

PSC 1002: Introduction to American Politics and Government

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Fall/Spring XXXX

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Class Hours: XXXX

Class Room: XXXX

Course Description

This course provides an overview of the American government, including its major political processes and institutions as well as the ideas, individuals, groups, and events that shaped them. It proceeds on the foundational assumption that the United States is, and ought to be, a democracy.

The course explains current politics by examining how the American political system has developed over time and operates today. Lectures, readings, and discussion will address the Constitution, federalism, Congress, the presidency, the judiciary, political parties, the media, and public opinion, among other topics. An overarching theme of the course is focusing on how these features of American government illuminate stories in the news—whether these involve the Biden administration, debates over racial equality and immigration, new legislation, or other topics.

Learning Objectives

Students who successfully complete the course will satisfy GPAC requirements in critical thinking and will be able to:

- Develop a basic knowledge of structures and functions of American government;
- Understand political science theories used to explain American politics; and
- Apply those theories to understand and interpret political outcomes.

Course Materials

There are two required texts that we will draw from throughout the semester, both of which are available at the campus bookstore, online, and on reserve at Gelman Library. Additional readings, videos, and podcasts are available online, with the URLs provided in the Course Calendar below and on the course web page on Blackboard.

Required Texts

Kernell, S., Jacobson, G. C., Kousser, T., Vavreck, L., & Johnson, T. R. (2021). *The Logic of American Politics*, 10th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. ["L" on Course Calendar.]

Kernell, S., & Smith, S. S. (2018). *Principles and Practice of American Politics: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, 7th edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. ["P" on Course Calendar.]

Expectations

Each class session will contain a discussion of relevant news based to the topic of study, so students are expected to come to class prepared to raise interesting stories or questions from the week's news. Students are recommended to read a daily newspaper (e.g., *The Washington Post* or *The New York Times*) or listen to a news program (e.g., NPR's *Morning Edition*) or consume news through other media like *The Daily Show*. Following current political events will enhance the value of this course, although they are no substitute for careful reading and classroom discussion and attendance.

Students are expected to attend lectures and do all readings prior to class meetings. They are also expected to contribute regularly in class. This means answering questions, participating in discussions, and helping other students. This is the best way to maximize performance.

Note: This is a 3-credit, lecture-based course. Federal regulations for 3-credit courses include 2.5 hours/week of direct instruction (in-class) and 5 hours/week of independent learning (out-of-class).

Grades

Quizzes (75%): In almost every class, there will be a quiz of 5 questions. The quizzes will cover material from that day's assigned reading and the previous lecture. There will be 25 quizzes over the course of the semester. The lowest 5 scores are dropped and the rest are averaged.

Why have frequent quizzes instead of a few exams or papers? Good question. There is evidence that frequent quizzes improve students' learning. For example, one study in a large introductory psychology class demonstrated that instituting online quizzes appeared to improve students' performance.¹ Moreover, students taking that class also did better in their other classes that semester, and in the classes they took the next semester. This suggests that regular assessment helps students develop study habits that are beneficial in other courses, not just the course that assigns quizzes. Frequent quizzes also help to ascertain how well concepts are understood, so that course content can be adjusted accordingly.

Because the lowest 5 quiz scores are dropped, **there will be no makeups**. Exceptions will be made only with prior consent for planned events such as sponsored GWU activities, religious observances or under unusual circumstances such as a documented medical emergency. Students must be in class to take a quiz.

Final Exam (25%): The final exam will assess if students have acquired an understanding of the structure, functions, and development of American politics and government. The final will consist only of essay and short answer questions. It will be cumulative, drawing on material from the entire semester. A study guide will be distributed to the class one week before the final exam.

Final letter grades for the course will be assigned as follows:

92.5% and above = A	80.0% – 82.49% = B–	67.5% – 69.99% = D+
90.0% – 92.49% = A–	77.5% – 79.99% = C+	62.5% – 67.49% = D
87.5% – 89.99% = B+	72.5% – 77.49% = C	60.0% – 62.49% = D–
82.5% – 87.49% = B	70.0% – 72.49% = C–	59.99 and below = F

¹Pennebaker, J. W., Gosling, S. D., & Ferrell, J. D. (2013). Daily Online Testing in Large Classes: Boosting College Performance while Reducing Achievement Gaps." *PLoS ONE* 8(11): e79774. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0079774.

