



UNIVERSITY OF  
**GEORGIA**

**POLS 1101: American Government**

**Classroom- Baldwin Hall 104**

**Class Time- Tuesday/Thursday 9:55-11:15**

**Instructor: Dr. Colin French**

**Office: 378 Baldwin Hall**

**Spring 2026**

**Office Hours: Friday 11AM-12, 1PM-4PM**

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Disclaimer: The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

**Description:**

How does the American political system operate? This course provides an introduction to American political ideas, institutions, behaviors, and processes. Topics include (among other things) the Constitution, Congress, the presidency, political ideology, and political participation. Although we will cover the “nuts and bolts” of American government, a major emphasis of this course will be to learn how to discuss and make substantive political arguments. We will also cover the Georgia State constitution.

**Student Learning Objectives:**

- 1: Students will learn to articulate competing positions on political topics in assignments.
- 2: Students will critically assess the effects of media and public opinion on political processes using analytical tools to interpret data related to the American political system, including public opinion surveys, election results, and demographic trends, and communicate their findings in written, verbal, and graphical formats.
- 3: Students will apply theoretical frameworks, such as federalism, separation of powers, and pluralism, to analyze the organization and functioning of American government, its political institutions, and processes.
- 4: Students will learn the philosophical and constitutional foundations of the US political system, including the state of Georgia, and examine primary sources over time, including the Declaration of Independence, Federalist Papers, the US and Georgia Constitutions, among others.
- 5: Students will demonstrate an ability to engage in respectful discussion and civil debate on American politics that are associated with multiple points of view.

**Readings:**

There is one book required for this course that is available through the book store. Readings are to be done BEFORE class whenever possible. Lectures and discussions will be based on the readings assigned for that class period. All readings that are included on the syllabus are fair game for exams, even if we do not discuss them at length in lecture or section.

**Book:** TopHat: "Understanding the American Way of Government & Politics"- Mike Evans. ISBN: 9781774947180

ELC Readings (Included but not limited to)

- The Declaration of Independence
- The Articles of Confederation
- The US Constitution
- The US Bill of Rights
- Federalist Papers
- The Gettysburg Address
- Emancipation Proclamation
- Georgia State Constitution and Bill of Rights
- Letter From Birmingham Jail

**Class Structure:**

Interactive discussion and the Socratic method are as important tools in the educational process as lecturing. As such, come to class with an open mind and be willing to explore, critique, and otherwise engage with ideas and theories. While I take attendance, students will receive 3 "free" unexcused absences. Any more will damage participation grades.

**Evaluation:**

Your grade in this class will be based on class participation, four exams, and a constitutional assignment. The breakdown is as follows:

Participation- 15%

Exams – 70%

Test 1- 15%

Test 2- 15%

Test 3- 15%

Test 4- 25%

Constitutional Amendment Assignment- 15% (Due May 1<sup>st</sup>)

**IMPORTANT Examination Dates**

**Test 1- February 17th**

**Test 2-March 24th**

**Test 3- April 16th**

**Test 4- April 29<sup>th</sup>-May 5<sup>th</sup> (Take-Home)**

At the end of the semester, your grade will be assigned based on the following scale:

A (94-100), A- (90-93), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D (60-69), and F (0-59). (Note that there are no +/- grades in the D or F range.)

## Participation

Your participation is necessary and vital to the class. You are expected to come to class and be actively engaged, both during your discussion sections. Questions during lectures can act as a bonus to the participation score.

## Exams

There will be 4 exams in this course. Each will consist of essay questions and short-answer identifications. You can find the dates of the exam on the calendar section of the syllabus.

### **Class Times & Dates:**

#### 1/13- Class Introduction

- Class policies & Constitution Design Assignment Details
- Opening Discussions- Anarchy & Early Humanity

#### 1/15- Anarchy and State formation

- Mancur Olson article (ELC)

#### 1/20 : The US Constitution (1/2)

- Articles of Confederation (ELC)
- Federalist Papers #10 & #51 (ELC)

#### 1/22: The Constitution (2/2)

- Textbook Chapter 2: The US Constitution
- Constitution of the United States (ELC)

#### 1/27 : Federalism (1/2) and Separated Powers

- Textbook Chapter 3: Federalism
- Emancipation Proclamation (ELC)
- The Gettysburg Address (ELC)

