

PSC 1002: American Politics and Government

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Lecture: T/Th, 3:45-4:35 pm, Fungler Hall 103
Office Hours: Th, 12:00-2:00 pm, Monroe Hall 472

Semester Spring 2026

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Course Description

This course is designed as a broad survey of American government and political processes. In this course, I hope to convey fundamental concepts and information for understanding politics. The goal is to help you employ these concepts to understand a variety of current political events.

We will begin by exploring the ideological and cultural foundations of the American political system. This exploration will highlight some of the criteria that we will use throughout the course to evaluate the performance of various political institutions (such as Congress) and actors (such as the electorate). Next, we will study how individuals, parties, and interest groups influence the political institutions that were established by the Constitution. Finally, we will study these institutions, themselves.

Learning Goals

The goal of this course is to improve your ability to:

1. Explain the American political system and the outcomes it produces.
2. Apply basic political science theories to explain American politics.
3. Become a better analyst of politics and a thoughtful consumer of political news.

Organization

All students enrolled in this class should also be enrolled in a discussion section that will be led by one of the Political Science Department's Graduate Teaching Fellows. Each section lasts 50 minutes and covers the material discussed in the previous week's lectures. The format for the week will be: lecture on Tuesday and Thursday, then a discussion section either Friday, the following Monday, or the following Wednesday. You

must attend the discussion section in which you are registered. You are also expected to participate every class. This attendance and participation is a component of your final grade.

Course Prerequisites

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Expected Time Commitment

You will spend 2.5 hours per week in direct instruction (lecture and discussion) or guided interaction. The average minimum amount of out-class learning expected per week is 8 hours (<https://cte.rice.edu/workload>) for a total of 120 hours per semester.

Learning Assessment

Grades will be composed of the following:

- 55% Daily quizzes
- 25% Final exam
- 20% Discussion section participation and attendance

Quizzes

Special thanks to Prof. Danny Hayes for this material.

Short quizzes will be used at the start of each class to incentivize active reading. The quizzes consist of 5 multiple choice, content-based questions. You will have 4 minutes to complete the quiz once you started, and the quiz must be completed within the first 8 minutes of class. The quizzes will be administered via Respondus LockDown Browser, so please bring an Internet-connected laptop to each class.

The quizzes will cover both material from that day's assigned reading as well as material covered in the previous lecture. You must be in lecture to take the quiz and showing up to take the quiz earns you 25 points out of the available 100 points for each quiz. Each question is worth 15 points. If you answer four questions correctly, for instance, you would receive an 85 out of 100. The quizzes will not be particularly difficult, but you will do well only if you keep up with the reading assignments. There will be 25 quizzes over the course of the semester. I will drop your lowest 5 scores and average the rest. Your quiz average will constitute 55% of your grade.

Why have frequent quizzes instead of a few exams? Good question. There is evidence that frequent quizzes improve students' learning significantly. For example, in one recent study in a large introductory psychology class, instituting on-line quizzes appeared to improve students' performance.¹ Students taking that class also did better in their other courses 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 me ascertain how well certain concepts are understood, so that I can adjust the content of lectures accordingly.

Because I am dropping the 5 lowest quiz grades, there will be no makeups (other than for religious observances [see policy below] or GW athletic or other GW events that you are required to participate in). These dropped quiz grades should also count for personal days/mild illness. If you experience an intense illness requiring physician care, you may make up the quiz conditional on submitting a doctor's note.

¹Pennebaker, James W., Samuel D. Gosling, and Jason D. Ferrell. 2013. "Daily online testing in large classes: Boosting college performance while reducing achievement gaps." PLOS One 8 (11) : e79774.

Final Exam

At the end of the semester, we will assess whether you have acquired basic knowledge of the structures, functions, and development of American politics and government. This is an overly complicated way of saying we're going to give you a final exam. The final will consist of essay questions and short answers. It will be cumulative — that is, you will be asked to demonstrate your understanding of material from the entire semester. We will hand out a study guide before the final. The exam will be worth 25% of your grade. In accordance with university policy, the final exam will be given in-person during the final exam period. For details and complete policy, see <https://provost.gwu.edu/administration-final-examinations-during-examination-period>.

Grading

At the end of the semester, your grade will be assigned based on the following 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+ (67-69), D (63-66), D- (60-62), and F (0-59). Scores within one-half point of the next letter grade will be rounded up. While a curve may be used in determining the final distribution of grades, the curve will only be used to improve your grade. **It is your responsibility to monitor your grade via quiz scores and participation in discussion sections.** You will not be able to make up missed quizzes at the end of the semester. Nor will you be able to submit extra work to raise your grade.

