**The Indiana Academy**

**SOC 302**

**Exploring American Government: Search for Democracy (Fall 2025)**

Instructor: Dr. Mark Myers Office Location: B009D Elliot

Phone: 765-285-7409 Email: msmyers@bsu.edu

Class Times: TR 10:00, 11:30, 2:00 Office Hours: MF 9-11, 2-4; TR 9-10

*Course Description:*

An exploration of United States government, with particular reference to the history and experience of creating and sustaining a democratic system and way of life for all. What is a democracy, and what does it mean to live in a democratic country? Topics may include diversity, equality, equity, political power, and similar pressing questions of past and present. Critical thinking and productive civil discourse will be consistently emphasized. (Only one credit can be earned from the Exploring American Government course series.)

*Required Texts:*

All readings will be posted to Canvas.

*Goals for and Obligations of Students:*

1. The first goal of the class is for students to gain an interpretive awareness of the major connections between democracy and inequality. All students are obligated to complete all assigned readings before class. This is imperative because this course relies heavily on class discussion. Class sessions will only succeed if you put in the time to read the assignments.
2. The second goal of the class is for students to become comfortable participating in class. Students are obligated to participate in all class sessions.
3. The third, and most important, goal of the class is to improve students’ critical thinking skills.

*Course Requirements:*

1. Essays: You are required to write four essays based on class materials. More information will be forthcoming. Each essay is worth 100 points.
2. Daily Assignments/Participation: The first type of daily assignment will be journals based on the daily readings. The journals will be posted to Canvas. These journals are designed to give you an opportunity to prepare for the discussion and should be two full paragraphs long. The only requirement is that you provide enough detail from the reading to show that you read the assignment. Half of your daily grade will be based on the reading journal. Most of our class sessions will consist of seminar discussions. These seminars may either be open conversations or led by a student discussion leader. I hope to convey to you the importance of collegial discussion. I consider a seminar to be a “team activity,” therefore there will be a class “baseline grade” for the seminar. However, if you do not participate, your score will be adjusted accordingly. I will be providing documents on Canvas to help you prepare for the seminars. Excused absences will not harm your seminar grade, but unexcused absences will earn no participation credit. Each daily grade is 10 points (5 for the journal & 5 for participation activities). The 4 lowest daily grades will be dropped.

Percentage of total points earned:

A: 90-100%

B: 80-89%

C: 70-79%

D: Below 70%

(Note: plus/minus may be used at my discretion)

*Format of the Course:*

Most days will include a seminar discussion of a major piece of the literature on the issues of inequality and democracy. Throughout the semester, we will also discuss major aspects of American government. Class days may have two distinct topics.

*Late Policy:*

All essays are due by 11:59 p.m. on the due date. Reading Journals are due by class time on the due date. Late essays will be accepted with a penalty of 10% per week late. Reading journals cannot be accepted late except in extraordinary circumstances (certain excused absences such as illness). If you know that you will be absent prior to the day of class, the reading journal must be submitted early. **No extension will be granted because a student is busy**. The absolute deadline for any late essay will be Thursday, December 18 at noon.

*Attendance:*

Attendance is mandatory. Students may receive excused absences at the professional discretion of the school nurse, the associate director of mental health services, the associate director of college counseling and student engagement, the director of academic affairs, and the executive director of the Indiana Academy. Unexcused absences occur when students miss class without prior approval from the aforementioned designated school officials. Continued absences (both excused and unexcused) from Academy classes increase the likelihood of unsuccessful completion.

Alongside steady attendance, students are expected to maintain consistent healthy habits of decorum, respect, and kindness towards their classmates, instructors, and teaching assistants. When students fail to meet these classroom behavioral standards and academic habits, it is the expectation faculty engage appropriately to bring quick and immediate resolution. When students consistently fail to meet these behavioral standards and academic habits in the classroom, an administrative consequence ladder will be adopted, and recorded, in attempt to administratively address, engage, and rectify ongoing challenges.

*IA Wireless Device Policy:*

Pursuant to Indiana Code 20-26-5-40.7, The Indiana Academy for Science,  
Mathematics and Humanities prohibits student use of wireless communication  
devices for non-instructional purposes in the classroom. As such, any and all  
portable wireless devices, that have the capability to provide voice, messaging,  
or other data communication between two or more parties, must only be used for  
academic purposes directly tied to the classroom activity or related educational  
task. Exceptions to this wireless device policy are eligible through academic  
accommodations, individualized education programs, or with instructor approval  
permitting the use of a wireless device for justification related to health,  
safety, and/or well-being.

