Course Overview: PSC 211

Course title: U.S. National Politics

Pre-requisites: None

Number of credits: 3

Catalog course description: The U.S. government creates and implements public policy that impacts daily life. This course examines how Congress and the President identify problems and develop policy solutions, and how the courts, the public, the media, and interest groups shape policy outcomes. Students evaluate the impact and implementation of public policy and consider alternative approaches when policies fall short.

Required instructor qualifications: M.A. or Ph.D. in Political Science or equivalent. Master's in Education considered with appropriate experience teaching political science or related courses.

Course's audience and role in Eastern's curriculum: Students study U.S. national politics through the lens of public policy, connecting the institutions and actors of American government to policy creation, implementation, and impact. The course emphasizes Critical Thinking, Communication, Integrative Learning, and Disciplinary Knowledge through sustained policy analysis, collaborative workshops, writing, and presentation. This course meets the general education ELAC requirement in Critical Thinking and is also approved in the ELAC Social Sciences category so is commonly taken by PSC majors and non-majors alike.

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the semester students will be able to:

- Identify areas of public policy and explain how policy is made and implemented.
- Use evidence to analyze policy issues, examine assumptions, synthesize information, and draw logical and reflective conclusions.
- Communicate clearly for a specific context, audience, and purpose using appropriate organization, content, format, and style.
- Connect experiences with national public policy to classroom learning and draw conclusions using examples, facts, or theories from more than one field or context.
- Identify how Congress, the presidency, and the federal courts influence public policy.
- Explain how the public, public opinion, the media, and interest groups influence the policymaking process.
- Evaluate how policy implementation and outcomes may differ from a policy's stated intentions.

Primary modes of instruction: Instruction should combine short lectures or instructional videos with focused readings, class discussion, and collaborative policy-analysis workshops. Students should investigate a public-policy topic across the semester and repeatedly apply course concepts to that topic.

High-impact practices include collaborative assignments/projects and diversity/global learning. Policy topics should provide opportunities to examine how public policy affects different communities and how contested perspectives shape policy debates.

Primary modes of assessment: The course should emphasize sustained, evidence-based policy analysis rather than relying primarily on examinations. A sample syllabus uses the following distribution:

- Policy Choice Submission (5%)
- Policy Paper Homework Assignments (15%)
- Paper 1: The Policy Problem (15%)
- Paper 2: Policy Creation (15%)
- Paper 3: Policy Implementation/Policy Impact (15%)
- Group Policy Presentation (15%)
- Participation (20%)

The major papers are approximately five pages each and build sequentially from defining a policy problem, to examining policy creation, to evaluating implementation and impact. Students also complete research/workshop assignments that require source identification and evaluation. The culminating group presentation synthesizes the semester's applied policy work.

A combination of exams and papers could also be used as long as there is at least one policy focused paper that could be about a law passed by Congress or a de facto policy created by a court decision. The intention here would be align the current high school syllabi with this course.

Other notes for instructors: The department does not require use of a designated textbook. Primary instructional materials include videos on the public, media, interest groups, and branches of government in policymaking, supplemented by policy-specific readings.

Suggested resources include:
- Glen Krutz, American Government 2e (OpenStax, 2019), used as a student resource.
- Johanna Dunaway and Doris Graber, Mass Media and American Politics, 11th ed. (Sage/CQ Press, 2018), for media-related material.

Instructors should coordinate significant changes to course content, learning outcomes, major assignments, or required materials with the Eastern faculty liaison.

Approved by the Department of Political Science, Philosophy, and Geography: 10/14/2026

Signature of department chair or faculty liaison: ___ Mark R. Weaver _____