Dear Instructor,

The American politics faculty at NAU has secured First Year Learning Initiative (FYLI) certification for POS 110 (American Politics). This process requires that all instructors for the course abide by a common set of course policies and pedagogical methods to improve student success and maximize their learning experience, particularly in their first year at NAU. A majority of the American politics faculty have met over the past year to decide on how all course sections of POS 110 should be generally structured to achieve FYLI standards, while ensuring that all instructors have the independence to do their jobs as they best see fit.

In order to ensure that our department remains FYLI compliant for POS 110, below is a working document (called a *syllabus of practice*) that details the FYLI requirements and recommendations on various aspects of course design (i.e., standardizing course content, student requirements, and grading policies).

Because this is a working document and we are a department that prides itself on collaboration cooperation, you are encouraged to provide the FYLI coordinator with any feedback that could improve our ability to maximize student learning and success.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the FYLI coordinator for POS 110.

**FYLI-Certified American Politics (POS 110)**

**Syllabus of Practice**

**Course Content for POS 110**

The American politics faculty recommends that all POS 110 courses should cover a minimum of thirteen core topics in American politics (see the table below). These topics are also recommended to be organized into three substantive areas: 1) Ideas and Rights, 2) Institutions and Political Actors, and 3) Politics and Political Behavior. However, it should be noted that instructors are free to include (or spend more time on) topics that align with their expertise and interests – even if they are not listed in the table below. Instructors are also free to reorganize the order in which the topics are covered in the course.

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**Course Text**

The American politics faculty recommends that POS 110 instructors use *We The People* (Ginsberg et al. 2015) as the core textbook for the course. The major reasons for choosing this
textbook include its affordability, the free access to online resources such as videos, websites, and news articles for all students, and the accessibility and practicality of the written content about the design and process of American politics. However, instructors are free to assign additional texts as they see fit.

**Learning Outcomes**

Although instructors can use their discretion as to what learning outcomes they would like to focus on, we recommend the following:

- Students should become familiar with the core structures and institutions of American national government.
- Students should understand the fundamental process for *who gets what, when, and how* in American politics.
- Students should identify & critically evaluate the major historical and contemporary conflicts in American politics.
- Students should develop an understanding for the role that citizens play in American democracy.

**Class Requirements & Student Assessments**

FYLI certification is intended to increase the rigor of the course and improve student learning, time management, and success. The American politics faculty agreed that to achieve these outcomes, there are four major requirements for the course including 1) Attendance, 2) Online Quizzes, 3) In-Class Exams, and 4) Take-home Web Assignments.

*Attendance.* Instructors for FYLI certified courses are required to take daily class attendance and use the GPS notification system to communicate with students who are exhibiting poor attendance. The American politics faculty recommends that this course requirement be worth 10 percent of students’ final grade. Instructors can record attendance in any way they deem effective (seating charts, sign-in sheets, roll-call). Peer TAs can implement methods preferred by instructors. Additionally, instructors have discretion to determine exactly how and factor student attendance into students’ final grade (i.e., number of absences, total days present, etc.) However, instructors should pay particular attention to student attendance during the *first three weeks of instruction.* This will not only help identify students at risk of failing the course, but also help reduce the DFW rates across the POS 110 sections. Although instructors have the discretion to deal with students who add the class late in the semester, students with poor attendance during the first three weeks of instruction should be notified as soon as possible using the GPS notification system. Additionally, the administrative drop policy should be adhered to if students fail to attend classes in the first and second weeks of instruction. Before this policy is administered, instructors are encouraged to communicate to students about being dropped before the deadline. Instructors who experience any student attendance issues should notify the Dean of Students at NAU. The Office of Student Affairs will intervene if necessary and help instructors determine the best course of action to resolve attendance issues.

