

American Federal Government

POS 2041

Fall 2025

Aug 21, 2025 – Dec 3, 2025

Instructor: Jake Caldwell

Office Hours: M/W 2:00 P.M. – 3:00 P.M. (or by appt.)

Email: jacobcaldwell@ufl.edu

[Calendly Link](#)

Course Description & Goals

This course provides a college-level introduction to American Federal Government. In it, we will cover various conceptions of democracy, and how they are translated into real-life political systems in the United States. We will examine how the American constitutional republic is structured and operates, as well as the philosophical and historical foundations of American government, including but not limited to the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and all its Amendments, and the Federalist Papers. The course also examines the branches of government, the government's laws, policies, and programs, and the ways in which citizens participate in their government and how their government responds to citizens.

This course addresses questions such as: How does government work in the U.S.? How do the three branches of government interact with each other and the public? What is a democracy, and how does the U.S. fit into this framework? What are some suggestions for how to better our institutions? We will engage these questions through a combination of lectures, civil discussions, readings, and videos. Ultimately, students should leave with a better understanding of how to engage in civic life, the ability to think critically about politics, and how to understand our institutions and their functions.

Note: Students are required to check Canvas Announcements and their UF email regularly to ensure they maintain the most current version of the syllabus and assignment deadlines.

Required Texts

- *The Struggle for Democracy, the 2024 Presidential Election Update*, 14th Edition by Greenberg and Page (available via UF All Access)
- The Constitution of the United States: <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/>
- The Federalist Papers: <https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/full-text>
- The Declaration of Independence: <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>
- All other readings will be distributed through Canvas.

Course Objectives: Student Learning Outcomes & Civic Literacy Competencies

Per the State of Florida's Civic Literacy Competencies ([Florida Statute 1007.25](#)), by the end of the course, students should demonstrate the following:

- Understanding of the basic principles and practices of America's constitutional republic.
- Knowledge of the nation's founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and its Amendments, and *The Federalist Papers*.
- Knowledge of landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation, and landmark executive actions.
- Knowledge of the history and development of the American Federal Government and its impact on law and society.
- The ability to apply course material to contemporary political issues and debates.
- 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 Behavior Sciences (S) General Education requirement. Please note that a minimum grade of C (73%) is required for a general education credit. More information on general education requirements can be found at [this link](#).

How the Class Works

Modules:

This course is organized into modules, with each week containing one module. Modules contain lecture videos, readings, and assignments. For each module, students are required to first read the textbook chapter, followed by the supplementary reading, watch any additional videos assigned, and then watch the lectures. Each module contains one weekly assignment. Some modules throughout the semester will also be discussion weeks (please see the course schedule below for which weeks these are). During the weeks in which discussions are held, students should familiarize themselves with the course material for that week *before* attending a discussion. Lastly, as this course is asynchronous, students are free to complete the assigned readings, watch the lecture videos, and do their assignments whenever and at whatever pace suits them, but all assignments for each week are due on **Sunday by 11:59 P.M. Eastern Time**.

Assignment Due Dates:

All quizzes and written assignments are due by 11:59 P.M. Eastern Time on Sunday at the conclusion of each module. Each exam is only offered for one day (Exam 1: September 12, Exam 2: October 16, Exam 3: December 3), and the entire exam must be taken at once, in a single sitting. If you are not available on the day of the exam due to an excused absence, you will be given a retake in the same format (see make-up policy directly below). Please communicate with me in advance if you know that you will be unavailable on an exam day.

Make-Up Policy

Make-up exams will be given in the same format as the original exam for students with excused absences. **There will be no makeup exams for unexcused absences.** Excused absences require documentation from a physician, government agency, court, university, or other documentation on a case-by-case basis.

If a student is seeking an excused absence for a missed essay, quiz, discussion section, or other assignment, the documentation must indicate that the student is unable to perform their coursework **for the entire week**. Students with unexcused absences from discussion will receive a zero for that week. Late work without an excused absence will not be accepted.

Graded Work

Graded Components

- Attendance in discussion sections: 5%
- Participation in discussion sections: 10%
- Quizzes: 10%
- Writing Assignments: 15%
- Current Event Reactions: 15%
- Exam 1: 15%
- Exam 2: 15%
- Exam 3: 15%

Attendance and Participation in Discussion Sections (5% and 10%)

Discussion sections will be held as part of this course to facilitate civil discussions related to the material covered. **Students must attend 7 (seven) discussions via Zoom throughout the semester. To accommodate students with irregular schedules, I also accept participation at Unify America's Civic Gym for a maximum of three of seven discussion credits (see Canvas page).** The schedule for class discussions can be found in the schedule below and on the Canvas page. Students are required to actively use their audio or chat feature in each discussion section and are required to stay on Zoom for the duration of the discussion. Video is welcomed, but not required. Student comments during discussions must be respectful and stay relevant to the topic, based on readings and other materials.

