

POLS 1101: American Government

Department of Political Science, University of Georgia

Course Instructor Information:

Dr. Erin Little

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Office hours by appt, either in-person (217 Candler Hall) or Zoom (link available on eLC)

Course Meeting Information:

301 Baldwin Hall

MWF, 3:00-3:50pm

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

The United States offers a significant case example on the global stage toward understanding both how stable democracies develop and how challenges to democratic governance can evolve toward either reform or democratic decline. This course begins with a theoretical and practical understanding of the patterns that motivated revolution, contrasting the American experience with that of France, both at the end of the 18th century. We will explore the U.S. Constitution and its Amendments, devoting particular attention to the language it uses to define the actors, rights, obligations, and conditions of U.S. institutions and civil rights and liberties. We then discuss the institutions that characterize our separation of powers, contextualized within a scope of other developed democracies, particularly the United Kingdom. The remainder of the class will be dedicated to the relationship between civil society and the State, including political parties, mass media, interest groups, and political movements, and domestic and foreign policy.

By the end of the semester, students will:

1. Understand the foundational principles of the American government, including federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances.
2. Identify and analyze the roles and functions of key governmental institutions such as the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches.
3. Evaluate political processes such as elections, policymaking, and the influence of interest groups, political parties, and media at the federal level and at the state level in Georgia.
4. Examine the significance of civil society, including NGOs, advocacy groups, and social movements, in shaping public policy and civic engagement.
5. Compare the U.S. governance system with those of other developed democracies, focusing on electoral systems, party dynamics, and citizen participation.
6. Communicate effectively about American government through coherent arguments, respectful dialogue, and proficiency in research and citation.

EXAMS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Quizzes and Exams

You will have 5 quizzes in the first half of the course concerning readings that will be made available on eLC. In addition, you will have two non-cumulative midterms and a comprehensive final. Details and a study guide for all exams will be made available the week prior to each exam.

Discussion Posts

At the end of the semester, you will have three available discussion post prompts, each concerning a primary source document to be made available on eLC. Answer *two* of these prompts in approx. 250-300 words. Completing all three posts will not earn you extra credit.

Constitutional Amendments Project

During the first half of the semester, you will be divided into groups (or individually if enrollment is under 30 students) and asked to write a proposed amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Along with your amendment, you must submit a report indicating evidence of need for the amendment and what your amendment will do to resolve the issue. Evidence may come in many acceptable forms, some examples include: statements and trends associated with political movements on the issue; reports from relevant interest groups; and academic research from political science scholars, think tanks, and/or policymakers. All reports will be made available to the class preceding an in-class debate and vote. More details and a rubric will be made available on eLC.

Civic Engagement Activity

To internalize some of the themes and processes we will discuss in the Module on Civic Society and the U.S. State, this assignment asks you to pick one of the following activities and write a short 2-page report following the experience with some evidence of completion. More details and a rubric on this assignment will be made available on eLC.:

1. Write an Op-Ed for a newspaper on an issue you care about. (This can be a campus newspaper, a local newspaper, or a national newspaper, but it must be a newspaper in regular circulation (i.e., no online blogs). Publication is not required for the assignment. Evidence of completion would indicate at minimum a draft Op-Ed written with the audience of a particular newspaper in mind.
2. Volunteer at a local community organization, preferably in the Athens or Atlanta area.
3. Attend a Civic Event, such as a town hall meeting or an electoral debate. Virtual attendance is acceptable, though your report should include enough of a comprehensive and original commentary for me to evaluate your participation.
4. If you have an idea of your own, talk to me about it! We can probably make it work.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance will be taken randomly 5 times during the semester (worth 1% each) and on constitutional amendment project days. Absences will only be excused for the following, discussed with me in advance: observance of a religious practice, documented (by a doctor or health clinic/hospital) sickness, or death of a relative or close friend. While attendance is not taken for each class session, the fast-paced nature of this course and the use of supplemental materials in class (which will also appear on exams) will make it more difficult to do well in this course without being present.

GENERATIVE AI POLICY

Generative AI tools, such as Chat GPT and Grammarly, are permitted for all assignments in this course to assist in spelling, grammar, and diction. For any final research papers or projects, students may be required to submit a generative AI version of the assignment populated from their research question and a prompt of their choice, noted on the submission. This version will be submitted separately alongside the final document. Only the final document will be graded.