#### 1/29: Federalism (2/2)

- Foot Voting (ELC)

#### 2/3: Congress (1/2)

- Textbook: The Legislative Branch (Chapter 10)

#### 2/5: Congress (2/2)

- No assigned readings

#### 2/10: The Presidency

- Textbook: The Executive Branch (Chapter 11)

2/12: The Judiciary, Supreme Court

- Textbook: The Judicial Branch (Chapter 12)

2/17: **Test 1 (Tuesday)**

2/19: Elections and the Electoral College

- Textbook: Voting, Elections, and Political Participation (Chapter 6)

2/24: Representation (1/2)

- Gilens- Inequality & Democratic Responsiveness (ELC)

2/26: Representation (2/2)

- Parliamentary vs Presidential systems
- FPTP vs Proportional Representation

3/3: Civil Liberties (1/2)

- Textbook: Civil Liberties (Chapter 4 Part 1)
- US Bill of Rights (ELC)

3/5: Civil Liberties (2/2)

- Textbook: Civil Liberties (Chapter 4 Part 2)

**Spring Break 3/09-3/15 (No Class Meetings)**

3/17: Civil Rights (1/2)

- Textbook: Civil Rights (Chapter 5 Part 1)
- Letter from Birmingham Jail (ELC)

3/19: Civil Rights (2/2)

- Textbook: Civil Rights (Part 2 & 3)

**3/24: Test 2 (Tuesday)**

3/26: Introduction to Ideology

- Declaration of Independence (ELC)
- Downs- An Economic Theory of Democracy (ELC)

3/31: Contemporary Political Ideologies & Debates

- No assigned readings

4/02: Public Opinion (1/4)

- Textbook: Public Opinion (Part 1)

4/07: Public Opinion (2/4)

- Textbook: Public Opinion (Part 2)

4/09: Public Opinion (3/4)

- Converse (ELC)
- Zaller (ELC)
- Page and Shapiro (ELC)

4/14: Public Opinion (4/4)

- Caplan: The Myth of the Rational Voter (ELC)
- Achen & Bartels: Democracy for Realists (ELC)

### **4/16: Test 3 (Thursday)**

4/21: Political Media

- Textbook: Media (Chapter 8)

4/23: Political Parties

- Textbook Political Parties (Chapter 9)

### **4/29-5/5: Test 4 (Final, Take-Home)**

- Additional Reading- Georgia State Constitution

### **5/1: Constitution Amendment Assignment Due**

#### **COURSE POLICIES**

Make-ups for major assignments will only be offered in the case of serious need. Students should not assume an extension or make-up opportunity will be granted in all circumstances. Health and personal issues can be valid reasons. Late assignments will be penalized by ten percent for each day they are late.

#### **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE**

Any assignments conducted with or with the aid of AI will receive an automatic score of 0, without exceptions. Emails and other communications sent using generative AI will be ignored.

#### **SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**

"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](http://honesty.uga.edu).

### **Plagiarism:**

Writing and presenting original work in college can be challenging, but this is not an excuse to plagiarize. Any directly taken information, quotations, or work that is not referenced or cited can be counted as plagiarism. Please take note and remember to provide references to any outside materials used in your work or writing.

### **Attendance:**

The student is responsible for all assigned course work and cannot be absolved of this responsibility. When enrolled in a particular course, the student is obligated to do all of the work assigned. Punctual and regular attendance is vital to the discharge of this obligation. Absences, excused or not, do not alter this responsibility. Regulations more restrictive than College guidelines, but not in conflict with it, may be established by the instructor for any course.

Instructors are responsible for distributing their individual course attendance guidelines in their syllabi during the first class each term. Absences will be excused for:

- documented illnesses,
- official representation of the College,
- death of a close relative,
- religious holiday, and
- other circumstances beyond the control of the student.

Excuses for official representation of the College must be obtained from the official supervising that activity or event.

Students whose unexcused absences surpass three of the scheduled classes may receive a lowered grade or failure at the instructor's discretion.

### **Wellness Statement**

*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](http://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](http://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*
- *Accessibility and Testing: accessibility.uga.edu*
  
- *Additional information, including free digital well-being resources, can be accessed through the UGA app or by visiting <https://well-being.uga.edu>.*