The improper use of a wireless device in an active classroom setting is subject  
to disciplinary action including, but not limited to, a verbal warning, temporary

seizure of said device by a school official, an unexcused absence for the class  
in question, written communication to parent/guardian, among other elevated  
consequences for repeated improper use.

*Canvas:*

Reading assignments and handouts will be posted on the class Canvas site. It is imperative that you check this regularly. You will also submit all written work via Canvas.

*Ball State University Benificence Pledge:*

Ball State University aspires to be a university that attracts and retains outstanding faculty, staff, and students. Ball State is committed to ensuring that all members of the campus community are welcome through our practice of valuing the varied experiences and worldviews of the people whom we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse as evident in our Beneficence Pledge. As a reflection of Ball State’s commitment to respect, civil discourse, and the Beneficence Pledge, inclusiveness at the Indiana Academy emerges as one of the priorities of our living and learning community. We strive to exist together respectfully and compassionately, creating an environment where every member can thrive.

*HUMANITIES DIVISION STATEMENT ON AI:*

“The Humanities Division recognizes that artificial intelligence (AI) provides some exciting new tools for academic work. However, AI also poses significant dangers for academic integrity. Passing off as your own any research, words, or ideas which you did not create is plagiarism. That is always the case whether the source is print, internet content, or generated by AI. It is vital to read the policies your individual humanities instructors have regarding AI, and ask them any questions you may have about the use of AI in their course.”

*Disclaimer:*

I reserve the right to make changes to the course calendar at my discretion. I will give notice to the class as soon as possible after making any change.

*Course Calendar:*

Week 1: 8/12 Intro to the Course

8/14 Governance & Representation

**Read: Jacob S. Hacker and Paul Pierson. “Winner-Take-All Politics: Public Policy, Political Organization, and the Precipitous Rise of Top Incomes in the United States.” Politics &Society 38(2) (June 2010): 152-204.**

Week 2: 8/19 Conflicts and Compromises toward Constitution

**Read: Richard V. Reeves. “The Dangerous Separation of the American Upper Middle Class.” Brookings Social Mobility Memos blog, September 3, 2015.**

**Read: Kay Lehman Schlozman, Henry E. Brady, and Sidney Verba. “The Big Tilt: Participatory Inequality in America.” The American Prospect 8(32) (May-June 1997).**

**Read: Benjamin Radcliff and Patricia Davis. “Labor Organization and Electoral Participation in the Industrial Democracies.” American Journal of Political Science 44(1) (2000): 132-41.**

8/21 The Constitution

**Read: Katherine Cramer. “Putting Inequality in its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective.” American Political Science Review 106(3) (August 2012): 517-32.**

Week 3: 8/26 Federalism

**Read: Maureen A. Craig, Julian M. Rucker, and Jennifer Richeson. “Racial and Political Dynamics of an Approaching ‘Majority Minority’ United States.” The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 677 (May 2018): 204-214.**

8/28 Civil Liberties

**Read: Rigby, Elizabeth and Gerald C. Wright. 2013. “Political Parties and Representation of the Poor in the American States.” American Journal of Political Science, 57(3): 552-565.**

Week 4: 9/2 Extended: No Class

9/4 The Bill of Rights Today

**Read: Franko, W. W. (2017). “Understanding Public Perceptions of Growing Economic Inequality.” State Politics & Policy Quarterly.**

Week 5: 9/9 Civil Rights

**Read: Swanstrom, Todd, Peter Dreier, and John Mollenkopf. 2002. “Economic Inequality and Public Policy: The Power of Place.” City & Community, 1 (4): 349-372.**

9/11 Essay #1 Due

Week 6: 9/16 Representation and the Organization of Congress

**Read: Richard Hall and Frank Wayman. “Buying Time: Moneyed Interests and the Mobilization of Bias in Congressional Committees.” American Political Science Review 84(3) (September 1990): 797-820.**

9/18 How a Bill Becomes a Law

**Read: Martin Gilens and Benjamin I. Page. “Testing Theories of American Politics: Elites, Interest Groups, and Average Citizens.” Perspectives on Politics 12(3) (September 2014): 564-81.**

Week 7: 9/23 The Powers of the Presidency

**Read: Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, Theda Skocpol, and Jason Sclar. “When Political Mega-Donors Join Forces: How the Koch Network and the Democracy Alliance Influence Organized U.S. Politics on the Right and Left.” Studies in American Political Development 32(2) (October 2018): 1-39.**

9/25 Presidential Government

**Read: Alexander Hertel-Fernandez, Theda Skocpol, and Daniel Lynch. “Business Associations, Conservative Networks, and the Ongoing Republican War over Medicaid Expansion.” Journal of Health Politics, Policy and Law 41(2) (April 2016): 239-86.**

Week 8: 9/30 How Does Bureaucracy Work?