Technology

Students are required to bring a Wi-Fi enabled device to every class session to take the quizzes through Blackboard. But that is the only time that students are permitted to use their devices. Studies of electronic devices in classrooms demonstrate that a student with the ability to use a laptop or smartphone will recall less of what occurred during class. Moreover, a student who does not have a laptop but can see another student's laptop also remembers less. Thus, electronic devices often distract both the user and those around them.² If a student has a unique reason for needing a laptop to take notes, please contact me.

University Policies

Campus Commitment & Policy

Students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the [campus commitment policy](#). By coming back to campus, students, staff, and faculty are agreeing to this policy. In our classroom environment, the section "Care for Others" is especially important, including the requirement for students to be masked in class.

University Policy on Observance of Religious Holidays

In accordance with University policy, students should notify faculty during the first week of the semester of their intention to be absent from class on the day(s) of religious observance. For details and policy, see: students.gwu.edu/accommodations-religious-holidays

Academic Integrity Code

Academic dishonesty is defined as cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one's own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information. For details and complete code, see: studentconduct.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity

Safety and Security

In an emergency: call GWPD 202-994-6111 or 911. For situation-specific actions: review the Emergency Response Handbook: safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook. In an active violence situation: Get Out, Hide Out, or Take Out: go.gwu.edu/shooterprep. Stay informed: safety.gwu.edu/stay-informed.

In the case of an emergency, if at all possible, the class should shelter in place. If the building that the class is in is affected, follow the evacuation procedures for the building. After evacuation, seek shelter at a predetermined rendezvous location.

Support for Students Outside the Classroom

GW Writing Center

The GW Writing Center facilitates collaborative, critical, and inclusive conversations about student writing. Working alongside peer mentors, student writers develop strategies to write inde-

²Hembrooke, H., & Gay, G. (2003). The Laptop and the Lecture: The Effects of Multitasking in Learning Environments." *Journal of Computing in Higher Education* 15(1): 46-64. Carter, S. P., Greenberg, K., & Walker, M.S. (2017). The impact of computer usage on academic performance: Evidence from a randomized trial at the United States Military Academy. *Economics of Education Review* 56: 118-132. Sana, F., Weston, T., & Cepeda, N. J. (2013). "Laptop multitasking hinders classroom learning for both users and nearby peers." *Computers and Education* 62(1): 24-31.

pendently in academic and public settings. Students are encouraged (but not required) to use the Writing Center at any stage of writing, from brainstorming to final editing. For additional information see: writingcenter.gwu.edu. Although appointments are not required and drop-ins are welcome, the Writing Center recommends that you reserve a time slot at gwu.mywconline.com/.

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact the Disability Support Services office at 202-994-8250 in Rome Hall, 801 22nd Street, NW, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information see: disabilitysupport.gwu.edu/

Counseling and Psychological Services 202-994-5300

GW's Student Health Center offers counseling and psychological services, supporting mental health and personal development by collaborating directly with students to overcome challenges and difficulties that may interfere with academic, emotional, and personal success. For additional information see healthcenter.gwu.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services.

Course Calendar

Week 1: Introduction and the Importance of Government

Day 1

Readings - Snyder, T. 2021. [The American Abyss](#). *The New York Times*.

Watch - [A Day of Rage: An In-Depth Look at How a Mob Stormed the Capitol](#). *The New York Times*.

Quiz - No Quiz

Day 2

Readings - L: Chapter 1

P: Olson (1-1)

Traub, J. 2021. [The World's Oldest Democracy is One of Its Worst](#). *Foreign Policy*.

Optional Watch: [Interest Group Formation - PBS CrashCourse](#)

Quiz - No Quiz

Week 2: The Founding and the Constitution

Day 1

Readings - L: Start Chapter 2

Read the [Constitution](#).

Quiz - Practice Quiz

Day 2

Readings - L: Finish Chapter 2

P: Madison (2-1 and 2-2)

Brockell, G. 2021. [Frederick Douglas Had Nothing But Scorn for the Fourth of July](#). *The Washington Post*.

