Course Syllabus – Spring 2011

Instructor: Peter Kovarik  
Office Hours: By Appointment  
Telephone: 407-247-8757

Classroom: WP Room # 113  
Meeting Time: 2:30 p.m. – 3:45 p.m.  
Tuesday - Thursday  
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I. TEXTBOOK:
Optional: American Government: Study Guide

II. COURSE DESCRIPTION:
US Government

Theory, organization, principles and functions of national government, stressing relationships of individual to all levels of government in political system. This course includes learning activity designed to ensure competence in the basic use of computers.

Pre-requisite/co-requisite: None

Independent critical thinking is a key objective of this class. On a regular basis, you will prepare for class discussions/debates where your active participation will be an essential part of your learning process and your academic evaluation. You will also read and critique newspaper articles; your task will be to separate facts from opinions, and form your own independent point of view based on your knowledge and available facts.

Our weekly current events discussions (following the news briefs) will also help you develop your own ideas about what’s going on the local and the national political scene.

III. COURSE MANAGEMENT GUIDE:

1. Tests and Grading Policy
For Midterm we will complete a class project concerned with protection of our environment and prevention of global warming. You will conduct individual and group research of specific environmental topics and work individually and in teams to prepare your projects. You will present your projects during our ECO Fair on Thursday March 3, from 2:30 -3:45 p.m. at the school Courtyard.
Your work will be evaluated according to the quality of your presentation (visual creativity, organization & clarity of the presented facts) as well as the quality of the research you did for your project. Prior to your presentation, you will submit a well researched comprehensive project outline. The completed project will be worth 50 points. More about ECO Fair in section 5 B..

Final exam is an in-class exam. It will be based on the last two chapters of the textbook (multiple choice). Its value is also 50 points.
Remember: Taking the final exam is mandatory – if you miss the Final you will fail the course.
The final exam will take place on Thursday 4/28 at 1:00 p. m. in our classroom (Rm.113)

2. Article reviews
During the semester you will get two newspaper articles to review. On the due day indicated on the assigned article you will turn in a 2 page critical review consisting of a brief summary of the text and your opinion about the article. To earn the full credit of 20 points you must follow the “Guidelines for writing article review” attached to the Syllabus.  
(There will be 2 article reviews assigned – maximum total: 40 points.)

3. “Critical Thinking” Assignments
Two “Critical Thinking” take-home assays will be assigned. Each essay will be at least two pages long and will each will earn a maximum of 20 points.
In your first Critical Thinking assignment, you will deal with the American presidency. After viewing a documentary on four former presidents, you will do your own research to find out what it takes to be a successful president.

In the second Critical Thinking assignment you will explore our country’s position in the Middle East.

4. Short QUIZZES and other assignments
Most chapters discussed in class will be followed by short in-class QUIZZES. The questions in the quizzes will be based on the material covered in class, lecture notes which I will post on WebCT and the appropriate chapter in your textbook. Each represents maximum 10 points. If you miss a quiz due to absence, you may ask permission to take it during your next day in class but not later.

We will have a number of class debates and discussions. They will be always announced ahead of time and will require preparation. You are encouraged to volunteer as moderator or member of a discussion panel for extra credit. Even if you will not volunteer for extra credit, your participation is essential - when called on to offer your own opinion or answer a question, you will be expected to know the material. If you come unprepared, unable to take part in the discussion, you will be given demerit of 5 points (this will be taken off the total points from which your final semester grade will be calculated).

5. Computer-based learning activity and the Internet – WebCT advantage
This course is characterized as “WebCT enhanced”. All other class work will be posted, submitted and evaluated on Blackboard (WebCT) with the exception of Quizzes, but quiz grades will be regularly posted in GRADES on WebCT (Blackboard). Make sure you know how to navigate WebCT and post your work on-line.

Outside of the classroom, the Blackboard platform (WebCT) will be the principal communication link between me as your instructor and you as the student. However, you are also welcome to send me e-mails through your regular Atlas account.

In addition to taking advantage of WebCT capacity, the school mandates improving skills in the basic use of computers. Our U.S. Government course (POS2041) is designed to include “computer-based" learning activities; these are included in the work needed to complete your papers and are evaluated together with the papers’ content.