**Read: Bonica, Adam, McCarty, Nolan, Poole, Keith, and Howard Rosenthal (2013). “Why Hasn’t Democracy Slowed Rising Inequality?” Journal of Economic Perspectives 27(3):103-24.**

10/2 Problems with Bureaucratic Control

**Read: Martin, Paul S. 2003. “Voting’s Rewards: Voter Turnout, Attentive Publics, and Congressional Allocation of Federal Money.” American Journal of Political Science 47 (1): 110-127.**

Week 9: 10/7 Extended: No Class

10/9 Federal Jurisdiction & Judicial Review

**Read: Thomas J. Hayes. 2013. “Responsiveness in an Era of Inequality: The Case of the U.S. Senate.” Political Research Quarterly: 66: 585-599.**

Week 10: 10/14 The Supreme Court in Action

**Read: Grumbach, Jacob M. “Does the American Dream Matter for Members of Congress? Social-Class Backgrounds and Roll-Call Votes.” *Political Research Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (2015): 306–23.**

10/16 **Essay #2 Due**

Week 11: 10/21 Public Opinion

**Read: Peter Dreier and Christopher R. Martin. “How ACORN Was Framed: Political Controversy and Media Agenda Setting.” Perspectives on Politics 8(3) (September 2010): 761-792.**

10/23 The Media

**Read: Jane Waldfogel. “SSN Key Findings: New Measures Reveal the True Impact of America’s Anti-Poverty Programs.” Scholars.org, Scholars Strategy Network, April 2014.**

**Read: Douglas S. Massey. “Residential Segregation is the Linchpin of Racial Stratification.” City and Community 15(1) (March 2016): 4-7.**

**Read: Suzanne Mettler. “SSN Key Findings: How U.S. Higher Education Promotes Inequality and What Can Be Done to Broaden Access and Graduation.” Scholars.org, Scholars Strategy Network, October 2014.**

Week 12: 10/28 Institutions of Elections

**Read: Baumgartner, Frank R., and Beth L. Leech. 2001. “Interest Niches and Policy Bandwagons: Patterns of Interest Group Involvement in National Politics.” Journal of Politics 63 (4): 1191-1213.**

10/30 How Voters Decide

**Read: Longres, John F. 1982. “Minority Groups: An Interest-group Perspective.” Social Work 27 (1): 7-14.**

Week 13: 11/4 Campaigns

**Read: Strolovitch, Dara Z. 2006. “Do Interest Groups Represent the Disadvantaged? Advocacy at the Intersections of Race, Class, and Gender.” Journal of Politics 68 (4): 894-910.**

11/6 Functions of the Parties

**Read: Hill, K. Q. and Leighley, J. E. (1992). The policy consequences of class bias in state electorates. American Journal of Political Science, 36(2):351–365.**

Week 14: 11/11 Party Systems

**Read: Griffin, J. D. and Newman, B. (2005). Are voters better represented? Journal of Politics, 67(4):1206–1227.**

11/13 Groups and Interests

**Read: Allard, Nicholas W. 2008. Lobbying is an honorable profession,” Stanford Law Policy Review 19(1), 23-68.**

Week 15: 11/18 **Essay #3 Due**

11/20 Economic Policy

**Read: Suzanne Mettler and Joe Soss. “The Consequences of Public Policy for Democratic Citizenship: Bridging Policy Studies and Mass Politics.” Perspectives on Politics 2(1) (March 2004): 55-73.**

Week 16: 12/2 Social Policy I

**Read: Andrea Louise Campbell. “SSN Key Findings: How Social Security Encourages Older Americans to be Active Citizens.” Scholars.org, Scholars Strategy Network, May 2012.**

**Read: Alexander Hertel-Fernandez. “Policy Feedback as Political Weapon: Conservative Advocacy and the Demobilization of the Public Sector Movement.” Perspectives on Politics 16(2) (June 2018), 364-379.**

12/4 Social Policy II

**Read: Andrea Louise Campbell. “America the Undertaxed: U.S. Fiscal Policy in Perspective.” Foreign Affairs 91(5) (September-October 2012): 99-112.**

Week 17: 12/9 Who Makes Foreign Policy?

**Read: Richter, B. K., Samphantharak, K., and Timmons, J. F. (2009). Lobbying and taxes. American Journal of Political Science, 53(4):893–909.**

12/11 The Instruments of Foreign Policy

**Read: Faricy, C. (2011). The politics of social policy in america: The causes and effects of indirect versus direct social spending. Journal of Politics, 73(01):74–83.**

Week 18: TBA **Essay #4 Due (Note: This will be due on the day the history and**

**economics courses are scheduled to take their final.)**