

# **POLS 101-OLA: AMERICAN NATIONAL GOVERNMENT**

Summer 2014, Term I

Online through Lander University Blackboard

---

Professor: Dr. Lucas McMillan  
Office: Carnell Learning Center M63

Phone: 864-388-8275  
E-mail: [smcmillan@lander.edu](mailto:smcmillan@lander.edu)

*E-mail is the preferred way to reach me, and I will respond quickly. Students are welcome to leave messages for me on my office phone, but I may not be as quick to return them. I am happy to make appointments to speak with students over the phone.*



**COURSE DESCRIPTION:** This course is a study of national governmental institutions with emphasis on the *Constitution*, the functions of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, civil liberties, and the role of the electorate and news media in American politics.

*Catalog Description:* An introductory study of major topics in American politics including political parties, elections, and public opinion.

## **RATIONALE FOR THE COURSE**

You may be enrolled in this course for one of several reasons:

- to complete the 3 hour General Education requirement in political economy
- as a course for your major or minor in political science
- as an elective course so you may learn about American politics, engage as a citizen, and/or develop your personal orientation toward politics.

As a course that is part of Lander's General Education program, this class will:

- provide you with a University-level knowledge base in American government and politics
- help you analyze and apply information related to American government and politics
- help you improve your ability to communicate effectively and appropriately.

A competent understanding of the U.S. political system is crucial since public policy decisions have such enormous impacts on our lives as citizens and/or residents. "Life skills" such as oral communication, writing, reading and critical thinking skills will be useful to students in future endeavors such as additional courses, jobs, or postgraduate education.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES:**

From this course, students should develop:

- an understanding of the origins, structures, and values of American government and politics
- a knowledge of theoretical perspectives of the human condition based upon theories and principles of political science
- a knowledge of basic principles of past and present relationships within society based on their understanding of the political process and the creation of public policy
- basic skills of political analysis
- improved skills in various forms of communication, reading, and critical thinking

## LANDER UNIVERSITY POLICIES

---

### **STUDENTS' CLASSROOM RESPONSIBILITIES:**

All Lander students will...

- read and follow their professors' syllabi, including course guidelines and procedures, to be prepared for class
- check their Lander e-mail accounts daily and check Blackboard daily for class announcements, assignments, etc.
- be aware of each professor's absence and tardy policies
- communicate concerns about classes to their professors, including asking for clarification if the student does not understand an assignment or expectations
- be courteous to peers, professors, and the learning environment, avoiding the following disruptive classroom behaviors: sleeping, inappropriate talking, inappropriate laptop use, rudeness, doing homework for other classes, text messaging, or answering cell phones
- not give, use, or receive unauthorized aid in academic activities because these are serious violations of academic integrity
- know and accept the consequences of committing plagiarism, which could include receiving a failing assignment grade, failing the course, or being suspended from the University.

**CELL PHONE POLICY:** Cell Phones are to be turned off before entering the class and shall remain off for the duration of the class. If there is an extenuating circumstance which requires the cell phone to be on during a class, the student must obtain permission prior to the class from the instructor to leave the phone on vibrate. Cell phones are not to be visible or used at any time, especially during quizzes or exams. Each instructor reserves the right to further restrict use of cell phones in class and to determine the consequences of not following this policy.

**ACADEMIC HONOR CODE AND PLAGIARISM:** Lander University is reliant upon all members of its academic community to maintain proper standards of honesty. You are responsible for understanding the possible consequences of violating Lander's Academic Honor Code. I will strongly uphold the Academic Honor Code and any evidence of academic dishonesty or plagiarism will result in my pursuit of the *strongest* punishment—i.e. failing the course—under the guidelines explained in the [Lander University Student Handbook](#).

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** If you have now or develop during this semester a physical or learning disability and you want me to make reasonable accommodations for that, you must contact the Lander University [Student Wellness Center](#) at 388-8885 or [studentwellness@lander.edu](mailto:studentwellness@lander.edu). Once the Wellness Center has received appropriate documentation, they will inform your instructors. *Students with documented disabilities are required to talk with the instructor to review their requests for accommodation so that both parties can be clear.*

**INCLEMENT WEATHER:** I encourage you not to risk traveling to campus if weather conditions are hazardous and prevent safe travel. If you miss a class due to travel conditions and the University is not closed you are responsible for all material covered in class during your absence. Whenever classes are canceled, Lander will inform local TV and radio stations. In addition information will be posted at the [Lander website](#). A recorded message will also be provided at 864-388-8000.