*Student Assessments:* For each of the three substantive areas (Ideas, Institutions, and Behavior), students are required to complete at least one quiz, one web assignment, and one exam. This is
intended for students to keep apace with their assigned readings and scaffold their knowledge over time. Additionally, instructors should note that FYLI certified courses require that student performance be assessed early in the semester (2nd/3rd week of instruction). This course will assess student performance in this time period using two methods: an online quiz and a take-home web assignment. If students do not exhibit satisfactory performance (passing grades) early in the semester, instructors are required to intervene ASAP by notifying students via GPS and scheduling a meeting with Peer TA and/or Instructor to determine the best course of action for underperforming students to ultimately succeed in the course.

**Online Quizzes.** To be FYLI compliant, this course requires frequent, low-stakes assessments of student performance. POS 110 students will be assessed on their ability to engage in critical reading by taking five prescheduled online quizzes throughout the semester. The American politics faculty has agreed that the top four (4) grades of the five (5) scheduled quizzes should be factored into students’ final grades. In other words, each quiz is worth 2.5% of their final grade. Quizzes should include a mix of 20-25 multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank questions related to the content of the readings and class lectures. Students should be given approximately 90 minutes to complete quizzes online via BBlearn. Although the book publisher provides a test bank to generate the quiz questions, instructors should feel free to revise questions (and answer options) as well as include questions that are not included in the test bank to reflect the learning outcomes listed above.

**Take-Home Web Assignments.** Students in POS 110 will also be assessed on their ability to engage in critical analysis of a current issue or topic in American politics. These assignments are designed to complement the quizzes that are aimed at assessing whether students master the course content. Although there are many example question prompts in the syllabus template below, POS 110 instructors are encouraged to edit and/or generate additional analytical questions aimed at helping students achieve the learning outcomes stated above. If you have other ideas please share them with other American politics faculty. We can all learn from each other’s knowledge and experience to help improve student interest and success. The top three (3) grades of the four (4) scheduled take-home web assignments should be factored into students’ final grades. Thus, each web assignment is worth 6.67% of their final grade. Finally, assignment rubrics are strongly encouraged to help students understand the expectations of the assignment.

**Exams.** For each substantive area (ideas, institutions, behavior), students will complete an in-class exam. This replaces the traditional mid-term and final exams offered in introductory courses. Although this substantially reduces the stakes for students compared to courses with mid-terms and finals, students will have to be well prepared for each exam because they are each worth 20% of their final grade. The exam format includes multiple choice and short essay questions. However, instructors have the discretion to determine the point distribution for the different exam questions as well as the quantity of questions in each exam. Instructors, however, should be conscious about the ability for students to complete the exam in class.

**In-Class Learning Experience**

A major component of FYLI certified courses calls for instructors to move away from lecture-only courses. Thus, FYLI course instructors are strongly encouraged to think about how to structure the in-class learning experience by determine how to incorporate both lectures and in-
class learning activities (i.e., film screenings, in-class discussions, trivia games, simulations, case studies) to maximize the learning experience for first-year undergraduates. Although instructors are discouraged from merely recapitulating the reading assignments, they are encouraged to supplement the reading assignments with outside knowledge of relevant research and current events. These strategies should help instructors achieve the standard learning outcomes listed above. Also, in-class discussions and written assignments should encourage students to think about why the course topics are relevant to them. This could be as easy as asking why topic X matters and why anyone should care about studying it. Instructors’ academic background and training should prepare them to adequately address these questions.

Instructors should also be sensitive to students’ diverse cultural backgrounds when assessing their participation and communication skills. Rubrics should be written in a way that would not penalize students who come from diverse backgrounds. Although it would not be required, instructors are encouraged to provide opportunities, via homework assignments and class discussions, for students of diverse backgrounds to explore and analyze the political status of racial/ethnic minority groups.

