



School of Policy, Government,
and International Affairs

GOVT 103: Introduction to American Government

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

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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:

<i>Daily quizzes/in-class assignments</i>	15%
<i>Midterm Exams</i>	50%
<i>Final Exam</i>	35%

Letter Grade Distribution:

>= 97.00	A+	73.00 - 76.99	C
93.00 - 96.99	A	70.00 - 72.99	C-
90.00 - 92.99	A-	67.00 - 69.99	D+
87.00 - 89.99	B+	63.00 - 66.99	D
83.00 - 86.99	B	60.00 - 62.99	D-
80.00 - 82.99	B-	<= 59.99	F
77.00 - 79.99	C+		

Required Books:

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

Lowi, Theodore J., Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere. 2015. *American Government: Power and Purpose*. 13th (with policy chapters) ed. New York, NY: W. W. Norton

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

- Seidman, Louis M. 2012. “Let’s Give Up on the Constitution.” *New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/31/opinion/lets-give-up-on-the-constitution.html?_r=0
 - 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
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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

- Grissom, Brandi. 2016. “Texas Gov. Greg Abbott calls for Convention of States to take back states’ rights.” *The Dallas Morning News*. <http://trailblazersblog.dallasnews.com/2016/01/gov-greg-abbott-calls-for-constitutional-convention-to-take-back-states-rights.html/>
 - Davey, Monica. 2009. “Health Care Overhaul and Mandatory Coverage Stir States’ Rights Claims.” *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/29/us/29states.html>
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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

- Stevens, John Paul. 2012 “Should Hate Speech Be Outlawed?” *New York Review of Books*. <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2012/06/07/should-hate-speech-be-outlawed/>.
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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

- Victor, Jennifer N. 2016. “A science-backed New Year’s resolution to help fix American politics.” *Mischiefs of Faction*. <http://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2016/1/12/10753612/political-donation-parties>
 - Drutman, Lee. 2015. “What we get wrong about lobbying and corruption.” *The Monkey Cage*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/04/16/what-we-get-wrong-about-lobbying-and-corruption/>
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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

- Madonna, Anthony, and Ian Ostrander. 2015. "If Congress keeps cutting its staff, who is writing your laws? You won't like the answer." *The Monkey Cage*.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/wp/2015/08/20/if-congress-keeps-cutting->
 - Drutman, Lee. 2015. "The House Freedom Caucus has some good ideas on how the US House should operate." *Polyarchy*. <http://www.vox.com/polyarchy/2015/10/20/9570747/house-freedom-caucus-process-demands>
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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

- Carey, John. 2016. "Strong presidencies may threaten democracy. Luckily, we don't have one." *Washington Post: In Theory Blog*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2016/01/14/strong-presidencies-may-threaten-democracy-luckily-we-dont-have-one/?postshare=641452790667719&tid=ss_tw
 - Howell, William. 2013. "A not-so-imperial Obama presidency." *Politico*. <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/08/opinion-william-howell-barack-obama-095352>
 - Nyhan, Brendan. 2013. "Covering 'The American Presidency': Fiction vs. reality in coverage of the White House." *Columbia Journalism Review*. http://www.cjr.org/united_states_project/fiction_vs_reality_in_coverage_of_white_house.php?page=all
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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

- Posner, Paul. 2015. "Why We Need to Grade Our Governments (Again)." *Governing*. <http://www.governing.com/columns/smart-mgmt/gov-grade-governments.html>
 - Rudalevige, Andrew. 2013. "Recess is Over?" *The Monkey Cage*. <http://themonkeycage.org/2013/01/recess-is-over/>
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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

- Voeten, Erik. 2013. "How the Supreme Court responds to public opinion." *Washington Monthly*. http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/ten-miles-square/2013/06/how_the_supreme_court_responds045541.php
- Rudalevige, Andrew. 2015. "The Supreme Court just gave presidential power a passport." *The Monkey Cage*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2015/06/09/>

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

- Noel, Hans. 2015. "Fact-checking Rubio on philosophers and welders exposes the limits of fact-checking." *Mischiefs of Faction*. <http://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2015/11/11/9711954/rubio-debate-welders-philosophers>
 - Rydberg, James. 2010. "Sex, Drugs and Witchcraft: What Voters Really Care About." *Model Politics*. <https://today.yougov.com/news/2010/11/11/sex-drugs-and-witchcraft-what-voters-real>
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Week 12 - M 4/18, W 4/20

ELECTIONS, VOTING, & CAMPAIGNING

Required

For Monday, 4/18:

- Lowi et al., Chapter 11 ("Elections")

Further material

- Shineman, Victoria. 2012. "Incentivizing Participation Would Increase Voter Turnout and Political Information." *The Monkey Cage*. <http://themonkeycage.org/2012/11/incentivizing-particip>
- Burden, Barry C., and Kenneth R. Mayer. "Voting Early, but Not So Often." *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/25/opinion/25mayer.html>

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

- Weissman, Jordan. 2013. "Are Democrats Really Better at Running the Economy Than Republicans?" *The Atlantic*. <http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2013/12/are-democrats-re-282037/>
- Gilens, Martin. 2012. "Forum: Under the Influence." *Boston Review*. <http://www.bostonreview.net/forum/lead-essay-under-influence-martin-gilens>

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.