

POLS 1101: Introduction to American Government

Dr. Karson P. Ray

University of Georgia, Fall 2025

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 1:00 – 2:00 pm

Office: Baldwin Hall 305A

Class Hours: T/Th 2:20 – 3:35 pm

Classroom: Baldwin Hall 104

Course Description

Introduction to American Government examines fundamentals of the American government, including the philosophical and constitutional foundations, political institutions and main actors, such as Congress and the presidency, democratic practices such as voting, political participation, and civil rights and liberties. It also includes a closer look at the State of Georgia, its constitution, and political system.

Required Materials

- Jillson, Cal. 2023. *American Government: Political Development and Institutional Change*. Routledge. 12th Edition. ISBN-10: 1032293969; ISBN-13: 978-1032293967. Can be purchased through Amazon or Routledge. Online textbook use is permitted.
- Primary source readings and any additional readings will be available on ELC weekly.

Course Objectives

This course introduces students to the history, processes, and institutions of American Government. Students will learn how laws are made, enforced, and interpreted by the three branches of the U.S. government, as well as the importance of political parties, interest groups, and civil rights and civil liberties in the American political system. Similar topics will be studied with regard to Georgia's state government, with particular attention to the Georgia state constitution. Throughout the course, students will demonstrate their understanding through a critical examination of the facts and principles of American government, they will learn theories about American government and how to evaluate them, they will practice their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and they will learn to apply these skills to ethical problems in the community. Students may be evaluated based on examinations, research papers, class discussion, presentations, and/or homework.

Successful students should be able to:

1. Understand the origins and workings of American government.
2. Analyze American government and consider democratic ideals.
3. Develop a working knowledge of current events in American and Georgia politics.
4. Improve critical thinking and communication skills by considering various political perspectives, reflecting on the development of personal views, and communicating those views effectively and respectfully.
5. Think about how democracy situates American government and what it means to be an active participant within our political system.

Course Structure

Class Structure

This course is designed to introduce you to American Politics in a generalized way. The abundance and intensity of readings is meant to challenge you; I do not expect you to have a full and complete understanding of the readings before class. What I do expect is for you to come to class with questions, and to leave with a more complete knowledge of the different aspects of American government.

Grades

- **Exams** will be administered three times during the semester. These exams will be comprised of multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, short answer (2-3 sentences), and essay questions. These exams will not be cumulative. You will have the entirety of the class to take the exam (1 hour and 15 minutes). Exams 1 and 2 will count for 20% of your final grade, and Exam 3 will count for 10% of your final grade. The dates of each exam are listed in the schedule, but are subject to change dependent upon our pace throughout the semester. **Makeup exams are only permitted in extraordinary circumstances such as documented medical emergencies. Makeup exams will not be offered without documentation and as much advance notice as possible, depending on the circumstances.**
- **Attendance** will be taken each day of in-person class, sometimes through activities. You are allotted **two excused absences, no questions asked**. After this, you will need to provide documentation for any days of class missed. A quick tip for success in this course: attending lectures will greatly increase your ability to do well! While I will be summarizing the readings and posting the lecture slides online after class, there is a lot of information to cover in this course...much of which may only be relayed through my lectures. If you have concerns about the attendance policy, please feel free to speak with me during office hours or before/after class.

- The **Choose Your Own Adventure Activity** allows you the opportunity to choose the way in which you engage with American government. There will be many options from which to choose! You will need to complete enough assignments to fulfill the 15-point (equates to the 15% of your total grade) requirement. Some options will be worth 15 points, some will be worth 10 points, and some will be worth 5 points. For example: you may complete one 15-point assignment, or three 5 point assignments, or one 10 point assignment AND one 5 point assignment to fulfill the activity requirements. The nature of the activities and correlating rubrics will be available on ELC and throughout classroom discussions. You may even have the opportunity to complete these assignments in class, if you so choose!
- **Position Papers** will be due three times throughout the semester, meaning that each short paper is worth 5% of your final grade. The intention of these papers is to challenge you to form your own opinions about relevant topics in American government. A rubric is available on ELC and the due dates for each paper are within the syllabus and on ELC. The most important aspect of these papers is to be able to justify your position, whatever it may be, with appropriate, peer-reviewed research. Each position paper should be no less than two pages double-spaced, not including headers or citations.
- A **Final Project** will be due in place of a final exam or paper. The Final Project is due on December 10th by 11:59 pm on ELC. This will be worth 15% of your final grade.

