

POLS 1101: Introduction to American Government

Fall 2026

Instructor: Karlee L. Kimbrell

Office:

Office Hours:

Email: karlee.kimbrell@uga.edu
klt45721@uga.edu

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to the institutions, processes, and behavior of American national government. Over the course of the semester, we will examine explanations of how our political system operates and how well it meets its democratic aspirations. The purpose of the course is to promote learning and critical thinking about U.S. politics that goes beyond much of what we hear and read in the news, social media, and everyday conversation. One of my goals then is to have you reevaluate commonly held assumptions and criticisms of the American political system. In some instances, what you learn will run counter to commonly held views about American government. In addition, we will focus on many basics of U.S. government that are not well known or understood.

Learning Objectives

As set by USG, by the end of this course:

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.

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.

Course Materials

Our main text will be [American Government 4e \(AG4e\)](#), a free open resource produced by OpenStax. While a PDF copy will be posted on eLC, I encourage you to take full advantage of the free resources online. All other class materials will be posted on eLC as well.

Office Hours and Help

I will hold office hours every week. I will be available to meet in my office or via zoom. It is important to me that this course is comprehensible for all. Office hours can be used to talk about lectures, assignments, grades, etc. If you feel like a question could be resolved via email, please allow me 24 hours to respond and until the next school day if over the weekend. If I happen to not respond within 24 school hours,

please email me again. All grade disputes should be emailed to me after 24 hours of the grade posting and before 1 week passes (after the initial 24 hour wait). In most circumstances, I am unable to review work that is due in less than 3 school days.

Grading

In this course, you will be graded on:

- ⇒ Midterm and Final (100 points each, 200 points possible)
- ⇒ Reflections (3 reflections, 100 points each, 300 points possible)
- ⇒ Concept Maps (4 concept maps, 50 points each, 200 points possible)
- ⇒ Participation (comprised of discussion and in class activities, 200 points possible)
- ⇒ Attendance (100 points possible)

Letter Grade	Required Points
A	930 - 1000
A-	900 - 929
B+	870 - 899
B	830 - 869
B-	800 - 829
C+	770 - 799
C	730 - 769
C-	700 - 729
D+	670 - 699
D	600 - 669
F	Below 600

Midterm and Final

These time restricted assessments will be taken inside of class and be comprised of multiple choice and short answer.

Reflections

You will have 3 writing assignments that will focus on connecting abstract concepts to concrete experiences. These are designed as structured reflections, which encourage you to connect larger political phenomenon with your personal, historical, and contemporary understanding of how politics impacts you and the communities you value. Successful completion of these assignments requires you to move beyond simply acknowledging different viewpoints to actively analyzing how structural factors create divergent political interest and strategic decisions. For further details, please refer to the instructions and rubric on eLC. **If you are using as a tool AI, you must identify and describe your use. Use of AI without disclosure or use of AI for writing will result in a zero.**

Concept Maps

Concept maps serve both as an active learning tool and a key component of your final grade. Unlike traditional study skills that simply list vocabulary, the concept map requires you to visually demonstrate your conceptual understanding of American government as a complex and dynamic system of power. Your goal should be to construct a map that clearly illustrates the structural relationships between different political institutions, concepts, and communities we study. Please refer to the instructions and rubric posted on eLC for more details. **No use of AI/GAI will be permitted for your assessment checks. Any use will result in a zero.**

Participation

Active participation is essential for your learning and contributes to the quality of our classroom discussions about complex political topics. Participation in this course takes multiple forms throughout the semester, including contributing to class discussions, engaging thoughtfully, participating in small group activities, and completing in-class exercises. These varied opportunities ensure that students with different communication styles can demonstrate their engagement with the material. If you miss a class session, you can earn back a portion of your participation points by completing discussion questions posted at the end of that day's lecture slides, which will be available on our learning management system. These make-up questions are designed to help you engage with the missed content while maintaining accountability for class attendance. To receive partial credit for participation, please submit your responses before the next class. If you miss a large participation day (i.e. Concept Maps, you must contact me directly for an alternative assignment that will only be granted in cases of documented absences. If repeated signs

of lack of engagement with course material arises, I reserve the right to supplement quizzes for participation supplementation.

Attendance

A key part of your success is just showing up (it makes the getting-things-done part easier). Showing up for this class means that you have done your part to prepare for class and you're actively preparing for class, drawing connections between the material, and ready to participate in conversation. This said, sometimes life happens, and you can't show up. Absences will be excused in cases of documented illness, official university related representation or events (with documentation from university/program official), death of a close loved one, religious holidays, and other circumstances beyond your control. I'm here to talk about situations that may arise. You are asked given two (2) unexcused absences and I will not ask any questions (I may if its two in a row). After the 2 unexcused absences, six (6) points will be deducted from your attendance grade. Starting at five (5) absences, 10 points will be deducted from your attendance grade. Most lecture slides will be posted on eLC for your reference. It is your responsibility to get notes from your peers from in class discussions and activities or come to office hours.

Late Work, Make-up Work, and Make-up Exams

Late work policy is in accordance with the University's policy on excused absences. Please inform me as soon as possible and I will work on deadlines with you. For assignments, I understand issues arise that may interfere with your work. If this occurs, please contact me at least 48 hours in advance (or what is reasonably possible), and I will try to work with you to turn in your late assignment. For late assignments without prior extension agreement, expect to have 10% of the submission grade deducted per day that it is late starting immediately after the deadline. Make-up work and exams/quizzes will only be given with proper documentation.