## SPECIFIC COURSE INFORMATION

---

### REQUIRED READINGS

- O'Connor, Karen, Larry J. Sabato, and Alixandra B. Yanus. 2009. *Essentials of American Government: Roots and Reform*. 9th ed. New York: Pearson/Longman.  
[later editions of the book are very useful, but the minimum is the 2009 book]
- All assigned articles and essays posted on Lander Blackboard or sent to students' e-mail accounts.

*The textbook's 2009 edition is listed above because the content has not significantly changed. Later editions have some updates in some chapters.*

### GRADING

▪ Internet Research Assignment and Quizzes	15% (each counts 3%)
▪ Class Participation (Online Discussions)	15%
▪ Short Paper	20%
▪ Mid-Term Exam	20%
▪ Final Exam	30%

Students are graded on the level of understanding they demonstrate. In all written assignments students should answer questions completely, providing facts and evidence, and constructing sound arguments that provide analysis and show critical thinking. Below is a breakdown of grades by percentage of points earned on assignments:

▪ <b>A</b>	90-100%	excellent understanding
▪ <b>B</b>	80-89%	good understanding
▪ <b>C</b>	70-79%	satisfactory understanding
▪ <b>D</b>	60-69%	poor understanding
▪ <b>F</b>	below 60%	marginal understanding

An **Internet research assignment** asks students to answer questions using official U.S. government websites to become more familiar with what parts of the U.S. government do and who serves as top-level officials. This assignment is meant to stimulate students' interest in using the Internet as a research tool. **\*\*Posted in the Assignments toolbar on Blackboard.**

**Four online quizzes** will be given about once a week to assess how well students are grasping major course topics. They will usually consist of five questions covering main topics from assigned readings for the week or previous class material. If a student misses the opportunity to take an online quiz, a grade of zero is given. A fifth quiz will be given to replace the student's lowest grade on Quizzes 1-4. **\*\*Posted through the Quizzes & Tests toolbar on Blackboard.**

In a **short paper** (4 to 5 double-spaced pages), students are asked to respond to President Barack Obama's 2014 State of the Union address. The task is to make an argument for the nation's most important problem (using news articles, books and journals as evidence) and evaluate whether President Obama adequately discussed this problem during his 2013 address to the Congress. All papers should be (1) typed in double-spaced format (2) have 1 inch margins (3) use a 12 point font (4) use page numbers and (5) cite all sources in a bibliography and in the text. Papers must be written originally and exclusively for this class and those not citing sources in a bibliography *and* providing in-text citations will lose two letter grades. *Students who plagiarize will fail this course.* **\*\*Posted in the Assignments toolbar on Blackboard.**

A **mid-term exam** and a **final exam** will consist of some multiple-choice questions, short answer questions, and essay-style questions covering course material. Exams will be cumulative and should display a mastery of information and concepts from assigned readings and class discussions. All students are required to take the Final Exam. **\*\*Posted in the Quizzes & Tests toolbar in Blackboard.**

### **CLASS PARTICIPATION & COURSE EXPECTATIONS:**

Students are expected to complete all assigned readings and participate in online class discussions at least *twice each week*. Since this is an online class, it is vital that students actively engage in online class discussions because it will help you (and others) better understand course material. Participation in these online discussions also counts 15% of the final grade.

The professor provides **narrated PowerPoint slides** for each chapter (available from the Course Information page on Blackboard) so that students can have a way to organize course material, hear in-depth explanations of key course concepts, and are provided with relevant examples (either historical, contemporary or hypothetical) about how the course relates to American politics. Since slides are narrated, files are large and can take some time to download, so students should plan accordingly.

Students are expected to keep up with major current events in American politics. Learn about national politics by reading newspapers such as *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times*. Other sources of news are encouraged such as (a) watching an evening news program, (b) reading news magazines in print or online, and (c) listening to National Public Radio. I will occasionally send e-mails to students' accounts with announcements or reminders about assignments. Therefore, students should check their Lander e-mail accounts *daily*.

### **ATTENDANCE**

- Students are expected to look at all class materials on Blackboard (monitored by the professor) and actively participate in online discussions ***at least twice each week***. Students are responsible for all coursework—PowerPoint presentations, announcements, and assignments whether actively participating in the class *or not*.
- After not participating in one week of class, a student's final grade will be lowered five points per subsequent participation absence.

