Govt 103: Introduction to American Government

Michelle M. Buehlmann

Fall 2019
George Mason University
Schar School of Policy and Government

E-mail: mbuehlma@gmu.edu
Office Hours: Wednesday 9-10, by appointment
Location: Research Hall 3rd Floor

Web: blackboard.gmu.edu
Class Hours: Monday: 7:20-10PM
Class Room: Innovation 105


Course Description:

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to American government. The course will primarily focus on the American national government, but state and local governments will be included. The course will cover a number of topics including: the historical foundation of American government, Federalism, Civil Liberties, Civil Rights, Congress, The Presidency, The Bureaucracy, The Judiciary, Public Opinion, The Media, Voting and Political Participation, Elections and Campaigns, Political Parties, Interest Groups, Public Policy, and State and Local government.

Course Objectives:

1. To understand vocabulary and technical terms of government and politics.
2. To improve the basic skills of citizenship.
3. To encourage students to take a position on important issues of American politics.
4. To improve the students' understanding of events appearing in newspapers and television.
5. To prepare students for more advanced courses in political science.
6. To understand the general principles of the U. S. Government and the interrelationships among the three branches of government.
7. To practice writing and making connections on topics related to American government and politics.

Attendance:

Students should email the teacher at the address listed at the top of this syllabus, BEFORE missing class, if at all possible. Any missed classes will result in a zero participation grade for that individual class.

- If a student misses four or more classes, they will receive a failing grade for the course.
- Students are responsible for turning assignments in on time, regardless of class attendance. (If you miss class the assignment is still due at the assigned time.)
- Students are solely responsible for any information they miss due to absences.

**Make-up Exams:**

It is the student’s responsibility to contact the professor to schedule the make-up exam. The student must make up the mid-term exam within one week of the originally scheduled mid-term exam. Mid-term exams not made up within 7 days will result in a zero. Final exams must be made up within 24 hours of the originally scheduled exam, so the professor can finalize grades for the university. Final exams not made up within 24 hours will result in a zero the final exam.

**Late work:**

Late work will not be accepted in this class. Prior to the due date students may contact the professor to make schedule adjustments, if necessary. Adjustments will be made at the professor’s discretion.

**Important Dates:** If the student wishes to drop this class, it is the student’s sole responsibility to do so in accordance with university policy. The dates below are provided to assist you in making that decision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Last day to drop with a tuition refund or change to audit</td>
<td>September 9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(census date)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Self-Withdrawal Period Ends</td>
<td>September 30th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selective Withdrawal Period</td>
<td>October 1 - October 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Day of Classes</td>
<td>December 7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination Period</td>
<td>December 11-18th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grade Breakdown:**
- Participation: 10%
- Current Events/Ask the teacher: 10%
- Response Papers: 20%
- Midterm: 30%
- Final Exam (cumulative): 30%

**STUDENT’S RESPONSIBILITIES:**

**Participation:** Participation is defined as being actively involved in class. This means (1) reading the assignments before you come to class (except the first class); (2) asking questions/making comments based on those readings (How else will I know you did the readings?); (3) making connections between the readings and current events (this will impress me), and (4) remaining in class for the entire class. Failing to talk or leaving class early may result in a zero for
participation for that day. If you are shy or quiet and have trouble talking in class please email me for help with this portion of your grade.

**Current Events/Ask the Teacher:** Once during the course, you will submit via Blackboard the following as a Word document (.doc or .docx) or pdf:

1. a copy of a news article (no video and no links) from one of the following sources: CNN, FoxNews, the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, or the Washington Times; and

2. a question that you have about American national government based on the article.

I will read the article and answer your question. The question should pertain to American national government. I will report back to the class regarding the current events stories and questions. I will not identify who sent me which questions. I want you to feel comfortable asking any question about anything you do not understand from the news. The grade for this is based on did you do it ON TIME. However, if the answer to your question is in the article you will receive a zero, so please read the articles before you send them to me.

**These assignments need to be submitted as a Word document or a pdf (so cut and paste the article) through Blackboard by 5PM on the due date listed in the table below.** For the current events assignment, students are divided into four groups based on the first letter of their last name.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Group</th>
<th>First letter of last name</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group A</td>
<td>A-I</td>
<td>September 9th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group B</td>
<td>J-R</td>
<td>October 21st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group C</td>
<td>S-Z</td>
<td>November 4th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Response Papers:** All students are required to do three response papers. For the first two papers, students may select from any of the five optional response papers listed in the table below. Students may do more than two, the highest two grades will be used in determining your course grade. The third and final response paper will involve the West Wing episode *Indians in the Lobby* and is required of all students and is due November 25th by 9PM.

