WEST VALLEY COLLEGE

Course Syllabus

COURSE: Political Science 1

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Sondra L. Ricar

EMAIL: Prior to the beginning of class, you can email me at sondra.ricar@wvm.edu. Due to the number of emails I receive, please put your name and the name of the class in the subject line. This helps me to identify students from all the other emails I receive. Once class begins, please email me ONLY through our Angel classroom.

OFFICE HOURS: Since this is an online class, I have no campus office hours. Once the class begins, if you email me, I will get back to you within 24 hours, usually less. In addition I will hold office hours during the regular semester. My office hours are held online BUT I cannot be on the whiteboard in all my online classes at the same time so I will simply be online on Angel, for the stated hours, reloading my page every 5 minutes to see if there are any emails. In addition once class begins I require that you email me from within ANGEL ONLY because I can get my ANGEL mail from anywhere with an internet connection.

VOICEMAIL: Checked rarely. It is preferable to contact me via email.

THE BOOKS ARE REQUIRED: You do need to purchase the textbook, Checks and Balances, an Introduction to American Government, and the reader for this course, Scenarios in American Government SECOND EDITION. The books are available in the campus bookstore or from www.ndbco.com. If you purchase them online, you will also receive a paper copy with the disk. While these are digitally interactive texts, many students find it helpful to have the paper copy also. If you purchase it from the bookstore, you will not receive a paper copy. You cannot use the first edition of Scenarios as there were significant changes made in the second edition.
Ricar, Sondra, Checks and Balances: An Introduction to American Government ISBN 9781936306718

**Valuable Links:**

- [How to Log in to Angel](#)
- [Angel Student Quickstart Guide](#)
- [Core Rules of Netiquette](#)

You are responsible for having read the information in each of these links and the material included is subject to testing on any quiz.


COURSE OVERVIEW
This is an introductory course in American political science. We will endeavor to learn about the Constitution and some of the founding principles of American government. One of the main concerns of this class will be the way in which the government is affecting our lives today, why, and what we can do about it. We will look at some of the mistakes made by our government in the past. Our job here is not to be judgmental; we are going to try to understand why our government has acted in such a manner, not condemn it for doing so. I ask only that you come to class with an open mind, prepared to learn, and willing to explore issues from many points of view. It is important to respect other’s opinions, particularly if you wish them to respect yours.

ONLINE COURSE DISCLAIMER AND RESPONSIBILITIES
Online education is not for everyone. This is not to say that you are unintelligent if you do not do well in this course, but you need to be self-directed, self-disciplined and patient. For example, in a face-to-face class when you have a quiz, if there is something you don’t understand you can approach the instructor and ask. In this class that is not an option. You will have to read the material on your own, interact with your classmates on discussion boards, and take quizzes to measure how much you have absorbed. In a traditional classroom I can see when a student doesn’t understand something, just based on their expression. Obviously that is not an option here. You must be willing to ask a question when something is unclear as I am not a mind-reader. I do not expect you to be a mind-reader either. If I have been unclear on something, you must let me know. You must pay attention to the calendar and due dates. While I will email the class regularly with reminders for the work and it will all be entered into the calendar, it is your responsibility to remember when something is due. It is very easy to fall behind if you slack off and you will not pass the class if you do not stay on top of the work. In order to successfully complete this course, you should plan your schedule very carefully and try to stick to it. Look carefully at your work schedule, school schedule, and family obligations and allow plenty of time for each. Realize that this course is an accelerated course and we essentially “meet” Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays. You will have assignments due each day, Monday through Wednesday. You cannot wait until the last minute to do all of the assignments for that week. Likewise, you cannot simply wait until the end of the term to do all of the assignments. You should plan on checking Angel at least once a day. Even though you may have completed the assignments for that week, there may be announcements or emails that will impact your grade. I will check Angel at least once a day. I respond to emails within 48 hours, usually within 24 hours. I usually have grading done within 24 hours of the close of the assignment but in extraordinary circumstances it may take me 48 hours.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:
You are responsible for reading the assigned books for this course. Although we will not discuss all the material covered in the books, you are responsible for reading them. The material will be the basis for your assignments. There may be additional reading and possibly homework assignments on Angel. The required reading is available for purchase in the campus bookstore or online at www.ndbco.com. There will be two
quizzes for each module. Each module you will have a discussion board which will require you to post several responses.

**CODE OF CONDUCT:**

All students are expected to familiarize themselves with the student code of conduct in the college catalog. I expect you to adhere to that code of conduct. Students who do not will be asked to leave the class. If you experience harassment or threatening behavior from any student in this class, please let me know so that I can take action to remedy the situation. Likewise, if I feel that you are harassing me or any person in class, I will take action to have you removed from the class. I take cheating seriously. Any incident will receive a zero and be reported to the Dean of Student Services and will result in your receiving an F for the course, in addition to whatever steps the Dean of Student Services chooses to take.

**ACCESSIBILITY AND LATE POLICIES**

Each week’s modules will open at the same time and in the first week all will be due at the same time. After that while each week’s modules will open at the same time, they will close in a cascade format. During the four week sessions (currently summer and winter) modules will be due each day at the specified time, Monday through Thursday. During the six week sessions (currently fall or spring), modules will be due each day at the specified time, Monday through Wednesday. **I will not accept any late work.** In the past students found this policy to be arbitrary and unprofessional. I do not accept late work in any of my classes. I set aside time to grade your work in order to give you timely responses to it. Late work complicates my ability to grade in a timely manner. And fundamentally, if I allow you to start falling behind, you will rapidly run into trouble. You will have a specific amount of time on each module so you must plan accordingly. It is also necessary for you to post to the discussion boards several times each module, in addition to your quizzes. You may also have a drop box assignment or other assignments for each module.

**COMPUTER EXCUSES**

You are taking an online class; it is your responsibility to have access to a computer and backup your files. What does this mean? Computer crashes, lost disk information, Internet access becomes unavailable, hardware/software difficulties, time zone issues, or your dog ate your computer are not reasons for inability to complete your work.

**SPECIAL NEEDS:**

Education should be open and available to everyone. Wounded warriors may have acquired injuries through which the American with Disabilities Act entitles them the use of accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for students with verified disabilities. To determine if you qualify or need assistance with an accommodation, please contact Disabled Student Services. Any student with special needs due to either "visible" or "invisible" disabilities is encouraged to contact me via email. Explain your difficulties and what I can do to help you by providing the appropriate accommodations. I will need verification of your needs from the appropriate college facility and their
recommendations for accommodating your needs. I strongly believe physical problems should not hinder your education and would like to do whatever I can to make all students comfortable in my class.

**“VIRTUAL CAFÉ” BOARD:**

I will have a Virtual Cafe discussion board on the home page for the course. You should check this board regularly as this is where some important announcements will be made, in addition to those sent to your ANGEL email account. This board is the place to go if you find something you don’t understand, as your classmates might be able to help. I will check this board regularly to respond to questions. You can however always email me if you feel your question is “too stupid” to put on the board. Usually what will happen in that case is I will remove your identifying information, post the question on the board and my answer to the whole class, as many students are wondering the same thing. Please feel free to discuss topics other than the class subject matter, but try to maintain some standard of civilized behavior. Refer to the Netiquette guide to ensure your posts are not violating acceptable standards.

**STUDENT LEARNER OUTCOMES**

Upon completion of this course the student should be able to:

1. Students will be able to explain the Constitutional institutions, structure, processes, and functions of government set up by the US Constitution and the California constitution, and explain how those institutions historically evolved.
2. Students will be able to define, cite and analyze: The Bill of Rights, The 1st ten amendments and the compromises of 1787, Famous Supreme court decisions vis a vis the Bill of Rights, How Judges Make Law, Judicial Activism versus judicial restraint, The clash between individual rights and the rights of the community.
3. Students will be able to differentiate between civil rights and liberties; define each and evaluate American democracy in its protection of and expansion of the rights. Recognize the significance of the The 14th Amendment as an augmentation to the Bill of Rights. Discuss and analyze how rights have impacted minorities and women, namely, African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Native American, women, the elderly, the disabled.
4. Students will be able to define federalism, identify the major Supreme Court decisions the have contributed to its evolution, contrast the powers of the national government with those of the states, recognize and explain the role of the states in modern federalism and discuss the operation of and institutions of California’s state and local government vis a vis the national government and discuss supremacy.
5. Students will be able to define and discuss the functions of: Interest Groups, PACS, political parties, the media, and other organizations in both national and state government.
6. Students will be able to define and analyze the relationship between the Executive, legislative, and Judicial branches of government at the national, state and local levels, with a emphasis on the concepts of separation of powers, checks and balance, and judicial review.
BASIS FOR GRADE:
Your work will be evaluated on a straight point system, with the following breakdown:

