

# **POL201H, Introduction to American National Government Spring, 2010**

Class is held MW, 3:35-4:30 in MM108

Instructor: Marsha Matson, Ph.D.

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Office hours: Monday, Wednesday, 1:25-3:25 P.M. and Friday, 11:15-12:05

Note: Dr. Matson checks her e-mail during office hours.

## **Course Description:**

The class provides an overview of the American political system. Topics include democracy and American government, the U.S. Constitution, federalism, civil liberties, civil rights, public opinion, the news media, interest groups, political parties, Congress, the presidency, the courts, and the federal bureaucracy. To introduce the wealth of government materials available online, Richter Library librarian, Chellammal Vaidyanathan, will present her government documents subject guides to the class. Students will write a paper on a topic based on the documents.

## **Learning Objectives:**

1. To understand the democratic and federalist structure of American government;
2. To become familiar with the U.S. Constitution, the foundation of American government;
3. To learn about the history and current status of civil liberties and civil rights in the United States;
4. To gain an understanding of the operation of the branches of American government: Congress, the presidency and bureaucracy, and the judiciary;
5. To explore how interest groups and political parties affect American government and politics;
6. To examine government documents and write a paper on a topic from the documents.
7. To connect class topics to current events.

## Required Reading:

Greenberg, Edward S. and Page, Benjamin I. *The Struggle for Democracy*, latest edition. Please read the assigned chapter before class. Dr. Matson encourages you to read *The New York Times* online daily ([www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)).

## Exams:

Exam 1 - Mon., Feb. 15 = 30 points

Exam 2 - Wed., March 24 = 30 points

Exam 3 - Thurs., May 6 = 30 points

There are three exams, each with 30 multiple-choice questions. Questions are based on class lectures, the textbook, current events discussed in class, videos, and any other material such as articles from *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, or *Miami Herald* that Dr. Matson presents for the class. The third exam is not comprehensive. Exam scores appear on MyUM.

A make-up exam is given only with a university-approved excuse and by permission of Dr. Matson.

## Government Documents Paper: Q and A for Students Due Mon., March 1

### 1. *What is the purpose of paper?*

The paper is on a topic of your choice concerning a controversy in American or Florida government and politics. It must be derived from your research in government documents found on UM's Richter Library website. This paper introduces you to the extensive and excellent resources of your university library while allowing you to explore a topic of interest to you using academic materials.

### 2. *Where do you find the databases?*

On Mon., Feb. 8, Chellammal "Chella" Vaidyanathan, the government documents and political science librarian at Richter Library will give you a presentation at the library on the subject guides and databases. Chella (305-284-6027; [cvaidan@miami.edu](mailto:cvaidan@miami.edu)) has prepared two subject guides containing hundreds of documents on American government <http://libguides.miami.edu/federalgovernmentinformation> and Florida government <http://libguides.miami.edu/floridastatedocuments>

### 3. *How do you obtain your two databases?*

- a. After Chella's presentation, Dr. Matson will assign you three databases, from which you will select one for your paper.
- b. You then pick another database from all the databases in the subject guides.
- c. You write your paper based on material you find in the two databases.

4. *What is in the paper?*

- a. Describe the two databases.
- b. Choose a topic derived from materials in both databases, create a thesis statement, and develop your argument. The topic must be relevant to American or Florida government and must be controversial, that is, it must have at least two sides which you present in your paper.
- c. Give your opinion of the usefulness of each database for your research and your opinion on the topic.
- d. Give a minimum of two citations from each of the two databases: 1 citation from each database = 4 citations in all.

5. *How is the paper graded?*

4 points - Thesis statement and development of the topic

2 points - Use of the databases in the paper

1 points - Your opinion on the databases and your opinion of the topic

1 point - Use of MLA Manuscript style

2 points - Grammar and spelling

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10 points

6. *What are the manuscript requirements?*

The length of the paper is 750 or fewer words (approximately three pages).

