

POS 2041: American Federal Government

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Office Hours: Tuesdays on Zoom from 1:00 PM-3:00 PM.

Schedule an appointment using Calendly [here](#)

Teaching Assistant: Roshaun Colvin

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 1-2 PM by appointment

Required Textbooks:

- *The Struggle for Democracy, 2020 Presidential Election Edition*, 13th Edition by Greenberg and Page, ISBN: 9780137585137
- All other readings will be distributed through Canvas

Purpose of Course:

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?

In this course, we will engage in thinking through these questions through a combination of lectures, civic discussions, videos, and readings. Ultimately, students should leave with a better understanding of how to engage in civic life, how to critically think about politics, and how to understand our institutions. To find our own individual answers to these questions, we must engage in the course material and weekly synchronous discussions. Students who do not read the assigned readings, view the assigned lectures, and interact during the course discussions should not expect to understand American government or receive a good grade for this course.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- Explain the basic historical, institutional, cultural, behavioral, and economic underpinnings of American politics and government.
- Identify and understand the basic roles of the constitutional framework, formal institutions, elections and public opinion, and linkage institutions in American politics and government.
- Begin to understand how the distributions of political and economic power in the United States are related.
- Think critically about American politics and, to a lesser extent, policy.
- Know how to effectively participate in American civic life.

This course covers these Civic Literacy Competencies (as required by Florida Statute 1007.25):

1. Understanding of the basic principles and practices of American democracy and how they are applied in our republican form of government.
2. An understanding of the United States Constitution and its application.

3. Knowledge of the founding documents and how they have shaped the nature and functions of our institutions of self-government
4. An understanding of landmark Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation and landmark executive actions and their impact on law and society.
5. Opportunities to engage synchronously in political discussions and civil debates with multiple points of view and to master the ability to synthesize information that informs civic decision-making

This course fulfills the Social Sciences General Education Requirement. A grade of a “C” or above is required to fulfill this requirement.

As per the UF Undergraduate Affairs website:

“Social and behavioral science courses provide instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and underlying theory or methodologies used in the social and behavioral sciences. Students will learn to identify, describe and explain social institutions, structures or processes. These courses emphasize the effective application of accepted problem-solving techniques. Students will apply formal and informal qualitative or quantitative analysis to examine the processes and means by which individuals make personal and group decisions, as well as the evaluation of opinions, outcomes or human behavior. Students are expected to assess and analyze ethical perspectives in individual and societal decisions.”

Course Policies:

Modules:

The course will be organized into modules, with each week containing one module. These will contain lectures, videos, readings, and assignments. Students are required to read and watch all content within each module. Assignments for the week due on each Sunday, at 11:59 PM Eastern Time.

Required Reading, Lectures, and Discussion Sections:

For each module, students are required to first read the textbook chapter, followed by the supplementary reading, any additional videos, and then watch the lectures. Students are required to familiarize themselves with all course material before the discussion section for the week. Exams contain questions about assigned readings, lectures, and discussion topics, which means that there may be questions from a reading that is not covered in lecture, or vice versa.

Quiz and Exam Policy:

All quizzes and written assignments are due by 11:59 Eastern Time on the Sunday of each module. Each exam is only offered for one day (Exam 1: July 13, Exam 2: August 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 the instructor in advance if you know you are unavailable on an exam day. You must utilize the Respondus Lockdown browser during quizzes and exams.

Make-Up Policy

Makeup exams will be given in the same format as the original exam for students with excused absences. **There will be no make-up 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. For essays, quizzes, and current event reactions, one letter grade will be subtracted per day of tardiness.

Grades

- Attendance in discussion sections: 10%
- Participation in discussion sections: 15%
- Quizzes: 10%
- Writing Assignments: 30%
- Exam 1: 15%
- Exam 2: 20%

Attendance and Participation in Discussion Sections:

Students must attend one Zoom discussion per week. Discussion sections will be held EVERY week of the semester (Zoom links will be posted in the modules). Attendance will be tracked in each synchronous discussion section, so students are not required to attend during the same slot each week they are held. Excused absences with proper documentation will not affect a student's final attendance grade, but the documentation must indicate the student is unable to attend discussion sections virtually for all the days they are held.

Students are required to actively participate using their audio or the chat feature in each discussion section they attend. Video is not required, but it is more than welcomed. Student comments during discussion sections must be relevant to the topic being discussed, based at least partly on readings and other material assigned that week, and respectful of other students and the instructor or TA.

Days and times when discussion sections will be held are as follows (all times are EST, New York time):

Discussions on Wednesdays 7:00-8:00 PM with Kristen Gary

Discussions on Fridays from 1:00-2:00 PM with Roshaun Colvin

This synchronous discussion 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.aa.ufl.edu/for-students/civic-literacy-requirement/faq/>.

Quizzes:

Timed quizzes will be assigned throughout the semester. Quizzes will cover assigned readings and lectures. There are currently 2 (two) quizzes, but the total number of quizzes is subject to change at any time.