Co-curricular Learning Experience

Instructors should think about encouraging students to start their own study groups and interact outside of class. Additionally, take-home web assignments should help students further think critically about current issues or topics in American politics beyond what they learn from reading the course texts. Instructors should make sure to remind students about the purpose behind the web assignments. Additionally, students should be encouraged to attend campus activities (guest speakers, conferences, panels, etc.). Instructors have the discretion to offer extra credit points on attendance and participation for students who attend these campus activities. Additionally, instructors could encourage students to reflect on how the activities connect to course topics in ways they see fit. Some POS 110 instructors in the past have encouraged students to attend a Flagstaff city council meeting.

Peer TAs in Your Class

As part of the larger effort to facilitate instructors’ abilities to create a dynamic learning experience for first-year students at NAU, the FYLI at NAU fully funds a Peer TA every semester for each section of POS 110. Therefore, instructors are encouraged to involve Peer TAs in various aspects of instruction such as sitting in on class lectures, being available to for tutorial sessions, and recording and monitoring student attendance and performance in the course. Because the FYLI certification encourages co-curricular learning as well, POS 110 instructors can be creative in how they incorporate Peer TAs to either market and socialize student participation in various events on and off campus (city council meetings, guest speakers, public debates, and film screenigns).
POS 110: American Politics  
*Suggested Course Syllabus Template*  
Fall 2015

Professor:  
Phone:  
Office Hours:  

E-mail:

Lecture:

Teaching Assistant:  
E-mail:

**Course Description**

This course provides an overview of the design and process of American national government. Introductory topics will focus on American political culture and the ideas that are central not only to the design of the U.S. Constitution, but also to the values the structure current political debates. Additionally, we will explore how the U.S. Constitution changed over time to open up the democratic process to previously excluded groups (African Americans, Latinos, Women, etc). We will also focus on how the core institutions of American government function in the American federal system. Special attention will be paid to the political behavior of the major institutional actors (Members of Congress, Presidents, Supreme Court Justices). Other course topics will explore elements of the democratic process including the role of political parties, interest groups, campaigns, voting, elections, and public opinion. Although the course will primarily focus on the basic structure and function of American government, we will cover current political debates as well as recent election outcomes to improve students’ general knowledge about contemporary American politics.

**Learning Outcomes**

*By the end of this course you should...*

- Become familiar with the core structures and institutions of American national government.
- Understand the fundamental process for *who gets what, when, and how* in American politics.
- Identify and critically evaluate central conflicts in American politics.
- Develop an understanding for the role that citizens play in American democracy.

**Required Course Text**

Ginsberg, Benjamin, Margaret Weir, Theodore Lowi, & Caroline Tolbert. 2015. *We the People: An Introduction to American Politics*. 10th ed. WW Norton & Co., Inc. (*“WTP” on Syllabus*)
Grading and Evaluation

Your final grade is based on the following:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance:</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>(100 points)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Online Quizzes (5):</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>(100 points)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exams (3):</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>(600 points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web Assignments (4):</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>(200 points)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
<td><strong>(1,000 points)</strong></td>
</tr>
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Course Policies and Assignments

**Attendance (10%):** Attendance is mandatory. Your attendance will be recorded daily. Your grade will be based on the number of days you are present in class divided by the total number of class days. I understand there will be times when you will not be able to attend class (for whatever reason). Thus, you will not be penalized for up to two (2) unexcused absences for the duration of the semester. If you plan to be absent for an extra curricular activity, you must notify your instructor at least five (5) days in advanced so that your absence will not affect your grade.

**Readings:** Readings should be completed by the date listed on the syllabus.

**Participation:** An integral part of any course is participation. Your contributions to our dialogue are critical. In fact, the success of this class depends on you. Therefore, it is imperative that you come to each class ready to answer questions, pose questions, and engage in the material assigned and the topic at hand.