Please be aware that **this course's synchronous discussion component is a requirement of the state of Florida as per section 1007.25(4)(b), Florida Statutes.** The addition of synchronous discussions into this asynchronous course is a requirement of the state and university. More information on Civic Literacy Requirements can be found here: <https://undergrad.ua.ufl.edu/for-students/civic-literacy-requirement/faq/>.

The schedule for these discussions can be found in this syllabus in the schedule below, in the Canvas calendar, and in the Modules that coincide with a discussion week. For each discussion week I host, there will be an option to attend on Monday at 7:00 P.M. Eastern Time and on Wednesday at 10:00 A.M. Eastern Time. These two discussions will be identical (that is, students will not receive credit for attending both in one week). The reason I hold two per discussion week is to ensure that students have a choice over when to attend. Once finalized, information regarding the Unify America Civic Gym will be added to the Canvas page. As a reminder, students may attend a combination of my discussions and the Unify America Civic Gym discussions to reach their required

7 for the semester. For more information on discussion options, please be sure to regularly check the Canvas Announcements! Students are required to actively use their audio or chat feature in each discussion section and are required to stay on Zoom for the duration of the discussion. Video is welcomed, but not required. Student comments during discussions must be respectful and stay relevant to the topic, based on readings and other materials.

Quizzes (10%)

Timed quizzes will be assigned throughout the semester. Quizzes will cover assigned readings and lectures. There are currently 5 (five) quizzes, but the total number of quizzes is subject to change at any time.

Writing Assignments and Current Event Reactions (15% and 15%)

There will be 3 (three) essays throughout the semester. Each writing assignment will require that students respond to a prompt in that week's module. Essays must be between 1.5 to 2 pages (450 – 600 words) double-spaced in length and submitted as a Microsoft Word or PDF document in 12-point font, Times New Roman (or another comparable font) with 1-inch margins. UF students can download the entire Microsoft Office suite, including Microsoft Word, free of charge at this link: <https://it.ufl.edu/services/gatorcloud-microsoftoffice-online>.

In addition to these essays, there will be 4 (four) current event reactions. These are short (150 – 300 words) analyses of current events through the lens of the course. Here is a helpful guide on how to select reputable news sources: <https://libguides.ucmerced.edu/news/reputable>.

Also worth noting is that UF students can get free online New York Times, Wall Street Journal, and Economist subscriptions at this link: <https://businesslibrary.uflib.ufl.edu/wsj-nyt-economist>.

Exams (45%)

There will be 3 (three) equally weighted exams throughout the course. The exams will consist of multiple-choice questions. The exams are not cumulative. A schedule of the exams and what content they will cover can be found below:

- Exam 1 (September 12): Weeks 1 – 4
- Exam 2 (October 16): Weeks 5 – 9
- Exam 3 (December 3): Weeks 10 – 16

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback professionally and respectfully is available at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email that they will receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluer.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

UF Grading Scale

See the UF Catalog's "[Grades and Grading Policies](#)" for information on how UF assigns grade points.

Note: A minimum grade of C is required to earn General Education credit.

Letter Grade	Number Grade
A	100-92.5
A-	92.4-89.5
B+	89.4-86.5
B	86.4-82.5
B-	82.4-79.5
C+	79.4-76.5
C	76.4-72.5
C-	72.4-69.5
D+	69.4-66.5
D	66.4-62.5
D-	62.4-59.5
E	59.4-0

University Policies and Resources

Attendance policy

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

Students requiring accommodation

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/students/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.

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
3. The central portal at <https://my-ufl.bluer.com>

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

University Honesty Policy

University of Florida students are bound by the Honor Pledge. On all work submitted for credit by a student, the following pledge is required or implied: "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) specifies 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/>.

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. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media,

book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party-note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

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](tel: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](tel:352-392-1308)) or the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu>; [352-392-1261](tel:352-392-1261)).

Resources available to students

Health and Wellness

- U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, [352-392-1575](tel:352-392-1575), or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- Counseling and Wellness Center: [Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call [352-392-1575](tel:352-392-1575) for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- Student Health Care Center: Call [352-392-1161](tel:352-392-1161) for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or [visit the Student Health Care Center website](#).
- University Police Department: Visit [UF Police Department website](#) or call [352-392-1111](tel:352-392-1111) (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
- UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call [352-733-0111](tel:352-733-0111) or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the [UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).
- GatorWell Health Promotion Services: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the [GatorWell website](#) or call [352-273-4450](tel:352-273-4450).

