



Online Undergraduate Studies

PBA 1065: US Democracy

3 units

Term: Spring 2026 Q2

March 16-May 10, 2025

Online/Asynchronous

Instructor: Anthony Wagner

Email: awagner@pointloma.edu

Office Hours: By Appointment

PLNU Mission

To Teach ~ To Shape ~ To Send

Point Loma Nazarene University exists to provide higher education in a vital Christian community where minds are engaged and challenged, character is modeled and formed, and service is an expression of faith. Being of Wesleyan heritage, we strive to be a learning community where grace is foundational, truth is pursued, and holiness is a way of life.

Course Description

This class serves as an introduction to the democratic political processes and governmental structures of the United States, focusing on national institutions, practices and values. Beginning with the Constitutional period, we will discuss the historical context, philosophical ideals and processes by which our governmental system was founded and how it has changed over time. We will examine the role of individuals in American politics through political socialization, public opinion, electoral participation, and the rights & freedoms individuals have under the law. We will also discuss the role of intermediary groups that connect individuals to our political institutions -- the media, political interest groups, and political parties. We will identify the rules, structure and processes of our electoral system, and analyze how they work in light of recent election cycles. Finally, we will examine the role that our major national governmental institutions -- Congress, the President, and the Supreme Court -- play in the political system. This course aims to further your development as scholars by requiring you to read and think critically about American government; to increase the depth and breadth of your knowledge of both current and historically important events in American politics; and to write analytically about the structures, processes and products of political systems.

Course Learning Outcomes

1. Possess a factual and theoretical understanding of the fundamental institutions and processes of American politics. (PLO 1) (Inquizitive)
 2. Apply political science knowledge and theories to identify and respond to current issues in American democracy. (PLO 2) (Govt in News Discussions)
 3. Evaluate formal and informal political institutions and their effectiveness in providing democratic representation. (PLO 2) (Federalism, Congress and Interest Groups short papers)
 4. Present solutions to strengthen the practices and function of US democracy. (PLO 3) (Demystifying Democracy final)
-

Program Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate critical skills to lead and manage in public governance.
 2. Appraise pressing problems using critical thinking, ethical thinking, and analytics to consider solutions and apply best practices.
 3. Articulate and apply a public service perspective to their role in their institution.
-

General Education Learning Outcome

Demonstrate an understanding of the complex issues faced by diverse groups in global and/or cross-cultural contexts.

Institutional Learning Outcomes

1. **Learning, Informed by our Faith in Christ**
Students will acquire knowledge of human cultures and the physical and natural world while developing skills and habits of the mind that foster lifelong learning.
 2. **Growing, in a Christ-centered Faith Community**
Students will develop a deeper and more informed understanding of others as they negotiate complex professional, environmental, and social contexts.
 3. **Serving, in a Context of Christian Faith**
Students will serve locally and/or globally in vocational and social settings.
-

Required Texts and Recommended Study Resources

Benjamin Ginsberg et. al., *We the People* (15th essentials edition), WW Norton.

Articles, podcasts and films as assigned, available online via links in syllabus.

Point Loma Nazarene University, as a non-profit educational institution, is entitled by law to use materials protected by the US Copyright Act for classroom education. Any use of those materials outside the class may violate the law. All supplemental materials posted on this course site (including articles, book excerpts, or other documents) are provided for your personal academic use. These materials may be protected by copyright law and should not be duplicated or distributed without permission of the copyright owner.

Note: Students are responsible for having the required textbooks prior to the first day of class. Students are also encouraged to begin reading the books in preparation for the class as soon as possible.

Point Loma Nazarene University, as a non-profit educational institution, is entitled by law to use materials protected by the US Copyright Act for classroom education. Any use of those materials outside the class may violate the law. All supplemental materials posted on this course site (including articles, book excerpts, or other documents) are provided for your personal academic use. These materials may be protected by copyright law and should not be duplicated or distributed without permission of the copyright owner.

Course Credit Hour Information

In the interest of providing sufficient time to accomplish the stated Course Learning Outcomes, this class meets the PLNU credit hour policy for a 3-unit class delivered over 12 weeks. It is anticipated that students will spend a minimum of 37.5 participation hours per credit hour on their coursework. For this course, students will spend an estimated 113 total hours meeting the course learning outcomes. The time estimations are provided below and in the Canvas modules.

