

Introduction to American Government

Govt 103, Section 002
George Mason University
Fall 2014

Class: Tuesday 4:30-7:10 Robinson Hall A111

Instructor: Andrew Armstrong

Office: Robinson Hall A, 218A

Office Hours: Tuesday & Wednesday 10-12, or by appointment

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Website: Blackboard (<http://mymason.gmu.edu>)

Goals and Expectations

This class will introduce you to American politics and government at the national level. The course has three broad goals: The first is to acquaint you with the history and logic behind government institutions. Along the way we will address several fundamental questions: How well does the political system realize the promise of democracy? To what degree does it accommodate competing groups, goals, and beliefs? What is the potential for reform?

The second goal is to provide an analytical framework to approach these questions, not just as a citizen, but as a researcher. You will be exposed to readings, concepts, and methods at the heart of political science. The theories of individual and group behavior discussed throughout the course will remain valuable over the course of your academic and professional career.

The final goal is to enjoy the course! American politics and government are exciting topics. Over the course of the semester we will discuss how well our theories can account for current events. And, of course, and the nation's capitol—the dynamic embodiment of what we will study—is (nearly) at our doorstep.

Reading & Requirements

The primary text is Kernell et. al.'s The Logic of American Politics, 6th Edition. Additional readings will be assigned as the semester progresses. Note that lectures may cover topics beyond those in the assigned readings. It is therefore vital to attend class and take careful notes to be fully prepared for the exams.

Policies

Be Respectful

Passion about politics is encouraged, and it is common to have strong opinions about many of the topics discussed over the course of the semester. In the spirit of productive discussion it is vital to be thoughtful and respectful.

No Electronics

No electronics of any kind—laptops, cell phones, recorders, drones, etc.—will be allowed during class. Please silence your cell phone before class starts.

Students With Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability, please contact me and the Office of Disability Resources. Accommodations will be arranged in accordance with their policies.

Blackboard

Take a moment to familiarize yourself with the course's blackboard page. Additional readings, resources, and grades will all be available through Blackboard.

Academic Honesty

Integrity is integral to GMU's academic and social culture. Cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Please refer to Blackboard for additional information about the Honor Code.

Exams & Grading

There will be four exams over the course of the semester: three in-class progress exams and a cumulative final exam. Since the course meets once a week, days with in-class exams will be followed by lecture/discussion. Note that:

- All exams will include a multiple-choice component. Students are responsible for bringing a Scantron sheet and pencil to each test day.
- Progress exams will primarily include material covered since the previous exam. However, I reserve the right to ask questions from earlier sections.
- The dates for progress exams *may* be changed as the semester progresses. Revised dates can only be pushed back to a later class, never forward.
- The final exam is cumulative. A number of questions on the final exam will come directly from the progress exams.

Make-up Exams

In the interest of fairness, three rules govern missed exams. Without exception:

- Missed exams count as a 0.
- If an exam is missed, a make-up exam will be offered *only* with documented evidence of an emergency.
- Make-up exams may be more difficult than the original.

Extra Credit

There will be an opportunity for extra credit during the semester. Details will be provided after the first exam. Please note that no extra-credit work will be given on an individual basis.

Summary of Grading

Exam 1	20%
Exam 2	20%
Exam 3	20%
Final Exam	40%

Grade Scale

A=93-100	A-=90-92	B+=88-89	B=83-87
B-=80-82	C+=78-79	C=73-77	C-=70-72
D=60-69	F<60		

Reading & Examination Schedule

Following is an outline of readings and assignments. The dates may adjusted over the course of the semester, and additional readings may be assigned. It is incumbent upon you to attend class and keep pace with the material.

Date	Topic	Reading
8.26	Course Introduction	Syllabus
9.2	Thinking Like A Political Scientist	Ch1; Hardin 1968
9.9	The Constitution	Ch2
9.16	Federalism	Ch3
9.23	Exam 1*	
9.30	The Congress	Ch6
10.7	The Presidency	Ch7
10.14	The Bureaucracy	Ch8; McCubbins & Schwartz 1984
10.21	Exam 2*	
10.28	Voting & Elections	Ch11; Verba et al 1993
11.4	Political Parties	Ch12;
11.11	Interest Groups	Ch13
11.18	Exam 3*	
11.25	The News Media	Ch14; Thrall 2007
12.02	TBD	
	Final Exam	

** The dates for the three progress exams may be adjusted. These dates can only be moved to a later date, never forward.*