

POLS 4400E: Political Psychology

May Session 2026

May 12 – June 3

Asynchronous Online Instruction

Professor: Geoffrey Sheagley

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Office Hours: By appointment via Zoom. Schedule via email.

Course Description

Examination of how psychological processes and concepts can influence political attitudes and behavior. This includes various aspects of human psychology, such as personality, motivation, values, and morality, as well as information processing, emotions, and group identities.

Course Prerequisites: POLS 1101, POLS 1101E, POLS 1101H, or POLS 1101S

Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will critically examine competing psychological and theoretical explanations for political behavior and public opinion formation.
- Students will develop well-reasoned arguments using empirical evidence and theoretical insights.
- Students will apply psychological theories to real-world political phenomena.
- Students will compare and contrast findings across studies and identify significant trends in political behavior or opinion.
- Students will write clearly organized essays that articulate evidence-based claims.
- Students will explore the role of group identity, partisanship, and socialization in shaping their own and others' political attitudes.

Institutional Competencies

- **Critical Thinking:** The ability to pursue and comprehensively evaluate information before accepting or establishing a conclusion, decision, or action.
- **Social Awareness & Responsibility:** The capacity to understand the interdependence of people, communities, and self in a global society.

Course Objectives

This class is an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of political psychology. Our focus is on members of the mass public in the United States, with the expectation being that completing this course will provide you a better understanding of how everyday people think and reason about many aspects of the political process. After completing this class, you will be able to:

- Describe how mental systems interact with information to shape political opinions
- Classify major theories of opinion formation and behavior in politics
- Critique methodological approaches used to study the sources of political opinions and behavior
- Develop an original randomized experiment to study an area of political psychology
- Explain a central concept from our class in an original way

Office Hours and Contact Information

I am available to meet over Zoom. Appointments should be booked in advance by contacting me over email (geoff.sheagley@uga.edu).

Do not send me a message using the eLC message system. Send all communication directly to my UGA email.

I will strive to make sure that the course is understandable and that you do not feel lost. If you have any questions about the course content, structure, or assignments please do not hesitate to contact me. This is especially important because of how quickly we will cover material during the May session and due to the online delivery of our material.

My primary means of communication with the class will be through announcements posted in eLC. Make sure you receive eLC updates for our class automatically via email (eLC > Click on your profile > Notifications > Instant Notifications).

Course Structure

This is an online course taught using asynchronous delivery. This means that we do not have live meetings. Rather, all of the class content is preloaded into eLC you generally complete the class at your own pace.

The class is divided into six modules, each of which will consist of recorded lectures, some sort of reflection activity, and an open-book/open-note quiz. You have to complete the modules sequentially and you cannot advance to the next module until you have completed all required materials in the current module.

Required Books

There are no required books for this class. All of the assigned readings are available on eLC.

Grading

Your letter grade in the class reflects the percentage of the total number of available points you obtain in the class. The distribution I use is:

Grade	Percent
A	94-100
A-	90-93
B+	87-89
B	84-86
B-	80-83
C+	77-79
C	74-76
C-	70-73
D	60-69
F	<60

The following are each of the areas in which points are assigned in the class:

Reading Quizzes (30%)

Each module includes a reading quiz. Each quiz is inclusive of all of the material covered in that module. Quizzes are open-book and open-note. They are also timed. Each quiz is worth 6% of your overall grade and your lowest quiz score will not be calculated toward your final grade.

Content Reflection (10%)

Each module contains an essay-style prompt for you to reflect on the course content for that section. These reflections do not need to be long (generally 1-2 paragraphs) and are intended to get you to critically reflect on themes from that module. They are graded on a pass-fail basis.

Experiment Paper (20%)

This assignment requires you to summarize and redesign an experiment included in an academic research paper. I will provide you with a list of papers to choose from. Detailed expectations are outlined in an assignment sheet and video overview provided on eLC. The deadline is

Concept Explanation (20%)

Pick a concept from our class and explain it so that somebody who hasn't taken our class will understand it. You can use any medium you would like to teach the concept, except for a standard written essay. Be creative! More details are available on the relevant assignment sheet.

Final Exam (20%)

A written final exam is a required portion of this class. The exam will be a response to a broad essay prompt.

Class Deadlines

- Modules 1-3 – 5/22 by 5pm
- Experiment Paper – 5/29 by 5pm
- Concept Explanation project – 5/29 by 5pm
- Final take-home exam
 - Distributed: 6/1 at 8:00am
 - Due: 6/4 by 5pm

Class Administration

eLearning

The entire class is administered through eLC. I will communicate with you primarily through eLC announcements. This is also where you will do things like watch lectures, submit assignments, and access class readings.

Deadlines

All assignments are due by the date and time listed in the syllabus. If an assignment is turned in after the time & due date, 15% of the total grade will be deducted from your assignment grade. An additional 15% of the total will be deducted for each day the assignment is late. For example, if you turn in an assignment one full day after it was due, it will be deducted 30% (15% for not being turned in by the deadline and another 15% for being turned in one day later). Assignments turned in more than 3 days late will receive an F.

