

American Federal Government

POS 2041 Class 15867

Lecture Periods: Tuesdays, Periods 5-6; 11:45 am – 1:40 pm

Thursdays, Period 6; 12:50 pm – 1:40 pm

Location: Weimer 1070

Academic Term: Spring 2023

Instructor:

Michael D. Martinez

martinez@ufl.edu

(352) 273-2363

208 Anderson Hall

Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:00 – 4:00 pm

Office Hour appointments available at <https://calendly.com/martinez-uf>

Office hour appointments can be requested as in-person, Zoom, or by phone.

Course Description:

What is democracy, and how democratic are American political institutions? How do political institutions help societies solve classical political questions? What is political power, and how concentrated is it in the United States relative to other democracies? How resistant to change is the United States Constitution, relative to other national constitutions? Should it be easier to amend the Constitution? Are American political parties relatively strong or weak, and what difference does that make? Why do we have an Electoral College, and who benefits from it? Can Congress effectively represent and effectively legislate at the same time? What is the role of an unelected judiciary in a democracy? Are federal bureaucrats responsive to political institutions, and should they be?

This course includes both lectures and discussions that provide opportunities for students 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 decisionmaking.

This course satisfies a Social and Behavioral Sciences (S) General Education requirement.

Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes

At the end of this course, students will be expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes in content, communication and critical thinking:

Content: Students will acquire a basic knowledge of the component elements of a democracy, the structural foundations of American politics, including the Constitution, the fragmentation of political power (horizontally and vertically), America's political culture, economic development, and the role of the US in the international system; the multiple dimensions of public opinion, and which parts of public opinion are reflected through linkage institutions, including the media,

interest groups, social movements, political parties, and the electoral system; institutions of Congress, the presidency, the judiciary, and the federal bureaucracy.

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.
- Achievement of this learning outcome will be assessed through the two exams and quizzes..

Communication: Students will communicate knowledge, ideas and reasoning clearly and effectively in written and oral forms.

- Achievement of this learning outcome will be assessed through the two exams (written communication) and discussion (oral communication).

Critical Thinking: Students will analyze information carefully and logically from multiple perspectives

- Some weekly assignments and class discussion will be used to assess how well students apply general principles to current issues and debates in American politics.

Course Pre-Requisites / Co-Requisites:

None.

Required Books:

Greenberg, Edward and Benjamin Page. 2021. *The Struggle for Democracy: 2020 Presidential Election Edition (Thirteenth Edition; ISBN 9780136901051)*. This text argues that policy results from a combination of structural, political, and governmental effects. Greenberg and Page also argue that American democracy is evolutionary, and offer numerous comparisons to other political systems.

Ellis, Richard J. and Michael Nelson. 2019. *Debating Reform: Conflicting Perspectives on How to Fix the American Political System. (Fourth Edition; ISBN: 9781544390598)* This reader looks at key questions about reforming political institutions, with each pro or con essay considering a concrete proposal for reforming the political system. Our discussions based on these essays will explore how political institutions can be made to work better.

Both books are available in either paperback or electronic formats. Either format is acceptable.

Other Required Readings:

Periodically, I will assign articles from [*The New York Times*](#) or [*The Wall Street Journal*](#) that are relevant to the topics that we are discussing. Those articles may be discussed in lecture or in discussion section, and should be considered required reading for an upcoming test or discussion section. Announcements and links will be provided on Canvas. UF students have free digital subscriptions to both (courtesy of the Provost's Office and Student Government).

- For access to the NYT subscription, go to my.ufl.edu. After signing in, click on "Main Menu," then click on "Quick Links" and finally click on "NY Times." From there, simply follow the directions. Please use your ufl.edu email address when signing up.
- To activate your Wall Street Journal subscription, go to <https://partner.wsj.com/enter-redemption-code/FLA043p2wca>

Other required readings will be made available on Canvas.

optional REVEL electronic package

Pearson Higher Education includes access to Revel (an electronic package to accompany the Greenberg and Page text) at no additional cost to students. It is also available as a stand alone product (without the printed text) for \$70. **Revel is not required for this class, but you may use it as a study guide (or just as an electronic version of the text) if you wish.** Revel includes the entire textbook (in both text and audio), plus some videos and simulations, short quizzes, key word reviews, and chapter exams to help students prepare for exams. If you wish to use Revel, here is how to register:

1. Visit this link: <https://console.pearson.com/enrollment/jjt2fc>
2. Sign in with your Pearson Account. You can either: sign in with an existing Pearson username and password OR create a new Pearson account if this is your first Pearson digital product.
3. Choose your course under 'My Courses' and choose an access option: redeem an access code that you got with the purchase of the textbook or you may purchase access online. There is a free trial if you are waiting for financial aid.