Academic Resources

- E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at [352-392-4357](tel:352-392-4357) or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- [Career Connections Center](#): Reitz Union Suite 1300, [352-392-1601](tel:352-392-1601). Career assistance and counseling services.
- [Library Support](#): Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources. Call [866-281-6309](tel:866-281-6309) or email ask@ufl.libanswers.com for more information.

- [Teaching Center](#): 1317 Turlington Hall, Call [352-392-2010](tel:352-392-2010), or to make a private appointment: [352-392-6420](tel:352-392-6420). Email contact: teaching-center@ufl.edu. General study skills and tutoring.
- [Writing Studio](#): Daytime (9:30am-3:30pm): 2215 Turlington Hall, [352-846-1138](tel:352-846-1138) | Evening (5:00pm-7:00pm): 1545 W University Avenue (Library West, Rm. 339). Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
- Academic Complaints: Office of the Ombuds; [Visit the Complaint Portal webpage for more information](#).
- Enrollment Management Complaints (Registrar, Financial Aid, Admissions): [View the Student Complaint Procedure webpage for more information](#).

Date	Topic	Readings/Preparation	Work Due
Week 1: Aug 21-22	Syllabus Overview & Democracy and American Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Syllabus “Welcome to the Course” Canvas Page TSD Chapter 1 <i>The Declaration of Independence</i> 	<u>Quiz 1</u>
Week 2: Aug 25-29	The Constitution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSD Chapter 2 Federalist 10 & 51 Scalia Reading, “Constitutional Interpretation the Old-Fashion Way” Marshall Reading, “The Constitution’s Bicentennial: Commemorating the Wrong Document?” 	<u>Quiz 2</u> <u>Discussion Week 1</u>
Week 3: Sep 2-5	Federalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSD Chapter 3 Intro of <i>Marijuana Federalism</i>, Adler 	<u>Current Event Reaction 1</u>
Week 4: Sep 8-12	The Structural Foundations of American Government & Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSD Chapter 4 	Exam 1: September 12
Week 5: Sep 15-19	Congress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSD Chapter 11 Article I of Constitution Gallagher, “How to Save Congress” Cillizza Reading, “People hate Congress. But most incumbents get re-elected. What gives?” 	<u>Essay 1</u> <u>Discussion Week 2</u>
Week 6: Sep 22-26	The Presidency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSD Chapter 12 Article II of Constitution Klein, “Why the president becomes more powerful when Congress fails” 	<u>Quiz 3</u>
Week 7: Sep 29- Oct 3	The Executive Branch (Bureaucracy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSD Chapter 13 Schulman, “The United States needs more bureaucracy, not less” 	<u>Quiz 4</u> <u>Discussion Week 3</u>
Week 8: Oct 6-10	The Courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSD Chapter 14 Article III of the Constitution Bazelon et al, "How to Fix the Supreme Court" 	<u>Current Event Reaction 2:</u> <u>Discussion 4</u>

Week 9: Oct 13-17	Civil Liberties & Civil Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSD Chapters 15 & 16 The Bill of Rights (Amendments 1-10 of the Constitution) 	Exam 2: October 16
Week 10: Oct 20-24	Political Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSD Chapter 9 Cohen Reading, “The two-party system is here to stay” Pew Research Center Reading, “As Partisan Hostility Grows, Signs of Frustration With the Two-Party System” Greenblatt Reading, “Why Partisans Can’t Kick the Hypocrisy Habit” 	<u>Current Event Reaction 3:</u> <u>Discussion Week 5</u>
Week 11: Oct 27-31	Voting, Campaigns, & Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSD, Chapter 10 Drutman, “This voting reform solves 2 of America’s biggest political problems” 	<u>Quiz 5</u> <u>Discussion Week 6:</u>
Week 12: Nov 3-7	Public Opinion & The News Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSD Chapters 5 & 6 Gorvett Reading, “How the news changes the way we think and behave” Zhang & Igielnik, “How Americans Feel about Tariffs: Trump loves tariffs. Do Americans? It depends on how pollsters ask the question.” 	<u>Current Event Reaction 4</u>
Week 13: Nov 10. 12-14	Interest Groups & Social Movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSD Chapters 7 & 8 Finger, “Interest groups’ influence on policy comes through the presence of faithful legislative allies – not gifts to their campaigns” 	<u>Essay 2</u>
Week 14: Nov 17-21	Domestic & Foreign Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TSD Chapters 17 & 18 	<u>Discussion Week 7</u>
Week 15: Nov 24-28	Thanksgiving Break		
Week 16: Dec 1-3	Where We Go From Here	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBD 	Exam 3: December 3