**Online Quizzes (10%):** To assess your comprehension of the course material and make sure you keep up with the class, five (5) online quizzes will be scheduled throughout the semester. The quiz questions will be based on both the course readings and the class lectures. Note that your lowest quiz grade will not be factored into your final grade. Thus, each of the four (4) highest scoring quizzes will be worth 2.5% of your final grade. Each quiz will include about 20 multiple-choice questions. Students are allowed up to three (3) quiz attempts; the highest grade will be recorded. It should be noted that quizzes are pre-scheduled (see schedule below). If you know that you will be absent due to an extra-curricular activity (i.e., athletic event & club outings) please notify your instructor at least five days beforehand to re-schedule it. If you fail to complete the online quiz the day it is due, you will not be allowed to make it up.

**Exams (60%):** You are required to complete three in-class exams (each worth 20 percent of your final grade). These exams are not cumulative, however, they will cover all required readings and lectures up to the date of the scheduled exam. The format consists of multiple choice and short-essay questions.

**Web Assignments (20%):** You are required to analyze some aspect of the political process by completing four (4) web assignments from the options listed in the pages below. Note that each assignment is worth 5% of your final grade. Additionally, you must submit each assignment on the pre-scheduled due date listed on the course schedule.
Web Assignments

Assignment Instructions. Choose to answer any four of the options listed on the pages below. All web assignments are to be 5-6 total pages in length; this includes a title page with your name, date, and assignment title as well as a bibliography page. The text should be double-spaced, have normal font and normal margins. All sources must be properly cited in the text using APA or MLA style formatting with a bibliography at the end of the document. Twenty (20) points will be deducted from your assignment if it does not meet any of these criteria. Late papers will not be accepted without an institutional excuse.

1. Political Culture (Chapter 1). In American political culture, expectations focus on rules and procedures rather than results. Discuss how the focus on rules and procedures affects the definitions of American core values and what is expected of government. Additionally, choose two recent major speeches: one by Republican Party leaders and the other by Democratic Party leaders. Thoroughly describe how and why the content of the two speeches relates at least three elements of American political culture discussed in the textbook. Be sure to give specific examples and indicate which speech you are referring to. Finally, explain the major differences between the two major political parties in terms of what elements of American political culture are emphasized and whether these values shape policy debates.
   • The 2012 RNC [http://www.politico.com/p/pages/rnc-2012-speeches/]
   • The 2012 DNC: [http://www.politico.com/p/pages/dnc-2012-speeches/]
   • Republican Party’s Response to the 2015 SOTU: [http://www.gop.gov/sotu/]

2. Federalism & The Constitution (Chapters 2-3). As the Constitution developed, political elites argued about where power should be concentrated (national government vs. state governments). Your task is to explain how the debate unfolded and understand how this debate continues to be relevant in contemporary American politics. Firstly, describe the nature of the debate about federalism that began after The American Revolutionary War. Secondly, identify at least two contemporary issues that continue to play into the federalism debate. For each issue, provide a detailed description of the nature of the debate and explain how and where the debate is unfolding (state legislatures, The Supreme Court, Congress, etc). Thirdly, explain how you think the issues should be resolved. That is, make compelling arguments for whether you think power should be given to the national government, state governments, or whether it should be shared between the two.

3. The Struggle for Equal Rights (Chapter 5). The Declaration of Independence asserts that all men are endowed by their creator with inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Over time, Americans have extended that idea to more and more people, such as former slaves and women. If you had to make a public presentation to incoming freshmen at NAU about the historical context of inequality in the U.S.A., what three things would you focus on and why? Make sure to provide sufficient detail in your response. Also, I want you to investigate whether there are groups in our society today that are not getting the full benefits of the ideal outlined in the Declaration of Independence. Make sure to include examples and cite sources in your response.