You may wish to bookmark <https://console.pearson.com> to easily access your materials. Pearson recommends using the latest version of Chrome, Firefox, or Safari with this digital product.

Again, Revel is not required for this course. No extra credit for doing the assignments in Revel, and no penalty for not doing them. But some students may prefer the convenience of an electronic text, and find the extras and assignments interesting or helpful as a study aide.

Normal Rhythm

Our normal rhythm will be

- Tuesdays will usually be primarily lectures. During lectures, I will present the basic structure of various aspects of the American political system, and I will often provide contrasts and/or critiques of the American political system from a variety of perspectives.
- A weekly quiz, usually due at 11:59 pm on Wednesdays on Canvas, will cover the major concepts in the text and other readings.
- A weekly assignment, also usually due at 11:59 pm on Wednesdays on Canvas, which may be a short writing assignment or short answer assignment based on accessing materials available on the web.
- Discussions on Thursdays will be focused on discussions of weekly readings, assignments, and current applications.

Evaluation

Midterm Exam (Tuesday, March 7, 11:45 am – 1:40 pm, Weimer 1070)	25%
Final Exam (Thursday, May 4; 10:00 am – 12 Noon, Weimer 1070)	30%
Weekly assignments on Canvas (usually due at 11:59 pm on Wednesdays)	15%
Weekly quizzes on Canvas (usually due at 11:59 pm on Wednesdays)	15%
Attendance	5%
Participation	10%
Total	100%

Grading Policy

Lower boundaries for grades are:

			B+	85.0%		C+	75.0%		D+	65.0%
A	91.0%		B	81.0%		C	71.0%		D	61.0%
A-	88.0%		B-	78.0%		C-	68.0%		D-	58.0%

Note that 84.97% is less than 85.0%, and is therefore a "B".

More information on UF grading policy may be found at: [Grades and Grading Policies](#)

Midterm Exam (25%) and Final Exam (30%)

There will be two examinations. Each will be a combination of true-false justify (short answers) and essay. Both exams will cover lecture, readings, completed assignments, and articles discussed in class.

It is important that you show up on exam day. Absences from exams may be excused with *verifiable* documentation of illness, quarantine, serious family emergencies, special curricular requirements (e.g., professional conferences), military obligation, legal obligation (e.g., jury duty or subpoena), severe weather conditions (as verified by the National Weather Service), religious holidays, and participation in official university activities. Make-up essay exams will be scheduled for students who provide verifiable documentation of an excused absence. Students must provide advance notice of absences due to religious observances, but those absences do not require verifiable documentation.

The date and time for the final exam were assigned to this class by the UF Registrar in order to assure that all students have time to prepare for all of their exams and avoid exam conflicts. Please advise parents, spouses, fairy godparents, and others who may be making travel plans for you of your final exam schedule. If you have unavoidable plans that prevent you from taking the final exam on May 4, you should consider dropping the course or registering for a different section of the course.

Please note that sending or receiving messages (including messages via electronic text or phone) during an exam is considered cheating, and will result in an immediate failure on that examination. Do not forget to turn off your cellphone before a test. If you do forget and the cellphone rings, don't answer it. Surrender the phone to an exam proctor, and you can pick it up after the exam is over.

Weekly assignments (15%)

Weekly assignments will generally be due on usually due at 11:59 pm on Wednesdays, and will often form the basis of class discussion on Thursdays. Assignments may take a variety of formats, including (1) a short reaction paper to one or more of the readings, (2) a reflection on how a contemporary political issue or event is related to the readings or lecture, (3) preparation of questions for guest speakers, or (4) a data collection task that can be completed online that is related to one or more of the readings or a point made in lecture.

Weekly quizzes (15%)

Weekly quizzes will generally be due on usually due at 11:59 pm on Wednesdays, and are intended to ensure that students are keeping up with the lectures and readings.

Attendance (5%)

Regular attendance is expected, as [consistent with University policy](#). If you have an aversion to attending class right after lunch (or ever), I encourage you to find an alternative class.

Students who can reasonably anticipate an absence must inform the instructor by email or Canvas message as soon as practical and prior to the anticipated absence.

Participation (10%)

This portion of the grade will be based on the quality of your participation in class discussions, including listening, preparation, quality of contributions, impact on the class, and frequency of participation. Opinions held by other students, the instructor, and the guest speakers should be respected in discussion, and conversations that do not contribute to the discussion should be held at minimum, if at all. Regular attendance is expected, in accordance with [University policy](#) and in the spirit of Honors students helping each other learn through respectful, engaged, and informed discussion with one another, the instructor, and the guest speakers.