The Response papers should be roughly two pages in length. The purpose of these papers is to draw connections among the episode of *West Wing* watched, the reading materials, the course lectures and class discussions. The papers MUST include (1) references to the textbook, (2) discussion of the West Wing episode, and (3) either mention to the lecture or classroom discussion. Inclusion of additional sources are permitted but must be properly cited. Papers should be written in 12pt Font, Times New Roman, double spaced and submitted via blackboard. A grading rubric will be provided on September 23rd before we watch *Five Votes Down.*
Midterm Exam: The mid-term exam enables you to familiarize yourself with the type of questions to expect on the Final Exam. It will also help you review the material from the first couple of weeks. It will include in-class material and the material in the textbook. In-class material is not limited to what I say; it may include points and questions raised by your fellow students, or by you. It will be a multiple choice exam of approximately 35-45 questions. **This exam will be held in class on October 7th.**

Final Exam: The final exam will be cumulative. It will cover the material in the textbook and the material we cover in class. In-class material is not limited to what I say. It may include points and questions raised by your fellow students, or by you! It will be a multiple choice exam of approximately 75 questions, and may include a short essay. **The date and time of this exam will be announced.**

Class Schedule:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>August 26</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>Introduction and West Wing Pilot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>September 2</td>
<td>No Class Labor Day.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>September 9</td>
<td>Chapters 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Current Events Group A assignment due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>September 16</td>
<td>Chapters 3 &amp; 4</td>
<td>Road to Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>September 23</td>
<td>Chapters 5 &amp; 6</td>
<td>West Wing: Five Votes Down</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>September 30</td>
<td>Catch up and review for mid-term exam.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>October 7</td>
<td>Mid-term Exam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>October 14</td>
<td>No Class Fall Break.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>October 21</td>
<td>Chapters 7 &amp; 8</td>
<td>Option 1: Response Paper on Five Votes Down Current Events Group B assignment due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>October 28</td>
<td>Chapters 9 &amp; 10</td>
<td>Option 2: Response Paper on Celestial Navigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>November 4</td>
<td>Chapters 11 &amp; 12</td>
<td>Option 3: Response Paper on 20 Hours in LA Current Events Group C assignment due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>November 11</td>
<td>Chapters 13 &amp; 14</td>
<td>Option 4: Response Paper on Lies, Damn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Syllabus

This syllabus is a tentative guide for the course. I reserve the right to make announced changes to this document and will distribute these changes in class and on blackboard. Each student will be responsible for all announcements and materials covered in class.

Class Conduct

Class atmosphere will be quite relaxed. Just a few guidelines to make sure:

- Arriving a few minutes late is tolerated as long as you make an effort to minimize the disturbance.

- Eating and drinking in class is permitted, but please try not disturbing others. (Avoid foods with strong smells, or serious allergies, if possible)

- Turn off / silence all cell phones.

- If you have to leave a class early, please let me know in advance, and select your seat to minimize the disturbance.

Disabilities and Accommodations

Please let me know within the first week of class if you require assistance or special consideration. I can make accommodations for those who need them but must be informed of the need in advance. Any requests for accommodation based on a disability must be arranged through the Office of Disability Services (ODS). [http://ods.gmu.edu/](http://ods.gmu.edu/)
Academic Integrity

All work completed in your name must be yours and yours alone. Any work you borrow or ideas you gather from other sources must be cited properly. Please see me if you are concerned about proper citation style. Any attempt to present someone else’s work as your own will be met with the harshest consequences. You may receive an F for the assignment and an F for the course. Furthermore, information pertaining to the violation will be forwarded to the appropriate university administrators.

Enrollment Statement

Students are responsible for verifying their enrollment in this class. Schedule adjustments should be made by the deadlines published in the Schedule of Classes.

Other Useful Campus Resources

- Writing Center • A114 Robinson Hall; (703) 993-1200; http://writingcenter.gmu.edu
- University
- Libraries • http://library.gmu.edu
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) • 703.993.2380; http://caps.gmu.edu

University Policies

The University Catalog, http://catalog.gmu.edu, is the central resource for university policies affecting student, faculty, and staff conduct in university academic affairs. Other policies are available at http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu.