**General Education Course Inclusion Proposal**

**PERSEPCTIVES ON SOCIETY**

*This proposal form is intended for departments proposing a course for inclusion in the Northern Michigan University General Education Program. Courses in a component satisfy both the Critical Thinking and the component learning outcomes. Departments should complete this form and submit it electronically through the General Education SHARE site.*

**Course Name and Number:** PS105 American Government

**Home Department:** Political Science

**Department Chair Name and Contact Information** (phone, email):

Carter Wilson, ext.: 1502, [carwilso@nmu.edu](mailto:carwilso@nmu.edu)

**Expected frequency of Offering of the course** (e.g. every semester, every fall): Every semester.

**Official Course Status**: Has this course been approved by CUP and Senate? YES

*Courses that have not yet been approved by CUP must be submitted to CUP prior to review by GEC. Note that GEC is able to review courses that are in the process of approval; however, inclusion in the General Education Program is dependent upon Senate and Academic Affairs approval of the course into the overall curriculum.*

**Overview of course** (please attach a current syllabus as well): *Please limit the overview to two pages (not including the syllabus)*

1. Overview of the course content:

American Government is divided into four parts: foundations, institutions, political processes, and public policy outcomes. Foundations examine the philosophical, legal, and constitutional formation of the U.S. government and federal system. It underscores the importance of ideas, social circumstances and socioeconomic arrangements on the formation of the U.S. government. It demonstrates how changes in historical circumstances and social structure produced changes in the organization of government: the shift from a localized, parochial, agricultural economy which allowed for limited federal powers to an industrialized, technologically advanced, national economy, connected from coast to coast which produced a stronger, national government, with more centralized powers. This part underscores the persistent theme throughout the history of the U.S. government of tensions between increasing federal powers and limiting these powers.

Institutions focus on the four major institutions of government: the legislature, presidency, judiciary and bureaucracy. It examines how changes in society produced changes in these institutions, as the U.S. society became larger, more technologically advanced, and more complex. Congress developed committee systems corresponding to major social issues—banking committees, education committees, foreign policy committees etc. The presidency created the Executive Office. The bureaucracy expanded, new cabinet departments, independent agencies, commissions and boards were added. Even the courts became more specialized.

Political processes examines elections, voting behavior and the formation of the two party system. It examines how major historical events and changes in the organization of society produced changes in the coalitions that form the two major political parties. This part of the course emphasizes the importance of the vote and political participation.

Public policies focus on major contemporary issues: the environment, civil rights, reproductive rights, criminal justice, foreign policy and others. This part of the course examines ethical issues of these public policies and encourages students to get involved in resolving these issues.

1. Explain why this course satisfies the Component specified and significantly addresses both learning outcomes:

PS105, American Government, satisfies the critical theory and perspectives on society learning outcomes as defined by the NMU General Education Committee.

Critical Theory

This course surveys the intellectual foundation of America government. It examines the U.S. Constitution, the political theories that inspired both the American Revolution and the formation of the American government, and the visions, values and ideas of the leaders that inspired the formation of this nation. It surveys theories used to assess and evaluate the forms and behavior of governments. It examines the organization and functions of the institutional of American government. It reviews data on public opinions, political behavior and public policies.

Evidence

Students learn about the text of the constitution, the specific ideas and values promoted by political leaders and intellectuals, the organization of operation of American government, the opinions of the public and the substance and impacts of public policy.

Integrate

Students learn not only specific information about American government. They learn to integrate that information into a deeper understanding of the constitutional foundation and the actual organization and operation of the American government.

Evaluate

Students will be challenged to use the information and theoretical models acquired from this course to evaluate the American government and the behavior or political leaders and institutions. They will to evaluate contemporary social issues and the impacts of public policies.

Summary

Students completing this course will learn how to integrate evidence and theory into cogent, coherent, logical analysis and assessments of American government, the behavior of its leaders and institutions and the impacts of public policies.

They will be challenged to rely on accurate and high quality information and evidence in developing political arguments. They will be required to integrate their evident and information to reach well developed and informed conclusions. They will have to evaluate information and ideas, analyze social issues, events, processes and structures. This course is designed to get students to think critically, address ethical issues and understand the development of U.S. government and society. This course clearly satisfied the learning outcome components for perspectives on society.

