GOVT 103: Introduction to American Government DRAFT
Robert J. McGrath
Summer 2018

George Mason University
Schar School of Policy and Government

E-mail: rmcgrat2@gmu.edu
Office Hours: T/R 12:00-1:00 p.m.
Fairfax Office: Research Hall 344
Arlington Office: Founders Hall 656

Course Description

This course serves as a broad overview of the workings of American government and the nature of American politics. This course will introduce you to many of the major issues in the study of American government, its historical foundations, institutions, and political processes. The purpose of this class is to teach you about the institutions, practices, and history of politics and government in the United States. This course will cover a great deal of ground, as we will discuss the Constitution, the three branches of the federal government, the state governments, interest groups, public opinion, campaigns, elections, and parties. In addition to studying the structure of American politics, we will discuss how individual Americans interact with their government. Who votes, and why does it matter? What do political parties, interest groups, and the news media do, and why does it matter? Why do candidates run negative ads, and does it matter? For each subject, we will examine some of the leading perspectives in political science, and we will incorporate current events and our personal experiences, as well.

Course Objectives

• To understand the structures and processes of American government and politics, the collective action challenges inherent in this system, and the practical implications of political structure and contestation in our lives.
• To sharpen our ability to think critically about the American political system by reading both contemporary and classic materials from a variety of sources that encompass both objective and opinion-based points of view.
• To demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of contemporary political debates.

Course Requirements

• Daily quizzes/in-class assignments 15%: For introductory courses, it is very important to keep pace with the material, as an understanding of later topics builds cumulatively on under-
standing of prior topics. Thus, to incentivize everyone to stay on top of things, I will be giving short quizzes on Blackboard that will be due before each substantive lecture. These activities will be quite "easy" in the sense that if you do the assigned reading, there should be no ambiguity answering the quiz questions. These quizzes will be released as a group to Blackboard at the beginning of the summer session and will be due by class time on the day they are due. At the end of the term, I will drop the lowest quiz grade for each student. You may not "make up" points for missed quizzes, except through the "enrichment activities" described below.

- **Short Writing Assignments 15%**: Learning how to evaluate content in writing is an essential part of the college experience. To this end, you are required to submit a series of 4 short papers (1-2 pages each, 3.75% each; 15% total) throughout the summer. I will post possible short paper topics and due dates for these topics to the Blackboard site by the beginning of the summer term. Make sure to browse these assignments for topics that fit your interest and your schedule. You may choose any four papers, but may not write more than one paper per assignment/due date.

- **Midterm Exams 20% each; 40% total**: There are 2 "midterm" exams for the course. These will be held in class on July 9 and July 18. Each exam will consist of approximately 25 multiple choice style questions and 3 short answer identification-style questions. Exams can only be rescheduled under extraordinary (and well documented) circumstances. Rescheduled exams must be taken as soon as possible and may be in a different format from the in-class exam (that is, they will most likely be short answers/essays). There will be no extra credit opportunities for exams.

- **Final Exam 30%**: There will be a comprehensive take-home exam distributed on Wednesday 7/25 and due on Friday 7/27 (by 5:00PM). The exam will consist of 3 short answer identification-style questions and 2 longer essays. Late exams will not be accepted.

- **Enrichment Activities**: You will have the opportunity to complete an (optional) enrichment assignment, graded pass/fail. If you complete an assignment satisfactorily, I will drop 2 additional quiz grades (this can be very helpful if you miss quizzes throughout the summer). Enrichment assignments are due by Thursday, July 26 at 1:30 PM. See the instructions and guidelines for these enrichment activities that are posted to Blackboard. Late enrichment papers will not be accepted.

**Student Responsibilities**

- **Class Attendance and Participation**: You are expected to attend class (showing up on time) and pay attention to lecture. This is a lecture class, but the material is often reflected in current events and we will often discuss politics and political science. These discussions are to remain civil and informed, and each student is expected to participate through discussion or by respectfully paying attention to the content of discussion.

- **Reading the news**: I expect you to read at least 1 national news story (from whatever newspaper or website that you prefer) per day. Avoid sources that peddle "fake news" (hint: if the ratio of advertising and merchandise to news content is greater than 1:1, it's probably a fake news site.) On the days we have lecture, I will call on people to discuss such stories and the events surrounding them, so be prepared to introduce your story when called upon.
• **Readings:** Complete the readings listed in the course schedule. All reading should be completed before the lecture on the topic. 9 times out of 10, when struggling students come to my office, they admit that they haven’t been reading – this is the single best way to improve in the class. Read before lecture, listen and take notes, then read again to study.