4. The American Legal System and The Courts – Part 1 (Chapter 15). In Federalist No. 78, Alexander Hamilton argued that the judiciary was the least dangerous branch of government. Many people would argue that Hamilton was incorrect and that today's courts wield an enormous amount of power. Why did Hamilton feel as he did, and what led to the courts' increase in power? What have been the implications of this increase in power? Do you think Hamilton would have a problem with the role the courts play today? Why or why not? Be sure to give specific examples of recent cases or issues facing the Supreme Court to complete your response.
5. The American Legal System and The Courts – Part 2 (Chapter 15). The Supreme Court has always been called upon to act as a rational arbiter and decide how to apply and interpret the constitution to modern occurrences within society. However, an in-depth analysis of the Supreme Court can show us that the decisions made by Supreme Court Justices are not always as black and white as they seem and often time’s justices have to make decisions based on precedent along with trying to apply founding principles to modern times. Using your textbook and any reputable online sources or scholarly publications, address the following:

a. What is the current ability of the US Supreme Court to impact policy?
b. Is precedent a major part of the judicial system? Why or why not?
c. The landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* to de-segregate schools is often praised and referenced in many discussions about the Supreme Court. However, Linda Brown was in Junior High in 1954 when the decision was made and it was not until 1968 when public schools in America were truly de-segregated. With this in mind do you feel that Supreme Court decisions actually have a large impact on the way society functions? Or are Supreme Court Decisions merely symbolic in the sense that they give off the illusion of progress?

6. Political Parties (Chapter 9). It is quite common during the campaign season for politicians to make claims about how there is little difference between Republicans and Democrats. Some have suggested that this is a strategic ploy to appeal to swing voters. Using the course texts as well as reputable online sources (DNC/RNC), respond to this claim. That is, explain whether and how the two major political parties differ on the at least three different issues. Also, be sure to thoroughly describe the ideological differences between the two parties on each issue as explained in the textbook. Choose a third party (Green, Libertarian, etc.) and investigate where they stand on these issues. Given your investigation for this assignment, what can you say about where there is room for compromise from any or both major parties? Or is there no hope to end party polarization?

c. Green Party: [www.gp.org](http://www.gp.org); Libertarian Party: [www.lp.org](http://www.lp.org)

7. Interest Groups (Chapter 11). Choose any three currently active interest groups in American politics and describe the resources that they have, as outlined in the textbook. Investigate how these resources influence the ability of these interest groups to acquire what they want from the system. Provide specific evidence for your claims using the course text as well as reputable sources. Also, respond to the argument that interest groups do a better job of achieving their goals than do political parties. Finally, given your investigation of the previous questions, explain which interest group represents you the best. Is it a group that works on a specific issue, like gun control or taxes? Or one representing a specific “identity” group, like women or Latinos or LGBT people? Or is it a group organized around a partisan or ideological perspective?

8. Congress (Chapter 12). Congress has been the subject of much scrutiny in the contemporary political spectrum, however, even though Congress as a whole receives poor approval ratings many members of Congress are often re-elected. Using your textbook and reputable online sources or books, address the following:

a. Based on your findings, do you feel that members of Congress are mainly concerned with reelection or serving their constituents? Justify your opinion.
b. Many popular academics have made the argument that when seeking reelection, it is a good idea for incumbents to engage in what is referred to as position taking. This essentially means that incumbents can verbally take a stance on an issue (i.e. “I support the president on this matter”) without actually taking any action. In this view many congressman are seen as
simply taking a stance instead of taking action. With this in mind, does it seem as though the notion of democratic elections for congress is merely an illusion?

c. How would your ideal congress function? (feel free to have fun and be creative with this one)

9. **The Presidency (Chapter 13).** Many of the framers, (most notably Alexander Hamilton) were very adamant about having the executive branch be one single person. The reasoning was that a single executive is less dangerous and less vulnerable than a plural executive. Using your knowledge of the presidency as well as reputable online sources (not Wikipedia) address the following:
   a. Were the founders right in thinking that a plural executive would conceal faults and destroy responsibility therefore making accountability obsolete because there would be no single person to blame for misconduct?
   b. Is having a single person to put the blame on really what is best for democracy?
   c. Why is it so widely accepted to have multiple people run the legislative branch while most people would likely be opposed to seeing a plural executive?