Nevertheless, assessing these learning outcome components is a challenge, primarily because learning outcomes are assessed primarily through ~~two methods:~~ exams ~~and class discussion~~. Occasionally, a faculty member will assign a short argument paper, but most do not. About 90 percent of a student’s grade for this course is based on student performance on four multiple choice exams. ~~About 10 percent of this grade is based on class discussions.~~ Most of the substance of the knowledge, analytical abilities, understanding of ethical issues and exploration of the development of human society is assessed through multiple choice exams.

1. Describe the target audience (level, student groups, etc.): This is a 100 level, introductory course. Its target audience focuses on freshmen and sophomores, but includes all undergraduates.
2. Give information on other roles this course may serve (e.g. University Requirement, required for a major(s), etc.): This course also satisfies the Division IV Liberal Studies Component: “foundation of social science.”

This course satisfies the Division IV Liberal Studies Component: “foundation of social science.” It is also a required course for the social studies component of the degree in education.

E. Provide any other information that may be relevant to the review of the course by GEC. See attached syllabus.

**PLAN FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES  
CRITICAL THINKING**

*Attainment of the CRITICAL THINKING Learning Outcome is required for courses in this component. There are several dimensions to this learning outcome. Please complete the following Plan for Assessment with information regarding course assignments (type, frequency, importance) that will be used by the department to assess the attainment of students in each of the dimensions of the learning outcome. Type refers to the types of assignments used for assessment such as written work, presentations, etc. Frequency refers to the number of assignments included such as a single paper or multiple papers. Importance refers to the relative emphasis or weight of the assignment to the entire course. For each dimension, please specify the expected success rate for students completing the course that meet the proficiency level and explain your reasoning. Please refer to the Critical Thinking Rubric for more information on student performance/proficiency in this area. Note that courses are expected to meaningfully address all dimensions of the learning outcome.*

Because PS105 classes tend to be large, faculty members rarely assign extensive papers or essays. Most course assignments consist of weekly chapter readings ~~and class discussions~~. The three dimensions of critical thinking learning outcomes are integrated throughout the course in chapter readings ~~and assessed in class discussions~~ and in three to four multiple choice exams. Each chapter in the text will require students to grasp evidence—evidence of specific provisions in specific articles and amendments of the constitution; evidence of how each of the four institutions of government (legislative, executive, judicial and bureaucratic) is organized and functions; evidence of the organization and operation of political parties, campaigns and elections; evidence of how public policy is made and the specific provisions of public policy. Each chapter will require students to integrate information, apply their understanding of the constitution to the operations of government. Each chapter will require students to make value judgments and evaluate the validity of truth claims about the constitutionality of the role of the president in issuing executive orders, of the role of the bureaucracy in creating administrative law, or the role of the courts in making public policies.

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| **DIMENSION** | **DIMENSION GUIDANCE** | **PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT** |
| **Evidence** | Assesses quality of information that may be integrated into an argument | The evidence criterion will be assessed with select multiple choice questions. Questions are attached. We expect 75 percent of our students to demonstrate proficiency in this dimension. |
| **Integrate** | Integrates insight and or reasoning with previous understanding to reach informed conclusions and/or understanding | The integrate criterion will be assessed using multiple choice questions. The questions are attached. We expect 75 percent of our students to demonstrate proficiency in this dimension. |
| **Evaluate** | Evaluates information, ideas, and activities according to established principles and guidelines | The evaluate criterion will be assessed using multiple choice questions. The questions are attached. We expect 75 percent of our students to demonstrate proficiency in this dimension. |

**PLAN FOR LEARNING OUTCOMES  
PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIETY**

*Attainment of the PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIETY Learning Outcome is required for courses in this component. There are several dimensions to this learning outcome. Please complete the following Plan for Assessment with information regarding course assignments (type, frequency, importance) that will be used by the department to assess the attainment of students in each of the dimensions of the learning outcome. Type refers to the types of assignments used for assessment such as written work, presentations, etc. Frequency refers to the number of assignments included such as a single paper or multiple papers. Importance refers to the relative emphasis or weight of the assignment to the entire course. For each dimension, please specify the expected success rate for students completing the course that meet the proficiency level and explain your reasoning. Please refer to the Rubric for more information on student performance/proficiency in this learning outcome. Note that courses are expected to meaningfully address all dimensions of the learning outcome.*