Readings

The required textbook for this course is:

- Samuel Kernell, Gary Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck, and Timothy R. Johnson. *The Logic of American Politics*, 12th edition.

This textbook is available at Gelman Library on reserve for 3 hour sessions. It also available to rent online. I urge you to shop around to find the best price. You must acquire the listed edition either in a digital or print edition.

A number of readings will also be placed on the class's Blackboard site. These are marked in the syllabus with "BB" and will appear with the materials for each week of the course.

Electronic Devices

Laptops and other electronic devices are not permitted in lecture or your discussion section. All lecture will be recorded and posted on Blackboard, as will all lecture slides. Please speak to me if you require a device for DSS accommodations.

AI

You may not use AI nor any other outside assistance or notes during quizzes or the final exam.

Important Dates

- 1/19 - Martin Luther King, Jr. Day (no Monday discussion section)
- 1/22 - PSC 1002 canceled
- 2/16 - Presidents' Day (no Monday discussion section)
- 2/26 - PSC 1002 canceled
- 3/9-3/14 - Spring Break
- 4/2 - PSC 1002 canceled
- TBD - Final exam (in-person)

*L=*Logic of American Politics, 12th Edition*; BB =Posted on Blackboard

Date	Topic	Reading	Quiz
1/13	Introduction	<i>None</i>	No quiz
1/15	Why Government?	L: Ch. 1 & BB: Olson (1965)	Practice quiz
1/20	The Founding and the Constitution I	L: Ch. 2 (stop at "Features of the Constitution") & L: The Constitution (pp. 617-632)	Quiz 1
1/22	<i>PSC 1002 canceled</i>	<i>...but go to your other classes!</i>	
1/27	The Founding and the Constitution II	L: Ch. 2 (remainder) & BB: Madison, <i>Federalist 10 and 51</i>	Quiz 2
1/29	Federalism I	L: Ch. 3 (stop at "Modern Federalism")	Quiz 3
2/3	Federalism II	L: Ch. 3 (remainder) & BB: Burns (1994)	Quiz 4
2/5	Civil Liberties I	L: Ch. 5 (stop at "Criminal Rights")	Quiz 7
2/10	Civil Liberties II	L: Ch. 5 (remainder) & BB: Menand, "Why Do We Care So Much About Privacy?"	Quiz 8
2/12	Civil Rights I	L: Ch. 4 (stop at "Current Civil Rights Policy")	Quiz 5
2/17	Civil Rights II	Ch. 4 (remainder) & BB: Menand, "The Color of Law"	Quiz 6
2/12	Civil Liberties I	L: Ch. 5 (stop at "Criminal Rights")	Quiz 7
2/17	Civil Liberties II	L: Ch. 5 (remainder) & BB: Menand, "Why Do We Care So Much About Privacy?"	Quiz 8
2/19	Congress I	L: Ch. 6 (stop at "Organizing Congress")	Quiz 9
2/24	Congress II	L: Ch. 6 (remainder)	Quiz 10
2/26	<i>PSC 1002 canceled</i>	<i>...but go to your other classes!</i>	
3/3	The Presidency I	L: Ch. 7 (stop at "The President as Legislator")	Quiz 12
3/5	The Presidency II	L: Ch. 7 (remainder) & BB: Interview w/ political scientist Frances E. Lee	Quiz 13
SPRING BREAK!			
3/17	The Judiciary	L: Ch. 9	Quiz 14
3/19	The Bureaucracy I	L: Ch. 8 (stop at "Who Controls the Bureaucracy")	Quiz 15
3/24	The Bureaucracy II	L: Ch. 8 (remainder) & BB: Natanson and Kornfield "The year Trump broke the federal government"	Quiz 16
3/26	Political Parties I	L: Ch. 12 (stop at "The Fifth Party System...") & BB: Masket, "Why Political Parties Never Die"	Quiz 17
3/31	Political Parties II	L: Ch. 12 (remainder) & BB: Drutman, "The two-party system is killing our democracy"	Quiz 18
4/2	<i>PSC 1002 canceled</i>	<i>...but go to your other classes!</i>	
4/7	Interest Groups I	L: Ch. 13 (stop at "Interest Groups and Elections")	Quiz 19
4/9	Interest Groups II	L: Ch. 13 (remainder) & BB: Burns, "K Street and the Status Quo"	Quiz 20
4/14	The Media	L: Ch. 14	Quiz 21
4/16	Public Opinion I	L: Ch. 10 (stop at "Effects of Background on Public Opinion")	Quiz 22
4/21	Public Opinion II	L: Ch. 10 (remainder) & Watch Pew Research Center videos on random sampling and question wording in polling	Quiz 23
4/23	Campaigns and Elections	L: Ch. 11	Quiz 24
4/28	Make-up day	TBD	TDB
TBD	Final Exam	Date sometime between 5/2 and 5/8	

