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 learn about 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 and interest groups do, and why does it matter? Why do candidates run negative ads, and do they 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.

This course is organized as an asynchronous online learning environment. That means we won’t meet at set times and you can work through the material at your own pace and schedule, subject to some set deadlines. The course is not lecture-based, though sometimes I will give short video lectures on relevant topics. Instead, there is a strong expectation that you be self-motivated enough to complete course reading and activities through Blackboard modules. These modules are designed to emphasize a number of broad course objectives that are identified below. You can think of these as the big takeaway skills and knowledge you will gain in the course.

You are not entirely on your own, though. Through structured activities and discussions, we will reinforce and apply knowledge from the book to facilitate your mastery of these course outcomes. These activities are low-stakes in that they individually won’t make or break your grade, but they are integral to learning the concepts deeply. You can expect to be very active and collaborative with respect to these tasks. For some activities, you will need to coordinate small group meetings that can occur in person or, more likely, though Blackboard Collaborate, Zoom, Skype, or your software of choice.
Course Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to . . .

1. Identify and assess basic facts regarding the structures and processes of American government.

2. Describe and integrate examples of collective action problems and the inherent costs of collective action.
   2a. Identify collective action problems and their institutional solutions throughout American and comparative political history and interpret challenges to achieving collective action in contemporary American government.
   2b. Analyze the American political system in terms of its adherence to democratic principles of access to government, protection of minority group rights, respect for the rule of law, and limited government.

3. Evaluate the origins of individual and group political preferences and adapt strategies for facilitating compromise among such preferences.
   3a. Reflect on how mass political preferences are considered by elected officials through the institutions of political parties and interest groups.

4. Describe and evaluate the institutional structure and operations of American national and state political institutions.
   4a. Analyze the strengths and weakness of American political processes, both in terms of their effectiveness in responding to public policy needs and in retaining constitutional protections.

5. Develop and demonstrate effective written and oral communication skills regarding politics, emphasizing the use of evidence-based argument and deliberative compromise.

6. Demonstrate knowledge of how to register to vote and the expectations of civic engagement in the United States.

Required materials


It is strongly suggested that you purchase the interactive eBook, which you can find HERE.

If you received an eBook access code packaged with a hard copy textbook, follow the below steps to redeem it on VitalSource Bookshelf. Your access code is included on the inside of the slimpack card you received with your textbook bundle.

1) Sign into or create your VitalSource Bookshelf account.

2) Enter your access code in the “Redeem Code” field.

You will be required to use Blackboard. All assignments will be submitted to Blackboard. Additional instructions about using Blackboard tools can be found below.

**Method of Instruction**

This course will be conducted entirely on Blackboard. Each week, instruction is provided through readings, videos, learning tasks, and assessments where you work collaboratively with your peers and the professor as course facilitator.

This instruction occurs through commonly used Blackboard tools, such as discussion forums, video lectures, and assignments. Synchronous instruction, when requested, is available through Blackboard’s Collaborate Ultra video conferencing tool.

Though the delivery method is fully online, it should take you the same amount of time as any typical 3 credit course to engage the material and prepare for and complete tasks and assessments (this is roughly 20 hours *per week* in a 5 week summer class).

It is critical to keep up with weekly requirements. Since the instruction is scaffolded sequentially (with each module building upon the one that precedes it), it is important to submit your work on time. Late assignments will not be accepted for credit.

**Technology Requirements: Hardware**

You’ll need a computer or tablet device with a reliable high speed internet connection, a built-in microphone, and webcam.

**Technology Requirements: Software**

You’ll need a browser and operating system that are listed compatible or certified with the Blackboard version available at Mason. See supported browsers and operating systems. Online courses typically use Acrobat Reader, Flash, Java, Windows Media Player, and Real Media Player.

Your computer should be capable of running current versions of those applications. Also, make sure your computer is protected from viruses by downloading the latest version of Symantec Endpoint Protection/Anti-Virus software for free antivirus software.

**Troubleshooting**

If you have difficulty accessing the course, please go to the Blackboard troubleshooting HELP pages HERE.

If you can’t find a solution in the HELP pages, please contact the ITU Support Center at support@gmu.edu to create a ticket or call (703) 993-8870.

**Getting Started with Blackboard**

To access our course, log into your GMU account at mymason.gmu.edu and locate the course from Summer 2020 from your list of course folders.

Have questions? Go to the Student Support Page.

Check for Blackboard supported browsers HERE.
Blackboard Video Tutorials – If you are not already familiar with Bb

Blackboard Learn: For Students: The complete series of short video tutorials to help you use the various Blackboard Learn tools to be successful online.

Working in Your Course: A playlist to help you learn how to access course content, take tests, turn in assignments, and other course related activities.

Staying Organized and Communicating: A playlist to help you use course tools to communicate and manage course work.

Setting Your Preferences and Environment: A playlist to help you customize their Blackboard experience and set their preferences.

Respect the Rules of “Netiquette”

Review the rules of “netiquette” and make sure to carefully craft all of your messages in class discussion boards to avoid misinterpretation: http://www.albion.com/netiquette/corerules.html.

Graded Course Elements

- **Chapter quizzes 15%**: For introductory courses, it is very important to keep pace with the material, as an understanding of later topics builds cumulatively on understanding 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 in the course of completing your weekly modules. You should not proceed with reading the next chapter until your end-of-chapter quiz is completed. Quizzes may not be completed after Friday (by 11:59 pm ET) of the weekly module they are part of and there are no exceptions to this rule. 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. You will have multiple opportunities to take quizzes to earn higher grades.

