



UNIVERSITY OF
GEORGIA

School of Public and International Affairs
Department of Political Science

POLS 1101: Introduction to American Government Spring 2026

Monday/Wednesday 8:15 – 9:35

Room: Baldwin Room 307

Instructor: Dr. John Newton

Contact: jmnewton@uga.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays 11:30 – 12:30

Course Description and Objective

This course will cover the fundamental elements of government. This includes elements of history, philosophy, and structure of the United States government and the government of Georgia. The objective is that you will leave the class with a better understanding of our system of government along with the ability to think critically about how it functions.

Text

You can purchase the textbook through the UGA Bookstore or by using a link to the chapter questions on ELC. The cost of the online textbook plus Connect should be about \$93. Connect is the name for the system used by the textbook to create the online questions for each chapter. You may also order a physical copy of the textbook for an additional fee. You can sign-up for fourteen days of free access if you do not want to purchase the textbook immediately.

The book is Thomas E. Patterson, *We the People* from McGraw-Hill.

Readings on ELC/Connect:

- The Declaration of Independence
- The Articles of Confederation
- The US Constitution
- The Bill of Rights in the US Constitution
- Federalist Papers
- The Gettysburg Address
- Emancipation Proclamation
- Georgie State Constitution and Bill of Rights
- Martin Luther King's Letter from a Birmingham Jail

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.

Grading Breakdown by Percentage:

SmartBook Questions: 20%

Project: 20%

Final: 20%

Letter: 10%

Public Forum: 10%

Presentation: 20%

Class Participation: +/-

Students who text, browse social media, shop online, or otherwise disrupt the class will receive a reduction in their overall grade. If a student is disrupting the class through the use of electronics, the student will be asked to leave and may be withdrawn from the class. No electronic devices may be used when we have a guest speaker.

Grading Scale:

A = 94-100
A - = 90-93
B+ = 86-89
B = 83-85
B- = 80-82
C+ = 76-79
C = 73-75
C- = 70-72
D+ = 66-69
D = 63-65
D- = 60-62
F = 0-59

Important Class Dates

Classes Begin: January 12
Drop and Add Deadline:
MLK Day: Jan 19
Withdrawal Deadline: April 9
Spring Break: March 2-7
Classes End: April 27
Final Exam: May 4, 8-11am

Due Dates

Bill to Govern 1101 – January 22
Chapter Presentations – On the Monday of the week for your assigned chapter
Class Project – April 20
Letter to Public Official – April 28
Textbook Chapter Questions – April 27
Public Forum – April 28

Syllabus Policy

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus if necessary. It can be difficult to project how long sections will take to cover. Other situations may indicate the need for changes in the assignments, so please pay attention in class. If you have questions, please ask.

Late Work

Assignments turned in late will be assigned a penalty for each day that an assignment is late (including weekends). The typical late penalty is ten points per day, but it may vary depending on circumstances. Assignments turned in after the deadline but on the day it is due will be given a partial penalty.

Honor Code

As a University of Georgia student, you have agreed to abide by the University's academic honesty policy, "A Culture of Honesty," and the Student Honor Code. All academic work must meet the standards described in "A Culture of Honesty" found at: <https://honesty.uga.edu>. Lack of knowledge of the academic honesty policy is not a reasonable explanation for a violation. Questions related to course assignments and the academic honesty policy should be directed to the instructor.

Accessibility and Testing

If you anticipate needing classroom or exam accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you must register for services with Accessibility and Testing. Additional information can be found at <https://accessibility.uga.edu>

Withdrawal Policy

UGA's withdrawal policy can be found at <http://www.reg.uga.edu/policies/withdrawals>.

Attendance Policy

Class participation is a very important part of the learning process in this course. Although not explicitly graded, you will be evaluated on the QUALITY of your contributions and insights. Quality comments possess one or more of the following properties:

- Offers a different and unique, but relevant, perspective;
- Contributes to moving the discussion and analysis forward;
- Assists in the learning process
- Demonstrates an understanding of the assigned material
- Includes evidence, argumentation, or recognition of contrasting values or tradeoffs (ie critical thinking)
- Demonstrates analytical thinking – especially using information or expertise learned outside of this class

Your participation is especially helpful for borderline grades. While your participation grade is subjective, it will not be random or arbitrary. And, clearly, more frequent quality comments are better than less frequent quality comments.

The decision to excuse an absence is the responsibility of the class instructor. Under certain circumstances, the Office of Student Care and Outreach may certify the legitimacy of absences.