Also, the textbook has its own website www.longmanamericangovernment.com. It’s an on-line course companion and contains practice tests, useful website links and addresses that will help you in your work. Visit & use the website often!

A. “Critical Thinking” assignments as discussed in Section II, 3
In both assignments you will research the Web for information and data.

B. ECO Fair class project - Midterm

Florida wants to be a Green State, so let’s help the Governor and our representatives in Tallahassee find new ways (including new laws and regulations) to protect our fragile environment and fight global warming. As concerned citizens, we will investigate areas where change in human behavior and creative political action can be part of the solution.

The class will break into teams which will identify areas suitable for individual action and/or government regulation to eliminate waste and protect our precious resources. While individual students will pick their own topics, conduct their own research, submit individual proposals and prepare final visual presentations, assigned teams will coordinate the topics presentation. We will present our projects on individual display panels in the Courtyard during the ECO Fair and teams will collaborate when necessary to create teams’ panels. When appropriate,
teams will suggest proposal for an action, such as a legislative iniciative, regulation or just a list of steps to deal with a particular problem.

The ECO Fair will take place on **Thursday, March 3**, (from 2:30– 3:45 p.m.) and will be organized mainly by our class. You will present your work (on a display panel) either as an' individual presenter or as part of a group, in this case sharing the panel with your team.

ECO Fair class project will be our ‘midterm exam’ with a maximum of 50 points, on par with the final exam.

The total of maximum 50 points include will include: 5 points for a brief outline & project title; 25 points for detailed summary & bibliography, 20 points for presentation. Only when all stages of your project are submitted by their respective due-dates you will qualify for full credit of 50 points for a complete midterm project.

You can **improve your writing skills**, learn to organize and express your thoughts more clearly and improve quality of your papers with the friendly & effective help from the **Student Communications Assistance Center!** (Rm.136, phone 407-582-6820). I want you to succeed in our class, so I strongly recommend this excellent and friendly service!

IV. **Attendance and Deportment:** I expect you to be on time to **all** class meetings and to attend **every** class. I will take roll at the beginning of every class meeting.

- **Tardiness:** Tardiness is disruptive, inconsiderate and unacceptable. Plan ahead to be at class on time. **Three tardies (late arrival by 30 min. or more) equal one absence.** These may lead to your withdrawal from the course.
- Make plans to stay for the whole class meeting. Don't get up in the middle of class to get a drink, make a phone call, etc.
- After missing **three** class meetings, you will be sent an **Excessive Absence notice and/or my personal reminder.**
- After **five** absences, regardless of the reasons, your grade will be lowered by one grade.
- After **six** absences you will be withdrawn from the class.
- Turn off all cell phones and pagers during class. Repeated use of cell phones will lead to your ejection from class.
- Use of computers in class is limited for individual presentations only. Keep your laptops off and closed during class.

V. **LATE WORK**
On-time delivered assignments and quality preparation (knowledge of the material assigned for class discussions/debates) are essential for your effective learning in this class. Only those assignments submitted by the due day will earn full credit; late submissions will be penalized by deducting 10% from the credit points. The cut-off for accepting any late assignment is two weeks from the due-date. You will also lose your assignment credit if you didn’t resubmit your paper (when sent back to you for corrections) within two weeks past due-date.

Make sure all you assignments are submitted as attachments, do not post them in the message box!!

**NOTE:** If you missed a Quiz, you may take it individually next class, but not later (of the same subject, but not necessarily identical). You will help protecting your good grade standing by volunteering for special assignments which will earn you extra credit points. Make sure you wouldn’t miss this chance of making up for lost points by volunteering too late in the semester!

**ORGANIZATION** is an essential tool of learning: I expect you to take notes during lectures and presentations. Make sure you come to class equipped with a writing pad or loose paper (and yes, a pen/pencil), then keep your notes together with other class papers (syllabus, handouts, assignments, etc. in a sturdy folder (best bet is a three-ring binder/notebook). Use of laptops in class is by special permission only.

