for understanding and participating in American politics; 2) developing an understanding of the relationship between culture, literacy, education, and democracy; and 3) strengthening your competencies in various forms of essay writing, collaborative work, and test-taking. 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.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: In addition to the readings and ejournal discussion assignments listed below, PSCI 216 features three written exams (the final exam will include some review questions) and two short essays. The second essay will meet requirements for both classes in this learning community. 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 and there are no makeup exams. In addition, perfect class attendance and on time arrival are required; more than three absences or frequent tardiness will result in a zero for the participation portion of your course grade. If you cannot make it to class for some unavoidable reason, you must inform me by voice mail or e-mail **BEFORE** that class. Regarding academic behavior and standards, please familiarize yourself with the University Student Code of Conduct accessible at the NEIU website. Your participation in this class is valued very much. If you have trouble keeping up with course work, please come and talk with me! If you are willing to work hard, 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.

Juan Gonzalez, HARVEST OF EMPIRE: A HISTORY OF LATINOS IN AMERICA.

WRITTEN EXAMS: Each of the three exams, consisting of short answer and short essay questions, will cover four chapters of the main textbook (chs. 1-4; 5-7& 9; and 10-12 & 14), as well as a few questions from the Gonzalez book. Exam dates are listed on the calendar.

ESSAY #1: Your first essay in this class will focus on migration and multiculturalism. In this essay, you will describe and reflect on one migration experience in the history of your own family. In doing this, you will be expected to relate your family's experience to Gonzalez's discussion of the history of U.S. immigration and of the migrations of specific Latino groups. This paper will proceed in a series of steps: topic/outline, ejournal writing, and the paper itself. This essay must be 3-4 pages, carefully proofread, typed and double-spaced.

ESSAY #2: Your second essay, an integrated central question assignment that will count for both classes in our learning community, will focus on the broad theme of "democracy and education". Guidelines for this essay will be provided by Professor Schroeder early in the semester.

EJOURNAL DISCUSSIONS: One of the goals of this course is to give you lots of opportunities to write informally as you make connections among course themes. To achieve this goal, we will all get subscribed to a discussion e-list/digest and to Blackboard in class on August 28.

GRADING: The various components of your grade for this class 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 exams	160 points (50/60 points each)	40%
Essay #1	80 points	20%
Essay #2*	80 points	20%
Ejournal writing*	40 points	10%
Attendance/participation	<u>40</u> points	<u>10%</u>
TOTAL	400 points	100%

*These two assignments, adding up to thirty percent of your final grade in this class, are common to both courses in this learning community. Whether you choose the grades-based or rubric-based option in Professor Schroeder's class, this assignment overlap increases the integration of our two classes and reduces your overall workload for this learning community.

ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUES: Throughout the term, I will periodically assess what you are learning

through ungraded classroom assessment techniques, such as “one minute papers.”

SPECIAL CAMPUS EVENTS: Class members are invited to participate in Politics Club and other student organization activities. Such activities generally take place Tuesday or Thursday during the Activity Hour, 1:40-2:40 PM. Extra credit will be offered for short typed responses (four points per report) to events that relate to our learning community.

COURSE CALENDAR

Week 1 Understanding and Evaluating American Politics: The Democratic Debate
August 26 and 28

READ: Miroff, et al., Preface and chapter 1
Gonzalez, Introduction

Computer Day on August 28 (Please activate your @neiu.edu or another email account.)

LC questions: *What is the difference between elite and popular democracy? What are elite and popular literacies? What are different perspectives on literacy, including political literacy?*

Week 2 The Declaration of Independence, The Articles of Confederation, and the
September 2 and 4 U.S. Constitution: Origins of the Democratic Debate

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 2
Gonzalez, chapter 1

LC questions: *What were the origins of the U.S. nation and the two foundings of its political system? How does this early history fit into the larger history of the Americas? Also, what are the histories of literacy and of educational systems in the U.S.?*

Week 3 American Political Economy: Corporate Capitalism versus Democracy
September 9 and 11

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 3
Gonzalez, chapter 2

LC questions: *How did the U.S. economic system, and nation, develop in the 19th and 20th centuries? How do current trends in the U.S. economy affect democracy, and how do they relate to the economics of (print) literacy? How does poverty affect literacy and democracy?*

Week 4 Public Opinion, Political Culture, and How We Learn About Politics

September 16 and 18

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 4
Gonzalez, chapter 11

LC questions: *How do our families, communities, and cultures shape our views of politics and political participation? What are immigrant experiences with language issues and obstacles?*

Essay #1 topic and outline due on September 23

Discussion of how to cite sources in Professor Schroeder's class.

Week 5 EXAM WEEK

September 23 and 25

READ: Gonzalez, chapter 4

Exam #1 on September 30

Week 6 Voting, Non-Voting, and Elections: Why Do So Many Americans Not Vote?

September 30 and October 2

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 5
Gonzalez, chapter 5

LC questions: *Why do people vote or not vote? Why are people literate or illiterate? How do elite and popular explanations of these questions differ? What are the cultural costs of, and responses to, print literacy (e.g. the literacy myth)?*

Week 7 The Politics of Corporate Mass Media -- and Popular Democratic Alternatives

October 7 and 9

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 6
Gonzalez, choose one chapter to read between chapters 6-9

LC questions: *Where do you get political news? What are your information alternatives? What are the differences between print and other forms of literacy (e.g. media literacies)?*

Essay #1 due on October 16

Week 8 Political Parties and Party Systems: Why Do We Have a Two-Party System?
October 14 and 16

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 7
Gonzalez, chapter 10

LC questions: *Why does the U.S. have a two-party system? How might new voters, like young people or the Latino “third force,” be changing and challenging this system? In the U.S. educational system, what are different approaches to standardization?*

Week 9 Interest Groups and the Interest Group System
October 21 and 23

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 9

Essay #2 outline due on October 28

LC questions: *Which groups have the most access and clout in the U.S. interest group system? What are the connections between literacy, education, and political access?*

Week 10 EXAM WEEK
October 28 and 30

READ: Gonzalez, chapter 13

Exam #2 on November 4

Week 11 Popular Social Movements in American History
November 4 and 6

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 10

Essay #2 first draft due on November 13

LC questions: *How have social movements enlarged and deepened U.S. democracy? How have the women’s, class-based, and ethnic empowerment movements generated alternative literacies?*

Week 12 The U.S. Congress and Types of Representation
November 11 and 13

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 11
Gonzalez, chapter 12

LC questions: *How does the National Language Act of 2001 illustrate how Congress functions? How does this proposal to make English the official language of the U.S. government relate to cultural literacies and education?*

Week 13 The Presidency and Elite Democracy
November 18 and 20

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 12
Gonzalez, chapter 14

Essay #2 final draft due on November 25

LC questions: *How do U.S. presidents shape and implement policies related to immigration, the status of Puerto Rico, and standardization and literacy in the educational system (e.g. President Bush's "Leave No Child Behind" approach)?*

Week 14 The Supreme Court and the Judicial System
November 25; Thanksgiving holiday

READ: Miroff, et al., chapter 14
Gonzalez, Epilogue

LC questions: *How does the U.S. Supreme Court function within the larger political system? How have Supreme Court rulings affected the U.S. educational system? How does all this relate to education, culture, and literacy?*

Week 15 EXAM WEEK
December 2 and 4

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

(Final) Exam #3: Thursday, December 11, 8:00-9:50am