Estimated Time to Complete Course

<i>Activity Category</i>	<i>Time-to-Complete (Hours)</i>
Required Reading	30
Discussions	40
Assignments	43
<i>Total:</i>	113

Assessment and Grading

Weighted Grades

This course uses weighted grades. Each assignment category is worth a certain percentage of the total grade (100%) for the course, as specified in the table below:

Course Assignments

<i>Assignment Category</i>	<i>Percentage of Total Grade</i>
Weekly Reading Assignments with InQuizzitive	15%
Weekly Lectures with Discussion & Activity Participation	20%
Weekly Government in the News Presentation and Responses	15%
Short "Analyze/Apply" Papers	30%
Demystifying Democracy Video Response Assessment	20%
Total	100%

Student grades for assignments will be posted in the Canvas gradebook no later than midnight on Tuesday of each week beginning in Week Two of this course. It is important to read the comments posted in the gradebook as these comments are intended to help students improve their work. Final grades will be posted by the due date as posted in the Academic Calendar.

Grading Scale

The following grading scale will be used for all exams and final course grades:

- 93-100% = A
 - 90 - 92% = A-
 - 87 – 89% = B+
 - 84 – 86% = B
 - 81 – 83% = B-
 - 78 – 80% = C+
 - *75 – 77% = C
 - 73 – 74% = C-
 - 71 – 72% = D+
 - 68 – 70% = D
 - Below 68% = F
-

Incompletes and Late Assignments

All assignments are to be submitted by the due dates. There will be a 10% reduction of possible points for **each day** an assignment is late, and assignments will **not be** accepted for credit four days after the due date. If missing assignments result in the failure to meet learning outcomes, you may receive a letter grade reduction on the final grade in addition to the loss of points for missing work. Assignments will be considered late if posted after the due date and time using Pacific Standard Time. No assignments will be accepted after midnight on Sunday night, the last day of class.

Exceptions for extenuating circumstances must be pre-approved by the instructor and the program director.

PLNU Spiritual Care

PLNU strives to be a place where you grow as a whole person. To this end, we provide resources for our Graduate and Adult Undergraduate students to encounter God and grow in their Christian faith. At the Mission Valley (MV) campus we have an onsite chaplain who is available during class break times across the week. If you have questions or a desire to meet or share any prayer requests with the onsite chaplain, you may email Dr. Sylvia Cortez Masyuk at scortezm@pointloma.edu.

In addition, on the MV campus, there is a prayer chapel on the third floor, which is open for use as a space set apart for quiet reflection and prayer.

State Authorization

State authorization is a formal determination by a state that Point Loma Nazarene University is approved to conduct activities regulated by that state. In certain states outside California, Point Loma Nazarene University is not authorized to enroll online (distance education) students. If a student moves to another state after admission to the program and/or enrollment in an online course, continuation within the program and/or course will depend on whether Point Loma Nazarene University is authorized to offer distance education courses in that state. It is the student's responsibility to notify the institution of any change in his or her physical location. Refer to the map on [State Authorization](#) to view which states allow online (distance education) outside of California.

PLNU Copyright Policy

Point Loma Nazarene University, as a non-profit educational institution, is entitled by law to use materials protected by the US Copyright Act for classroom education. Any use of those materials outside the class may violate the law.

PLNU Recording Notification

In order to enhance the learning experience, please be advised that this course may be recorded by the professor for educational purposes, and access to these recordings will be limited to enrolled students and authorized personnel.

Note that all recordings are subject to copyright protection. Any unauthorized distribution or publication of these recordings without written approval from the University (refer to the Dean) is strictly prohibited.

PLNU Academic Honesty Policy

Students should demonstrate academic honesty by doing original work and by giving appropriate credit to the ideas of others. Academic dishonesty is the act of presenting information, ideas, and/or concepts as one's own when, in reality, they are the results of another person's creativity and effort. A faculty member who believes a situation involving academic dishonesty has been detected may assign a failing grade for that assignment or examination or, depending on the seriousness of the offense, for the course.

For all student appeals, faculty and students should follow the procedures outlined in the University Catalog. See [Adult Undergraduate Academic and General Policies](#) for definitions of kinds of academic dishonesty and for further policy information.

During the first week of class, you will be asked to submit an Academic Honesty Verification Statement. Submitting the statement is a requirement of this course. By submitting the Academic Honesty Verification Statement, you will be verifying all assignments completed in this course were completed by you. Carefully review the Academic Honesty Statement below.

Statement: "In submitting this form, I am verifying all the assignments in this course will be completed by me and will be my own work."

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy

You are allowed to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools (e.g., ChatGPT, iA Writer, Marmot, Botowski) to generate ideas, but you are not allowed to use AI tools to generate content (text, video, audio, images) that will end up in any work submitted to be graded for this course. If you have any doubts about using AI, please gain permission from the instructor.

PLNU Academic Accommodations Policy

PLNU is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all its programs, services, and activities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students with disabilities may request course-related accommodations by contacting the Educational Access Center (EAC), located in the Bond Academic Center (EAC@pointloma.edu or 619-849-2486). Once a student's eligibility for an accommodation has been determined, the EAC will work with the student to create an Accommodation Plan (AP) that outlines allowed accommodations. The EAC makes accommodations available to professors at the student's request.

PLNU highly recommends that students speak with their professors during the first two weeks of each semester/term about the implementation of their AP in that particular course. Accommodations are not retroactive,

so clarifying with the professor at the outset is one of the best ways to promote positive academic outcomes.

Students who need accommodations for a disability should contact the EAC as early as possible (i.e., ideally before the beginning of the semester) to ensure appropriate accommodations can be provided. It is the student's responsibility to make the first contact with the EAC. Students cannot assume that because they had accommodations in the past, their eligibility at PLNU is automatic. All determinations at PLNU must go through the EAC process. This is to protect the privacy of students with disabilities who may not want to disclose this information and are not asking for any special accommodations.

Language and Belonging

Point Loma Nazarene University faculty are committed to helping create a safe and hospitable learning environment for all students. As Christian scholars, we are keenly aware of the power of language and believe in treating others with dignity. As such, it is important that our language be equitable, inclusive, and prejudice-free. Inclusive/Bias-free language is the standard outlined by all major academic style guides, including MLA, APA, and Chicago, and it is the expected norm in university-level work. Good writing and speaking do not use unsubstantiated or irrelevant generalizations about personal qualities such as age, disability, economic class, ethnicity, marital status, parentage, political or religious beliefs, race, gender, sex, or sexual orientation. Inclusive language also avoids using stereotypes or terminology that demeans persons or groups based on age, disability, class, ethnicity, gender, race, language, or national origin. Respectful use of language is particularly important when referring to those outside of the religious and lifestyle commitments of those in the PLNU community. By working toward precision and clarity of language, we mark ourselves as serious and respectful scholars, and we model the Christ-like quality of hospitality.

If you (or someone you know) have experienced a bias incident regarding language, you can find more information on reporting and resources at www.pointloma.edu/bias.

Sexual Misconduct and Discrimination

Point Loma Nazarene University faculty are committed to helping create a safe learning environment for all students. If you (or someone you know) have experienced any form of sexual discrimination or misconduct, including sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available through the [Title IX Office](#). Please be aware that under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, it is required to disclose information about such misconduct to the Title IX Office.

If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting responsibility, you can contact Counseling Services at counselingservices@pointloma.edu or find a list of campus pastors via our [Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Policy](#).

If you (or someone you know) have experienced other forms of discrimination or bias, you can find more information on reporting and resources via our [Nondiscrimination and Anti-harassment Policy](#).

PLNU Attendance and Participation Policy

Regular and punctual attendance at all class sessions is considered essential to optimum academic achievement. Therefore, regular attendance and participation in each course are minimal requirements.

If the student is absent for more than 10 percent of class sessions, the faculty member will issue a written warning of de-enrollment. If the absences exceed 20 percent, the student may be de-enrolled without notice until the university withdrawal date or, after that date, receive an "F" grade.

Students who anticipate being absent for an entire week of a course should contact the instructor in advance for approval and make arrangements to complete the required coursework and/or alternative assignments assigned at the discretion of the instructor. Acceptance of late work is at the discretion of the instructor and does not waive attendance requirements.

Refer to [Academic Policies](#) for additional details.

Synchronous Attendance/Participation Definition

For synchronous courses that have specific scheduled meeting times (including in-person, hybrid, and synchronous online courses), absences are counted from the first official meeting of the class regardless of the date of the student's enrollment. For courses with specific attendance requirements, those requirements are outlined in the course syllabus.

Note: For synchronous courses with an online asynchronous week, refer to the Online Asynchronous Class Attendance policy listed below.

