

PS 101
Introduction to American Government and Politics
Summer Session B 2022
Asynchronous Online

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Course Overview and Goals

This course provides a survey of the political processes and institutions of American government.

That sounds boring, right? Actually, this course will be anything but boring. U.S. political history, the processes by which citizen preferences are converted into policy, and the political institutions of this nation are all characterized by drama and conflict. We will answer questions such as: why did over 96% of members of Congress who ran for re-election win when public opinion polls consistently find that Americans rate Congress lower than cockroaches, root canals, traffic jams, and Genghis Kong? We will focus on topics like the civil rights movement, the war on terrorism, polarization in Congress, the 2016 presidential election and 2018 mid-term elections, and debates over gun control just to name a few. You will learn what Ludacris can teach us about public opinion. You will learn how to become a more engaged citizen.

Each of these questions or political issues can be understood most clearly through the lens of the historical and institutional developments of the American political system. In this course our lectures, readings, discussions, and assignments will focus on the fundamental ideas and structures of government that create the arena in which political events occur and ideas are discussed. We will focus on the political struggles during this nation's founding that continue to impact politics today; the Constitution; political parties; Congress; the presidency; the judiciary; voting, campaigns, and elections; public opinion; the news media; among other topics.

This course has four objectives:

- To provide you with an understanding of the United States' political development, its institutions, its political systems, and its current politics.
- To help you learn how social scientists ask and answer interesting questions about politics, including providing you with a basic familiarity with various theories of political science and how political scientists use them to understand politics.
- To help you become a savvy consumer of political news and current events, both in this class and beyond. This will include gaining the ability to interpret basic quantitative or qualitative data to understand and assess political debates, the behavior of political actors, and America's governmental institutions.

- To provide you with a foundation in what you need to know to be an engaged American citizen in your communities.

Online Course Policies and Overview

As an online course, there are a number of dynamics and logistics that work a bit differently than a traditional, classroom course. As such, there are a few additional policies necessary for these classes to function smoothly. First, it is even more important that you regularly check your email that BSC has on file for you, your BSC email, and the course's Moodle page daily for updates. I will only email you at your BSC email address or the email BSC has on file for you, or post updates to Moodle. Likewise, if you have any questions or concerns as the course progresses, please email me. I will do my best to respond within 24 hours during BSC's business days (Monday through Friday).

Second, a bit about how the course is designed. This is an asynchronous course. That means we don't meet at specified times or hours during the week, rather, you may progress through each week's material at your own pace. The course material is divided into 6 weeks. Each week, except Week 1 which has four, is composed of two or three topics, each of which have either one or two parts to them. All assigned reading, lecture viewing, and assignments should be completed by 11:59pm the Saturday of the week in which they occur. The one exception to this is Week 6. In Week 6, everything is due by Friday, July 8th at 11:59pm, because that is the end of the summer term. Week 2, for example, is composed of two topics, each divided into two parts. There are also two discussion assignments for this week. All discussion assignments, lecture viewing, and reading, should be completed and submitted by 11:59pm on the Saturday at the end of that week, which is 6/11. Additional assignments (blog posts, mid-terms, the final, and final papers) are due as designated in the syllabus and on Moodle. The final day of the Six-week session is Friday, July 8th.

Thirdly, office hours. I don't have set office hours during the summer. However, I check my email regularly Monday to Friday, and will make a point to respond to emails within 24 hours of receiving them Monday to Friday. I'm also available to meet via phone or video-conferencing services if that is preferred.

Netiquette

The Internet is hard. It can be difficult to communicate formally with one another, yet still convey our humanity. We lack so many of the cues we have in real life, such as body language, tone, gestures, facial expressions, among others. This can easily lead to misunderstandings or disagreements that aren't necessary. Thus, it is helpful to remember how to communicate formally, yet warmly with our peers, and to be respectful in all of our communications. As such, I have adopted the University of Florida's netiquette guide as the guiding etiquette for this class. Please review it (linked on Moodle) before the course begins and keep the guidelines in mind during the class.