• **Technology:** Turn your phones off while in class. **You may not use laptop computers or tablet devices in class.** The only exception to this policy is if we do an online redistricting activity in week 3. If this restriction poses a challenge for you, please discuss it with me.

• **Email:** Use proper email etiquette. There are lots of guides online. See here for a good one: [http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor](http://www.wikihow.com/Email-a-Professor). Do not ask for extra credit or for grade changes over email. Also, do not email "I missed class yesterday - did I miss anything?" I will not reply to these emails. In the case that there is a technological difficulty with Blackboard while attempting a quiz, contact me ASAP.

• Regularly check the course Blackboard page for announcements and quizzes.

### Grade Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Daily quizzes</th>
<th>15%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short Writing Assignments</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm Exams</td>
<td>20% each, 40% total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>30%</td>
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</tbody>
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### Letter Grade Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;= 97.00</td>
<td>A+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93.00 - 96.99</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90.00 - 92.99</td>
<td>A-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87.00 - 89.99</td>
<td>B+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83.00 - 86.99</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80.00 - 82.99</td>
<td>B-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77.00 - 79.99</td>
<td>C+</td>
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### Required Book

There is one required book for this course and it is available at the campus bookstore:

  - The 8th edition is more expensive, but it includes more up-to-date information. Either edition is sufficient.

- The companion website is a really good resource for reviewing course materials: [https://edge.sagepub.com/kernell7e](https://edge.sagepub.com/kernell7e)
Class Schedule

The following is a tentative schedule for the course. Updates to this schedule may be posted to Blackboard or communicated in class, as appropriate. This schedule is meant to give you a sense of the topic(s) to be covered on a given day. It is also meant to guide you if you wish to complete readings ahead of time. You are required to have read the assigned reading by the days listed below.

Week 01, 06/25 — Monday — Introduction/The Logic of American Politics

- *Logic*, Chapter 1

Week 01, 06/26 — Tuesday — The Constitution

- *Logic*, Chapter 2
- Declaration of Independence (Appendix 2 in *Logic*)
- Articles of Confederation (Appendix 1 in *Logic*)
- U.S. Constitution and all amendments (Appendix 3 in *Logic*)

Week 01, 06/27 — Wednesday — Federalism

- *Logic*, Chapter 3

Week 01, 06/28 — Thursday — Civil Liberties

- *Logic*, Chapter 5

Week 02, 07/02 — Monday — Civil Rights

- *Logic*, Chapter 4

Week 02, 07/03 — Tuesday — NO CLASS

Week 02, 07/04 — Wednesday — NO CLASS

Week 02, 07/05 — Thursday — Catch-up/Exam Review

Week 03, 07/09 — Monday — MIDTERM EXAM 1

- Don’t forget to bring Scantron sheets and pencils

Week 03, 07/10 — Tuesday — Congress

- *Logic*, Chapter 6
Week 03, 07/11 — Wednesday — The Presidency
  • *Logic*, Chapter 7

Week 03, 07/12 — Thursday — The Bureaucracy
  • *Logic*, Chapter 8

Week 04, 07/16 — Monday — The Judiciary
  • *Logic*, Chapter 9

Week 04, 07/17 — Tuesday — Catch-up/Exam Review

Week 04, 07/18 — Wednesday — MIDTERM EXAM 2
  • Don’t forget to bring Scantron sheets and pencils

Week 04, 07/19 — Thursday — Public Opinion
  • *Logic*, Chapter 10

Week 05, 07/23 — Monday — Voting, Campaigns, Elections
  • *Logic*, Chapter 11

Week 05, 07/24 — Tuesday — Political Parties
  • *Logic*, Chapter 12

Week 05, 07/25 — Wednesday — Interest Groups
  • *Logic*, Chapter 13
  • Final Exam distributed

Week 05, 07/26 — Thursday — “Reading” Day/NO CLASS

FINAL EXAMS DUE ON FRIDAY 7/27, BY 5:00PM
Additional Concerns

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 the course website. 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 for other students.
- Eating and drinking in class should be reduced to a minimum. It is not forbidden, but please make sure that you are not disturbing others.
- Turn off all cell phones (or don’t even bring them).
- If you have to leave a class early, please let me know in advance. It is very rude to simply walk out in the middle of a class.

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/

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 will receive an F for the assignment and an F for the course. Furthermore, notification of, and supporting documentation for, the violation will be forwarded to the appropriate university administrators.

Enrollment Statement

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

- Last Day to Add: 6/27
- Last Day to Drop: 7/9

Please note, after the last day to drop a class, withdrawing from this class requires the approval of the dean and is only allowed for nonacademic reasons. Undergraduate Students may choose to exercise a selective withdrawal. See the Schedule of Classes for selective withdrawal procedures.
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. All members of the university community are responsible for knowing and following established policies.