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| **DIMENSION** | **DIMENSION GUIDANCE** | **PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT** |
| **Analysis of society** | Synthesis and analysis of social structures and processes or events | The analysis of society criterion will be assessed using multiple choice questions. We expect 75 percent of our students to demonstrate proficiency in this dimension. |
| **Ethical Issues** | Addressing ethical issues in society | The ethical issues criterion will be assessed using multiple choice questions. We expect 75 percent of our students to demonstrate proficiency in this dimension. |
| **Development and context of society** | Explore themes in the development of human society | The development and context of society criterion will be assessed using multiple choice questions. We expect 75 percent of our students to demonstrate proficiency in this dimension. |

**General Education Program**

**Assessment Questions for PS105 American Government**

**Critical Thinking**

**Evidence** (Information is credible, appropriate to support a coherent analysis.)

Former presidential candidate and neuro-surgeon Ben Carson believes in the U.S. Constitution and he also believes that a Muslim should not hold a leadership position in the federal government. Which of the following statements is the best assessment of Dr. Carson’s position?

1. Dr. Carson’s view accurately reflects the views of the founding fathers that the United States is a Christian Nation.
2. Dr. Carson’s view contradicts Article 6 of the Constitution which states that “no religious test shall **ever** be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.”
3. Dr. Carson’s view is consistent with Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution which allows voters to select members of Congress and the president on the basis of their religious affiliation.
4. We all know that the United States is a Christian nation and that all of the founding fathers were Christians, therefore, Dr. Carson’s statement is consistent with the constitution and the founding fathers.

The Budget Act of 1921

1. Created the Congressional Budget Office
2. Limited presidential powers over the budget
3. Prohibits the president from passing a budget bill
4. Shifted responsibilities over the national budget from Congress to the president.

Critical thinking involves the ability to identify high quality, credible information directly related to the comprehensive analysis of a topic. These two questions require students to do more than just recall important parts of the U.S. Constitution and statutes. It requires them to know and understand the importance of these constitutional and statutory statements as valuable and credible evidence used in assessing the validity of political statements. It also requires them to use the evidence in an analysis of a topic.

These two questions are representative of a large universe of multiple choice questions that we will use to assess critical thinking and the use of evidence.

**Integrate** (Synthesizes ideas and information appropriate for purpose.)

What do you think Benjamin Franklin meant by this expression: Those who would sacrifice

liberty for security deserve neither?

1. The United States needs to put more resources into securing its borders and into monitoring Muslim Mosques for terrorist in order to make us freer and more secure.
2. We should never be so fearful of terrorist attacks that we agree to more police surveillance to make us feel more secure.
3. It is better to give up our liberty in order to make us safer from terrorist attacks.
4. We need more security in order to have more liberty.

The War Powers Act of 1973 deviates from the constitution because

1. The constitution gives the president the power to declare war but the War Powers Act requires the president to obtain special permission from Congress 60 days before sending troops into combat.
2. The constitution makes the president the commander in chief, but the War Powers Act expands the war powers of Congress over the president.
3. The constitution gives Congress the power to declare war, but the War Powers Act allows the president to send troops into combat to save American lives, providing that the president informs Congress 48 hours after sending the troops.
4. The constitution gives Congress the power to declare war, but the War Powers Act allows the president to send troops into combat providing that the president gets Congressional approval 60 days before sending the troops.

Critical thinking involves the ability to integrate insights and reasoning and to synthesize ideas and information appropriate to reaching an informed conclusion. These questions require more than just rote memory or the simple recall of the substance of the law or ideas of the founding fathers, but the synthesis of the meaning of statutes or ideas, the principles and information appropriate to reaching informed conclusions. These are not just the only questions, but a sample of the universe of related questions.