The Office of Student Care and Outreach does not excuse or verify routine absences. The decision to excuse an absence, allow make-up work, or reschedule or make up an exam is entirely at the discretion of each faculty member or instructor.

Students who miss a significant amount of class (generally more than one week) and have documentation that helps provide verification of the legitimacy of the absences may provide that documentation to the instructor. If there are compelling privacy concerns, Student Care and Outreach will review the documentation at the request of the student and/or instructor. If the documentation appears sufficient to establish verification of the legitimacy of the absences, Student Care and Outreach will send a memo to the student's instructor(s) notifying the instructor(s) that the student has provided sufficient documentation of legitimate reasons for the absence. This memo will inform the instructor's decisions regarding whether to and/or how to accommodate or excuse any absences. The decision to excuse an absence, allow make-up work, or reschedule or make up an exam is entirely at the discretion of each faculty member or instructor.

Prohibition on Recording Lectures

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.

Artificial Intelligence Software

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a tool that will be part of the future. We will discuss in class how it may be used. If AI is used on an assignment, it should be explicitly stated and an explanation of how it was used should be included. Failure to include that AI was used and how it was used will constitute academic dishonesty.

Preferred Name and Pronouns

Please let me know how you would like me to refer to you and/or what to call you. I'm happy to oblige to your preference of name and pronouns. My pronouns are he, him, his. As a student in this class, it is most appropriate to refer to me as Dr. Newton.

Email/Contact Etiquette

I want to help you succeed and achieve greatness. UGA students are enormously capable, and I am constantly impressed with what you all accomplish. However, I don't know you and my impression of you is based on our interactions and how you communicate with me. For that reason, it is a good idea to be respectful in our communications. Here are my suggestions:

- Please email me from your UGA email address. This helps me know who you are and connect you with this class.
- Please do not email me through ELC. I have missed those emails in the past and I am afraid I might not see your email. It is best to email me from your UGA email account.
- Please understand that I may post your email and my response on ELC. I started this practice because many students have similar questions. I don't post every email on ELC, because the email may not pertain to class questions. If you email me questions about tests, what we are supposed to be reading, about concepts or anything we are learning – I may post your question and my reply to benefit others in the class.
- It is best to be respectful of everyone. You never know when that may come in handy for a recommendation, a suggestion, or something else. Talk to other people in the class (and in all your classes). Take a moment to say something nice to someone and be supportive of each other. We are stronger together.

UGA Well-Being and Involvement

UGA has a number of resources to assist you. I encourage you to take a moment to visit <https://well-being.uga.edu> to familiarize yourself with what is available. Here are a few I think are especially important:

- Student Care and Outreach – They are the hub to connect you to the resources provided by UGA. Start here with any questions or needs from mental health, falling behind in classes, not fitting in, etc. SCO@uga.edu or 706-542-7774.
- UGA Health Center – <https://healthcenter.uga.edu> - physical and mental health. They even have healthy cooking classes.
- Rec Sports – <https://recsports.uga.edu> - stay healthy and have fun. I encourage you to maintain a fitness routine as this is great for physical and mental health. Also – if you go on an outdoor trip, I would love to hear about it so I can live vicariously through you.
- Georgia Museum of Art – not part of the well-being initiative, but you should visit. Take a break and walk around. It is free, on campus, and a great place to spend some time. <https://georgiamuseum.org>.
- UGA Involvement Network – <https://uga.campuslabs.com/engage>

- The UGA Police – 706-542-2200: You can contact them 24/7. They work for UGA and can connect you to on call mental health, help fix broken lights, or whatever you might need. You can also use the UGA Safe app to text the police anytime.

Emergencies

In the case of an emergency in class we will take the following actions. If there is a tornado warning, we will proceed to the lowest floor in the building for shelter. If there is a fire, we will quickly exit the building. The class will reconvene in the walkway behind the cemetery next to Baldwin Hall in an attempt to make sure everyone exited the building. If there is a medical emergency, I will ask students to flag down the emergency vehicles outside the building and lead them to our room. As needed, I may ask a student to get the nearest AED which is outside room 101D. Students are encouraged to make sure their information in UGA Alert is accurate and to download the UGA Safe app.

Exam/Assignment make-ups

Makeup exams will not be offered unless previously scheduled because of extenuating circumstances or in the event of a verifiable emergency. Similarly, the due dates for assignments such as papers are not negotiable unless a true emergency warrants further consideration. Turning in a late paper will significantly reduce the grade. Late work may not be accepted. If any late work is accepted, the reduction in grade is at the sole discretion of the instructor.