Quiz - Quiz 1

Week 3: Federalism

Day 1

Readings - L: Chapter 3

Watch - [Separation of Powers and Checks and Balances - PBS CrashCourse](#); [Federalism - PBS CrashCourse](#)

Quiz - Quiz 2

Day 2

Readings - P: Kettl (3-1)

Watch - [Constitutional Compromises - PBS CrashCourse](#)

Quiz - Quiz 3

Week 4: Civil Liberties

Day 1

Readings - L: Chapter 5

Quiz - Quiz 4

Day 2

Readings - P: Supreme Court (5-2)

Listen - [Eye in the Sky - Radiolab](#)

Quiz - Quiz 5

Week 5: Civil Rights

Day 1

Readings - L: Chapter 4

Quiz - Quiz 6

Day 2

Readings - P: Levitt (4-2)

Menand, L. 2013. [The Color of Law](#). *The New Yorker*.

Quiz - Quiz 7

Week 6: Congress

Day 1

Readings - L: Chapter 6

Quiz - Quiz 8

Day 2

Readings - P: Jacobson (11-2); Binder (6-2)

Watch - [I'm Just a Bill \(Schoolhouse Rock!\)](#)

Quiz - Quiz 9

Week 7: The Presidency

Day 1

Readings - L: Chapter 7

Quiz - Quiz 10

Day 2

Readings - P: Neustadt (7-1); Kernell (7-2)

Watch - [How Presidents Govern - PBS CrashCourse](#)

Quiz - Quiz 11

Week 8: The Judiciary

Day 1

Readings - L: Chapter 9

Watch - [Legal System Basics - PBS CrashCourse](#); [Supreme Court of the United States Procedures - PBS CrashCourse](#)

Quiz - Quiz 12

Day 2

Readings - P: Hamilton (9-3)

Watch - [Judicial Review - PBS CrashCourse](#)

Quiz - Quiz 13

Week 9: The Bureaucracy

Day 1

Readings - L: Chapter 8

Watch - [Bureaucracy Basics - PBS CrashCourse](#)

Quiz - Quiz 14

Day 2

Readings - P: Moe (8-1); Lewis (8-2)

Watch - [Controlling Bureaucracies - PBS CrashCourse](#)

Quiz - Quiz 15

Week 10: Political Parties

Day 1

Readings - L: Chapter 12

Watch - [Political Parties - PBS CrashCourse](#)

Quiz - Quiz 16

Day 2

Readings - P: Drutman (12-2)

Quiz - Quiz 17

Week 11: Interest Groups

Day 1

Readings - L: Chapter 13

Watch - [Interest Groups - PBS CrashCourse](#)

Quiz - Quiz 18

Day 2

Readings - P: Schattschneider (13-1)

Quiz - Quiz 19

Week 12: The Media

Day 1

Readings - L: Chapter 14

Lepore, J. 2021. [Facebook's Broken Vows](#). *The New Yorker*.

Watch - [Media Institution - PBS CrashCourse](#)

Quiz - Quiz 20

Day 2

Readings - P: Madrigal (14-2)

Quiz - Quiz 21

Week 13: Public Opinion

Day 1

Readings - L: Chapter 10

Packer, G. 2021. [How America Fractured into Four Parts](#). *The Atlantic*.

Watch - [Public Opinion - PBS CrashCourse](#)

Quiz - Quiz 22

Day 2

Readings - P: Asher (10-1)

Quiz - Quiz 23

Week 14: Campaigns and Elections

Day 1

Readings - L: Chapter 11

Watch - [Election Basics - PBS CrashCourse](#); [Political Campaigns - PBS CrashCourse](#)

Quiz - Quiz 24

Day 2

Readings - P: Popkin (11-1)

Quiz - Quiz 25

Week 15: Wrap-up and Final Exam Review

Day 1

Readings - All of the above

Quiz - No Quiz

Day 2

Readings - All of the above

Quiz - No Quiz

NOTE: In accordance with university policy, the final exam will be given during the final exam period and not the last week of the semester. For details and complete policy, see: provost.gwu.edu/administration-final-examinations-during-examination-period.