Grade Appeals

Any appeals of a grade must be made at least 24-hours after I hand back the assignment or test. If you would like to appeal a grade, prior to meeting with me you must submit a written statement detailing why you think that your grade should be changed. I will then meet with you to discuss your statement.

If I have made a mistake in totaling your grade in the class (e.g., I did not add up all of the points correctly) then you do not need to write the statement. Talk to me after class or during office hours and I will fix the mistake.

Academic Honesty

Academic integrity is required for a positive learning environment. All students enrolled in university courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own, can result in disciplinary action. Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive an F in the course. Additionally, I will forward your name to the University.

The UGA Student Honor Code states: "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 <https://honesty.uga.edu/>

Use of Generative AI Technology for Coursework

The use of Generative AI (GAI) tools is not permitted in this course unless I provide explicit written and/or verbal permission. If you are uncertain about using a particular tool to support your work, please consult with me before using it. I conduct random AI checks of every assignment to determine whether it was created using generative AI. If I believe a violation of UGA's "A Culture of Honesty" may have occurred, I have a responsibility to report to the Office of Academic Honesty. If I do, you will be informed of the report and you will receive an email from the Office of Academic Honesty to schedule a facilitated discussion between us. The goal will be an agreement reached about what occurred, and if it involved dishonesty, an appropriate sanction. To protect your rights, we cannot discuss your case outside of that facilitated meeting.

Course Recordings

In the absence of written authorization from me or UGA Accessibility and Testing, 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.”

Accessibility Services

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 here: <https://accessibility.uga.edu>

Diversity and Civility

Diversity and civility are integral components of my classroom and the real world. My classroom is open to anybody, no matter their race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or any other quality. I strive to treat all my students with respect, and I ask that you treat your fellow students the same way. Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. This includes (but is not limited to) inappropriate use of classroom technology, ringing cell phones, text messaging, watching videos, checking email, surfing the internet on your computer, disruptive behavior, bullying, and disorderly conduct.

UGA Well-being Resources

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

Class Schedule & Structure

The class is divided into 6 modules (excluding the introduction). Each module will open once you complete the previous module. All of the readings are available at the start of the class. The syllabus is an outline and subject to revision.

Class Introduction

This section is about familiarizing yourself with the class. Start by looking through the syllabus and watching the course introduction video. Review class assignments and the general setup of the class. You are also required to complete an ungraded syllabus quiz.

- Readings: None
- Completion Requirements:
 - Content Reflection: Introduction Post
 - Syllabus Quiz (required but ungraded)

Module 1 - Political Psychology Foundations

We examine how people approach judgment & decision-making, including their levels of motivation and engagement. The Kahneman chapters provide an overview of the balance between passive & active judgement.

- Readings: Kahneman (Chs. 1, 2, and 7)
- Completion Requirements:
 - Content Reflection: Modes of Decision-Making in Everyday Life
 - Reading Quiz 1

Module 2 - The Experimental Method

This topic focuses on the experimental method, which is the common scientific approach used in political psychology. McDermott and Druckman et al. discuss the specifics of experiments, including key terms.

- Readings: McDermott 2002 (pgs. 31-41; 50-57); Druckman et al. 2011
- Completion Requirements:
 - Reading Quiz 2
 - Experiments Project Paper Selection

Module 3 - Information Processing & Motivation

The readings this week discuss the psychological motivations that shape how people approach, process, and integrate political information. The first Taber reading describes information processing while the second outlines the theory behind “motivated reasoning.” The Bolsen and Druckman piece applies the theory of “motivated reasoning” to understand how people form opinions about new & complicated technologies. The final reading covers conspiracy theories.

- Readings: Taber 2003 (pgs. 433-446); Taber 2001; Bolsen & Druckman 2016; Miller et al. 2014
- Completion Requirements:
 - Content Reflection: Motivation in Everyday Life
 - Reading Quiz 3
- Suggested Completion Milestone
 - Experiment Paper (this is roughly a good time in the class to have completed this project)

Module 4 – Party Identification

This topic is on party identification – the tendency for people to socially identify with one of the two major parties in the United States. The first reading is about the psychological definition of party identification. The Klar and Krupnikov chapters extend these themes and examine why people identify as “independents.”

- Readings: Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Klar and Krupnikov (assorted chapters)
- Completion Requirements
 - Content Reflection: Partisanship and Independents in American Elections
 - Reading Quiz #4

Module 5 – Social Identity and Political Tolerance

These readings focus on social identity and prejudice. We begin with the core theory developed in psychology to understand these processes: social identity theory (SIT). The final two readings examine prejudice and political tolerance in light of group identities.

- Readings: Huddy 2013 (selected portions); Green and Wong 2002; Mousa (2020)
- Completion Requirements
 - Content Reflection: Promoting Political Tolerance
 - Reading Quiz #5
- Suggested Completion Milestone
 - Concept Explanation Project

Module 6 - Citizen Competence

The readings in this final session examine what the public knows (and more often doesn't know) about the political world. We also explore the efficiency of "heuristics" – tools that voters can use to overcome lack of knowledge about the political world. And we conclude with a larger piece focused on the link between identity and representation.

- Readings: Dancey & Sheagley 2013; Achen and Bartels (Ch. 11).
- Completion Requirements
 - Content Reflection: Political Knowledge
 - Quiz #6