Class Project:

You will be required to complete a project this semester. Please ask if you have questions. The project will be to choose a topic from the topics provided and produce some type of work (see the types of work) that could persuade an audience to favor one side over the other. In other words, you are creating persuasive work based on the topic and side of the topic you choose.

This should be your original work. Downloading a presentation by someone else, photos by someone else, artwork by someone else, etc does not count. If you are unsure, please ask! Submit your project in the assignments section on ELC.

Type of work:

Narrated PowerPoint (narrated by you in your voice and with a video of you). Limit of 7 minutes.

- This is probably what I would do because I am a very linear thinker. You are basically recording yourself doing a presentation. Microsoft has support articles on how to do this and Microsoft Office 365 is free for you as a UGA student.

Podcast in your voice (limit of 7 minutes)

- This can be done by you alone or you can work with classmates.

Video with you in it (limit of 7 minutes)

- This could be you alone or a debate with classmates.

Artwork with a written explanation

- Think of something like Francisco Goya's *The Third of May, 1808* or something by Jacques-Louis David. You must provide me with a written explanation.

Song with a written explanation

- Protest songs are numerous. Almost all songs have some sort of meaning or purpose. If there are enough people in the class to form a band this could count for the entire group that performs the song.

Photo or series of photos with a written explanation

- There are so many famous photos that caused change. This could be photos of people not able to vote, photos of weddings, photos of religious events, etc. This should be photos that you take not photos that you collect off of the internet.

Something else that I did not think of with approval.

Be creative in your type of work. You cannot write an essay or research paper. Choose a form of expression and make an argument for the side you want.

Topics:(You can be for or against)

A wedding photographer should be able to refuse service for same sex and/or interracial couples based on religious beliefs.

The death penalty should be abolished because it is unfairly used against minority groups.

Companies like Facebook, Google, X, YouTube, TikTok and others should not be able to discriminate or limit users content based on political views, hate speech, or obscenity. These are public forums and limiting speech violates our value of free speech.

The University of Georgia should offer automatic admission to any Georgia student that finishes in the top three percent of his/her graduating high school class.

The University of Georgia should eliminate the Office of Institutional Diversity.

The state of Georgia should use an independent committee to determine the boundaries of voting districts to avoid gerrymandering similar to what is used in Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Michigan, Montana, New York, and Washington.

Georgia should repeal SB 202 known as the Election Integrity act of 2021. This bill removed 24/7 voting drop boxes, eliminated mobile voting units, and decreased the availability of absentee ballots. [You can argue for any changes to Georgia voting laws – increase the available voting hours, increase or decrease voter ID laws, increase voter security, etc]. For criticism of Georgia see <https://dpo.org/party/resolutions/2021-resolutions/resolution-2021-06-regarding-georgias-voter-suppression-law/>.

UGA students should be allowed to carry guns of any type in the dorms, at sporting events, and any places on campus where students are legally allowed to be.

Political Science 1101, Introduction to American Government, should not be a mandatory class at UGA.

Businesses in Georgia must limit the pay of their highest paid employees to no more than 100 times the pay of the lowest full-time employee of that company.

The federal government should adopt a flat tax. [You can advocate for any taxation change you might want].

Georgia should adopt a minimum wage of \$15/hour. This minimum wage should be adjusted for inflation each year.

The federal government should eliminate the Department of Education. This is primarily a state government function. This would decrease the size of government and save taxpayer money.

The Electoral College should be eliminated. The President of the United States should be elected based on popular vote.

The most pressing issue facing the federal government is the national deficit. Entitlement programs such as social security, Medicare and Medicaid should be limited and greatly reduced in order to decrease the deficit.

The United States should greatly reduce all tariffs to increase free trade.

The United States should end all aid to Israel until an independent Palestinian State is established.

Public Forum

Students are required to attend a public forum either in person or virtually. The purpose of this is for the students to experience civic engagement.

Each student will choose a public forum to attend. This should be a local or state government forum. Examples of this are local commission meetings, local planning meetings, police oversight meetings, local budget meetings, etc. Students can choose to attend any local or state forum in any jurisdiction. All commission meetings for Athens-Clarke County are streamed live. For more information go to <https://www.accgov.com/176/Mayor-Commission-Meetings>.

To get credit for attending a meeting, students will answer questions using the form link posted below. The form will ask questions such as the date/time/location of the forum, a significant issue discussed at the forum, the different sides of the issue, etc. Students need to be able to explain an issue discussed during the forum and explain the different sides of the issue demonstrating an understanding of the issue.