Online Asynchronous Attendance/Participation Definition

Students taking online courses with no specific scheduled meeting times are expected to actively engage throughout each week of the course. Attendance is defined as participating in an academic activity within the online classroom which includes, but is not limited to:

- Engaging in an online discussion
- Submitting an assignment
- Taking an exam
- Participating in online labs
- Initiating contact with faculty member within the learning management system to discuss course content

Note: Logging into the course does not qualify as participation and will not be counted as meeting the attendance requirement.

Course Modality Definitions

1. Online Courses: These are courses with class meetings where all instruction and interaction are fully online.
 1. Synchronous Courses: At least one class meeting takes place at a designated time.
 2. Asynchronous Courses: All class meetings are asynchronous.
 2. Hybrid Courses: These are courses with class meetings that take place both in the classroom and online synchronously and/or asynchronously.
 3. In-Person Courses: These are courses that meet in person with the instructor and students in a physical classroom setting. With approval by the area dean, this may include up to 25% of qualified class interactions through a Learning Management System (such as Canvas).
-

Use of Technology

In order to be successful in the online or hybrid environment, you'll need to meet the minimum technology and system requirements; please refer to the [Technology and System Requirements](#) information. Additionally, students are required to have headphone speakers, microphone, or webcams compatible with their computer available to use. Please note that any course with online proctored exams requires a computer with a camera (tablets are not compatible nor allowable) to complete exams online.

Problems with technology do not relieve you of the responsibility of participating, turning in your assignments, or completing your class work.

GPS Academic Resources

PLNU offers the following free academic resources virtually for Graduate Professional Studies (GPS) Students. Visit myPLNU through the links below for more information.

- [The GPS Writing Center](#) offers:
 - **Zoom Writers Workshops** offered each quad on a variety of helpful topics
 - **One-to-one appointments** with the Writing Coach
 - **Microlearning YouTube Video Library** for helpful tips anytime
- [Research Help Guide](#) to help you start your research
 - The physical office is located on the third floor of the [Mission Valley Regional Center](#) off the student lounge
- [Academic Writing Resources Course](#): Found on your Canvas Dashboard, this course is non-credit with 24/7 access, no time limits, and self-paced content. [Watch a quick video run-through](#) and take time now to explore!
- [Grammarly](#): Students have unlimited FREE access to Grammarly for Education, a trusted tool designed to help enhance writing skills by providing real-time feedback, identifying areas for improvement, and providing suggestions. Grammarly's Generative AI is NOT available with our student accounts.
- [Tutoring](#): Students have access to 24/7 live or scheduled subject tutoring through Tutor.com, including a Paper Drop-Off Service with feedback within 12 hours.

Assignments-at-a-Glance

The course summary below lists our assignments and their due dates. Click on any assignment to review it.

1. **Weekly Readings with InQuizitive Questions (CLO 1)** As a student of American Government, it is vital that you comprehend our readings and bring your critical thinking and discussion skills to each class session throughout the semester. Therefore, you will complete the InQuizitive module associated with our *We the People* textbook before Tuesday each week to support you in comprehension and critical thinking
2. **Weekly Lectures and Discussions (insert CLOs)**: Students will watch the posted lecture and respond to a set of discussion questions, engaging in meaningful discourse about the topics of this course.
3. **Weekly “Government in the News” Presentation in small Group Discussions (CLO 2)**: Each week, one students will be assigned the role of “presenter” to find a current event that deals with the topic we are learning about this week, and prepare a short presentation on how this issue in the news illustrates or illuminates important aspects of our topic. They will pose questions to the rest of the class to discuss what’s at stake in how we see this aspect of US democracy playing out in real time or affecting our everyday lives. The rest of the members will engage in discussion with the presenter about the current event presented. Students in each group will take turns being the presenters or the participants each week.
4. **“Analyze/Apply” Papers (CLO 3)**: Students will submit 3 short writing assignments during the Quad. These three papers will be 3 pages double spaced in APA or Chicago Author-Date format, using headings and subheadings with standard one-inch margins in 12-point font. Papers should include a reference page if you refer to texts from class or other outside sources, using correct formatting to create in-text citations within the body of the paper.
5. **Demystifying Democracy Assessment (CLO 4)**: Based on what you have learned this semester, what would you say is one of the most important concepts for the average person to better understand how government/politics works that is, in fact, widely misunderstood by the American public? How might U.S. democracy work better if more people properly understood this concept? For this final assignment, you will write a short script and create a 3-minute video explaining the reality of this concept versus how it is commonly misused/misunderstood. You must cite credible sources to make your case and give interesting examples to keep your audience engaged.