- **Discussion board task participation 40%**: Each module of the course includes multiple required discussion board activities. Faithfully engaging these activities is the key to applying any knowledge that you gain from reading the assigned material and watching the instructor’s introductory videos. Details of each activity can be found in the class Discussion Board, though most require some interaction with your classmates or the instructor.

- **Oral history writing assignment 10%**: DETAIL ON THIS ASSIGNMENT IS FORTHCOMING

- **Final exam 35%**: There will be a comprehensive take-home exam distributed on Thursday 8/13 (at 7:00AM) and due on Friday 8/14 (by 5:00PM). The exam will consist of 3 short answer identification-style questions and 2 longer essays. Late exams will not be accepted. As a precondition for taking the exam, each student must have completed the self-assessment paper. If you don’t complete this assignment, you will automatically earn a 0 on the exam.

Grade Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter quizzes</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion board task participation</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral history writing assignment</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Letter Grade Distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>&gt;= 97.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93.00 - 96.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90.00 - 92.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87.00 - 89.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83.00 - 86.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>80.00 - 82.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>77.00 - 79.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73.00 - 76.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70.00 - 72.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>67.00 - 69.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D-</td>
<td>63.00 - 66.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60.00 - 62.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;= 59.99</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Class Schedule

The following is the schedule for the course. The course is organized by week and each weekly module must be completed in full before the 11:59 pm ET on Sunday (though some module tasks are due on Thursday by 11:59 pm ET or Friday 11:59 pm ET, see detail below). Any task not completed on time will not be accepted by the instructor for credit. Each weekly module is broken down into a number of topical sub-modules as noted in this detailed schedule.

#### Module A — Introduction/The Logic and Practice of American Politics (July 13-19)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module A: Introduction, The Logic and Practice of Politics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are 3 submodules here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.1: Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.2: The Logic of American Politics.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.3: Duties and Expectations for Civic Engagement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Module Assignments

- Discussion Board assignment A.1
- Read Ch. 1 of textbook
- Quiz A.2
- Discussion Board assignment A.2
- Discussion Board assignment A.3

### Module B — The “Rules of the Game” (July 20-26)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module B: The “Rules of the Game”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are 4 submodules here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.1: The Constitution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.2: Ideation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.3: Civil Liberties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.4: Civil Rights</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Module Assignments

- Read Ch. 2 of textbook
- Quiz B.1
- Read Ch. 3 of textbook
- Quiz B.2
- Discussion Board Assignment B.2
- Read Ch. 4 of textbook
- Quiz B.3
- Quiz B.4
- Discussion Board Assignment B.4

### Module C — Political Preferences: Origins and Effects (July 27-August 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Module C: Political Preferences: Origins and Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are 4 submodules here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.1: Public Opinion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.2: Voting, Campaigns, and Elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.3: Political Parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.4: Interest Groups</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Module Assignments

- Read Ch. 5 of textbook
- Quiz C.1
- Read Ch. 6 of textbook
- Quiz C.2
- Discussion Board Assignment C.2
- Read Ch. 7 of textbook
- Quiz C.3
- Read Ch. 8 of textbook
- Quiz C.4
- Discussion Board assignment C.4

### Discussion Assignments

- All initial posts by Tuesday 7/21
- All replies to peers by Sunday 7/26
- Quiz 1 - By Friday 7/24

### Module Assignments

- All initial posts by Tuesday 7/28
- All replies to peers by Sunday 7/26
- Quiz 2 - By Friday 8/01
### Module D — The Governmental Machinery (August 3-9)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 4 (August 3-9)</th>
<th>Module D: The Governmental Machinery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are 4 submodules here.</td>
<td>8.1 Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 The Presidency</td>
<td>8.3 The Bureaucracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4 The Judiciary</td>
<td>8.6 Of textbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiz D.1</td>
<td>Quiz D.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Board Assignment D.2</td>
<td>Read Ch. 3 of textbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiz D.3</td>
<td>Read Ch. 3 of textbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiz D.4</td>
<td>Read Ch. 3 of textbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Board Assignment D.4</td>
<td>Oral History Writing Assignment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discussion Assignments**
- All initial posts by Thursday 6/6
- All replies to peers by Sunday 6/9

**Quizzes**
- By Friday 6/7

**Oral History Writing Assignment**
- By Sunday 6/9

### Module E — Self-Assessments, Study Period, and Final Exam (August 10-14)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 5 (August 10-14)</th>
<th>Module E: Self-Assessments, Study Period, and Final Exam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There are no formal modules this week. Instead, there will be exam review sessions each day on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Each student must attend at least one of these sessions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Self-assessment Assignment</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Take-home final exam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self-Assessment Assignment**
- By Wednesday 8/12
- This assignment is not graded, but you need to submit it in order to take the final exam

**Final Exam**
- Distributed at 7:30 am Thursday 8/13
- Submitted to Blackboard by 11:59 pm Friday 8/14

6/7
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 on the course website. Each student will be responsible for reading and following changes made via announcement.

Class Conduct

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 (DS). http://ds.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. http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/

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: 7/14
- Last Day to Drop: 7/15

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
- B213 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.