**Evaluate** (Conclusion or opinion is logically tied to an appropriate range of information and insight. Conclusions are logical and reflect informed evaluation and ability to utilize evidence, perspective and/or insight.)

What are the advantages of a more centralized federalism?

1. There are no advantages of centralized federalism because as federal powers increases,

democracy and liberty decreases.

1. Under centralized federalism, the federal government imposes federal priorities and goals on state and local governments. This was an advantage in the implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 because this imposition ended racial segregation in the South.
2. Expanding federal powers means concentrating powers in a single individual, the president. This has advantages during war times when we need strong leadership.
3. Expanding federal powers means increasing the powers of the president over congress. This has the advantage in assisting congress in passing new laws to solve current problems.

Critical thinking involves the ability to evaluate information, ideas and activities according to established principles and guidelines. Given organizational principles related to governmental institutions, this type of question tests students on their ability to apply these principles to the organization of federal powers.

**Perspectives on Society**

**Analysis of Society** (Demonstrates ability to synthesize and analyze major social structures and processes or events.)

How do political parties in the United States today differ from political parties of the 1960s.

1. Political parties today are no different from the way they were in the 1960s.
2. In the 1960s political parties were more geographically based where Northern Democrats and Northern Republicans had more in common than Southern Democrats and were better able to engage in bipartisan cooperation; whereas political parties today are more ideologically based and therefore are more polarized.
3. Today, both political parties are more connected to the people, tend to have a broader base of political support, and are less dependent on donations from large corporations or from the very rich.
4. People are more supportive of political parties today than they were during the 1960s.

A major aspect of the analysis of society is the ability to synthesize and analyze major social structures,

institutions, processes and events in an understanding of the larger society. These structures, institutions and

processes involve variations in geographical regions and institutions of government and organizations of

political parties. This particular question involves variations in geographical regions and changes in the

organization of political parties and the impact of these changes on political processes and political events. This

question is but one in a universe of questions involving the analysis of society.

**Ethical Issues** (Identifies ethical issues and their origins within society. Explains the impact of ethical issues within society.)

During the Flint, Michigan lead and water crisis, the U.S. EPA deferred to the judgment of state

and local officials. According to the Governor of Michigan and most political observers, which

of the following reflects the best ethical judgment:

1. In every and all circumstances, federal regulatory agencies should defer to the judgment of local officials, because local officials are closer to the people and know best what the people need that bureaucrats in Washington D.C.
2. In this case, EPA scientists who knew that lead levels were dangerously high had responsibility to sound the alarm and take action to protect the people of Flint and they failed to do so.
3. Deferring to the judgment of state and local officials was the ethical thing to do because officials in the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality are better qualified to assess the water than EPA officials.
4. The EPA is the chief agency in the United States responsible for guaranteeing safe water and for enforcing the Clean Water Act of 1972. This agency should not defer to the judgment of state and local officials.

Ethical issues related to perspectives on society involve more than the simple ability to identify ethical issues within society. It entails the ability to evaluate ethical issues; to understand the consequences of political judgments; and to identity underlining political or administrative principles that contribute to bad judgments and bad consequences in the first place. This question is but one among many that assess ethical issues in perspectives on society.

**Development &** (Identifies and examines historical and contemporary themes pertaining to

**context of society** human development and human organizations and their effect with the human society and the natural world.)

Political leaders today are divided over the issue of increasing federal powers versus increasing state powers. How would the founding fathers weigh in on this debate?

1. All the founding fathers believed in limiting federal powers and increasing state powers.
2. All the founding fathers believed increasing federal powers in the area of national defense and state powers in all other areas.
3. Jefferson believed in limiting federal powers except when it came to enforcing the Bill of Rights.
4. Jefferson and Madison believed in states’ rights and limited federal powers but Adams and Hamilton believed increasing federal powers.

This question is one among many in the universe of questions that examine one of the most important historical and contemporary theme pertaining to human development and human organizations and their effect with the human society and the natural world: What is the most appropriate pattern of distributing power in political institutions in society. This question focuses on the issue of federalism and the distribution of power between the federal government and state governments. It is no less important today than it was in 1787.