

POLS 1101H
Mon & Wed, 9:55–11:15 a.m.
Baldwin 302
Fall, 2026

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AMERICAN GOVERNMENT, HONORS

This course introduces students to the organization and principles of American Government. Roughly two-thirds of the course covers “facts” about the institutions and history of American Government, while the remaining one-third introduces a couple of “theories” that help us explain some political phenomena.

My section is organized around historical developments and themes from the Federalist Debates. After engaging in our own debate, we will investigate whether the fears of the Anti-Federalists have come to pass. We will also address questions such as why is our government organized the way it is? Why have political candidates traditionally appeared moderate? Do voting rules in Congress affect political outcomes, and if so, how? Does our system guarantee that every citizen's interest is equally represented? If not, what does this mean for democracy? Applying themes from the Federalist debates should energize the topics and give you an understanding of one of the most important debates in American political history.

Polling

Occasionally we will use Google Forms for in-class polling. I won't know who answered a question nor record individual responses, but it will help us see patterns in the class in real time. If the QR-codes don't work, use this url: <https://forms.gle/2jbWtCLQ5xunWTXg9>.

Assignments

You will be assigned a debate, a mid-term exam, an assignment on political parties, a term paper, and an in-class final exam. I expect students to attend all classes and assume that you are mature enough to understand what happens when you miss a class. Ask another student for notes if you miss a class before asking me for help. All assignments can be downloaded and uploaded using [ELC](#).

Although I generally think of 90-100 as an A, 80-90 as a B, etc., your overall grade for the course will be based upon the following scale:

		A	92 or above	A-	90-91.99
B+	88-89.99	B	82-87.99	B-	80-81.99
C+	78-79.99	C	72-77.99	C-	70-71.99
D+	68-69.99	D	62-67.99	D-	60-61.99
F	59.99 or below				

- **Federalist Debates.** Shortly after the course begins you will be divided into groups of three to four students and assigned to one of three debates. With the members of your group you will prepare to debate one side of a Federalist / Anti-Federalist issue. These debates will allow you to understand the philosophical theory behind the United States Constitution and some important issues in democratic theory. You will be graded on a five page summary of your party's position on the issue (due the first day of the debates), a presentation before the class, and your response to questions from the audience. These debates can be very entertaining, but they also represent 20% of your final grade. Your groups should provide great study partners for the exams and a source of notes if you miss class. **Students who are absent during the presentation of their debate will be required to turn in a 5 page paper in lieu of their presentation. The paper will summarize the philosophical tradition of the entire Federalist/Anti-federalist debates and be due in the class immediately following the student's assigned debate. This is in addition to the 3-4 page written assignment you are required to submit. Don't let your teammates down. Late penalties apply.**

- **Legal Precedent.** Legal precedent makes interpretation of the law predictable and consistent. To help you understand this very important facet of the American legal system, you will be assigned to one of five Supreme Court cases as the person in charge of either the legal summary, majority opinion, concurring opinion, or dissenting opinion. In addition to summarizing your findings, you and the other students assigned to the case will lead classroom discussion. You will receive a 2 (out of 2) for a serious and accurate discussion, a 1 for an attempt, and a 0 for not participating (5% of your grade).

- **Term Paper.** 25% of your grade is reserved for a term paper on one of three essay prompts. Regardless of the essay you chose, you will develop your essay in three stages, each worth a different amount of your overall grade. In the first stage, you will write a research-based term paper with the assistance of AI tools, such as ChatGPT, but you will not rely solely on that tool (5% of your overall grade). In the second stage, you will provide feedback on a paper written by one your peers (recommended). And in the third stage, you will submit a polished research paper that incorporates peer comments and meets the standards set out in the assignment (20%). Please get started early so you have plenty of time for research.

- **Exams.** The final part of your grade will be a mid-term and a final exam. Both exams will contain multiple choice, fill in the blank, possible problem solving, and essay type questions worth 25% each. The idea is to give you multiple types of questions to evaluate your understanding of the material, not your aptitude for a particular type of test question. Since the lectures and the readings sometimes cover different material, please be prepared to answer questions from *assigned* readings that were not covered in class. Questions from readings *will* be on the exams. The final is *not* cumulative.

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Percent of Grade</u>
Federalist Debates	Sept 9 - 16	20%
Legal Precedent	Oct 7 - 12	5%
Midterm	Oct 19	25%
Term Paper		
• Initial Submission	Nov 9	5%
• Peer Review (recommended)	Nov 18	0%
• Final Submission	Nov 30	20%
Final Exam	Dec 9	25%

Make-ups

Assignments and term papers require a fair amount of analysis time. Please plan ahead to avoid turning them in late. **Late assignments will be lowered one letter grade for every day they are late.** Grades are lowered for every *day* they are late, not every class day they are late. If an assignment is late, it would be a good idea to upload it on ELC then e-mail me so I know it is posted. Do this as soon as possible to avoid any unnecessary late penalties.

If you miss the midterm for a good reason, pre-approved by me, you will be allowed to complete a make-up exam on Tuesday, October 20 at 4:30 pm, meeting in Baldwin 408. Make-ups are not available any other time or date. The make-up is more difficult than the regular exam and should be avoided.

AI Software

With the exception of the term paper assignment, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT, Copilot, or similar generative AI systems is strictly prohibited for any part of an assignment, including brainstorming, writing, or editing. This policy facilitates your learning of the material.