Readings

Most readings will come from the two texts assigned for the course. Occasionally, I will assign

additional readings or other material to review, such as a podcast or short video. These will usually be posted on Moodle following the Content Release Dates available on the course's Moodle site. It is your responsibility to obtain the readings listed for the class period if they are not posted on Moodle.

There are two texts assigned for the class. They are available online and at the bookstore (and online from the bookstore) and should be available in print or e-book versions (though, I'm not certain about ebook):

Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck, and Timothy Johnson. 2021. *The Logic of American Politics*, 10th Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. (Noted as "Logic" in the course calendar below).

Kernell, Samuel and Steven S. Smith. 2019. *Principles and Practice of American Politics: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, 7th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. (Noted as "Principles" in the course calendar below).

It should not be surprising for a political science course on American government, that in addition to the assigned readings each week it is expected that you will keep up with the daily news. Reading a newspaper - online or in print - is the best way to do this. If you are not one to read the newspaper there are many other good alternatives online, on the radio, and on television (I, for example, prefer to listen to NPR as my main source of the day's news). The only requirement is that your chosen news source must have frequent coverage of national politics. Our discussions will frequently touch on current events, often as a way to illustrate concepts from lecture or readings. Regularly consuming the news will not only bring course material to life, but it will also make the class more interesting.

Evaluation

Your grade will be determined based on the following (weights in parentheses):

- Communities Blogging Assignment (40%)
- Mid-term Exam (15%)
- Final Exam (15%)
- Class Preparation Activities (15%)
- Participation (15%)

Communities Project – Throughout the course of this semester, you will be required to assist in maintaining a class blog. The goal of this blog is to document various political and social issues facing communities around the United States and abroad. You will select a community of importance to you and write a series of blog posts about local or national issues affecting the community. You will be expected to complete three blog posts during these six weeks. In each blog post, you should select an issue affecting your community and then: 1) provide a detailed overview

of the issue/problem, 2) how it affects your community, 3) engage with multiple perspectives on the issue, making sure to provide the perspective of various members of the community, 4) offer up evidence-based solutions for solving or resolving the issue or problem OR consider what it might mean to select one solution over another. This may take substantial research into the local news of the community you select as well as into various policy problems and their solutions. Each blog post should be between 500 and 750 words. Finally, you will be required to write a 3 to 4 page reflection paper about your experience thinking and writing about local issues, including what challenges or surprises you encountered, how you learned to engage with multiple perspectives on issues, what you learned about American politics, and how it made you more aware of the communities that you reside in and your place and identity within the various communities. This will be due on 7/8 by 11:59pm. I will provide a prompt with more specific information about the paper as the date gets closer.

I will address the class blog, logistics, and the assignment in greater detail during one of the recorded lectures during the first week. In the meantime, you may want to begin thinking about a community that matters to you.

Each blog post and your final reflection paper are worth 10% of your final grade.

Mid-term Exam – This exam may include a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions focusing on material from the readings, lecture, and discussions. You will have one hour and twenty minutes to complete the exam. It will be made available on Moodle for you to take any time from 9am on 6/13 to 11:59pm on 6/18. You must complete the exam by 11:59pm on 6/18. Once you begin the exam you may not stop and continue it later. It must be completed in one session. It is a closed note, closed book exam.

Final Exam – The final exam will cover material from the second half of the course. The final will not be cumulative. The exam may include a combination of multiple choice, short answer, and essay questions focusing on material from the readings, lecture, and discussions. It will be made available on Moodle for you to take any time from 9am on 7/4 to 11:59pm on 7/8. You must complete the exam by 11:59pm on 7/8. Once you begin the exam you may not stop and continue it later. It must be completed in one session. It is a closed note, closed book exam.

Class Preparation Activities – Throughout the schedule below you will see a series of “Class Preparation Activities” listed under the assignments section. These assignments are designed to get you engaged with the readings and be prepared for the lectures. You should type-out your responses to the preparation activities and upload them in the appropriate assignment on Moodle by the due date. These should be between about 250 to 500 words. Throughout the course there will be 6 of these, each will be worth 2.5% of your final course grade. They will be graded as either unsatisfactory – earning you half of the possible credit – or satisfactory, earning you all of the possible credit for that activity.

If you do not submit your class preparation activity by 11:59pm on the date they are listed as due in the syllabus you will receive a “0” for that activity. Late activities will not be accepted.