University Policies

Observance of Religious Holidays

Students must notify faculty during the first week of the semester in which they are enrolled in the course, or as early as possible, but no later than three weeks prior to the absence, of their intention to be absent from class on their day(s) of religious observance. If the holiday falls within the first three weeks of class, the student must inform faculty in the first week of the semester. For details and policy, see: provost.gwu.edu/policies-procedures-and-guidelines.

Academic Integrity Code

Academic integrity is an essential part of the educational process, and all members of the GW community take these matters very seriously. As the instructor of record for this course, my role is to provide clear expectations and uphold them in all assessments. Violations of academic integrity occur when students fail to cite research sources properly, engage in unauthorized collaboration, falsify data, and otherwise violate the Code of Academic Integrity. If you have any questions about whether particular academic practices or resources are permitted, you should ask me for clarification. If you are reported for an academic integrity violation, you should contact Conflict Education and Student Accountability (CESA), formerly known as Student Rights and Responsibilities (SRR), to learn more about your rights and options in the process. Consequences can range from failure of assignment to expulsion from the University and may include a transcript notation. For more information, refer to the CESA website at students.gwu.edu/code-academic-integrity or contact CESA by email cesa@gwu.edu or phone 202-994-6757.

Use of Electronic Course Materials and Class Recordings

Students are encouraged to use electronic course materials, including recorded class sessions, for private personal use in connection with their academic program of study. Electronic course materials and recorded class sessions should not be shared or used for non-course related purposes unless express permission has been granted by the instructor. Students who impermissibly share any electronic course materials are subject to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct. Contact the instructor if you have questions regarding what constitutes permissible or impermissible use of electronic course materials and/or recorded class sessions. Contact Disability Support Services at disabilitysupport.gwu.edu if you have questions or need assistance in accessing electronic course materials.

Writing Center

GW's Writing Center cultivates confident writers in the University community by facilitating collaborative, critical, and inclusive conversations at all stages of the writing process. Working alongside peer mentors, writers develop strategies to write independently in academic and public settings. Appointments can be booked online. See gwu.mywconline.

Academic Commons

Academic Commons provides tutoring and other academic support resources to students in many courses. Students can schedule virtual one-on-one appointments or attend virtual drop-in sessions. Students may schedule an appointment, review the tutoring schedule, or access other academic support resources at academiccommons.gwu.edu. For assistance contact academiccommons@gwu.edu.

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Any student who may need an accommodation based on the potential impact of a disability should contact Disability Support Services to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations: disabilitysupport.gwu.edu or call 202-994-8250.

Student Health Center

The Student Health Center (SHC) offers medical, counseling/psychological, and psychiatric services to GW students. More information about the SHC is available at healthcenter.gwu.edu. Students experiencing a medical or mental health emergency on campus should contact GW Emergency Services at 202-994-6111, or off campus at 911.

Safety and Security

- In an emergency: call GYPD 202-994-6111 or 911
- For situation-specific actions: review the Emergency Response Handbook at safety.gwu.edu/emergency-response-handbook
- GW Alert is an emergency notification system that sends alerts to the GW community. GW requests students, faculty, and staff maintain current contact information by logging on to alert.gwu.edu. Alerts are sent via email, text, social media, and other means, including the Guardian app. The Guardian app is a safety app that allows you to communicate quickly with GW Emergency Services, 911, and other resources. Learn more at safety.gwu.edu.
- Protective Actions - GW prescribes four protective actions that can be issued by university officials depending on the type of emergency. All GW community members are expected to follow directions according to the specified protective action. The protective actions are Shelter, Evacuate, Secure, and Lockdown (details below). Learn more at safety.gwu.edu/gw-standard-emergency-statuses.
- Classroom emergency lockdown buttons - Some classrooms have been equipped with classroom emergency lockdown buttons. If the button is pushed, GWorld Card access to the room will be disabled, and GW Dispatch will be alerted. The door must be manually closed if it is not closed when the button is pushed. Anyone in the classroom will be able to exit, but no one will be able to get in.