	Strong	Needs Development	Unsatisfactory
Listening	Actively and respectfully listens to peers and instructor	Sometimes displays lack of interest in comments of others	Projects lack of interest or disrespect for others (including browsing other materials during class)
Preparation	Arrives fully prepared with all assignments completed, and notes on reading, observations, questions	Sometimes arrives unprepared or with only superficial preparation	Little evidence of having completed or thought about assigned material
Quality of contributions	Comments are relevant and reflect understanding of assignments, previous remarks of other students, and insights about assigned material	Comments sometimes irrelevant, betray lack of preparation, or indicate lack of attention to previous remarks of other students	Comments reflect little understanding of either the assignment or previous remarks in class
Impact on class	Comments frequently help move class discussion forward	Comments sometimes advance the conversation, but sometimes do little to move it forward	Comments do not advance the conversation or are actively harmful to it
Frequency of participation	Actively participates at appropriate times	Sometimes participates but at other times is "tuned out"	Seldom participates and is generally not engaged or absent

Grading scale for participation component:

- A - Strong in most categories
- B - Participation is strong in some categories but needs development in others
- C - Need for development in most categories
- D - Typically unsatisfactory in several categories
- E - Unsatisfactory in nearly all.

Cell phones (and cookies)

Please silence and do not answer cell phones during class. If a cell phone rings audibly during class, the owner of the phone will be required to bring cookies or alternative healthy treats for all class participants (including the instructor) at the next class meeting.

Recordings

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. *In such a proceeding, the recording may be used as evidence either in support of or against the interests of the person making the recording.* 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 class discussions, 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 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](#).

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](#). 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.

Course Evaluation

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 in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

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](#) 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 in this class.

As a reminder, UF’s policy on plagiarism prohibits “reuse of the Student’s own submitted work, or the simultaneous submission of the Student’s own work, without the full and clear acknowledgment and permission of the Faculty to whom it is submitted.” If you are working on a project that might partially satisfy requirements in multiple classes, please consult with me and with the other professor(s) *prior* to starting your work. We will seek to determine the degree to which the distinct components of your project meet (or do not meet) the separate course requirements, and advise you accordingly. I will want to see the other course requirement/assignment.

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 the [Notification to Students of FERPA Rights](#).

Campus Resources:

Health and Wellness

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:** 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 police.ufl.edu.

Academic Resources

- [E-learning technical support](#), 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to Learning-support@ufl.edu.
- [Career Connections Center](#), Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling.
- [Library Support](#), 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.
- [Writing Studio](#), 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Course Schedule

The following is provided as a guideline to the course. I reserve the right to make adjustments to the calendar if needed, delay particular assignments, or to change them to optional. I will add links to short articles in the electronic media from time to time.

Seq	Dates	Topics	<i>Struggle</i> Chapter(s)
	January 10	Introduction to the course	
	<i>January 12</i>	<i>No class: Southern Political Science Association Meetings</i>	
1	January 17-19	Political Power: Who Governs?	1
2	January 24-26	Constitution: America's Founding Compromise	2
3	January 31-Feb 2	Federalism: Vertical fragmentation	3
4	February 7-9	Structural Foundations: How Well Developed is the United States?	4
5	February 14-16	Public Opinion and Media: Are We Polarized? If so, is it the Media's Fault?	5 and 6
6	February 21-23	Interest Groups: What Accent the Heavenly Chorus?	7
7	February 28- March 2	Social Movements: Grassroots or Astroturf?	8
	<i>March 7</i>	<i>Midterm Exam</i>	
	<i>March 9</i>	<i>Midterm Exam debrief</i>	
	<i>March 14-16</i>	<i>Give me a (spring) break!</i>	
8	March 21-23	Political Parties and Elections: Why Did Al Gore Win an Oscar instead of the Presidency?	9 and 10
9	March 28-30	Congress: Do We (Sort of) Love our Congress(wom)man, but Hate Congress?	11
10	April 4 - 6	Presidency: Are there really Two Presidencies?	12
11	April 11 - 13	Bureaucracy: Is our Bureaucracy Tyrannical?	13
12	April 18 - 20	Judiciary: Do Unelected Judges Preserve Democracy?	14
13	April 25	Civil Rights: The Struggle Continues	16
	<i>May 4, 10:00 am to Noon</i>	<i>Final Exam</i>	