Participation – Your participation grade will be based on your participation in discussion of the material in the discussion forums on Moodle. Throughout the semester I will pose six discussion prompts, each with two to four questions, for you to consider. You will be responsible for doing the following:

First, in the forum for that particular discussion prompt, thoughtfully respond to each of the questions posed by the prompts. Second, reply to two of your classmates’ responses, engaging them thoughtfully and respectfully in a dialogue about their responses. Ideas for responses might be engaging with whether or not you agree with their response to the prompt, and why, or you could engage them by pointing out things you think they did well or discussing things you think they may want to have considered. Of course, this is in addition to many other things you could respond to.

You will be graded on both the thoughtfulness of your response to the prompts and your replies to your classmates’ responses. Remember, the online forums on Moodle are a classroom environment, thus you should reply to and engage with your fellow classmates with respect and courtesy, even when you disagree.

Final Grades

At the end of the semester your final grade will be calculated using your grades on each of the metrics above and their respective weights, and you will receive a letter grade based on the following grading scale:

A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D (60-69), and F (0-59).

Here are some final notes about grading in the class:

- If you do not believe that the grade you received is indicative of your work I will regrade your assignment for you. You must contact me in writing, sending a memo about why you believe you did not deserve the grade that you received. You must contact me within one week of receiving back your work, if you do not you waive the right for me to reconsider your grade for that assignment. Once I receive your petition in writing I will regrade your work, and the resulting grade, whether higher or lower than your original, will be your final grade for that assignment.
- Late assignments will be penalized by 10-points per business-day that it is late (Monday through Friday).
- The only acceptable excuses for not completing an assignment on time are illness or family emergency. If either circumstance arises, I will give you extra time, but only if you (1) communicate with me before the assignment is due, and (2) provide documentation of the circumstance. After that is completed we will discuss a new due date.

- If you fail to complete an assignment, you will receive a 0 for that assignment.
- There is no extra credit

Academic Integrity:

This class is designed for you. Please make the most out of this academic experience and do not engage in cheating or plagiarism. Any students found cheating/plagiarizing will receive a 0 for the assignment or exam, in addition to university level sanctions.

Disability Support Services: Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office of Disability Support Services at 202-994-8250 or dss@gwu.edu in the Marvin Center, Suite 242, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information, please refer to <http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss>.

Academic Freedom

Each student is strongly encouraged to participate in class discussions. In any classroom situation that involves discussion and critical thinking, particularly about political ideas, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. Students may not only disagree with each other at times, but the students and instructor may also find that they have disparate views on sensitive and volatile topics. It is my hope that these differences will enhance class discussion and create an atmosphere where all of us will be encouraged to think and learn from each other. Therefore, be assured that students' grades will not be affected by any beliefs or ideas expressed in class or in assignments. Rather, we will all respect the views of others when expressed in classroom discussions.

Course Schedule and Readings

Note: This is subject to change at the will of the instructor as the semester progresses)

Logic: *Logic of American Politics*

Principles: *Principles and Practice of American Politics*

Part I: The Foundations of American Government and Politics

Week 1: Introduction; What is government, why do we have it, & what does it do?; Founding of the United States and Writing the Constitution; Blogging Assignment

Topic: Introduction to the Course

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 1 – Introduction to the course
- Reading
 - No reading. Get a head start on the next topic's reading
- Assignments (due 6/4 by 11:59pm):
 - Discussion Prompt 1 – Getting to Know You
For this discussion, and this discussion only, you needn't respond to your peers' responses. However, you may wish to say hello to your fellow classmates.

Topic: What is government, why do we have it, and what does it do?

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 2 – What is Government and Why do we Have It?
- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 1 ("The Logic of American Politics")
 - Principles: Olson, "The Logic Of Collective Action," (1-1)
- Assignments (due 6/4 by 11:59pm):
 - Class Preparation Activity 1: What is a collective action problem? What are some collective action problems currently facing the nation? How might the government be used to overcome the collective action problems you identified?

Topic: Founding and the Constitution

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 3 - The Founding and the Constitution
- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 2 ("The Constitution")
 - Principles: Madison, "Federalist 10 and 51," (2-1 and 2-2)
 - Brutus, "Anti-Federalist 3"
- Assignments (due 6/4 by 11:59pm):
 - None

Topic: Communities Blogging Assignment Details

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 4 – Communities Assignment Information
- Reading
 - Communities Blogging Project Assignment
- Assignments (due 6/4 by 11:59pm):
 - Email Professor Jenkins the community you have decided you will blog about.

Week 2: Federalism; Civil Rights

Topic: Federalism Pt. I

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 5 – Federalism Pt. I
- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 3 (“Federalism”)
- Assignment (due 6/11 by 11:59pm):
 - None

Topic: Federalism Pt. II

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 6 – Federalism Pt. II
- Reading
 - Principles: Kettl, “Federalism: Sorting Out Who Does What,” (3-1)
 - Feldman, Noah. 2021. "Federalism shows its age fighting COVID-19, climate change," *Milford Daily News*.*
- Assignments (due 6/11 by 11:59pm):
 - Respond to Discussion Prompt 2 (and remember to respond to two of your classmates’ posts)

Topic: Civil Liberties Pt I:

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 7 – Civil Liberties Pt. I
- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 5 (“Civil Liberties”)
- Assignments (due 6/11 by 11:59pm):
 - None

Topic: Civil Liberties Pt II:

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 8 – Civil Liberties Pt. II
- Reading
 - Principles: Supreme Court *Roe V. Wade* (5-2)
 - Listen/read: *RadioLab* “Eye in the Sky”

- Assignments (due 6/11 by 11:59pm):
 - Respond to Discussion Prompt 3 (and remember to respond to two of your classmates' posts)

Reminder: You should also complete your first communities blog post by 6/11 at 11:59pm.

Week 3: Civil Rights; Congress; and the Mid-Term Exam

Topic: Civil Rights Pt. I

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 9 – Civil Rights Pt. I
- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 4 (“Civil Rights”)
- Assignments (due 6/18 by 11:59pm)
 - Class Preparation Activity 2: What are the differences between civil rights and civil liberties – both conceptually and in practice? What are the similarities?

Topic: Civil Rights Pt. II

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 10 – Civil Rights Pt. II
- Reading
 - Principles: Levitt (4-2)
 - Menand (2013): “The Color of Law,” *The New Yorker*
- Assignments (due 6/18 at 11:59pm)
 - None

Part II: The Formal Institutions of American Government

Topic: Congress Pt. I

(note, this is still part of Week 3, but begins the second thematic portion of the course, “The Formal Institutions of American Government”)

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 11 – Congress Pt. I
- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 6 (“Congress”)
- Assignments (due 6/18 at 11:59pm)
 - Class Preparation Activity 3: Would you rather serve in the House of Representatives or the Senate? If you were elected from your home district, or state, which committees would you like to serve on and why?

Topic: Congress Pt. II

- Lecture

- Watch Lecture 12 – Congress Pt. II
- Reading
 - Principles: Smith, “Congress, the Troubled Institution,” (6-1); Binder, “Legislating in Polarized Times,” (6-2)
- Assignments (due 6/18 at 11:59pm)
 - None

Reminder: Mid-term exam must be completed by 6/18 at 11:59pm. The mid-term will be available on Moodle from 6/13 at 9am to 6/18 at 11:59pm.

No blog posts due this week because of the mid-term.

Week 4: The Presidency; The Judiciary; and 1/2 of Political Parties

Topic: The Presidency

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 13 – The Presidency
- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 7 (“The Presidency”)
 - Principles: Neustadt, “From Presidential Power,” (7-1); Kernell, “Going Public,” (7-2)
- Assignments (Due 6/25 by 11:59pm)
 - None

Topic: The Judiciary Pt. I

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 14 – The Judiciary Pt. I
- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 9 (“The Federal Judiciary”)
- Assignments (Due 6/25 by 11:59pm)
 - Class Preparation Activity 4: Where does the legitimacy of the Supreme Court and the decisions it makes come from? Is it the people? The Constitution? Something else? Does it matter whether or not the Court is viewed as legitimate by the people and that the people respect it?