Grading Summary

I reserve the right to curve the scale dependent on overall class scores at the end of the semester. Your final grade will count these assessments using the following proportions:

- **50%** of your grade will be determined by 3 exams (Exams 1 and 2 are each worth 20% and Exam 3 is worth 10%).
- **15%** of your grade will be the Final Project.
- **15%** of your grade will be the Position Papers (5% each, 3 short papers total).
- **15%** of your grade will be your "Choose Your Own Adventure" Activity (or activities).
- **5%** of your grade will be determined by attendance and participation.

A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	88-89
B	84-87
B-	80-83
C+	78-79
C	74-77
C-	70-73
D+	68-69
D	64-67
D-	60-63
F	< 60

Class Policies

During Class

I absolutely understand that using laptops to record notes is important, so computers will be allowed in my classroom, as long as the use of these devices does not disturb the learning capability of other students. If laptops are discovered to be used for any other purpose than academics, pertaining to this course, then the privilege of electronic devices will be taken away. I aim to respectfully allow each student the same learning capability, which could be hindered by the use of electronic devices. Phones will not be allowed during class time, except in case of emergency. Eating and drinking are permitted, so long as we can respect our classroom and allow for regular class to be conducted.

Attendance Policy

As mentioned above, attendance will be taken every day of in-person class (excluding exam dates), and this will account for 5% of your grade. You will be allotted two excused absences, no questions asked. After these two absences have been utilized, you will need to provide documentation for your absences. Excused absences will include those with legitimate documentation, which can be sent to my email up to 7 days after the absence.

Policies on Incomplete Grades and Late Assignments

I will accept incomplete or late assignments when a legitimate excuse is provided. This requires documentation, and notice as soon as possible. I am flexible and understanding, but I must be aware of your circumstances to be able to accept incomplete or late work. Incomplete work without an excuse will be graded as such, and late work without an excuse is subject to a 10% reduction in overall grade for every business day after the deadline.

Academic Integrity and Honesty

Please see UGA's extensive policies on academic honesty (<http://honesty.uga.edu>). Be aware that under no circumstances will cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of academic dishonesty be tolerated in this class. 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 at honesty.uga.edu.

Please note that in my class, the use of unauthorized devices on in-class exams will result in an automatic report to UGA's Office of Academic Honesty and severe grade penalties. Should you need to have access to your phone for emergency purposes during an examination, you must speak with me **before** the assessment takes place.

Policy on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

To ensure you develop and master the foundational knowledge and skills in this course, the use of generative AI (GAI) tools is strictly prohibited. This includes all stages of your work process, even the preliminary ones. This prohibition extends to AI writing tools like Grammarly and Wordtune, as well as GAI tools like ChatGPT, Copilot, Writesonic, Rytr, and Rtotr. If you are uncertain about using a particular tool to support your work, please consult with me before using it.

Mental Health and Wellness at UGA

UGA Well-being Resources promote student success by cultivating a culture that supports a more active, healthy, and engaged student community. Anyone needing assistance is encouraged to contact Student Care & Outreach (SCO) in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-8479 or visit sco.uga.edu. Student Care & Outreach helps students navigate difficult circumstances by connecting them with the most appropriate resources or services. They also administer the Embark@UGA program which supports students experiencing, or who have experienced, homelessness, foster care, or housing insecurity. UGA provides both clinical and non-clinical options to support student well-being and mental health, any time, any place. Whether on campus, or studying from home or abroad, UGA Well-being Resources are here to help.