### **LATE POLICY & MAKE-UP ASSIGNMENTS:**

- Students will be allowed to take make-up exams or turn in assignments late without penalty *only* in cases of extraordinary circumstances such as an illness or family emergency. Students should make every effort to inform the professor about such circumstances *before* the day of the scheduled exam or when assignment deadline.
- In these causes, the burden of proof rests with the student, and the decision to give a make-up exam is within the professor's discretion.
- Written assignments must be e-mailed to the professor.
- Assignments turned in after the deadline (without a prior approved excuse from the professor) will receive a zero.

### **MY TEACHING PHILOSOPHY**

American politics is a fascinating subject constantly in the news, but not always adequately understood. An appreciation for its history and knowledge about the actors and processes involved will build greater understanding for what politics is and how it works. I seek to create an environment in which students will rigorously examine the readings and apply current events to the topics we consider. While reading, students should ask themselves these questions:

- *What are the major themes or purposes of this writing?*
- *What is the argument and how compelling is it?*
- *What relevant historical events and concepts apply? How can current events relate?*

### **IMPORTANT DATES TO REMEMBER**

- |                                    |                                    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| ▪ Online Quizzes                   | Weekly, except during test weeks   |
| ▪ Internet research assignment due | Tuesday, May 27 at 12 midnight     |
| ▪ Mid-Term Exam                    | Tuesday, June 3, 8:30-10:00pm      |
| ▪ Short Paper due                  | Wednesday, June 11, at 12 midnight |
| ▪ Final Exam                       | Thursday, June 26, 8:30-10:30pm    |
- 

### **COURSE SCHEDULE\***

(BB) = posted on Lander Blackboard

*\*Subject to change with prior notice by the professor.*

*Pages listed are from the textbook's 2009 edition. Newer editions have similar chapter titles.*

## **PART I: FOUNDATIONS OF GOVERNMENT**

### **Week 1: Course Introduction; America's Founding & The U.S. Constitution**

*Monday, May 19– Friday, May 23*

Course Introduction

Chapter 1: The Political Landscape, pp. 1-22

Appendix I: The Declaration of Independence, pp. 436-437

*What is politics? What are government's functions? Why does politics matter? Types of government; ideas from Hobbes & Locke; principles of representative democracy; American political culture & characteristics; current attitudes about politics*

Chapter 2: The Constitution, pp. 24-50

*The Constitution of the United States* (annotated), pp. 52-71

Appendix II: *Federalist No. 10*, pp. 438-440

Appendix III: *Federalist No. 51*, pp. 441-442

*The Articles of Confederation; Philadelphia convention & making of the Constitution; basic principles of the Constitution; articles, clauses to remember; Ratification and Federalists vs. Anti-Federalists essays' arguments; The Bill of Rights; methods of amending the Constitution*

**Take Quiz 1 between May 22 – 25**

### **Week 2: American Federalism, Civil Rights and Civil Liberties**

*Monday, May 26 – Friday, May 30*

***Internet Research Assignment due on Tuesday, May 27 at 12 midnight***

Chapter 3—Federalism, pp. 82-106

*The roots of federalism; natl. & state powers; rise of the natl. government & history of U.S. federalism; important Supreme Court cases; models of federalism; 20th century federalism; constitutional, political & fiscal dimensions of federalism*

## Chapter 4—Civil Liberties, pp. 108-138

*The Bill of Rights & doctrine of incorporation; 1st Amendment guarantees—religious freedom, freedom of speech, press & assembly; tests of freedom; 2nd amendment; rights of criminals; fundamentals of American criminal justice; right to privacy?*

## Chapter 5—Civil Rights, pp. 140-168

## Liberalism vs. Conservatism Ideology Sheet (BB)

*History of American civil rights; important Supreme Court cases; Civil rights movement; Women's rights movement; Constitutional standards for review; conservatism vs. liberalism and American political ideologies*

Bob Barr, "Presidential Snooping Damages the Nation" *Time*, Jan. 9, 2006. p. 34. (BB)

Charles Krauthammer, "How do You Think we Catch the Bad Guys?" *Time*, Jan.