You must meet these manuscript style requirements: 12 point font; 1" margins, Times Roman font, double spaced, and MLA style including citations in the text and a Works Cited page.

<http://www.unk.edu/academics/library.aspx?id=14245>

7. *Where can I get help?*

a. Writing the paper: For in-person help on grammar, spelling, writing or MLA manuscript style, make an appointment online or by phone with the university's Writing Center at

<http://www.as.miami.edu/writingcenter/students/fags> Dr. Matson strongly recommends that you go to the Writing Center, as two points of the grade are based on grammar, spelling, and one point is for MLA style. Caution: Good writing is area in which some students lose points in otherwise excellent papers. Don't let this be you!

b. Thesis statement and development: Dr. Matson (305-284-4232, [mmatson@miami.edu](mailto:mmatson@miami.edu), office hours : Monday and Wednesday 1:25-3:25 and

Friday, 11:15-12:05 in Jenkins Hall, Room 314Q. Or see Dr. Matson before or after class or make an appointment.

c. Library help: Chellammal Vaidyanathan (Chella - 305-284-6027; [cvaidan@miami.edu](mailto:cvaidan@miami.edu)).

*8. When and where do I turn the paper in?*

The paper is due Mon., March 1 in class. Turn in a paper copy in class on the date due for grading. Do not turn in an e-mail copy of the paper. Dr. Matson grades only the paper copy, not e-mail. Each day late turning in a paper copy of the paper reduces the grade by one point per day.

*9. How much toward the final grade does the paper count?*

The paper counts 10 points out of the final 100 points.

## Grades:

The score on each exam is based on the number of correct answers from 0-30. At the end of the class, students will have three exam grades with up to 30 points each and one paper grade with up to 10 points. Add the three exam grades and paper to calculate the final grade based on this scale:

A+ =100-97; A =96-94; A- =93-90;

B+ = 89-87; B =86-84; B- = 83-80;

C+ = 79-77; C =76-74; C- = 73-70;

D+ = 69-67; D =66-60;

F = 59 & below

**Extra Credit:** There is no extra credit.

**Attendance:** Dr. Matson does not take attendance. However, because exams are taken primarily from class discussion, it behooves you to attend class in order to do well on the exams.

**Class schedule:**

Mon. 01/20 Syllabus distribution. Discussion of class requirements.

Wed. 01/22 1 Democracy and American Politics

Mon. 01/25 1

Wed. 01/27 2 The Constitution

Fri. 01/29 2

Mon. 02/01 2

Wed. 02/03 3 Federalism

Fri. 02/05 3

**Mon. 02/08 Class presentation by Chellammal Vaidyanathan on government documents in library**

Wed. 02/10 4 The Structural Foundations of American Government and Politics

Fri. 02/12 4

Mon. 02/15 ***First exam, Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4***

Wed. 02/17 5 Public Opinion

Fri. 02/29 5

Mon. 02/22 6 News Media

Wed. 02/24 6

Fri. 02/26 11 Congress

***Mon. 03/01 11 and Government documents paper due***

Wed. 03/03 11

Fri. 03/05 12 Presidency

Mon. 03/08 12

Wed. 03/10 12

Fri. 03/12 13 The Bureaucracy

**M-F 03/15-03/19 Spring Break**

Mon. 03/22 13

***Wed. 03/24 Second exam, Chapters 5, 6, 11, 12, 13***

Fri. 03/26 14 Courts

Mon. 03/29 14

Wed. 03/31 14

Fri. 04/02 15 Civil liberties

Mon. 04/05 15

Wed. 04/07 15

Fri. 04/09 16 Civil rights

Mon. 04/12 16

Wed. 04/14 16

Fri. 04/16 9 Political Parties

Mon. 04/19 9

Wed. 04/21 9

Fri. 04/23 7 Interest groups

Mon. 04/26 7

Wed. 04/28 7

Fri. 04/30 Make-up exams only

***Thurs. 05/06 Third exam, Chpts. 7, 9, 14, 15, 16, 2:00-4:30 in MM108***