GRADING POLICY

The breakdown of your grades and the scoring rubric for this course are below (P/F indicates a Pass/Fail grade):

5% - Attendance

10% - Reading Quizzes (2% each)

10% - Discussion posts (5% each)

20% - Midterm Exams (10% each)

20% - Final Exam

20% - Constitutional Amendment project

- 5% for debate participation
- 15% for amendment proposal

15% - Civic Engagement activity

94 to 100 – A

90 to 93 – A-

87 to 89 – B+

84 to 87 – B

80 to 83 – B-

77 to 79 – C+

74 to 77 – C

70 to 73 – C-

67 to 69 – D+

64 to 67 – D

60 to 63 – D-

59 and below – F

OUTLINE OF TOPICS

MODULE I: FOUNDATIONS OF U.S. GOVERNANCE	
Jan. 6, 8, 10	Week 1 – Syllabus and Introduction
Topics	Review the syllabus and course requirements “Norton I, Emperor of the United States” (aka, why don’t we have an emperor?)
	<i>Nothing due this week</i>
Jan. 13, 15, 17	Week 2 –Liberal Theory before 1765
Topics	John Locke’s <i>Second Treatise of Civil Government</i> Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s <i>The Social Contract</i> Montesquieu’s <i>The Spirit of Laws</i>
<i>Due by Jan. 22nd at 11:59pm</i>	<i>(Reading) Quiz #1</i>
Jan. 22, 24	Week 3 – Political Movements and Revolution 1/20 – <i>NO CLASS; MLK, Jr. Day</i>
Topics	Analyzing the American and French Revolutions Social movements cycle from absolutist monarchies to representative governments
	<i>Nothing due this week</i>
Jan. 27, 29, 31	Week 4 – Week 3 (cont.) and Institutional Bargaining (1777-1789)
Topics	The Articles of Confederation and negotiating constitutional reform The bargaining model and early American political actors

<i>Due by Feb. 3rd at 11:59pm</i>	<i>(Reading) Quiz #2</i>
MODULE II: THE U.S. CONSTITUTION	
Feb. 3, 5, 7	Week 5 – Institutional Bargaining (cont.)
Topics	The bargaining model and early American political actors (cont.)
<i>Due by Feb. 10th at 11:59pm</i>	<i>Midterm Exam #1 (available on eLC beginning Feb. 6th at 8am) Weeks 1-4</i>
Feb. 10, 12, 14	Week 6 – Articles I – VII and Federalism
Topics	Constitutional powers on paper and Limits of Executive power and authority
<i>Due by Feb. 17th at 11:59pm</i>	<i>(Reading) Quiz #3</i>
MODULE III: U.S. GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS	
Feb. 17, 19, 21	Week 7 – The Bill of Rights and Constitutional Amendments
Topics	Ratification and implementation by U.S. states (special emphasis on Georgia) Civil Rights and Liberties in the Constitution Evolution of Actors, Rights, Obligations, and Conditions in the Constitution Judicial
<i>Due by Sept 30th at 11:59pm</i>	<i>(Reading) Quiz #4</i>
Feb. 24, 26, 28	Week 8 – Congress & The Executive
Topics	Judicial interpretations of the Speech or Debate Clause U.S. Presidential democracy vs. U.K. Parliamentary democracy

<i>Due by Mar. 10th at 11:59pm</i>	<i>(Reading) Quiz #5</i>
Mar. 3-7	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS
Mar. 10, 12, 14	The Judiciary and Week 8 (cont.)
Topics	The federal court system (district courts, circuit courts, and the Supreme Court) State courts, private international law, and the military justice system
<i>Due by Mar. 14th at 11:59pm</i>	<i>Constitutional Amendments Assignment</i>
Mar. 17, 19, 21	Week 10 – Constitutional Amendment Debate
Topics	Debating, revising, and selecting amendments from your submitted proposals (More details will be made available on eLC)
<i>Due by Mar. 24th at 11:59pm</i>	<i>Midterm Exam #2 (available on eLC beginning Mar. 20th at 8am) Weeks 5-8</i>
MODULE IV: CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE U.S. STATE (Special Emphasis on Georgia)	
Mar. 24, 26, 28	Week 11 – Political Parties, Campaigns, and Elections
Topics	Election processes, voting behavior and public opinion The changing role of political parties and political polarization
<i>Due Apr. 14th at 11:59pm</i>	<i>Discussion post #1</i>
Mar. 31, Apr. 2, 4	Week 12 – Mass Media and Interest Groups
Topics	Representing the public through media and interest groups Political misinformation, social media, changing communication technology
<i>Due Apr. 14th at 11:59pm</i>	<i>Discussion post #2</i>