9, 2006. p. 35. (BB)

Ellen Nakashima, "Verizon Providing All Call Records to U.S. Under Court Order." *The Washington Post*, June 3, 2013. [[Web](#)] (BB)

Charles Krauthammer, "A Ban We Don't (Yet) Need" *The Washington Post*, June 9, 2006. [[Web](#)] (BB)

*Civil rights and civil liberties online discussion & debate on relevant topics*

Take **Quiz 2** between May 29 – June 1

**Mid-Term Exam on Tuesday, June 3 from 8:30 to 10:00pm**

## **PART II: INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT AND THE MEDIA**

### **Week 3: The U.S. Congress and Presidency**

*Monday, June 2 – Friday, June 6*

## Chapter 6—Congress, pp. 170-195

*Constitutional powers of Congress; differences b/t the House & Senate; Congressional structure—leadership, committee system & staff in House and Senate; How a bill becomes law; Congressional procedures; Congress & the executive branch*

## Chapter 7—Presidency, pp. 196-218

## Appendix IV: Presidents, 1789-2005, pp. 443-445

*President's roles; presidential power: constitutional & informal powers; the Cabinet; White House staff & Executive Office of the President; Vice President & succession; presidential veto; Executive-Congressional relations; presidential public opinion*

The Colbert Report. "[Discussion of the Authorization of the Use of Military Force \(AUMF\) \[passed in 2001\] given President Obama's 2013 speech.](#)" Aired May 23, 2013.

*Executive-Congressional relations; war powers; presidential power*



**Week 4: The Bureaucracy, Judiciary, and News Media**

Monday, June 9 – Friday, June 13

Chapter 8—The Executive Branch and the Federal Bureaucracy, pp. 220-242

*Fifth branch of government? characteristics of bureaucracies; civil service history & reforms; types of bureaucracies; issue networks; iron triangles/capture theory vs. pluralist theory; making policy; bureaucratic accountability & responsiveness*

Chapter 9—The Judiciary, pp. 244-274

Selected Supreme Court Cases, pp. 446-453

Adam Liptak, “How Activist is the Supreme Court?” *The New York Times*, Oct. 13, 2013.

[[Web](#)] and (BB) [see the graphic [here](#)]

*Judicial review; state & local courts; federal court system—district courts, courts of appeal, selection of judges; what the courts do? who are federal judges?; Supreme Court at work; judicial philosophy & decision-making; checks on judicial power; debate about prisoners in Guantanamo Bay and activist judges*

Chapter 10—Public Opinion and the News Media, pp. 276-311

David S. Broder, “Tension Over Press Leaks” *The Washington Post*, April 27, 2006. (BB)

Nicholas D. Kristof, “Mr. Bush, Take a Look at MTV” *The New York Times*, April 17, 2005. (BB)

*Measuring public opinion; political socialization—agents & processes; types of polls and their shortcomings; political participation—motives, forms, impact; Media as the fourth branch of govt.? roles of the media; media bias; government regulation of electronic media; changes in sources; media monopolies? journalists, their sources & leaks*

**Short Paper due on Wednesday, June 11 at 12 midnight**

**Take Quiz 3 between June 12 – 15**

### PART III: CAMPAIGNS, ELECTIONS, & POLICYMAKING

**Week 5: Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Elections**

Monday, June 16 – Friday, June 20

Chapter 11—Political Parties and Interest Groups, pp. 312-343

*Political parties—what they do; two-party system; third parties; parties in the past, present & future; party ID; what do parties do? changing roles of parties  
Interest groups, characteristics and major types of interest groups; what interest groups do; PACs; review of capture theory vs. pluralist theory*

Chapter 12—Campaigns, Elections and Voting, pp. 344-381

*Voting requirements over time; running for president & the nomination process; polls reconsidered; the Electoral College, its problems & possible reforms; Congressional elections & incumbency advantages; Who votes? why is turnout so low? patterns in vote choice; campaign finance & recent reforms; sources of funds; presidential elections*

John Harwood, “Dissent Festers in States That Obama Forgot.” *The New York Times*, June 20, 2013. A18. [[Web](#)] (BB)

Maureen Dowd, "Brace Yourself for Hillary and Jeb." *The New York Times*, March 2, 2014. SR1. [[Web](#)] (BB)

*How the Electoral College determines presidential campaign travel; dynasties in American politics*

**Take Quiz 4 between June 19 – 22**

**Week 6: The Policy-Making Process; Final Exam**

*Monday, June 23 – Wednesday, June 25*

Chapter 13—Social and Economic Policy, pp. 382-390

*Stages of the policy-making process*

**FINAL EXAM**

***Thursday, June 26 from 8:30-10:30pm***