

American Federal Government

POS 2041 | Credits: 3.00 | Fall 2025

August 21, 2025 – December 3, 2025

Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, 11:45 A.M. – 12:35 P.M.

Anderson Hall, Room 0034

Instructor: Juliana Mucci

Office Hours: M/W 2:30 P.M. – 4:00 P.M. (or by appt.)

[Calendly Link](#) (Also available on Canvas Homepage)

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Course Description

In this course, students will investigate how the national government is structured and how the American constitutional republic operates. It covers the philosophical and historical foundations of American government, including but not limited to the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution and all its Amendments, and the *Federalist Papers*. The course examines the branches of government and the government's laws, policies, and programs. It also examines the ways in which citizens participate in their government and the ways their government responds to citizens.

The course will address questions such as: How does government work in the United States? How do the three branches of government interact with the public and each other? What is a democracy, and how does the United States fit into this framework? What are some suggestions for how to better our institutions? Students will engage in thinking through these questions through a combination of lectures, civic discussions, readings, and exams. Ultimately, students should leave with a better understanding of how to think critically about politics and government, how to understand our political institutions, and how to engage in civic life.

Note: This syllabus is subject to change as needed. Students are required to check Canvas and their UF email regularly to ensure they maintain the most current version of the syllabus, which may include changes deadlines or assigned readings. Please note that aspects such as the course's grading scheme, learning objectives, and University policies are not subject to change.

Required Texts

Our main texts will be Greenberg et al.'s ***The Struggle for Democracy: 2024 Presidential Election Edition*** (ISBN-13: 9780138361334) and Ellis and Nelson's ***Debating Reform: Conflicting Perspectives on How to Fix the American Political System*** (4th Edition; ISBN: 9781544390604). In the course schedule below, these books will be referred to as "TSD" and "DR". These books are available for purchase in physical and digital form and through UF All Access (you must opt in to use the books this way), and whichever format you choose is acceptable.

Library West has physical copies of earlier editions of TSD available for checkout, which are perfectly acceptable to use (though it is important to note that examples will be outdated). While

it is okay for students to use earlier editions of *TSD*, I request that students use the edition of *DR* listed here, as the chapters and content differ across editions.

We will also regularly read from the **Constitution of the United States** and the *Federalist Papers* as we progress through the course. You are more than welcome to purchase your own copies of these documents, but know that links to these readings are available both in this document and through Canvas.

- [The Constitution of the United States](#)
- [The Federalist Papers](#) (selected papers are noted in the schedule below)

All other assigned readings (such as the Declaration of Independence and George Washington's Farewell Address) are linked in this document in the course schedule and will be linked on Canvas.

Materials and Supplies Fee

N/A

Student Learning Outcomes & Civic Literacy Requirement:

By the end of the course, students will be able to do the following, per the state of Florida's Civic Literacy Competencies (as required by [Florida Statute 1007.25](#)):

- Demonstrate an understanding of the basic principles and practices of the U.S.'s constitutional republic.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the nation's founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and its Amendments, and the *Federalist Papers*.
- Demonstrate knowledge of landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation, and landmark executive actions.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the history and development of the American Federal Government and its impact on law and society.
- Demonstrate an ability to apply course material to contemporary political issues and debates.
- Demonstrate the ability to engage in discussion and civil debate on American politics that are associated with multiple points of view.

General Education

This course fulfills a Social and Behavioral Sciences (S) General Education requirement, and there is no prerequisite for this course. Please note that a minimum grade of C (73%) is required to obtain the general education credit. More information on general education requirements can be found [here](#).

UF's Student Learning Outcomes for General Education courses can be found [here](#), and the Subject Area Objectives for the General Education courses can be found [here](#). To review the Subject Area Objectives for this course, please read the section for Social Science (S).

Assignments and Evaluation

Attendance (5%) and Participation (10%) in In-Class Discussion (15% in total):

Throughout the term, we will have *ten (10)* in-class discussions. These discussions will be held on Fridays, and they will center around the topics and themes that we discussed that week, including any relevant current events. Participation in the discussion will be graded on these days, and please note that attendance is included as a component (5%) of this grade, as a participation grade cannot be assessed if a student is not present for the discussion. Below is the grading rubric for discussion participation. This portion of your grade (10%) is based on the quality of your participation, including listening, preparation, and quality of contributions. Opinions held by other students and the instructor should be respected in the discussions.

