

## PSC 1002: INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT

Fall 2019  
T&Th, 11:10 am-12:25 pm  
Funger Hall 103

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Th, 1:30-3:30 & by appt.

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M, 11-12:30 & W, 1:30-3:00

### COURSE OVERVIEW AND GOALS

This course provides a survey of the political processes and institutions of American government. In years past, I had a line at this point in the syllabus that said: “I know what you might be thinking—that sounds boring.” And then I would try to persuade you that it would be more interesting than you might assume.

That doesn’t really seem necessary any more. “Boring” isn’t a word that many of us use to describe American politics today. But “confusing” might be. So my goal in this class is to help explain our 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. Throughout the course, we will focus on how these features of American government help us understand stories in the news—whether these involve the Trump administration, debates over racial equality and immigration, congressional polarization, the 2020 presidential primaries, or other topics.

Students who successfully complete the course will satisfy G-PAC requirements in critical thinking and local/civic engagement and should achieve these learning outcomes:

- Develop a basic knowledge of structures and functions of American government.
- Understand political science theories used to explain American politics.
- Be able to apply those theories to understand and interpret political outcomes.
- Become a better analyst of politics, and a thoughtful consumer of political news

### LEARNING ASSESSMENT

We will evaluate your success in achieving these goals with the following criteria:

- *Quizzes*. 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. We will drop your lowest 5 scores and average the rest. Your quiz average will constitute 75% 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.<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> Pennebaker JW, Gosling SD, Ferrell JD (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.

quizzes also help us ascertain how well certain concepts are understood, so that we can adjust the content of lectures accordingly.

Because we're giving you 5 get-out-of-jail-free cards, **there will be no makeups** (other than for religious observances [see policy below] or GW athletic or other events that you are required to participate in). You must be in class to take the quiz.

- *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 draw on material from the entire semester. We will hand out a study guide before the final. The exam will be worth 25% of your grade.

A makeup exam will be given only in extreme circumstances, such as illness or family emergency. In order to qualify for a makeup, you must (1) notify us *before* the exam and (2) provide documentation of the illness or emergency. If you fail to do either of these things, you will not be eligible to take a makeup.

The components of your final grade will be as follows:

- Quizzes: 75%
- Final exam: 25%

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).

## READING

There are two required books. In the course schedule below, you are expected to complete the reading before the class for which it is assigned. You must acquire the listed editions of both books. There are also a handful of supplemental materials available online. You are also responsible for keeping up with the news.

### Books

Kernell, Samuel, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck. 2019. *The Logic of American Politics*, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. (Noted as “L” in the course schedule below.)

Kernell, Samuel, and Steven S. Smith. 2018. *Principles and Practice of American Politics: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition. Washington, DC: CQ Press. (Noted as “P” in the course schedule below.)

You can find a copy of the required books on reserve at Gelman Library, through a program called [Top Textbooks](#). Top Textbooks can be checked out for three hours at a time, can be taken outside the library, and have no cost to use.

### The News

It should come as no surprise in a political science course that you are expected to keep up with the news. Our discussions during lecture frequently will touch on current events, so it is critical that you keep apprised of major political goings-on. Reading a major newspaper is perhaps the best way to do this, although there are of course many other news sources with ample political coverage. In addition, you may be interested in [The Monkey Cage](#), a *Washington Post* blog about politics and political science, for which I have served as an editor and contributor.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

You must bring a wi-fi-enabled device to every class session so that you can take the quizzes through Blackboard. But that is the only time you are permitted to use it. As great as technology is (how else would we get the cat videos?), the fact is that laptops, smart phones, and other devices are a distraction to your classmates and to me. Not only that, but [research](#) has [shown](#) that we learn more when we take notes by hand. So other than for the quizzes, you may not use electronic devices in class. If you have a unique reason for needing a laptop to take notes, please contact me.

## **CREDIT HOUR POLICY**

In a 15-week semester, including exam week, students are expected to spend a minimum of 100 minutes of out-of-class work for every 50 minutes of direct instruction, for a minimum total of 2.5 hours a week. A 3-credit course should include 2.5 hours of direct instruction and a minimum of 5 hours of independent learning, totaling a minimum of 7.5 hours per week. More information about GW's credit hour policy can be found [here](#) or [here](#).

## **UNIVERSITY POLICY ON 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 their day(s) of religious observance. For details and policy, see [here](#).

