POLS 1101: Introduction to American Government
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Course Information: Office Hours:
M/W 1:15-2:30 M/W 2:30-3:30
Room 308 and by appointment
Shared Instructor Space

“You didn’t choose your legislators, they chose you” - Martin Dyckman

WARNING: You will be expected to learn in this course! You will be challenged, but you will
become a better student and a critical thinker. You will be required to actively participate in the
learning process and to speak in class. We will cover some controversial topics in this course and at
times will use materials that may have some coarse language. If you have an issue with any of this,
please find a more suitable section. There are sections in which this course is bland but easily
digestible, where you will not be challenged to think, and where you can hide or fail to show up in
class at all. This is NOT one of those sections! On the plus side, you will (sometimes at least) enjoy
coming to class and you will be evaluated using a wide-range of assessment techniques designed to
put your academic success squarely within your own hands. AND you will leave with a deep
appreciation of American government. Oh, and there will be pie and punch!*

Course Description

An intensive examination of the Constitution and the three governmental divisions. The course
includes a study of the national government in its relation to the states. Examples from the
government of Georgia are included.

This course can be used in Area E in the core curriculum.

This course fulfills the Georgia and U.S. Constitution and History requirement.

This course fulfills the U.S. Perspectives Learning Outcome

*no pie or punch will be provided by the instructor

Course Goals

This course is designed to provide a broad understanding of the American political system and
contemporary politics. Governmental policies and the politicians elected to debate and enact
them affect every facet of our lives. From healthcare and immigration, to climate change and
energy policies, decisions being made in Washington D.C. today will affect you and your
children for decades to come. As such, it is prudent for college students to develop a working
knowledge of the American political system to become civically engaged and capable of making informed political decisions.

Course Details

The course begins with an explanation of the ‘logic’ of American politics. Why do people need political systems to enable collective decision making? An examination of the Constitution and the fight to ratify it provides the student with a historical and theoretical framework by which to understand America’s unique style of democracy. The three major institutions of government are dissected: the presidency, congress, and the federal judiciary. The last part of the course focuses on the public’s influence over national policy by examining the electoral system and the role that public opinion, political parties, interest groups and the media play in shaping individual and collective vote decisions. In addition, special attention will be paid to Georgia state politics.

Course Objectives (Expected Outcomes)

By the time students have finished this course, they should be able to:

- Analyze the interaction of political actors and institutions in the United States and their interactions with global actors and forces.
- Analyze the historical and philosophical roots of America’s system of government and the Constitution.
- Show understanding of Georgia’s history and government, including current issues in Georgia politics.
- Formulate and defend logical arguments in discussing a variety of contemporary political issues.
- Examine the effects of cultural differences and economic interests of political actors within the United States and between the United States and other global actors.
- Assess the accuracy, completeness and potential bias of sources of information pertaining to politics and government in the U.S. and world.

Teaching Methods

This course utilizes several teaching methodologies combined with the traditional lecture. A heavy emphasis is placed on in-class activities and student participation. Class sessions are not used to merely regurgitate the chapter readings. In addition, movies, documentaries, and video clips are used to bring the concepts discussed in lectures and your textbook to life. Some of this video material may be controversial or humorous (or both) and may contain some foul language. The instructor also reserves the right to occasionally show video content of dubious educational value.

An emphasis will be placed on discussion, participation, and critical thinking. Students will be expected to come to each class prepared to engage in discussions. Politics involves controversial issues that can and should provoke debate. Expect to be challenged by some of the course material. Constructive debate is welcome, but should always be conducted so that only the issues are debated. Personal attacks will not be tolerated.
Required Text

1. The Logic of American Politics 6th edition by Kernell, Jacobson, Kousser, and Vavreck. Students are REQUIRED to buy the new 6th edition as it has been updated to include the 2012 elections and several chapters have been heavily revised.

