

POS 1041:005 | AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

Meeting Place: BEL-0033 | **Meeting ☉:** MWF 9:05am-9:55am

Instructor: Matthew J. Uttermark, PhD | ✉: mju14@my.fsu.edu

Office: Bellamy 550 | **Office Hours ☉:** M 3:30pm-4:30pm

Introduction

Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly, and applying the wrong remedies – Groucho Marx

This is an introductory course on American national government. Over the semester we will discuss the behaviors and institutions associated with politics in the United States. This course will provide students with a better understanding of politics in the United States. I do not assume that those enrolled in the course have more background knowledge on the subject matter than what is typically acquired in high school. Regardless of their major, students should have the opportunity to succeed in the class. Furthermore, the material is relevant to everyone's civic life and future

This course has been approved as meeting the requirements for **Liberal Studies Area III, History and Social Science**. The Liberal Studies Program at The Florida State University has been designed to provides a perspective on the qualities, accomplishments, and aspirations of human beings, the past and present civilizations we have created, and the natural and technological world we inhabit. In combination with your other Liberal Studies courses this class provides an important foundation for your interaction with a global society.

Course Goals

The pivotal goal of this class is to build critical thinking skills with respect to American government; to understand not only **WHAT** is happening in American politics but **WHY** it is happening.

This course is designed to expose students to scholarship and research in political science. First, students will acquire a base of factual information about American national government. As members of an introductory course, students will be expanding their vocabulary regarding, and their working knowledge of, American politics. An information base provides the foundation for intelligent discussion and critical thinking about American politics. Building this base, students will delve into both longstanding debates about the roles of a nation's government and contemporary scholarship on American political behavior, voting and elections, and the institutions of national government.

Second, this course will introduce students to the scientific study of American politics. Emphasizing that the scientific method guides political scientists, its coverage will highlight the role of theory and the importance of assessing potentially falsifiable, theoretically-derived hypotheses via databased tests. As a part of this introduction, students will learn that the goals and the work product of research-oriented political scientists differ from those of the political media, political pundits, and political pollsters. Students will learn that, guided by the scientific method, political scientists strive to provide explanation and enhance understanding of political behaviors and outcomes. Among the requirements for the course is an internet-based assignment in which students will assess a theoretically-motivated hypothesis based on data that they will access and analyze.

Third, drawing from social choice theory, the course will introduce students to analytical concepts that will enable them to assess and understand better various behaviors that pose dilemmas for American representative democracy. Among the most important of these concepts are (the problem of) free-riding, the prisoner's dilemma, and the tragedy of commons. As they engage these concepts, students will also review arguments that suggest that political institutions and practices, as well as social capital, may provide solutions (albeit imperfect ones) to problems that citizens face when they need to act collectively.

Fourth, throughout the course, students will consider the political trade-offs among the competing values of liberty, equality, and order. Doing so facilitates understanding of the Founding Period and the Constitution, ideology, civil liberties, and civil rights, among other subjects. Recognition of these inherent trade-offs provides a frame for understanding many of the conflicts and controversies in American politics – both contemporary and historical.

Moreover, as a Liberal Studies Social Sciences Course, students will also meet the goals of three Social Science Competencies:

- Competency 1: critically examine, interpret, and explain how personal, political, cultural, economic, and social experiences and/or structures shape the past and/or the present.
- Competency 2: gather and analyze data using social science and/or historical methodologies to evaluate causal arguments and analyze assertions, assumptions, and explanatory evidence.
- Competency 3: evaluate and employ appropriate methods and technology in the collection and analysis of data.

In sum, emerging from the course, students will have an enhanced ability to analyze and engage American politics—whether it be as someone who goes on to make contributions to the body of knowledge about American politics, as someone who can read and evaluate an article on campaign finance reform or as someone who choose to run for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Required Text

Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck. 2016. *The Logic of American Politics* 8th Edition. Los Angeles: CQ Press.

Electronic copies of the textbook are available, and can be used in this class.

This book should be available for purchase in the campus bookstore, Amazon.com and Chegg.com, among other sites. In the reading schedule, this book is referred to as **LoAP**.