- 90-100% - A
- 80-89% - B
- 70-79% - C
- 0-69% - F

1. Quizzes:
There will be two quizzes for each module based on the readings and lectures. If you miss a quiz, it cannot be made up. One quiz will be ten multiple choice, true-false questions drawn from the test-bank for the textbook, C&B, except in the introduction module where the quiz will be based on the syllabus and associated readings. The multiple choice quiz will be fifteen minutes long and be worth ten points. The time is limited to prevent you from spending too much time looking up the answers in the textbook. The other quiz will be an essay quiz. You will have fifteen minutes to write a minimum 100 word response to each essay question. You will have three questions and can choose which two questions you wish to answer. The essay questions will be drawn from the assigned reading in the reader, SIAG. The best way to study would be to be able to summarize the main points in each section of the readings. The essay quiz is also worth 10 points. The essay questions are demanding and require thoughtful answers. If your answer is not long enough, you will not receive enough points to pass the quiz. If you find you cannot write that much in the time allotted, you might have an accessibility issue and need to be tested at DESP. Each multiple choice quiz will be randomly generated with the questions in scrambled order so that you cannot share your answers with your friends. You will only be allowed to access each quiz one time. If you do not know for sure that you will be able to complete the quiz at that time, do not access it. I have the time limit set in this way for the following reason: If I allow more time, too many students spend their time looking up answers to the multiple choice/true-false questions. I do not mark down for poor grammar on the essay and do not expect nicely formed paragraphs. This is an information dump. I understand that, but at the same time I must be able to understand your answer so please do not use texting abbreviations or slang.

2. Discussion:
Each module you will have discussion board assignments. I will post two topics or prompts each module and you must respond to one of the prompts with an answer of a specific word count minimum. You must also respond to the postings of two classmates with an answer of a specific word count minimum. I also stipulate that you must respond to both prompts in each module. In other words, if you respond to prompt A in your initial post you must address the issues raised by prompt B in at least one of your response posts. Each discussion board initial post will be worth 10 points. Each response post will be worth 5 points. You will be graded on your content, which must address the issues raised by the assignment.
You must use common English in your posts. I will take points off if your answer is too short or if you use texting abbreviations. Some of the issues that have been problems in recent classes are:

- I use the “Post First” limitation which means you must post to the board before you can see what your classmates have posted. This makes it more difficult for students to copy from one another. However, you will not be able to edit your post once you have completed it, so be sure you have said what you wanted to before posting it.

- I have posted comments on each board, comments that you will be able to read once you have posted. I want you to read these comments and consider them prior to making your reply posts, but while you can reply to my comments, those replies will not count as one of your replies for points. You will still need to reply to two of your classmate’s posts.

- I may edit the posts. In other words, if I read something that needs to be addressed to prevent the rest of the class from wrongly interpreting something, I will insert comments directly into the post, using a different colored font. This is not meant as criticism of the author, but it is meant to clarify things so that other students do not have problems when making a reply to that post.

- Please address the prompts I put up each module. You may find something else fascinating for that module, but if it isn't one of the prompts I put up, it doesn't belong on that discussion board. If you want to discuss something fascinating, the Virtual Café board is the place for it. If you go off topic for that module's board, you will lose points.

- Please do not explain the facts that you learned from the lecture and/or readings. I presume all students have done the assigned reading and if you are explaining the facts it is judged to be a way to pad your word count. That will lead to a reduction in grade.

- There is an assumption that all you have to do is post and you will receive full points. It is not quite that simple. Your post must be long enough, it must engage the topic, and it must show some signs of thought. While the vast majority of the prompts ask for opinions, they must be reasoned, thoughtful opinions, not simply "because I think so."

- Angel now has the “Post First” option. What this means is you must post on one of the prompts before you can see what your classmates have posted. This eliminates the possibility of students simply rewording someone else’s post. However, this can create the problem that everyone has been responding to one prompt, which means the students cannot reply to a post on the other prompt. If you have posted and find that there are a lot of posts to the same prompt you did, and no one has posted to the other one, email the class and let them know that people need to start posting on that prompt. Also, some students have tried to game the system: they post a “test post” and then post their original post. I can accept that once you may have a problem and thus will post a mistake. If this happens more than once I will progressively deduct more and more points from your score.

- Finally, and at one level most important, please treat one another civilly. Do not tell someone they are wrong or ignorant or prejudiced or that they made a
mistake in their post. You are free to disagree with one another, but do it in a polite manner.

3. **Student Learner Assessment**

Part of the accreditation of the college (the outside board that says your diploma means something) is an exercise that is given periodically, the results of which are compared over time to see if the college is improving in its ability to educate students. Currently this assignment is given in the fall semester. It is a quiz and therefore would fall into the quiz category of assignments. It is administered in Module 15 and is a multiple choice quiz drawing from questions administered throughout the term.

4. **Final Exam:**

You must take and pass the final exam to pass the class. The final exam will most likely be short essay questions. It will be comprehensive only in a very loose way.

**Excessive Absences:**

In the traditional, face-to-face classroom, the college policy is once you have missed three classes you should be dropped for excessive absences. Obviously this is difficult to maintain in the online environment. Therefore the policy will be that if you miss four assignments I will drop you. Keep in mind that this class is accelerated, six weeks, and thus taking a week off will lead to your missing too much class and being subject to an instructor drop. I do realize that sometimes something happens in your life that necessitates missing class. However, this class is online so it is available from anywhere. If something happens that may cause you to miss due dates, contact me to let me know what is happening. I will see if we can work out the problem without dropping you. And simply “showing up” to class is not enough to prevent you from being dropped. You must submit work each day there is something due in order to be considered “present”. Fundamentally, I take attendance by looking at the submitted work. Thus if I don’t see enough work from you, I will drop you. State law has mandated that online classes need to replicate face-to-face classes as much as possible and thus we will “meet” for class every Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

**Extra Credit:**

It is important that each student be judged on the same body of work. Therefore, I rarely offer extra credit.

By staying in this class you are agreeing to undertake all of the work outlined in this syllabus. Be sure you are aware of the workload and adjust your schedule accordingly.

**Readings and Due Dates**

*Checks and Balances C&B, Scenarios in American Government SIAG*

**Week One All Modules Close August 27 at 10 am**

Introduction Module August 22 to August 27
Module One  August 22 to August 27  
C&B  Chapter One  SIAG Chapter One  Introduction  

**Week Two Modules** Open August 27 Close in Cascades, **Monday to Wednesday**  
Module Two  August 27 to September 1  
C&B  Chapter Two  SIAG Chapter Two Constitution  
Module Three  August 27 to September 2  
C&B  Chapter Three  SIAG Chapter Three Federalism  
Module Four  August 27 to September 3  
C&B  Chapter Four  SIAG Chapter Four Civil Liberties  

**Week Three Modules** Open September 3 Close in Cascades, **Monday to Wednesday**  
Module Five  September 3 to September 8  
C&B  Chapter Five  SIAG Chapter Five Civil Rights  
Module Six  September 3 to September 9  
C&B  Chapter Six  SIAG Chapter Six Public Opinion and Socialization  
Module Seven  September 3 to September 10  
C&B  Chapter Seven  SIAG Chapter Seven Advocacy Groups & Political Parties  

**Week Four Modules** Open September 10 Close in Cascades, **Monday to Wednesday**  
Module Eight  September 10 to September 15  
C&B  Chapter Eight  SIAG Chapter Ten Campaigns and Elections  
Module Nine  September 10 to September 16  
C&B  Chapter Nine  SIAG Chapter Eleven The Media  
Module Ten  September 10 to September 17  
C&B  Chapter Ten  SIAG Chapter Twelve Legislative Branch  

**Week Five Modules** Open September 17, Close in Cascades, **Monday to Wednesday**  
Module Eleven  September 17 to September 22  
C&B  Chapter Eleven  SIAG Chapter Thirteen Executive Branch  
Module Twelve  September 17 to September 23  
C&B  Chapter Twelve  SIAG Chapter Fourteen Bureaucracy  
Module Thirteen  September 17 to September 24  
C&B  Chapter Thirteen  SIAG Chapter Fifteen Judiciary  

**Week Six Modules** Open September 24 Close Monday and Tuesday, **the Final Exam Closes Wednesday**  
Module Fourteen  September 24 to September 29  
C&B  Chapter Fourteen  SIAG Chapter Sixteen Domestic Policy  
Module Fifteen  September 24 to September 30  
C&B  Chapter Fifteen  SIAG Chapter Seventeen Defense Policy
Final Exam Open from 10 am September 30 to 10 am October 1 ONLY