Your answers should be thorough. I suggest reading the questionnaire prior to attending/watching the forum. The purpose of the survey is to let me know that you paid attention and understand the issues. You should also be able to explain the issues to me in a way that I understand the issue. There should be at least two sides, and you should explain each side. I expect at least two paragraphs on the question that asks you to explain the different sides of the issue. Your grade is based on how well you explain the issues and how well you answer the questions. This assignment is not difficult, but students who put one sentence answers or who do not demonstrate an understanding of the issues should expect to receive a low grade.

To get credit you must fill out the survey prior to 5:00pm on 4/28/2026. To fill out the survey, [go here](#). The link is also on ELC.

Write Your Public Official

You must write a letter to a member of the Georgia Legislature. You do not have to send the letter. You may write about any issue. In the letter you should advocate for your public official to take a position on some issue that is within their authority and related to their elected position. The public official must be someone for whom you are a constituent (ie Georgia Legislature, Congressperson, Senator, etc). Letter should be submitted on ELC.

A few tips for the letter:

- Make sure it is aimed at the appropriate level of government. If you are writing about a local issue, the letter should be addressed to a local official. If you are writing about a state issue, the letter should be addressed to a state official, etc.
- Make sure it is a letter. You can check out some letter style examples at [Examples of business letter format. – The Writing Center – UW–Madison](#).
 - Make sure to include a mailing address that is in the district of the elected official
 - Include some easy contact information (ie email/phone) so your elected representative can get back to you about your issue
- If you don't know what interests you, consider looking at the social media of your representative and seeing what issues they have posted about. You may find you agree or disagree with them.

- Make sure to explain the issue in your letter.
- Your letter should be easy to read and follow. Elected officials get lots of letters and emails. The more difficult it is for them to understand your issue, the less likely they are to consider your views.
- Make sure you are explicit about what you want your elected representative to do. There are a wide variety of reasons to write a letter. You may want your elected official to vote on a bill, write a piece of legislation, contact someone on your behalf, to make them aware of a problem, to oppose an appointment, etc.

You can find your legislator at <https://pluralpolicy.com/find-your-legislator/> and <https://georgia.gov/who-represents-you>.

Final Exam

The final exam will be a multiple choice exam on ELC and you can use any resource other than a human for the final exam. I'll make the final available for several days including the assigned day for final exam.

Chapter Questions

These are provided by your textbook. A link to them is on ELC. Complete the chapter questions for each chapter. The due date for all chapter questions is April 27, 2026.

Class Activities

We will do various activities in class. You likely will not know about the activity until the day of the class. If you do all of the activities, you will not have to take the final exam. If you miss one activity, you can ask to do a presentation on a topic (assigned by me) to make up for missing the activity. A sample assignment would be an explanation of presidential power on tariffs.

Presentations

Each student will give a presentation that summarizes the main points of a chapter from the textbook. A more detailed explanation is on ELC. To sign up, go to the groups section on ELC.

Course Schedule

Week 1 (starting January 12)

Readings: Chapters 1

Critical Thinking and Political Culture: Becoming a Responsible Citizen

Week 2 (starting January 19)

Readings: Chapter 2

Constitutional Democracy: Promoting Liberty and Self Government

Week 3 (starting January 26)

Readings: Chapter 3

Federalism

Bill to Govern POLS 1101 on January 22

Week 4 (starting February 2)

Readings: Chapters 4

Civil Liberties

Week 5 (starting February 9)

Readings: Chapters 5

Equal Rights

Week 6 (starting February 16)

Readings: Chapters 6

Public Opinion

Week 7 (starting February 23)

Readings: Chapters 7

Political Participation

Week 8 (starting March 9)

Readings: Chapter 8 & 9

Political Parties; Interest Groups

Week 9 (starting March 16)

Readings: Chapter 9

Interest Groups

Week 10 (starting March 23)

Readings: Chapter 10

Media

Week 11 (starting March 30)

Readings: Chapter 11

Congress

Week 12 (starting April 6)

Readings: Chapter 12
The Presidency

Week 13 (starting April 13)

Readings: Chapter 14
The Judiciary

Week 14 (starting April 20)

Readings: Chapter 15 & 16
Economic and Environmental Policy; Social Policy

Week 15 (starting April 27)

Readings: Chapter 17
Foreign Policy

Reading Day: April 28

Final Exam: May 4, 8-11am