Writing Assignments:

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

Exams:

There will be two (2) exams in the course. The exams will be a mix of multiple choice, true or false, and fill-in-the-blank. Exam 1 will cover weeks 1-3 and Exam 2 will cover weeks 3-5.

Exams are not cumulative.

Class Schedule

June 30-July 4, 2025Week 1: Syllabus, Democracy in America, and the Constitution

- Chapters 1 & 2
- *Federalist* 51
- Justice Scalia, "Constitutional Interpretation the Old-Fashioned Way"
- Frederick Douglass, "What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?"

July 7 –11, 2025Week 2: Federalism, Civil Rights, and Civil Liberties

- Textbook Chapters 3, 15, 16
- *Federalist* 10
- Breyer, "Active Liberty"

July 14- 18, 2025Week 3: Linkage Institutions: Public Opinion, the Media, and Interest Groups

- Textbook Chapters 5, 6, 7
- TBD

July 21-25, 2025Week 4: Parties and Elections

- Textbook Chapters 9, 10
- Benoit, "Duverger's Law and the Study of Electoral Systems"

July 28- Aug 1, 2025Week 5: The Presidency, Congress, and Policymaking

- Textbooks Chapters 11, 12, 17
- Klein, "Why the president becomes more powerful when Congress fails"

Aug 4-8, 2025Week 6: The Supreme Court and the Bureaucracy

- Textbook Chapters 13, 14
- Bazelon, et al, “How to Fix the Supreme Court”

Disclaimer: Several articles from news sites are linked as weekly reading. The usage of these texts does not indicate endorsement of the author, nor does it indicate endorsement of the policy proposals therein. These texts are being used to spark conversation and thoughtful engagement with the textbook. Furthermore, this syllabus represents the instructor’s current plans and objectives. As we go through the semester, those plans may need to change. Such changes, communicated clearly, are not unusual and should be expected.

UF Policies:

Controversial Material in Classrooms

People learn best when they are encouraged to ask questions and express their diverse opinions on course content, which may include images, texts, data, and theories from across the disciplines. This is especially true in courses that deal with provocative or contemporary issues. UF offers many such courses, in which students encounter concepts of race, color, sex, and/or national origin. We teach these important issues because understanding them is essential for anyone who seeks to make economic, cultural, and societal contributions to today’s complex world. With this in mind, we do not limit access to, or classroom discussion of, facts, ideas, and opinions—including those that some may find uncomfortable, unwelcome, disagreeable, or even offensive. In response to challenging material, students and instructors are encouraged to ask honest questions and thoughtfully engage one another’s ideas. But hostility, disruptive and disrespectful behavior, and provocation for provocation’s sake have no place in a classroom; reasonable people disagree reasonably. These guidelines can help instructors and students as they work together to fulfill the mission of the University of Florida, which includes the exploration of intellectual boundaries, the creation of new knowledge and the pursuit of new ideas.

Registration of Student Complaints

If students have concerns about classroom issues, disagreements or grades, their first point of contact is the classroom instructor whose contact information appears on the syllabus. If the problem cannot be resolved, the student should email the next departmental contact: in classes with TAs, this is the instructor of record, in classes without TAs, this may be the departmental course coordinator or the department chair. Their contact information can be found on the syllabus or on the program’s website at <https://polisci.ufl.edu/>. That email should include a clear description of the student’s concern, and any supporting documents. Most concerns are resolved at this level. If a resolution cannot be reached at the departmental level, the student will be referred to the Office of the UF Ombuds <https://www.ombuds.ufl.edu>.

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office. Information about accommodation letters and testing accommodations can be found at <https://disability.ufl.edu/> (look for the “Accommodation Letters” and “Accommodated Testing Request” buttons). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodations. You must submit this documentation prior to submitting assignments or taking the exams if you wish receive accommodations for those assignments and exams. Accommodations are not retroactive,

so students should contact the office as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Class Recordings

Students are allowed to record audio/video of class lectures for: personal educational use, a complaint to the university, or as evidence in a civil or criminal proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Publication or transmission without written permission of the instructor is prohibited, which includes sharing with other students or online uploads to third party sites. The permission to record class lectures does not extend to activities that involve student presentations or discussions.

Software Use

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Student Privacy

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. For more information, please see:
<http://registrar.ufl.edu/catalog0910/policies/regulationferpa.html>

Campus Resources:

U Matter, We Care:

If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352 392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.

Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc>, and 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS)

Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.

University Police Department at 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies), or

<http://www.police.ufl.edu/>. ***Academic Resources***

E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to Learning-support@ufl.edu. <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>.

Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling. <https://www.crc.ufl.edu/>.

Library Support, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <https://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>.

Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>.

Student Complaints Campus: https://www.dso.ufl.edu/documents/UF_Complaints_policy.pdf.

On-Line Students Complaints: <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/student-complaint-process>