Extra Credit

As of right now, there are three (3) extra credit opportunities scattered throughout the course. You will have the option to opt in to taking 3 surveys over the course of the semester for data collection purposes. These are optional and completely anonymized and will not negatively affect your grade. You are under no obligation to complete these surveys and alternative forms of extra credit will be offered during the same time for students who do not consent to their data being collected. During any given offer of extra credit, you will only receive credit for one option. I do not offer individual extra credit. I reserve the right to offer additional forms of extra credit throughout the semester.

Academic Honesty & Artificial Intelligence

The University of Georgia has an academic honesty policy. 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 a failing grade in the course. Additionally, I will forward your name to the University. You can read the policies in their entirety here: <https://honesty.uga.edu/Academic-Honesty-Policy/>

I feel that it's important to teach and model ethical usage of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GAI) tool. These tools can help you brainstorm ideas, polish your writing, and much more. However, as professionals in training, it's important to critically evaluate when and how you use these tools responsibly. There are several GAI tools on the market that have conflated successful learning and efficiency. Learning takes

work! It can be slow and frustrating. While you can use GAI for brainstorming, ideation, etc., don't let GAI replace your thinking and critical reflection. **However, GAI will not be permitted for use on your Concept Maps and Assessment Checks. If you are using as a tool AI, you must identify and describe your use. Use of AI without disclosure or use of AI for an entire assignment will result in a zero for the assignment or activity.** Furthermore, I believe it is important to talk about the environmental impact that GAI tools have. GAI requires massive energy consumption, and this leads to an increase in carbon emission and water usage. Additionally, to continue to produce GAI hardware and machinery, there is an increase in mining of limited earth minerals—which can cause pollution and habitat destruction. If you are unsure if your use of GAI is appropriate, I am happy to chat with you about academically ethical methods.

Accessibility, Accommodations, & Preferences

The purpose of disability accommodation is to provide equal access to the academic material and equal access to demonstrate mastery of the material. Disability accommodations work best starting at the beginning of the semester but can be approved and started at any point in the semester. Accommodations start at the time the accommodation letter is presented to faculty within reasonable timelines; accommodations are not given retroactively. If you plan to request accommodations for a disability, please register with the Accessibility and Testing Center. If you need accommodations but are unable to register formally with the ATC, please reach out to me and we will discuss reasonable accommodations that you may need.

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to a collaborative and supportive learning environment. Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name. I am eager to address you by your preferred name and/or gender pronouns. Please let me know your preferences at the beginning of the course or via email before the first day of class so that I may adjust my roster.

Withdrawal policy

Undergraduate students can only withdraw from four courses and receive a withdrawal- passing (WP) grade while enrolled at the University. Students can drop any class without penalty during the drop/add period at the beginning of every semester. Dropped courses during the drop/add period do not qualify as withdrawals. Instructors have the ability to withdraw a student from the class due to excessive absences. Please carefully review the policy in its entirety here: <http://www.reg.uga.edu/policies/withdrawals>

Class Recordings and Materials

I require that you seek my permission if you want to make audio and/or video recordings of any portion of our class (including of my lectures and discussion sections). If you do not have this permission (or an accommodation from ACT), do not take photographs, audio recordings, or video recordings of any person in this class without their express permission. Further, do not take or share audio or video recordings of course lectures or discussions. Violation of this policy may result in you receiving 0% for class participation, and, depending on the severity of the violation, may result in you receiving a grade of "F" in the class. Lectures, course material (presentations, exams, activities, notes, etc.) are my production. You are not to reproduce or distribute this content without written and explicit permission from me.

Well-Being Resources

UGA Well-being Resources promote student success by cultivating a culture that supports 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. Additional information, including free digital well-being resources, can be accessed through the UGA app or by visiting <https://well-being.uga.edu>.

- 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

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is a federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. FERPA affords students certain rights with respect to their education records. Specifically, it affords students the right to:

- Inspect and review their education records
- Request the amendment of inaccurate or misleading records
- Consent to disclosure of personally identifiable information contained in their education record
- File a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged failures of the institution to comply with this law

Course Outline and Student Input on Class Materials and Discussion

See something that you think would be great to add to the course schedule or chat about in discussion—send me an email! Below is the course outline. I reserve the right to adjust, and any adjustments will be discussed in class and sent out via email.

Week	Dates	Topic
<i>Week 1</i>	August 18 th August 20 th	Syllabus Day & Colonization
<i>Week 2</i>	August 25 th August 27 th	Models of Government & Democracy • Declaration of Independence • Articles of Confederation • Federalist Papers
<i>Week 3</i>	September 1 st September 3 rd	Constitution & Separation of Powers
<i>Week 4</i>	September 8 th September 10 th	Federalism
<i>Week 5</i>	September 15 th September 17 th	State, City, Local, & Tribal Governments • GA Constitution and BOR

<i>Week 6</i>	September 22 nd September 24 th	Public Opinion & Media
<i>Week 7</i>	September 29 th October 2 nd	Political Parties & Interest Groups
<i>Week 8</i>	October 6 th October 8 th	Campaigns & Elections Midterm Week
<i>Week 9</i>	October 13 th October 15 th	The Legislative Branch- Congress
<i>Week 10</i>	October 20 th October 22 nd	The Executive Branch- The Presidency • Gettysburg Address • Emancipation Proclamation
<i>Week 11</i>	October 27 th October 29 th	The Executive Branch- Agencies & Bureaucracy
<i>Week 12</i>	November 3 rd November 5 th	The Judicial Branch- The Courts
<i>Week 13</i>	November 10 th November 12 th	Civil Liberties
<i>Week 14</i>	November 17 th November 19 th	Civil Rights • Letter from Birmingham Jail
<i>Week 15</i>	November 24 th November 26 th	Thanksgiving Break
Finals Week		