GOVT 103: Introduction to American Government

Spring 2016 - Enterprise Hall 80; MW 1:30-2:45 PM

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Office: West PE Module
Office Hours: MW 12:00-1:00 PM

Course Description:
This course serves as a broad overview of the workings of American government. The course will introduce you to many of the major issues in the study of politics and political science and will give you a sense of the sorts of things that political scientists do. We will use theories of politics, as well as historical and current events, to develop an understanding of the structures and processes of our government. A major goal of this course is to introduce you to some of the analytical tools necessary to interpret contemporary political issues. I expect that, by the end of the course, you will have not only learned about how other people study politics, but will be able to actively use your knowledge to study politics (with your chosen level of intensity) yourself.

Course Goals:
This course is designed to meet three primary objectives. First, I hope to stimulate your curiosity about government and politics and provide you with a life-long desire to be an informed, critical, and active citizen. Second, I hope students will develop a base level of knowledge and understanding about the institutions that form our government, the incentives of political actors, and the interactions between the two. Third, the course is designed to help students improve their analytical and critical thinking skills.
Course Requirements:

- **Daily quizzes/in-class assignments 15%**: For introductory courses, it is very important to keep pace with the material, as an understanding of later topics builds cumulatively on understanding of prior topics. Thus, to incentivize everyone staying on top of things, I will be giving short quizzes at the conclusion of each substantive lecture. These activities will be quite “easy” in the sense that if you attend class and pay attention, there should be no ambiguity answering the quiz questions. These quizzes will be released to Blackboard by the conclusion of each lecture, and will be due by **midnight** on that same day. I will often reserve the last few minutes of class time for quiz taking; or, you can complete the quiz in your own time after class. I will drop the lowest **two** quiz grades for each student. **You may not “make up” points for missed quizzes.**

- **Midterm Exams 25% each; 50% total**: There are 2 “midterm” exams for the course. These will be held in class on February 24 and April 6. Each exam will consist of approximately 50 multiple choice style questions. Exams can only be rescheduled under extraordinary (and well documented) circumstances. Rescheduled exams must be taken as soon as possible and may be in a different format from the in-class exam (that is, it will most likely be short answers/essays).

- **Final Exam 35%**: There will be a comprehensive in-class exam covering material from the entire course. The final will be longer than the midterms (approximately 80-100 multiple choice questions) and will be held at the university’s designated time (May 4, from 1:30-4:15 pm).

Student Responsibilities:

- **Class Attendance and Participation**: You are expected to attend class (showing up on time) and pay attention to lecture. This is a lecture class, but the material is often reflected in current events and we will often discuss politics and political science. These discussions are to remain civil and informed, and each student is expected to participate through discussion or by respectfully paying attention to the content of discussion.

- **Readings**: Complete the readings listed in the course schedule. All reading should be completed before the lecture on the topic.

- **Technology**: Turn your phones off while in class. **You may not use laptop computers or tablet devices in class, except if you are sitting in the back row.** The only exception to this policy is at the end of class when I allow time to complete the daily quiz. If this restriction poses a challenge for you, please discuss it with me.

- Regularly check the course Blackboard page.

- Read the news/ follow current events.

Grade Distribution:

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<th>Grade Distribution</th>
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<tr>
<td>Daily quizzes/in-class assignments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm Exams</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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Letter Grade Distribution:

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Required Books:
There is one required book for this course and it is available at the campus bookstore.


Topics and Schedule of Readings
The following is a tentative schedule for the course. Updates to this schedule may be posted to Blackboard or communicated in class, as appropriate. This schedule is meant to give you a sense of the topic(s) to be covered on a given day. It is also meant to guide you if you wish to complete readings ahead of time. You are required to have read the assigned reading by the week listed below.

“Further reading” is not required and will not be necessary for exams. Some of the hyperlinks may look wonky, but they should work when you click them.

W 1/20

Course Introduction and Organization

No reading

Part I. The Foundations of American Government

Week 1 - M 1/25, W 1/27

The Study of American Politics/The Constitution
Required reading

For Monday, 1/25:
◦ Lowi et al., Chapter 1 (“Five Principles of Politics”)

For Wednesday, 1/27:
◦ Lowi et al., Chapter 2 (“Constructing a Government: The Founding and the Constitution”)  
◦ Lowi et al., Appendix on “The Constitution of the United States”

Further material

◦ EconTalk “Seidman on the Constitution”: http://www.econtalk.org/archives/2013/02/seidman_on_the.html  
◦ EconTalk “Glenn Reynolds on Politics, the Constitution, and Technology”: http://www.econtalk.org/archives/2013/02/glenn_reynolds.html

Week 2 - M 2/1, W 2/3

FEDERALISM

Required

For Monday, 2/1:
◦ Lowi et al., Appendix on “Federalist Papers”  
◦ Lowi et al., Chapter 3 (“Federalism and the Separation of Powers”)

Further material


Week 3 - M 2/8, W 2/10

CIVIL LIBERTIES & CIVIL RIGHTS
**Required**

For Monday, 2/8:
- Lowi et al., Chapter 4 (“Civil Liberties”)

For Wednesday, 2/10:
- Lowi et al., Chapter 5 (“Civil Rights”)

**Further material**


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**Week 4 - M 2/15, W 2/17**

**Political Parties & Interest Groups**

**Required**

For Monday, 2/15:
- Lowi et al., Chapter 12 (“Political Parties”)

For Wednesday, 2/17:
- Lowi et al., Chapter 13 (“Interest Groups”)

**Further material**


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**First Exam**

Monday 2/22: First exam review session

Wednesday 2/24: First exam
Part II. Institutions of American Government

Week 6 - M 2/29, W 3/2

**CONGRESS**

**Required**

For Monday, 2/29:
- Lowi et al., Chapter 6 (“Congress: The First Branch”)

**Further material**


**SPRING BREAK**

Monday 3/7, Wednesday 3/9: NO CLASS

**Week 7 - M 3/14, W 3/16**

**THE PRESIDENCY**

**Required**

For Monday, 3/14:
- Lowi et al., Chapter 7 (“The Presidency as an Institution”)

**Further material**


Week 8 - M 3/21, W 3/23

THE BUREAUCRACY

Required
For Monday, 3/21:
◦ Lowi et al., Chapter 8 (“The Executive Branch: Bureaucracy in a Democracy”)

Further material

Week 9 - M 3/28, W 3/30

THE JUDICIARY

Required
For Monday, 3/28:
◦ Lowi et al., Chapter 9 (“The Federal Courts”)

Further material
Second Exam

Monday 4/4: Second exam review session

Wednesday 4/6: Second exam

Part III. People and Political Behavior

Week 11 - M 4/11, W 4/13

Public Opinion & Media

Required

For Monday, 4/11:
○ Lowi et al., Chapter 10 (”Public Opinion”)

For Wednesday, 4/13:
○ Lowi et al., Chapter 14 (“The Media”)

Further material


Week 12 - M 4/18, W 4/20

Elections, Voting, & Campaigning

Required

For Monday, 4/18:
○ Lowi et al., Chapter 11 (“Elections”)

8
Further material


Part IV. Policymaking and Governance

Week 13 - M 4/25, W 4/27

**Domestic Policy**

*Required*

For Monday, 4/25:
○ Lowi et al., Chapter 15 (“Economic Policy”)

For Wednesday 4/27:
○ Lowi et al., Chapter 16 (“Social Policy”)

*Further material*


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**Final Exam**

Monday 5/2: Final exam review session

Wednesday 5/4: Final exam (held during exam period: 1:30-4:15 PM)
Additional Concerns

Syllabus
This syllabus is a tentative guide for the course. I reserve the right to make announced changes to this document and will distribute these changes in class and on the course website. Each student will be responsible for all announcements and materials covered in class.

Class Conduct
Class atmosphere will be quite relaxed. Just a few guidelines to make sure:

- Arriving a few minutes late is tolerated as long as you make an effort to minimize the disturbance for other students.
- Eating and drinking in class should be reduced to a minimum. It is not forbidden, but please make sure that you are not disturbing others.
- Turn off all cell phones (or don’t even bring them).
- If you have to leave a class early, please let me know in advance. It is very rude to simply walk out in the middle of a class.

Disabilities and Accommodations
Please let me know within the first week of class if you require assistance or special consideration. I can make accommodations for those who need them but must be informed of the need in advance. Any requests for accommodation based on a disability must be arranged through the Office of Disability Services (ODS). http://ods.gmu.edu/

Academic Integrity
All work completed in your name must be yours and yours alone. Any work you borrow or ideas you gather from other sources must be cited properly. Please see me if you are concerned about proper citation style. Any attempt to present someone else’s work as your own will be met with the harshest consequences. You will receive an F for the assignment and an F for the course. Furthermore, notification of, and supporting documentation for, the violation will be forwarded to the appropriate university administrators.

Enrollment Statement
Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Scheduled adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes.

Last Day to Add: 1/26
Last Day to Drop: 2/19

Please note, after the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons. Undergraduate Students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.

Other Useful Campus Resources:
Writing Center
A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; http://writingcenter.gmu.edu

University Libraries
http://library.gmu.edu

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
703.993.2380; http://caps.gmu.edu

University Policies
The University Catalog, http://catalog.gmu.edu, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.