Apr. 7, 9, 11	Week 13 – Political Movements and Reform
Topics	Mechanisms for local, state, and federal legislative reform Major economic and social movements of the 21 st century
<i>Due Apr. 14th at 11:59pm</i>	<i>Discussion post #3</i>
MODULE V: PUBLIC POLICY	
Apr. 14, 16, 18	Week 14 – State-level Policy (special emphasis on GA)
Topics	Georgia’s fiscal and social policy State-level institutions and GA’s state constitution
	<i>Nothing due this week</i>
Apr. 21, 23, 25	Week 15 – National and Foreign Policy
Topics	U.S. State Department, Immigration policy, and militarized conflicts abroad Fiscal and Social policy
<i>Due by Apr. 25th at 11:59pm</i>	<i>Civic Engagement Activity report</i>
Apr. 28	Epilogue (Looking ahead) <i>NO CLASS NOV. 27-29th (Thanksgiving Break)</i>
Topics	What do we mean when we characterize the U.S. as “democratic”? <i>No quiz this week</i>

<i>Due by May 5th at 11:59pm</i>	<i>Final Exam (available on eLC from May 1st at 8am to May 5th at 11:59pm)</i>
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ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

UGA Student Honor Code: “I will be academically honest in all of my academic work and will not tolerate academic dishonesty of others.” A Culture of Honesty, the University’s policy and procedures for handling cases of suspected dishonesty, can be found the website of Office of Instruction. We expect that the Student Honor Code will guide your efforts in this course. A lack of knowledge of the academic honesty policy does not explain a violation. Please direct any questions to the instructor.

COURSE POLICIES

The following is taken verbatim from the University Council: “The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.”

The following is taken verbatim from LINK: “In the absence of written authorization from the UGA Disability Resource Center, students may not make a visual or audio recording of any aspect of this course. Students who have a recording accommodation agree in writing that they:

- Will use the records only for personal academic use during the specific course.
- Understand that faculty members have copyright interest in their class lectures and that they agree not to infringe on this right in any way.
- Understand that the faculty member and students in the class have privacy rights and agree not to violate those rights by using recordings for any reason other than their own personal study.
- Will not release, digitally upload, broadcast, transcribe, or otherwise share all or any part of the recordings. They also agree that they not profit financially and will not allow others to benefit personally or financially from lecture recordings or other course materials.
- Will erase/delete all recordings at the end of the semester.
- Understand that violation of these terms may subject them to discipline under the Student Code of Conduct or subject them to liability under copyright laws.”

FERPA STATEMENT

The following is taken verbatim from the Syllabus Checklist:

“The Federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) grants students certain information privacy rights. See the registrar’s explanation. FERPA allows disclosure of directory information (name, address, telephone, email, date of birth, place of birth, major, activities, degrees, awards, prior schools), unless requested in a written letter to the registrar.”

DISABILITY SERVICES

The following is taken verbatim from the Disability Resource Center:

“If you plan to request accommodations for a disability, please register with the Disability Resource Center. They can be reached by visiting Clark Howell Hall, calling 706-542-8719 (voice) or 706-542-8778 (TTY), or by visiting the Disability Resource Center”

The following is taken verbatim from the document of Syllabus Creation:

“Students with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations in order to participate in course activities or meet course requirements should contact the instructor or designate during regular office hours or by appointment.”

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS RESOURCES

The following is taken verbatim from the University Council:

“If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit the website of Student Care and Outreach. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services.

UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services or crisis support. If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA for a list of FREE workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center. Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.”