	Strong (A+ to B+)	Needs Development (B to C)	Unsatisfactory (C- or lower)
Listening (15 points possible)	Actively and respectfully listens to peers and instructor. (15 – 13 points)	Actively listens most of the time, though sometimes displays lack of interest in discussion. (12 – 11 points)	Projects lack of interest or disrespect for others (including browsing other materials during class). (10 – 0 points)
Preparation (20 points possible)	Arrives fully prepared for discussion and is eager to contribute observations and questions. (20 – 17.4 points)	Sometimes arrives unprepared or with only superficial preparation. (17.4 – 14.6 points)	Little evidence of having prepared or thought about the upcoming discussion. (14.6 – 0 points)
Quality of Contributions (45 points possible)	Comments are relevant and reflect understanding and insights about content and previous remarks of other students; comments and questions frequently help move the discussion forward. (45 – 39 points)	Comments and questions are sometimes irrelevant, betray lack of preparation, or indicate a lack of attention to previous remarks of other students; sometimes advance the conversation, but sometimes do little to move it forward. (38 – 33 points)	Comments reflect little understanding of either the content or previous remarks in class; comments and questions do not advance the conversation or are actively harmful to it. (32 – 0 points)
Frequency of Participation (20 points possible)	Actively participates at appropriate times. (20 – 17.4 points)	Sometimes participates, but at other times is “tuned out.” (17.3 – 14.6 points)	Seldom participates and is generally not engaged or absent. (14.5 – 0 points)

As this grade is composed of both an attendance (5%) and participation (10%) component, the total 15% will be calculated in the following manner:

$$\left[\frac{\# \text{ Discussions Attended}}{\# \text{ Total Discussions}} \times (0.05) \right] + [\text{Participation Grade} \times (0.10)]$$

Discussion Responses (25%):

For this assignment, students will choose *two* (2) discussion topics to respond to. Students should choose the discussion debate that is the most interesting to them and that they feel the most passionate about. Please note that responses should not regurgitate the debaters' arguments. Rather, students should articulate which stance they agree with and why (or, why the student disagrees with both stances). More information about these responses will be discussed during the first class session.

	Exceeds	Proficient	Competent	Below
Analysis & Critical Thinking (75 points possible)	Synthesizes new concepts and formulates evidence-based conclusions; makes connections to readings and/or current events. Key issues fully identified. (75 – 68 points)	Evaluates and analyzes the concepts and provides some examples. Most key issues are identified. (67 – 60 points)	Understands and discusses basic concepts. Minimal use of readings and examples. Some key issues were identified. (59 – 53 points)	Gathers and understands simple concepts related to the topic; discussion superficial; few or no examples given; key issues missing. (52 – 0 points)
Conventions (25 points possible)	Few spelling or grammatical errors; well organized. Key organizing thesis present. (25 – 23 points)	Occasional spelling or grammatical errors. Some sense of a thesis statement. (22 – 20 points)	Frequent errors; thesis not clear. (19 – 17 points)	Multiple grammatical and spelling errors; no thesis present. (16 – 0 points)

Exams (60%):

We will have *three* (3) exams, and each exam is equally weighted (20% per exam). The exams will be taken in class on the following days:

- Exam 1: Friday, September 19
- Exam 2: Wednesday, October 29
- Exam 3: ** *UF Has Not Yet Assigned Date and Time of Final Exam* **

Exams will cover material from lectures, discussions, readings, and current events. The exams are *not* cumulative. Please be aware, however, that while the exams are not cumulative, some

information learned early in the semester may still be relevant and useful for understanding information covered later in the term. More information about the exams will be provided in class a week in advance of each exam date.

If You Need to Miss Class:

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in the course are consistent with university policies. See <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/> for more information regarding the University Attendance Policies.

Viewing Grades:

Students will be able to view their grades through UF's E-Learning platform, Canvas.

UF's Grading Policy

This course will follow UF's grading scheme. The following cutoffs will be used for grades:

93.0 – 100% (A)	83.0 – 86.9% (B)	73.0 – 76.9% (C)	63.0 – 66.9% (D)
90.0 – 92.9% (A-)	80.0 – 82.9% (B-)	70.0 – 72.9% (C-)	60.0 – 62.9% (D+)
87.0 – 89.9% (B+)	77.0 – 79.9% (C+)	67.0 – 69.9% (D+)	<60% (F)

Information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points can be found [here](#).

Resources Available to Students

Accommodations

Students who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

Health & Wellness Resources

If you or someone you know is struggling with any crisis, including, but not limited to, gender, sexual, racial, or domestic violence, there are many community and University of Florida resources available. Some of these include:

- U Matter, We Care: 352-392-1575, umatter@ufl.edu, or visit their [website](#)
- Counseling and Wellness Center: 352-392-1575, counseling@ufl.edu, or visit their [website](#)
- Alachua County Crisis Center's Crisis Line: 352-264-6789
- Student Health Care Center: 352-392-1161 (24/7), shcc@ufl.edu, or visit their [website](#)
- UFPD Office of Victim Services: 352-392-1111, police@ufl.edu
- UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: 352-733-0111
- GatorWell Health Promotion Services: 352-273-4450, or visit their [website](#)

Academic Resources

The resources listed below are not exhaustive of all the academic resources that are available to students, but these encapsulate those that are helpful for students seeking library support or those looking for help with writing, tutoring, and general study skills:

- Library Support: 866-281-6309, ask@ufl.libanswers.com, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>.
- Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138, <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>.
- Academic Resources: provides services like tutoring, <https://academicresources.clas.ufl.edu>.

