

PLS 105--AMERICAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT
SPRING 2009

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BR 426D

This course in American government probably differs from many other courses you have taken or are taking in college. It is based upon the principle of personalized or individualized instruction, by which each student learns as if he or she were a class of one, proceeding at his or her own pace. Many courses give the impression of an adversary system with student and instructor each trying to outwit the other. The desired goal here, on the other hand, is mastery of the subject matter.

To this end, there will be no lectures or formal classes during the semester. To help you cover the material on your own, you will receive a study guide on each of the fifteen units. Each unit's study guide will be distributed as you successfully complete the preceding unit. As you proceed, you will spend considerable time discussing the material with fellow students, and proctors (discussed below), and the instructor.

So how do you know when you have completed a unit? You will take a short written test, a mastery test. Each test will contain ten questions, nine multiple choice questions plus one short essay question. Each of the questions will relate to the study questions in your study guide, so you will know in advance what sort of questions to expect. Your test will be immediately graded by a proctor (see below). To pass it you must get nine out of ten questions right, or 90%, and the proctor will make sure that you understand completely the questions you got right as well as what gave you difficulty. If you do not get 90%, this will not hurt you, because you can take a re-test later if necessary. You can take an unlimited number of re-tests, so retakes do not hurt your grade. But they do waste your time.

The staff for the course consists of the instructor and several regular proctors to one of whom you will be assigned for the semester. The proctors are political science majors or former 105 students who have done well. Your proctor will grade your unit tests, and he or she and the instructor will always be available during the regularly scheduled class hours to discuss course material with you. Since there are no lectures, the staff will be freely available for consultation that would not otherwise be possible.

When you come to class during the class periods to study, discuss material with your proctor, or take a unit test, please sit on the side of the room nearest the doors. When you are ready to take a test, ask either a proctor or the instructor for a test on the unit you are completing. Then take your test to the side of the room nearest the windows, and take your test. Then bring it to your proctor to correct. This division of the room should make the atmosphere less distracting for everyone.

Although this problem is not anticipated, any individual who is caught cheating on a unit test will not be allowed to complete that unit. In other words, he or she will automatically receive four points less (see below) on the accumulated units than would otherwise be the case.

Two further points regarding procedure:

1) You may take as many test versions of one unit as you have time for during a single class period. You may not, however, take tests on more than one unit in a single class unit immediately and have extra time. First, you will not yet have received the study guide for the next unit. But more importantly, experience shows that when students try to study and remember too much material at once, none of it is learned as well. Besides, since, in theory, a person could finish all fifteen units in five weeks (three classes a week), confining work to one unit per class period really should not delay anyone unduly.

2) We ask that you request any unit tests you want to take in a class period by 9:35. This means that if you are taking one version of a unit test, you need not get here on the hour, but you must get here and start the test by 35 minutes into the class period. Or, if you are taking several versions, you must request the last version by 35 minutes into the period. This is simply to give you time to take the test and the staff time to go over it with you before the end of the period. Many people have other commitments across campus the next hour, and overwhelmingly, the classroom is needed by another class the next hour.

You should be able to earn a good grade in this course. To get an A, you need 90-100 points. You can earn these points by passing units, doing well on the final exam, and by completing units according to the schedule below.

Each of 15 required units = 4 points each; 15 x 4 60 points
 Final exam counts a maximum of 35 35 points
 Passing every 3 units on schedule, up to. 5 points

As you pass each required unit with a grade of 90% or better, you will gradually be accumulating points, four at a time, towards the 60 you will get for completing the required units. Thus, each unit passed represents real progress. In addition, you can accumulate 5 more points by passing units on a schedule which will help you to be sure to finish all units by the end of the course. This works as follows:

Unit 3 by Feb. 13. 1 point
 Unit 6 by March 6 1 point
 Unit 9 by March 27. 1 point
 Unit 12 by April 17 1 point
 Unit 15 by May 4 1 point

If you earn all five points you will need fewer points from the final exam than as if you accumulate none of them. In the latter case, with your 60 points from the units, you will have to accumulate at least 30 more on the exam to earn an A in the course, at least 20 more to earn a B , and at least 10 more to earn a C . (Just as an A is 90-100 points, a B is 80-90 points, and a C is 70-80 points.)

Since this is a course based upon the principle of mastery, there is no D grade. If you do not finish the units and if you cannot earn at least the 10 points on the final exam necessary for a C , you have not mastered the material well enough to pass or earn credit for the course.

Students admit that they work harder on this type of course, but that they also learn more and enjoy it more. One of the most important things for you to remember is: don't procrastinate. You are responsible for completing the required study routine. It will not work for you just to cram for the test and also have to schedule additional study periods. If you are conscientious, you can proceed as fast as you want to. Below are two alternative schedules, one of which will allow you to finish the course rapidly, and the other of which spreads the work more evenly over the course of the semester. (The slower schedule will allow you to earn all the 5 extra points mentioned above.)

<u>Week of</u>	<u>Fast</u>	<u>Slower</u>
Jan. 26	Units 1 and 2	Unit 1 (ch. 1)
Feb. 2	Units 3 and 4	Unit 2 (ch. 2)
9	Units 5 and 6	Unit 3 (ch. 3)
16	Units 7 and 8	Unit 4 (ch. 4)
23	Units 9 and 10	Unit 5 (ch. 5)
Mar. 2	Units 11 and 12	Unit 6 (ch. 6)
9	Units 13 and 14	Unit 7 (ch. 7)
Mar. 16	(SPRING BREAK)	
23	Unit 15	Unit 8 (ch. 8) & Unit 9 (ch. 9)
Mar. 30		Unit 10 (ch. 10)
Apr. 6		Unit 11 (ch. 11)
13		Unit 12 (ch. 12)
20		Unit 13 (ch. 14) & Unit 14 (ch. 15)
27		Unit 15 (ch. 16)
May 4	Last Class	

Please note that units and chapter numbers do not always correspond.

The final exam will be

Monday, May 11, 9:00 a.m.

These are the regular exam times for classes at these hours. However, there will also be a special early exam April 13 for those who do not want to wait around. If you take this early final (you must first have completed the required units) and do not like your score, you can still take the regular final and count the better score. No additional units can be completed after May 4. If for some reason you are unfortunate enough not to complete the required units by that date, you will receive credit only for those units which you have completed.

It should be mentioned that no midterm grade will be filed. Those who have completed few units may catch up and do well, while those who are far along must still do well on the final examination to receive a high grade.

Do not hesitate to come to the proctors or the instructor at any time with questions or comments, or if you simply want to discuss points in the material that interest you. You, the proctors, and the instructor will all be working hard, but we should all be learning a lot too. Good luck!!

Required Text

Lowi, Ginsberg, and Shepsle, American Government: Power and Purpose, 10th ed.