## **SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM**

### *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 the Rome Hall, Suite 102, to establish eligibility and to coordinate reasonable accommodations. For additional information, see [here](#).

### *Mental Health Services*

The University's Mental Health Services offers 24/7 assistance and referral to address students' personal, social, career, and study skills problems. Services for students include: crisis and emergency mental health consultations confidential assessment, counseling services (individual and small group), and referrals. For additional information, see [here](#).

## **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY CODE**

Thinking of cheating? Don't do it – either in this class or on your significant other. 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 [here](#).

## **SAFETY AND SECURITY**

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.

Date	Topic	Reading/Listening/Viewing	Quiz?
8/27	Introduction	None	No quiz
8/29	Why Government?	L: Ch. 1 P: Olson (1-1)	No quiz
9/3	The Founding and the Constitution	L: Ch. 2 (pp. 36-51) L: Be familiar with the Constitution (pp. 691-693)	Practice quiz
9/5	The Founding and the Constitution	L: Ch. 2 (pp. 52-90) P: Madison (2-1 and 2-2)	Quiz 1
9/10	Federalism	L: Ch. 3	Quiz 2
9/12	Federalism	P: Kettl (3-1) Read Somin, <a href="#">“Federalism, the Constitution, and Sanctuary Cities”</a> and Yee, <a href="#">“Judge Blocks Trump Effort to Withhold Money from Sanctuary Cities”</a>	Quiz 3
9/17	Civil Liberties	L: Ch. 5 [ <i>note that we’re reading Ch. 5 before Ch. 4</i> ]	Quiz 4
9/19	Civil Liberties	P: Supreme Court (5-2) Listen to Radiolab, <a href="#">“Eye in the Sky”</a>	Quiz 5
9/24	Civil Rights	L: Ch. 4	Quiz 6
9/26	Civil Rights	P: Levitt (4-2) Read Menand, <a href="#">“The Color of Law”</a>	Quiz 7
10/1	Congress	L: Ch. 6	Quiz 8
10/3	Congress	P: Jacobson (11-2)	Quiz 9
10/8	Congress	P: Binder (6-2) Watch an <a href="#">interview</a> with political scientist Francis Lee	Quiz 10
10/10	The Presidency	L: Ch. 7	Quiz 11
10/15	The Presidency	P: Neustadt (7-1) Read Plott, <a href="#">“Ignoring Trump’s Orders, Hoping He’ll Forget”</a>	Quiz 12
10/17	The Judiciary	L: Ch. 9 P: Hamilton (9-3)	Quiz 13
10/22	No class: Fall break	None	No quiz
10/24	The Bureaucracy	L: Ch. 8 Read Flavelle and Bain, <a href="#">“Washington Bureaucrats Are Quietly Working to Undermine Trump’s Agenda”</a>	Quiz 14

Date	Topic	Reading/Listening/Viewing	Quiz?
10/29	Political Parties	L: Ch. 12	Quiz 15
10/31	Political Parties	P: Drutman (12-2) Read Masket, <a href="#">“Why Political Parties Never Die”</a>	Quiz 16
11/5	Interest Groups	L: Ch. 13	Quiz 17
11/7	Interest Groups	P: Schattschneider (13-1) Read Burns, <a href="#">“K Street and the Status Quo”</a>	Quiz 18
11/12	The Media	L: Ch. 14	Quiz 19
11/14	The Media	P: Allcott and Gentzkow (14-1) Read Hayes, <a href="#">“When the Senate Gun Control Bill Died, So Did the Story”</a>	Quiz 20
11/19	Public Opinion	L: Ch. 10	Quiz 21
11/21	Public Opinion	Watch Pew Research Center videos on <a href="#">random sampling</a> and <a href="#">question wording</a> in public opinion polling Read Cassidy, <a href="#">“Is America an Oligarchy?”</a>	Quiz 22
11/26	Campaigns and Elections	L: Ch. 11 (pp. 474-488)	Quiz 23
11/28	No class: Thanksgiving	Stuff yourself, turkeys	No quiz
12/3	Campaigns and Elections	L: Ch. 11 (pp. 488-511) P: Popkin (11-1)	Quiz 24
12/5	Campaigns and Elections	Read Edsall, <a href="#">“Donald Trump’s Identity Politics”</a>	Quiz 25
TBD	Final Exam	All of the above	
	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 <a href="#">here</a> .		

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\*L=*Logic of American Politics*, 9<sup>th</sup> Ed | P=*Principles and Practice of American Politics*, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed