

American National Government

POS2041 Spring 2026, 3 credit hours

Thursday 9:00-10:15am Reed Hall 236/hybrid asynchronous

Instructor: Dr. Sean Ewing, Ph.D.

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Office Hours: Tuesday 1-3:00 pm (Merwin 183) or by appointment

Course Description

In this course, students will investigate how the national government is structured and how the American constitutional republic operates. It covers the philosophical and historical foundations of American government, including but not limited to the Declaration of Independence, the United States constitution and all its amendments, and The Federalist Papers. The course examines the branches of government and the government's laws, policies, and programs. It also examines the ways in which citizens participate in their government and ways their government responds to citizens.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the basic principles and practices of America's constitutional republic.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of the nation's founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and its amendments, and The Federalist Papers.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation and landmark executive actions.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of the history and development of the American federal government and its impact on law and society.
- Students will demonstrate an ability to apply course material to contemporary political issues and debates.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to engage in discussion and civil debate on American politics that are associated with multiple points of view.

General Education Learning Outcomes

- Students will identify how social or historical factors shape the ideas or emotions that people express or the objects they create.

- Students will compare the ways in which people express complex ideas or emotions in a particular cultural, historical, or artistic environment.

Civic Literacy Competencies

- Understanding of the basic principles and practices of American democracy and how they are applied in our republican form of government.
- An understanding of the United States Constitution and its application.
- Knowledge of the founding documents and how they have shaped the nature and functions of our institutions of self-government.
- An understanding of landmark Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation and landmark executive actions and their impact on law and society.

Completing Florida's Civic Literacy Requirement

Consistent with Florida Board of Governors Regulation 8.006 and Florida Statute Section 1007.25, in order to earn a bachelor's degree, undergraduate students must satisfy the State of Florida's Civic Literacy requirement by demonstrating competency in civic literacy. Depending on when a student initially enters a public Florida institution (Florida College System (FCS) or State University System (SUS) institution) as an undergraduate degree-seeking student, certain requirements must be met prior to graduation.

To see which of these requirements apply to you (based on your cohort), please see:

<https://www.fgcu.edu/catalog/undergraduateinformation?fmid=Civic+Literacy+Competency>

For information on the civic literacy exam (i.e., how to enroll, how to take, etc.) please see:

<https://www.fgcu.edu/testing/>

Core Syllabus Policies FGCU has a set of central policies related to student recording class sessions, academic integrity and grievances, student accessibility services, academic disruption, and religious observances that apply to all courses at FGCU. Be sure to review these online at:

<https://www.fgcu.edu/about/leadership/officeoftheprovoast/core-syllabus-policy-statements>

Required Texts

Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck, and Timothy R. Johnson. 2025. The Logic of American Politics, 12th Edition. CQ Press.

Core FGCU Policies

<https://www.fgcu.edu/about/leadership/officeoftheprovoast/core-syllabus-policy-statements>

Please review these core policies and let me know if you have any questions!

Grade Breakdown

News Reflections: 20%
Attendance/Participation: 20%
Weekly Reading Quiz/Exit Ticket: 10%
Midterm Exam: 25%
Final Exam: 25%

News Reflections:

Twice during the semester, students are expected to write a 2 page reflection on a news article of the student's choosing about American politics. The news article can be about anything related to American politics, but students should specifically search for articles where they can make meaningful connections to course content.

Students should begin by identifying a news article from the past 30 days from a reputable news outlet. Outlets such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, NPR, Associated Press, or a local newspaper are best. Students can use outlets such as Fox News or MSNBC, but be aware that these outlets can be biased and using articles from these outlets will require an analysis of any detectable bias that may impact the articles contents. Students should avoid using hyper partisan news outlets (such as Breitbart or Crooked Media) or non-traditional news outlets (such as news found on TikTok, Twitch, or other social media apps/sites). Opinion pieces, editorials, and blog posts should be similarly avoided.

Students should then write a 2 page reflection on how the article's content relates to course concepts from at least two separate classes. This should include a brief summary of the article and at least **two** ways in which the article connects to what was discussed in class. Finally, students should conclude by explaining why the article matters for understanding American government.

Students will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

- Selection of a relevant news article (2 points)
- Brief explanation of the news article (2 points)
- Accurate and thoughtful connection to course concepts from two separate classes (4 points)
- Writing is clear and well organized (2 points)

The best way to approach this assignment is to read a handful of news articles before class each week. During class, students can begin making connections between what they read and what they are learning in class. After class, students can either use an article they've already read or explore additional articles and then make the best selection possible. The best reflections will use an interesting and dynamic news article and connect it with concepts from both the textbook and the class lecture/discussion.

Attendance/Participation:

Due to the hybrid nature of the class, attendance is critical and students are required to attend every class. Absences will be penalized unless a reasonable excuse is provided either before or the day of the class. In these cases, I will assign makeup work for the student to complete that will count for attendance in that week. Students are expected to review the slides and get notes from a classmate in order to not fall behind.

There will be several opportunities for discussion and participation in each class. While students are not required to participate, frequent participation and relevant insights will be rewarded with up to five extra credit points on the final exam (depending on the level of participation).

Weekly Reading Quiz/Exit Ticket:

Each week, students will be given either a short reading quiz at the beginning of class or a short exit ticket at the end of class. These are not meant to test deep knowledge but rather to ensure students are completing the readings and paying attention in class. Reading quizzes will happen at the beginning of class and exit tickets will happen at the end of class (with each week featuring one or the other).

Exams:

There will be two exams in this class (a midterm and a final). The midterm will occur during class on **February 26th**, and will be a combination of fill in the blank and short answer questions. The final exam will occur during class on **April 23rd** and will be a combination of fill in the blank, short answer, and one essay question. I will not evaluate the short answer or essay questions based on spelling, organization, or grammar, but rather the articulation and accurate description of core class concepts.

Grading

All assignments are due the day listed on this syllabus. Late work will be deducted by a letter grade for each day it is late. If you have an exceptional situation that you believe qualifies you for an extension, please email me *prior* to the due date.

Communication/Office Hours

The best way to reach me is via email. I check my email fairly regularly, but please allow me 24 hours to respond to emails. If I do not respond within 24 hours, feel free to email me again or swing by my office!

My office hours and location are listed above. If those times do not work for you, please email me and we can schedule an alternate time to meet.

Academic Integrity and Artificial Intelligence Tools

All assignments and exams are expected to be completed at the highest standards of academic integrity. Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are taken very seriously and will not be tolerated. This includes the use of ChatGPT or other Artificial Intelligence tools- while there may be appropriate ways to use these tools in an academic setting in some cases, taking phrases or sentences directly from AI is considered plagiarism and will be treated as such.

For the purposes of this class, students are not permitted to use AI in any form to assist with writing assignments or exams. Using AI is not only a violation of academic integrity but also a poor way to approach learning at the university level. Relying on artificial intelligence tools will not serve you well in the long run and will deprive you of the opportunity to engage meaningfully with studying politics and government.

Course Schedule

TOPIC	READINGS	ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS
1/8 Introduction	The Logic of American Politics Chapter 1	None
1/15 NO CLASS	None	None
1/22 The Constitution	- The Logic of American Politics Chapter 2 <i>Federalist #10, 47, and 51</i>	None
1/29 Federalism	- The Logic of American Politics Chapter 3 50 states, 50 fixes, <i>New York Times</i> https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/climate/50-states-fixes.html	None
2/5 Civil Rights and Civil Liberties	- The Logic of American Politics Chapters 4 and 5 - Martin Luther King Jr., <i>Letter from Birmingham Jail</i> (1963)	None
2/12 Congress	- The Logic of American Politics Chapter 6 - Mayhew, David. (1974). <i>Congress: The electoral connection</i>. Yale University Press. Chapter 1.	None
2/19 The Presidency	- The Logic of American Politics Chapter 7 - Selected Excerpts from <i>Trump v. United States</i>	Weekly News Reflection #1 Due

2/26 Midterm Exam	No reading, study for the midterm exam!	Midterm Exam
3/5	Spring Break! No class or assignments	None
3/12 The Bureaucracy and The Federal Judiciary	- The Logic of American Politics Chapters 8 and 9 - I Am Part of the Resistance Inside the Trump Administration (NYT Op-ed, Sep. 5 2018)	None
3/19 Public Opinion	- The Logic of American Politics Chapter 10 - Explore the following website: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/polls/donald-trump-approval-rating-polls.html	None
3/26 Voting, Campaigns, and Elections	- The Logic of American Politics Chapter 11 - Sides, John, Chris Tausanovitch, and Lynn Vavreck. 2022. <i>The Bitter End: The 2020 Presidential Campaign and the Challenge to American Democracy</i>. Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.	None
4/2 Political Parties and Interest Groups	- The Logic of American Politics Chapters 12 and 13 - Reading the Democratic Autopsy: https://democraticautopsy.org/how-democrats-lost-the-white-house/	None
4/9 The Media	- The Logic of American Politics Chapter 14 - Ewing, Sean. 2026. Profit over Public Good: The Impact of Investment Firm Ownership on Local News and Political Behavior. <i>Political Communication</i>	None
4/16 NO CLASS	None	Weekly News Reflection #2 Due
4/23 Final Exam	No reading, study for the final exam!	Final Exam