**Plagiarism:** Write your own stuff. I expect that that ideas presented in your writing assignments were authored by you and that all outside sources have been cited properly. I am very allergic to plagiarism; in fact, have a zero tolerance for it. Any assignment that shows signs of plagiarism will receive a grade of zero. Plagiarism can also result in earning an "F" in the course and/or being withdrawn from the course with “F”.

VI. **WITHDRAWAL POLICY**
The last withdrawal date to receive “W” is 3/25
If you miss the final exam you will fail the class.
VII. GRADES

90% - 100% = A
80% - 89% = B
70% - 79% = C
60% - 69% = D
less than 60% = F

NO CHEATING WILL BE TOLERATED

(For further details on ACADEMIC HONESTY see the college STUDENT HANDBOOK)

With the presently listed assignments, there will be a total of 295 points possible without any extra credit. To get an “A” you need to earn at least 90% of the 295 points, i.e. 266 points. Conversely, you failed if you had only 59% or less of the 295 points, i.e. 175 points or less.

Midterm ECO Fair project 50 pts.; Final exam: 50 pts.; 10 quizzes: 100 pts.; two Article Reviews: 40pts.; two Critical Thinking essays: 40 pts.; Constitution Questions/Amendments: 5 pts.; Civil Rights Movements compared: 10 pts.. In case more graded assignments were added, the same grading scale will still apply.

VIII. EXTRA CREDIT

Sign up for the class News Bureau as News Correspondent. As a Correspondent you will follow current events as reported by public media (newspapers, radio/TV, Internet) and will select one or two important news items to be presented in each class. You will pass a short summary of these news items to your Bureau Chief. The Bureau Chief will select the most newsworthy items (from collected contributions) and presents them to class during a News Brief. (At the top of Tuesday class.) You will get credit for your contribution regardless whether your news items were or were not selected by the Chief. Correspondents may earn up to 10 extra points, the Bureau Chief up to 20 points depending on the quality and consistency of their work. Correspondents select three Bureau Chiefs who will be reporting on three news areas: local/state; national, international. It is the responsibility of the Bureau Chiefs to keep an updated log of Correspondents’ contributions. Without presenting a well-kept log of Correspondents work at the end of semester, Chiefs will not get a full credit for their own work. Only those correspondents who will be submitting their news items regularly will earn the full extra point credit (missed contributions will be deducted).

Spring 2011 COURSE SCHEDULE

January 11 Introduction.: Political Trivia Class Contest. Syllabus.
Introduction Questionnaire.
Assigned: Quiz 1 (Syllabus). Read and understand Syllabus.
Read Chapter 1; get organized for class, volunteer for News Bureau!

January 13 Quiz 1 (Syllabus).
Class News Bureau established. Introduction to “Government and its purpose”.
Assigned: Read Chapter 1, study lecture notes posted on-line (Blackboard)

January 18 What’s New in the World & Beyond – class News Brief #1
US Government, Political Culture & Ideology – lecture & discussion..
Assigned: prepare for Quiz 2 (Government, Political Culture & Ideology)

January 20 Quiz 2 (Government, Political Culture & Ideology)
Project ECO Fair introduced & discussed
Assigned: Choose a topic for your project, wrote a brief outline. (Due: 1/27)
Assigned: Article review #1 (Due 1/25)

January 25 News Brief #2 Article review #1 submitted..
US Constitution – lecture & e-Video
Assigned: Write 5 questions you want to ask Founding Fathers about the Constitution. Prepare to debate amendments to the Constitution in class debate 1/27.

January 27  
ECO Fair individual project title & brief outline submitted.  
Panel of volunteer Founding Fathers & Mothers will answer questions from students (5 Extra credits offered for excellent work).  
Assigned: Quiz 3 (US Constitution)

February 1  
News Brief #3 Quiz 3 (US Constitution)  
ECO Fair individual projects finalized.  
Assigned: Quiz 4 on Federalism, State government.

February 3  
Quiz 4 (Federalism, State government)  
Library staff presentation on academic research & writing papers.  
ECO Fair Project discussed, teams & individual students present progress reports.  
Assigned: Prepare a well researched, detailed & complete summary of your ECO Fair project including complete bibliography (list of all your sources). Submit by 2/17.  
Assigned: Article review #2 (Due: 2/8)

February 8  
News Brief #4 Article review #2 submitted  
Civil Liberties, Bill of Rights. E-Video, discussion.  
Assigned: Quiz 5 (Civil Liberties, Bill of Rights)

February 10  
Quiz 5 (Civil Liberties, Bill of Rights)  
Civil Rights: Selma 1964- documentary video, discussion.  
Assigned: Research & write a paper discussing your position on similarities/differences between the gay rights movement of today and the civil rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. (Due 2/15)

February 15  
News Brief #5; Civil rights & Gay rights paper submitted  
US Congress: Lecture, e-Video, discussion.  
Assigned: Quiz 6 (US Congress)

February 17  
Quiz 6 (US Congress)  
ECO Fair individual projects papers submitted: detailed summary of findings with a complete bibliography.  
US President: Lecture – discussion.  
Assigned: Quiz 7 (US President)

February 22  
News Brief # 6. Quiz 7 (U.S. President)  
Documentary video: Four U.S. Presidents  
Assigned: Critical Thinking #1: U.S. President – due: 10/24  
Reminder: Prepare for presenting your ECO Fair project on March 3 at the Courtyard!
February 24  Critical Thinking # 1 (US president) submitted
US Court System: Lecture, discussion;
Assigned: Quiz 8 (US Courts)

March 1  News Brief #7
Quiz 8 (US Courts)
Preparations for ECO Fair at the WP VCC Courtyard.

March 3   **ECO Fair in the Courtyard, presentation of individual and group projects 2:30 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.**

March 15  News Brief #8
Video: 20 years old in Middle East – take notes for your assignment!
Assigned: Critical Thinking #2: “US and the Middle East” due 3/22

March 17   Orange County Courthouse visit: class will meet at 2:30 at the Lobby

March 22  News Brief #9; Critical Thinking #2 (US & the Middle East) submitted
Political Parties. Lecture, video, discussion.
Assigned: Quiz 9 (Political Parties)

March 24  Quiz 9 (Political Parties)
Public Policy – Domestic Policy, Social Issues
Video: “Wal-Mart”
Assigned: Prepare for class discussion on Social Policy (read Ch.17 pp.609-626)

March 29  News Brief # 10
Class debate on Social Policy (Poverty & welfare policy in U.S.)

March 31  Video: Sicko (1st part)

April 5  News Brief #11
Video: Sicko (2nd part)

April 7  Political Economy in U.S. (US economic policy); Lecture-discussion.
Assigned: Quiz 10 (Political Economy)

April 12  News Brief #12
Quiz 10 (Political Economy)
Video: The Other Side of Outsourcing (Globalization)

April 14  USA and the World. US Foreign Policy: Lecture – discussion
Assigned: Prepare for class debate on US foreign policy on 4/19
(Extra points can be earned by volunteer debate leaders)

April 19  News Brief # 13 Bureau Chiefs submit their Correspondents’ logs
America’s Place in the Changing World - class debate

April 21   Prepare for Final Exam (Chapters 17, 18 & 19)

April 26  Final Exam (10:00 a.m. Rm.112)
Class will not meet on: March 7 - March 11 (Spring Break).

Important: To view assigned videos: go to VCC home page, in Quick Links click on Libraries, then Winter Park Campus, then Online Databases & Articles, then FMG on Demand (Films Media Group), than on Connect to Database & type the title of the video in the Search box.

USEFUL RESOURCES:

**National Public Radio (WFME 90.7 FM)**
24 hrs news & in-depth reporting and commentary.

**National Public TV (PBS, Channel 24, WFME TV)**
Headline news and in-depth reporting, features and commentary in:
“PBS News Hour”, Monday through Friday from 7-8 p.m., repeated at 12:00 p.m.
“Washington Week in Review” every Friday at 8:00 p.m. (panel discussion of the week in politics)

**Websites:**

VALENCIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT CORE COMPETENCIES:
Valencia faculty has defined the following four basic interrelated competencies that prepare you to become a successful member of the world community:

*Think, Value, Communicate, Act.*

**Think clearly, critically and creatively.**
**Evaluate your own and others’ values from individual, cultural and global perspectives.**

**Communicate by reading, listening, writing and speaking effectively.**

**Act purposefully, reflectively and responsibly.**
**Understand and use quantitative information.**

In this course, through classroom lecture and discussion, group work, and other learning activities, you will further develop your mastery of these important competencies.