Other readings (book chapters, journal articles) will be made available on Canvas.

Evaluation and Grading[†]

A*	93-100	B	83-86	C	73-76	D	63-66
A-	90-92	B-	80-82	C-	70-72	D-	60-62
B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D+	67-69	F	0-59

[†]Note: Grades within less than 0.5% of a higher letter grade will be rounded up.

Ex: If you have an 89.5% (B+), I will round your grade up to a 90% (A-).

* An A is the highest grade you can receive in the course.

Class Engagement (10%): This is a small class. Habitual absences will be noticed and detrimental to your final grade. Please make an effort to come to class, ask questions, and be prepared to engage with the material.

Small Group Presentations (20%) Starting in week four, students will work in small groups and lead class lecture on chapters of material. Students will be expected to prepare slides, lead lecture, and answer questions from their peers. A rubric (and some course materials) will be made available on Canvas—grading will be a function of instructor and peer evaluations. Slides are due 24 hours prior to a group’s first day of lecture. You are encouraged to meet with me prior to your presentation to show a draft of slides and receive feedback.

Liberal Studies Assignments (15%): In order for this course to meet university requirements for Liberal Studies there will be mandatory assignments on Canvas. Instructions on how to complete the assignments will be made available on Canvas. Typically these assignments will require some reading and answering of questions—multiple choice and true false.

Two Exams (55% total): There will be two exams, a midterm worth 25% of the final course grade and a final worth 30% of the final course grade. The midterm is scheduled for Wednesday October 16th; the final is scheduled on Thursday December 12th (3pm-5pm). Review sessions will be held prior to each exam.

Class Policies

Makeup Work No make-up work will be accepted in this course; unless the student has a university approved absence. University approved absences include:

- A documented illness (or serious illness of a dependent child).
- A death in the family.
- Call to active military duty.
- Jury duty.
- A religious or work-restricted holy days.
- Official university activities (i.e. student athlete competing in a meet).

It is your responsibility to inform me and get documentation **before** the absence occurs. For example, if you are ill the day of an assignment, I require a signed note from a medical doctor dated the day of the exam. I will then work to determine how to make-up the assignment. Unless otherwise noted in the Evaluation and Grading section, late work receives a zero.

Incomplete Grades I do not expect to hand out a grade of “Incomplete” to any student in this course. However, a grade of “Incomplete” will only be given if there is an agreement between the instructor and the student prior to the end of the semester. The instructor reserves the right to determine a legitimate reason for assigning an incomplete grade.

Email Policy Please avoid emailing the instructor with questions that can be answered by reading the syllabus. The instructor will not reply to such emails. This document contains information on how your grade is calculated and what is covered each day in class. Additionally, if you wish to set up an appointment with the instructor outside of office hours, please provide a list of times to meet in the first email sent to the instructor.

Technology in the Classroom While technology has made our lives easier, the classroom is not the place to attempt to update Instagram. To facilitate learning, and to be respectful to other classmate’s learning,

please refrain from using cell phones and media devices in the classroom. Keep phones on silent and go into the hallway if you must take a phone call.

I strongly encourage you to take notes the traditional way (pen and paper), however I do allow students to use laptops to take notes in the classroom. The first two rows of desks in the classroom are a laptop-free zone so that students who wish not to be distracted have a space to learn efficiently. Stay off social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, etc.) while in class.

If your behavior is a distraction to the class, I reserve the right to tell a student to put their electronic devices away for the remainder of the class. If the problem is habitual I reserve the right to reflect the student's lack of decorum in their final grade.

Maintaining a Respectful Classroom Environment Florida State University is committed to providing and maintaining a respectful environment that is conducive to safe working, learning, and living for all members of the institutional community. It is expected that all students will respect each other in their personal interactions, inside and outside of the classroom. Acts of violence, threats of violence, derogatory comments, and behavior meant to intimidate others is prohibited.

I reserve the right to have a student escorted from the classroom for persistent violations of this policy and the students final grade will reflect their lack of decorum.