University Policies

Academic Integrity

As members of the UF community, we are all bound by the [Honor Pledge](#). The following pledge is required or implied on all work submitted for credit:

“On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”

The Student Honor Code and Conduct Code (Regulation 4.040) specify a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code, as well as the process for reported allegations and sanctions that may be implemented. All potential violations of the code will be reported to Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. If a student is found responsible for an Honor Code violation in this course, the instructor will enter a Grade Adjustment sanction which may be up to or including failure of the course. For additional information, see <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>.

As the Honor Pledge relates to the work in this course, plagiarizing written work (which includes having AI write for you) and cheating on exams are unacceptable. In addition to harming your professional career, and especially your grade, academic dishonesty will ultimately destroy your ability to learn from this class. Honor code violations often occur when students feel rushed and overwhelmed. If this happens, do not panic, and instead reach out to me so we can address the situation together.

In-Class Recording

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures; however, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. **Please note that this means that any in-class discussions or student presentations cannot be recorded.** Students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. More information about in-class recording can be found [here](#).

Procedure for Conflict Resolution

Any classroom issues, disagreements, or grade disputes should be discussed first between the instructor and the student. If the problem cannot be resolved, please contact Dr. Ben Smith (bbsmith@ufl.edu, 352-273-2345). Be prepared to provide documentation of the problem, as well as all graded materials for the semester. Issues that cannot be resolved departmentally will

be referred to the University Ombuds Office (<http://www.ombuds.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1308) or the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1261).

UF Course Evaluation Process

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways: (1) the email they receive from GatorEvals; (2) their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals; or (3) the central portal at <https://my-ufl.bluera.com>.

Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Date	Topic	Readings
8/22	Syllabus & Course Introduction	
8/25	Democracy & American Politics	• TSD Ch. 1 • The Declaration of Independence • The Preamble to the Constitution
8/27	The Constitution, Part I	• TSD Ch. 2 • Federalist #51 • Brutus 1 (Anti-Federalist)
8/29	Discussion 1	• DR Ch. 6
9/1	** LABOR DAY, NO CLASS **	
9/3	The Constitution, Part II	• TSD Ch. 2
9/5	Discussion 2	• DR Ch. 1
9/8 – 9/10	Federalism	• TSD Ch. 3 • Federalist #39 • Revisit <i>Brutus 1</i>
9/12	Discussion 3	• DR Ch. 3
9/15 – 9/17	Structural Foundations of American Government and Politics	• TSD Ch. 4 • “The changing face of Congress in 7 charts” (Pew)
9/19	Exam 1	
9/22 – 9/24	Congress	• TSD Ch. 11 • Article I of the Constitution
9/26	Discussion 4	• DR Ch. 11
9/29 – 10/1	The Presidency	• TSD Ch. 12 • Article II of the Constitution
10/3	Discussion 5	• DR Ch. 15
10/6 – 10/8	The Courts	• TSD Ch. 14 • Article III of the Constitution
10/10	Discussion 6	• DR Ch. 3
10/13 – 10/15	The Executive Branch/Bureaucracy	• TSD Ch. 13
10/17	** HOMECOMING, NO CLASS **	
10/20 – 10/22	Civil Liberties	• TSD Ch. 15 • The Bill of Rights (Amendments 1 – 10)
10/24	Discussion 7	• DR Ch. 4
10/27	Civil Rights	• TSD Ch. 16
10/29	Exam 2	
10/31	Political Parties	• TSD Ch. 9 • Washington’s Farewell Address (1796)
11/3 – 11/5	Voting, Campaigns, & Elections	• TSD Ch. 10
11/7	Discussion 8	
11/10	Public Opinion	• TSD Ch. 5
11/12	The News Media	• TSD Ch. 6
11/14	Discussion 9	• DR Ch. 5
11/17 – 11/19	Interest Groups	• TSD Ch. 7 • Federalist #10
11/21	Discussion 10	• DR Ch. 8
11/24 – 11/28	** THANKSGIVING BREAK, NO CLASS **	
12/01	Social Movements	• TSD Ch. 8
12/03	Course Conclusion	
** UF Has Not Yet Assigned Date and Time of Final Exam **		