Course Information

	Topic	Reading and Other Media Assignments	Assignments
Week 1			
	The US Constitution	- <i>We the People</i> Chapter 2	InQuizitive reading Chapter 2

		• Lecture 1 -Listen to the Constitutional Podcast, Framed (60 minutes) Watch Vox, The Electoral College, Explained (8 minutes) Read The Electoral College: Top 3 Pros and Cons	Lecture 1 Discussion Questions
			Weekly “Government in the News” Current Event Presentation Discussion
Week 2			
	Federalism	-<i>We the People</i> Chapter 3 • Lecture 2 on federalism -Watch Peter Sagal, “A More Perfect Union” on federalism (51 minutes) -Darrell West, “Why Federalism Has Become Risky for American Democracy,” September 23, 2022 -<i>We the People</i> Chapter 4 Short Lecture 3 (Civil Liberties)	InQuizzitive reading Chapter 3
	Civil Liberties	-Listen to “The First Amendment” Constitutional podcast (52 minutes)	InQuizitive reading Chapter 4
			Lecture 2: Federalism Discussion Questions
			Weekly “Government in the News” Current Event Presentation Discussion
			Paper #1 on Federalism
			Lecture 3: Civil Liberties Discussion Questions
Week 3			
	Civil Rights	<i>We the People</i> Chapter 5 Listen to The 1965 Voting Rights Act: Where Does It Stand?, Civics 101 (38 min) Read “Voter Suppression, Then and Now,” Marketplace 2020	InQuizitive reading Chapter 5
			Lecture 4 Discussion Questions
			Weekly “Government in the News” Current Event Presentation Discussion
Week 4			
	Public Opinion and Media	<i>We the People</i> chapters 6 and 7 Watch “Social Media and Political Polarization in America,” 60 Minutes, 2022 (13 minutes) Check out news sources you use on Ad Fontes interactive media bias chart	InQuizitive reading Chapters 6 and 7
			Lecture 5 Discussion Questions
			Weekly “Government in the News” Current

			Event Presentation Discussion
Week 5			
	Political Parties and Interest Groups	<i>We the People</i> Chapter 8 Watch “How the Two Parties Formed” from PBS, Preserving Democracy (6 minutes) Watch How to Break the Two-Party System, Vox (3 minutes) Read Liliana Mason on party polarization, <i>Washington Post</i> Listen to <i>This American Life</i>, “Take the Money and Run for Office” (53 minutes) Optional: If you’re curious and want to know more about the history & (re)alignments of our two major political parties and their issues, listen to “The Republican and Democratic Parties,” Civics 101 podcast	InQuizitive reading Chapter 8 Lecture 6 Discussion Questions Weekly “Government in the News” Current Event Presentation Discussion Paper #2 Interest Group Analysis
Week 6			
	Political Participation, Campaigns and Elections	<i>We the People</i> Chapter 9 Read Why Many Americans Don’t Vote, FiveThirtyEight, October 26, 2020 Highly Recommended: Netflix Explained, Whose Vote Counts (24 minutes)	InQuizitive reading Chapter 9 Lecture 7 Discussion Questions Weekly “Government in the News” Current Event Presentation Discussion
Week 7			
	Congress	<i>We the People</i> Chapter 10 Podcast: Civics 101, Congressional Committees (10 min) Ron Elving, NPR, The Secret Strategy of Congressional Seniority (4 minutes)	InQuizitive reading Chapter 10 Lecture 8 Discussion Questions

		Podcast: NPR, Throughline: The Battle Over the Filibuster's Future is a Battle Over Its Past (7 min)	Weekly "Government in the News" Current Event Presentation Discussion Paper #3 Member of Congress Analysis
Week 8			
	The Presidency and the Courts	<i>We the People</i> chapters 11 and 13 Vox News How a Case Gets to the Supreme Court (5 min) Read The Conversation Sandra Day O'Connor's experience as a legislator guided her consensus-building work on the Supreme Court Listen to All Things Considered "The Roots of Judicial Activism" 2009 (4 minutes) Listen to Civics 101, The Shadow Docket (22 minutes)	InQuizitive reading Chapters 11 and 13 Lecture 9 Discussion Questions Weekly "Government in the News" Current Event Presentation Discussion "Demystifying Democracy" Final Video Assessment