Required Texts

Reading assignments vary in length. When you are assigned a short reading you may want to read ahead so that you don't fall behind in the future. Readings come from three sources: 1) the TopHat textbook (purchase), 2) the Bullock and Gaddie book on Georgia Politics (select chapters on ELC), and 3) additional readings (linked below or posted on ELC). Unless otherwise designated, readings are required. I will test you on some of the readings not discussed in class.

Please read the entire assignment once (at least superficially) before coming to class. Remember, if you work hard and complete all the readings, this should be a very rewarding class. Allow two hours of reading for every hour of class time, except during the exams.

1. Textbook: TopHat: "Understanding the American Way of Government & Politics"- Mike Evans. ISBN: 9781774947180.
2. Bullock, Charles S and Ronald Keith Gaddie. 2011. *Georgia Politics in a State of Change*. New York: Pearson (don't buy, select chapters will be posted on ELC).

3. Additional readings, linked below or posted on ELC.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

Aug 17	1. Introduction - French
Aug 19	Anarchy and State Formation - French Mancur Olson article (ELC).
	2. The Constitution and Foundations of the U.S. Republic
Aug 24	*Federalist Papers #10 & #51 - French * Articles of Confederation (read introduction and Article XIII, skim rest).
Aug 26	*Textbook Chapter 2: The US Constitution - French
Aug 31	* Constitution of the United States – bring a copy of the Constitution to class for highlighting. * Fun version of the same (optional).
Sept 2	*Bullock and Gaddie, <i>Georgia Politics in a State of Change</i> , Chapter 4, Constitutions and Institutions, see ELC. * Georgia Constitution (and its history) (read history, skim text).
Sept 7	Labor Day: No Class!
Sept 9 - 16	The Federalist Debates (see assignment area of ELC for readings) (written federalist assignment due Sept 9)
Sept 18	Constitution Day (optional) *5 extra credit points on your federalist debate assignment for attending . If you can't make the lecture but want the extra points, please email me a 1.5 page summary of Thomas Jefferson's role in creating the Constitution by 11 pm, Saturday, Sept 19.
	3. Federalism
Sept 21	*Textbook Chapter 3: Federalism

4. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

Sept 23 *Textbook, Chapter 5, Civil Rights.

Sept 28 *Textbook, Chapter 4, Civil Liberties.

*Letter from Birmingham Jail.

Sept 30 No Class! NASPAA Conference.

5. The Judiciary

***Textbook, Chapter 12, The Judicial Branch.**

Oct 7 **Legal Precedent Assignments due (Oct 6 - 8)**

*[Griswold v Connecticut](#)– read the opinions and dissents, on the left, after you scroll down.

*Roe v. Wade.

*Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania v. Casey.

Oct 9 **Principles of 1776 lecture** (optional)

*5 extra credit points on the final submission of your term paper for attending. If you can't make the lecture but want the extra points, please email me a 1.5 page summary of Benjamin Franklin's role in creating the Declaration of Independence by 11 pm, Saturday, Oct 10.

Oct 12 *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt.

*Dobbs v Jackson Women's Health Organization.

Oct 14 Catch-up & Review

Oct 19 Midterm Exam

6. The Legislature

Oct 21 - 26 *Textbook, Chapter 10, The Legislative Branch.

*Bullock and Gaddie, *Georgia Politics in a State of Change*, Chapter 5, The Georgia General Assembly (skim), see ELC.

Oct 28 - Nov 2 *Hinich and Munger, “The Spatial Model of Downs and Black,”
Analytical Politics, on-line reading, see ELC.

7. The Executive

- Nov 4 - 9 *Textbook, Chapter 11, The Executive Branch.
 *[The Emancipation Proclamation](#).
 *[Gettysburg Address](#).
 *Bullock and Gaddie, *Georgia Politics in a State of Change*, Chapter 6,
 The Executive Branch (skim), see ELC.

Term paper, initial submission due Nov 9

- Nov 11 *Moe and Howell, “Unilateral Action and Presidential Power,”
 Presidential Studies Quarterly, see ELC.
- Nov 16 Presidential Assertions of Power (short reads)
 *[Truman’s seizure of steel mills](#).
 *[Nixon’s use of executive privilege](#).
 *[Bush post-9/11 powers](#).
 *[Obama’s DACA order](#).
 *[Trump’s travel ban](#).
 *[Biden’s student loan actions](#).

8. Elections

- Nov 18 *Textbook, Chapter 6, Voting, Elections, and Political Participation.

Term paper, peer review due Nov 18

- Nov 23 - 27 NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK

- Nov 30 Catch-up and Review

Term paper, final submission due Nov 30

- Dec 9 FINAL EXAM: 8:00-10:00 am (same location)**

CLASSROOM AND UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Student Learning Outcomes

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.

Students will learn the philosophical and constitutional foundations of the U.S. political system, including the state of Georgia, and examine primary sources over time, including the Declaration of Independence, Federalist Papers, the U.S. and Georgia Constitutions, among others. 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.

Students will learn to articulate competing positions on political topics in assignments. Students will demonstrate an ability to engage in respectful discussion and civil debate on American politics that are associated with multiple points of view.

This course applies to Area V Social Sciences requirements of UGA's General Education Curriculum. It also satisfies the USG graduation requirements for demonstrating knowledge of both the U.S. and Georgia Constitutions.

Disclaimer

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

Student Honesty

All academic work must meet the standards contained in “A Culture of Honesty.” Students are responsible for informing themselves about these standards before performing academic work. The penalties for academic dishonesty are severe and ignorance is not an acceptable defense. Also note that the course syllabus is a general plan for the course and that deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Mental Health and Wellness Resources

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 <https://sco.uga.edu>. 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 students 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.