The course section devoted to exploring connections between political ideas and political action will implement some of the elements of learner-centered teaching paradigm.

I ask you to take into consideration also the following:
Students with disabilities who qualify for academic accommodations must provide a letter from the Office for Students with disabilities (OSD) and discuss specific needs with the professor, preferably during the first two weeks of class. The Office for

Students with disabilities determines accommodations based on appropriate documentation of disabilities (Winter Park Campus, Room 203, Phone: 407/ 582-6887).

Please make note of evacuation route from your Valencia classroom in case of an emergency. Interpret all audible alarms as valid and act accordingly. *This syllabus may be subject to change*
Appendix to Course Syllabus

Guidelines for writing Article Reviews

Every article review consists of two basic parts: the article summary and your opinion/critique.

The First part is a summary of the article’s facts & arguments. Its purpose is to give the reader, in a compressed form, all the necessary information about the article’s subject, its key arguments and facts. You have to assume that your reader never read the article so you need to explain what it is about. Never start your review by offering your opinion and critique - nobody would know what you are talking about! So, remember to keep the horse (summary) in front of the wagon (your opinion), not the other way around!

The second part of your paper is the critical one, here you will write your opinion, your critique. You will start the first part, the summary, with a “thesis”. In a sentence or two, the thesis will reveal the article’s key idea.

Here is what you need to do:
Read the whole article; think about it for a minute. Ask yourself: did I really understand what it is about? If you are not sure, read it again. Did you get its key message, idea; can you put it in a sentence or two? Than do so!

In the First Part, the Summary:
- Start with writing down the thesis of the article - the main idea, ‘message’ of the article. It could just one or two sentences long. Keep the thesis in a separate paragraph. (Pay attention to the title of the article and/or its subtitle - most likely they will give you a good clue as to what the article is about, often spelling out the thesis itself.
- Next, summarize the article’s content. This has to be a short, yet well developed summary.
- If too many issues were mentioned, focus on one or two most important. Identify key facts/data. If the article is an opinion piece, summarize the author’s argument(s). Put different ideas, arguments, issues, in separate paragraphs - this way your writing will be more effective!

In the Second part of your paper you may finally sink your teeth into the article, express your opinion about the subject matter, and see how the issue was treated by the writer. In your critique, you are looking for the following:
- Did you find the issue/s was well explained, was the article full of quality info & hard facts or just a lot of fluff?
- According to your opinion, did the article’s writer miss something important or did he leave out something important deliberately? Did you find some factual errors?
- Did the author support his arguments/opinions well by facts or was he unreasonably biased?
- How do you feel about the subject yourself?

NOTE: In case you are writing about OPINION ARTICLE, (column commentary, editorial, etc.), don’t blame the author for his biased attitude, he is entitled and expected to express his own point of view. After summarizing her argument (no matter how strange it might seem to you) you may offer your own point of view!
Important: At the end of your piece, identify at least two new for you terms or concepts you’ve come across in the article. Look up their definition/explanation and write it down at the end of your review. Examples:

- **Pollyanna-ish:** excessively optimistic, trusting
- **Poverty line:** officially-set income standard

NOTE: writing down and looking up new terms is required; you will lose points if you don’t!

Points schedule: Thesis 4, Summary 7, Opinion 7, New words 2. Maximum total: 20 points

**Length of Article Review:** Minimum 2 pages double-spaced. Article reviews are always due next class. If you miss the deadline, you will automatically lose 10% of the Article Review credit value. No assignments will be accepted after seven days past the due date. Remember: you need to break your writing into separate paragraphs according to the structure of the paper and logic of your writing; only this way you will achieve the necessary effect (and full credit).