Plagiarism Any form of cheating will NOT be tolerated. If you are caught plagiarizing any written work you will receive an automatic zero on the assignment and will be reported to the university in accordance with FSU policy. The FSU History department defines plagiarism as "handing in a paper you did not write, attempting to pass of someone else's work as your own, or using your own ideas, information, or phraseology of other writers without giving proper credit in your text." Self-plagiarism, handing the same written assignment for multiple courses, is also prohibited. See the university honor code details below for more information.

FSU's Academic Honor Code "The academic honor system of The Florida State University is based on the premise that each student has the responsibility: (1) To uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student's own work. (2) To refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the University community, and (3) To foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the University community."

I expect students to bring possible violations of the honor code to my attention as soon as possible, so that the violation may be resolved. Violations included, but are not limited to, plagiarism of work, assisting a student in obtaining unauthorized information for an assignment, project or test. A complete list of violations can be found in FSU Student Handbook. Violation of the Academic honor code lead, but is not limited to, a lower/failing grade on the assignment or a lower/failing grade in the course. The university may take additional measures including, formal reprimand, academic probation, suspension, or expulsion from the university.

For more information on FSU's Honor Code, visit:

<http://www.fsu.edu/~dof/honorpolicy.htm>

Americans with Disabilities Act Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation must (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC), and (2) bring a letter to the instructor from the SDRC indicating that you need academic accommodations. This must be done within the first week of class. Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from the Student Disability Resource Center has been provided. This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request. For

more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact.

Student Disability Resource Center
847 Traditions Way
108 Student Services Building
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
(850) 644-9566 (voice)
(850) 644-6504 (TDD)
sdr@admin.fsu.edu
<http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu/>

Course Schedule

This syllabus is subject to change as necessary over the course of the semester. Regularly check Canvas and your e-mail for updates on any changes.

Aug 26th

Syllabus Day

Aug 28th

Instructor at conference – No Class

Aug 30th

Instructor at conference – No Class

Sept 2nd

Labor Day – No Class

Sept 4th

LoAP, Chapter 1: The Logic of American Politics

Sept 6th

LoAP, Chapter 2: The Constitution

Sept 9th

The Constitution

Sept 11th

LoAP, Chapter 3: Federalism

Sept 13th

Federalism

Sept 16th

LoAP, Chapter 10: Public Opinion

Sept 18th

Public Opinion

Sept 20th

Public Opinion

Sept 23rd

LoAP, Chapter 14: The News Media

Sept 25th

The News Media

Sept 27th

The News Media

Sept 30th

LoAP, Chapter 12: Political Parties

Oct 2nd

Political Parties

Oct 4th

Political Parties

Oct 7th

LoAP, Chapter 11: Voting, Campaigns, and Elections

Oct 9th

Voting, Campaigns, and Elections

Oct 11th

Voting, Campaigns, and Elections

Oct 14th

Review Day

Oct 16th

Midterm

Oct 18th

TBD

Oct 21st

LoAP, Chapter 13: Interest Groups

Oct 23rd

TBD

Oct 25th

TBD

Oct 28th

Interest Groups

Oct 30th

LoAP, Chapter 8: Bureaucracy

Nov 1st

Bureaucracy

Nov 4th

LoAP, Chapter 6: Congress

Nov 6th

Congress

Nov 8th

Congress

Nov 11th

Veterans Day – No Class

Nov 13th

LoAP, Chapter 7: The Presidency

Nov 15th

The Presidency

Nov 18th

The Presidency

Nov 20th

LoAP, Chapter 9: The Federal Judiciary

Nov 22nd

The Federal Judiciary

Nov 25th

The Federal Judiciary

Nov 27th

LoAP, Chapters 4: Civil Rights & Chapter 5: Civil Liberties

Nov 29th

Thanksgiving Break – No Class

Dec 2nd

Civil Rights & Civil Liberties

Dec 4th

Civil Rights & Civil Liberties

Dec 6th

Review

Dec. 9th – Dec. 13th

FINALS WEEK

Final Thursday Dec. 12th 3:00pm-5:00pm

Syllabus Change Policy: Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.