10. **Public Opinion (Chapter 6).** Living in the United States we are all taught that our opinions and voices matter when it comes to electing representatives to run the country. Opinions about politics vary from person to person and at times it can seem almost too good to be true that all elected officials deeply care about what the general public thinks about certain issues. Regardless if they do it does not stop people from engaging in politics and sharing their views when asked. While engaging with your textbook and reputable online sources or books, address the following:
   a. Is the sole act of voting enough to make public opinion matter? What other approaches to implementing political change do you think can be effective at conveying public opinion?
   b. How can minority groups and opinions ever be recognized fully in a system that functions by only acknowledging what is perceived to be the views of a majority?
   c. Why do you think that the founders (primarily Madison) of the country were so concerned with how much of a voice the public could have? Do you think that the founders (or any elites for that matter) in the US really care about what the public wants or do you they just desire power and control?

11. **Campaigns, and Elections (Chapter 10).** Discuss the different strategies used and issues discussed by the Republican and Democratic candidates during the 2012 presidential elections. Compare and contrast the dynamics at the pre-primary, primary, and general election stages. How does the primary election strategy differ from the strategy of the general election campaign? Based on the outcome of the 2012 election, what advice would you give to future candidates on running a successful campaign? Be sure to use the course texts as well as reputable sources to formulate your response.

12. **Political Participation & Voting (Chapter 8).** Milenials, the demographic cohort born between 1980 and early 2000s, is thought to be the most unreliable voting bloc due to low participation rates. First, investigate how this group is distinguished from others when it comes to participation in civic and political activities. Second, describe Milenials’ patterns of political participation and vote choice in the most recent presidential and mid-term elections. Did they help or hurt the winner(s) and loser(s)? Or did they not matter at all? That is, explain their role in the election outcomes. Additionally, given all the determinants of participation outlined in the course texts, explain why Milenials have variable participation rates and also describe at least three things that could be done improve this group’s involvement in the democratic process.
## Course Schedule

**PART I – IDEAS & RIGHTS**

### Week 1) August 31-September 4: Course Overview & Political Culture

**Quiz 1 on syllabus and course structure**
- Review course requirements and begin discussion of political culture

### Week 2) American Political Culture Continued

**Complete Online Quiz #1**
- WTP Ch. 1 “American Political Culture.”

### Week 3) The Founding & The Constitution

**Submit Web Assignment #1**
- WTP Ch. 2 “The Founding and The Constitution”

### Week 4) Federalism

**Complete Online Quiz #2**
- WTP Ch. 3 “Federalism”

### Week 5) Civil Liberties & Civil Rights

- WTP Ch. 4 “Civil Liberties” / Ch. 5 “Civil Rights”

### Week 6) Exam 1: Ideas & Rights

**PART II - INSTITUTIONS & POLITICAL ACTORS**

### Week 7) Congress & Representation

**Submit Web Assignment #2**
- WTP Ch. 12 “Congress”

### Week 8) The Presidency

**Complete Online Quiz #3**
- WTP Ch. 13 “The Presidency”

### Week 9) The Courts

- WTP Ch. 15 “The Federal Courts”

### Week 10) Political Parties

**Complete Online Quiz #4**
- KTR Ch. 12 “Political Parties”

### Week 11) Interest Groups

** Submit Web Assignment #3**
- KTR Ch. 13 “Interest Groups”

### Week 12) Exam 2: Institutions and Political Actors
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<td>• WTP Ch. 6 “Public Opinion”</td>
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<td>Week 14) Campaigns, Elections, &amp; The Media</td>
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<td><strong>Complete Online Quiz #5 Friday</strong></td>
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<td>Week 15) Political Participation</td>
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<td><strong>Submit Web Assignment #4</strong></td>
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<td>• WTP Ch. 8 “Political Participation and Voting”</td>
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<td>Week 16) Exam 3: Politics &amp; Political Behavior</td>
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