- Well-being Resources: well-being.uga.edu
- Student Care and Outreach: sco.uga.edu
- University Health Center: healthcenter.uga.edu
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services: caps.uga.edu or CAPS 24/7 crisis support at 706-542-2273
- Health Promotion/ Fontaine Center: healthpromotion.uga.edu
- Disability Resource Center and Testing Services: drc.uga.edu

Disability Accommodations

If you anticipate needing classroom or exam accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you must register for services with the Accessibility and Testing Center (A&T), formerly the Disability Resource Center (DRC). I will accommodate requests from A&T in this course. Additional information can be found here: <https://accessibility.uga.edu>

Prohibition on Class Recordings and Distribution of Course Materials

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 will 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.

For more information on securing an accommodation to record lectures, see: <https://accessibility.uga.edu/faculty-guidelines-for-record-lecture/>.

Schedule and Weekly Learning Goals

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary. The schedule is tentative and subject to change, though I commit to giving you plenty of advance notice if anything changes. The learning goals expressed in the syllabus above should be viewed as the key concepts you should grasp after each week.

(Week 1) 8/14: Introduction

- Skim Jillson Chapter 1

(Week 2) 8/19 and 8/21: Revolution

- Jillson, Chapter 2
- Declaration of Independence (ELC)

(Week 3) 8/26 and 8/28: Constitution

- Jillson, Chapter 2, continued
- Articles of Confederation (ELC)
- U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights (ELC)

(Week 4) 9/2 and 9/4: Federalism

- Jillson, Chapter 3
- Gettysburg Address (ELC)
- Emancipation Proclamation (ELC)
- DUE on 9/4 at 11:59 pm on ELC: Position Paper #1

(Week 5) 9/9 and 9/11: Public Opinion and Mass Media

- Jillson, Chapters 4 and 5

(Week 6) 9/16 and 9/18: Exam 1

- Exam 1 review on 9/16 in class if time allows.
- Exam 1 on 9/18 in class.

(Week 7) 9/23 and 9/25: Interest Groups and Elections/Voting

- Jillson, Chapters 6 and 8

(Week 8) 9/30 and 10/2: Political Parties

- Jillson, Chapter 7

(Week 9) 10/7 and 10/9: Guest Speaker

- DUE on 10/7 at 11:59 pm on ELC: Position Paper #2
- Guest Speaker on 10/9. Attendance will be taken.

(Week 10) 10/14 and 10/16: Congress & Presidency

- Jillson, Chapters 9 and 10

(Week 11) 10/21 and 10/23: Presidency & Courts

- Jillson, Chapters 10 (continued) and 12

(Week 12) 10/28 and 10/30: Exam 2

- Exam 2 review on 10/28 in class if time allows.
- Exam 2 on 10/30 in class.

(Week 13) 11/4 and 11/6: Georgia Politics

- Georgia Constitution (ELC)
- Additional Georgia Politics readings TBD on ELC.

(Week 14) 11/11 and 11/13: Bureaucracy

- Jillson, Chapter 11
- DUE on 11/13 at 11:59 pm on ELC: Position Paper #3

(Week 15) 11/18 and 11/20: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

- Jillson, Chapters 13 and 14
- Letter from Birmingham Jail (ELC)

(Week 16) 11/25: Last Day of Class and Happy Thanksgiving!

- Suggested: Jillson, Chapters 15 and 16
- Adventure Activities due on December 1st. Submit on ELC by 11:59 pm.
- Exam 3 will be available from December 4th at 8:00 am to December 8th at 11:59 pm.
- Final Project due on December 10th. Submit on ELC by 11:59 pm.

Withdrawal deadline is November 12.

Friday class schedule in effect on December 2 (no class meeting for us).

Reading Day is December 3.

Final exam period is December 4-10.

Assignment	Due Date
Position Paper #1	September 4
Exam 1	September 18
Position Paper #2	October 7
Exam 2	October 30
Position Paper #3	November 13
Adventure Activities	December 1
Exam 3	December 4-8
Final Project	December 10