Grading

Attendance and Participation: 15%
UNG Assessment Essay: 10%
Test #1 25%
Test#2 25%
Final Exam 25%

Lecture Notes

To foster better discussion and to allow the pace of the course to flow naturally I provide a copy of the lecture slides for each chapter in advance of lecture. Lectures will not be slowed down for you to write down information already on the slides. The slides supplement material discussed in the chapter reading. They are focused on the key concepts or more complex concepts covered in that chapter. They do not simply regurgitate the chapter page by page and there will be many times were we do not go through them page by page. You are responsible for reading each assigned chapter and coming to class prepared to discuss that day’s covered material. You are responsible for knowing any material covered on the lecture slides or readings for exams even if the specific concept is not lectured on (though detailed study guides are given). At times the slides will instruct on outside material (such as current events), information from in-class movies and activities. This material is included on exams.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is a required and graded component of this course and a roll sheet will be circulated at the beginning of class each day. For each day that you attend class and actively engage in the learning process (IE: you do not sleep or spend the class time on facebook) you will receive 2 points. One point is for showing up. The second point is awarded based on participation. The reason for this policy is to help YOU—not me. Students that attend class regularly consistently outperform their peers that do not. Not coming to class can seriously affect your ability to do well on the exams. Students who are more than 5 minutes late will not be able to sign the sheet for that day unless prior arrangements have been made. PLEASE be on time for class—it is very disruptive for other students to have people walking in late!

Any student who maintains perfect attendance (0 absences) will receive 3 bonus points applied directly to their final exam score. This means if you earned an 88% you suddenly have a 91%! Students with no more than 2 absences will receive 2 bonus points.

All computers/tablets/cellphones are banned in my classroom
Student Assessment

Exams

There are 3 exams for this course. Exams 1 & 2 are not pre-scheduled: you will receive 2 weeks notice for the date of these exams. This allows for flexibility on how we cover the material, in-class movies, and for in-class activities. A study guide will be provided at least 1 week before each exam.

UNG Student Assessment Essay

In order to ensure that all UNG students are meeting certain benchmarks and criteria the university has adopted a general assessment activity designed to measure each student’s academic performance. A detailed handout will be given out regarding this assignment but briefly, it involves reading a short assigned reading and writing a short response paper regarding the assigned reading (about 700-800 words).

Important Dates
No class meeting Wednesday, January 14th (graded at home movie assignment w/handout)
Monday, January 19th No Class MLK Jr. Day
February 7th: Withdrawal deadline
March 16-21: Spring Break
Final Exam: Monday, April 27th at 12:40 pm

Course Schedule/Reading Assignments

Below please find the topics this course will cover. Again, I do not put out a date-specific course schedule because I prefer to have some fluidity with the pace and because it allows us to spend time discussing course content and developing political events without worrying about a schedule. If you prefer a highly regimented course schedule please consider signing up for a different, more traditional section.

Part 1: The Logic of American Politics and the Nationalization of Politics
Ch. 1 The Logic of American Politics
Ch. 2 The Constitution
Ch. 3 Federalism
Ch. 4 Civil Rights,
Ch. 5 Civil Liberties
Supplemental Readings TBA
Test 1

Part 2: The Institutions of Government
Ch. 6 Congress
Ch. 7 The Presidency
Ch. 9 The Federal Judiciary
Supplemental Readings TBA
Test 2
Part 3: The Public’s Influence on National Policy
Ch. 10 Public Opinion
Ch. 11 Voting, Campaigns, and Elections
Ch. 14 The News Media
State of the Union
Supplemental Readings TBA
Final Exam

* Specific details of this schedule and syllabus may be subject to change

General Information

Email

Students are responsible for checking their official UNG email frequently. I will be using email to update information regarding the reading schedule and other important information. Not checking email will not excuse you from the responsibility of knowing this information.

Availability

If you are struggling to understand course material, need studying tips for the exams, require assistance with the policy paper, or otherwise just want to chat politics PLEASE feel free to stop by my office during office hours. If my hours conflict with yours I will make every effort to find a suitable alternative. In addition, I am very responsive to email. However, I will not respond to emailed questions the night before an exam after 8pm so plan accordingly.

Make Up Exams
Make up exams will only be given for documented SERIOUS illness and emergencies and I must be notified before the exam. Please note: make up exams will be different than the exam given in-class. If you fail to take an exam you will receive a 0% for that portion of your class grade.

Academic Honesty

Students are expected to strictly adhere to UGA’s academic honesty policies. I have a zero tolerance policy for cheating and plagiarism and will not hesitate to turn over suspected cases to the appropriate university authorities. You are responsible for reading and adhering to conduct as outlined in UNG’s academic integrity policy available at http://ung.edu/academic-affairs/policies-and-guidelines/supplemental-syllabus.php

Supplementary Syllabus

Please follow this link for information regarding disability services, inclement weather policies, the full academic integrity policy, etc.
http://ung.edu/academic-affairs/policies-and-guidelines/supplemental-syllabus.php

* (Specific details of this syllabus may be subject to change.)