Topic: The Judiciary Pt. II

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 15 – The Judiciary Pt. II
- Reading
 - Principles: Hamilton, “Federalist 78,” (9-3)
 - Yee (2017): “Judge Blocks Trump Effort to Withhold Money From Sanctuary Cities,” *Washington Post*. *

- Assignments (Due 6/25 by 11:59pm)
 - Respond to Discussion Prompt 4 (and then respond to two of your classmates' posts)

Part III: Connections Between the Government and the Public

Topic: Political Parties Pt I

(Note: this is a continuation of week 4, but a new thematic section. Also, political parties will be continued next week)

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 16 – Political Parties Pt. I
- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 12 (“Political Parties”)
- Assignments (Due 6/25 by 11:59pm)
 - None

Reminder: You should your second communities blog post by 6/25 at 11:59pm.

Week 5: Political Parties; Interest Groups; The Media

Topic: Political Parties Pt. II

(Note: this is a continuation of the topic from last week)

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 17 – Political Parties Pt II
- Reading:
 - Principles: Fiorina, “Parties as Problem-Solvers,” (12-3)
 - Masket (2016): “Why Parties Never Die,” *Politico*.*
- Assignment (Due 7/2 by 11:59pm):
 - Respond to Discussion Prompt 5 (and then respond to two of your classmates' posts)

Topic: Interest Groups

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 18 – Interest Groups Pt. I
 - Watch Lecture 19 – Interest Groups Pt. II
- Reading:
 - Logic: Chapter 13 (“Interest Groups”)
 - Principles: Schattschneider, “The Scope and Bias of the Pressure System,” (13-1)
- Assignment (Due 7/2 by 11:59pm):
 - None

Topic: The Media Pt. I

- Lecture

- Watch Lecture 20 – The Media Pt. I
- Reading
 - Logic: Chapter 14 (“The News Media”)
- Assignment (Due 7/2 by 11:59pm):
 - Class Preparation Activity 5: For a 24-hour period, pay careful attention to your use of the media. Note where you get information about current events from, how frequently, and what other sorts of media you use for non-news use. Make a log of your media consumption and usage for a whole 24-hour period. Reflect upon this log. What do your media habits say about you and your politics?

Topic: The Media Pt. II

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 21 – The Media Pt. II
- Reading
 - Hamilton, “The Market and the Media”
 - Principles: Allcott and Gentzkow, “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election” (14-1)
- Assignment (Due 7/2 by 11:59pm):
 - None

Reminder: Final (third) Communities Blog Post due by 7/2 at 11:59pm)

Week 6: Public Opinion; Campaigns and Elections

Topic: Public Opinion Pt. I

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 22 – Public Opinion Pt. I
- Reading:
 - Logic: Chapter 10 (“Public Opinion”)
 - Principles: Asher, “Analyzing and Interpreting Polls,” (10-1)
- Assignments (Due 7/8 by 11:59pm)
 - Class Preparation Activity 6: Go on to Moodle and in the folder for this week find the “Understanding and Using Polls Activity.” Read through, complete the assignment, and bring it in to class. Make sure to respond to the discussion questions at the end.

Topic: Public Opinion Pt. II

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 23 – Public Opinion Pt. II
- Reading:
 - Principles: Fiorina, “From Culture War, The Myth of a Polarized Electorate,” (10-2); Abramowitz, “The Polarized Electorate,” (10-3)

- Assignments (Due 7/8 by 11:59pm)
 - Respond to Discussion Prompt 6 (and then respond to two of your classmates' posts)

Topic: Campaigns and Elections

- Lecture
 - Watch Lecture 24 – Campaigns and Elections Pt. I
 - Watch Lecture 25 – Campaigns and Elections Pt. II
- Reading:
 - Logic: Chapter 11 (“Voting, Campaigns, and Elections”)
 - Popkin, “From The Reasoning Voter,” (11-1)
- Assignments (Due 7/8 by 11:59pm)
 - None

Reminder: Communities Project final reflection paper due by 11:59pm on Friday, 7/8.

Final Exam due by 11:59pm on Friday, 7/8. It will be available from 9am on Monday, 7/4 to 11:59pm on Friday, 7/8.