

This is a sample syllabus for POS1041. Students should reference the section syllabus provided at the beginning of the semester for specifics regarding assignments and grade assignments.

POS 1041: Introduction to American National Government
Semester Year (days and time)
Building Room

Instructor: xxxx
Office: xxxx
Office Hours: xxxx
Email: xxxx

Welcome to the introductory course on American national government. Having designed the course to provide students with a better understanding of politics in the United States, I do not assume that those enrolled have more background knowledge on the subject matter than what someone typically acquires in high school. Regardless of their major, students should have the opportunity to succeed in the class. Furthermore, the material is relevant to everyone's civic life and future.

Goals and Objectives:

First, students will acquire a factual understanding of American national government. Students will be expanding their vocabulary regarding, and their knowledge of, American politics. An information base provides the foundation for intelligent discussion and critical thinking about American politics. The course covers, and subsequently assesses via examinations, students' knowledge of the following subjects:

- the basic principles and practices of American representative democracy and their application in its republican form of government
- the U.S. Constitution and its application
- the Founding documents and their shaping of the nature and functions of the institutions of self-governance in the United States
- landmark Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation, and landmark executive actions and their impact on American law and society

Throughout the course, students will also consider the political trade-offs among the competing values of liberty, equality, and order. Doing so facilitates understanding of the Founding Period, the U.S. Constitution, ideology, civil liberties, and civil rights, among other subjects. Recognition of these inherent trade-offs provides a frame for understanding many of the conflicts and controversies in American politics—both contemporary and historical.

Second, expanding on this base, students will engage both longstanding debates about the roles of a nation's government and contemporary scholarship on American political behavior, voting and elections, and the institutions of national government. Drawing from social choice theory, the course will introduce students to analytical concepts that will enable them to assess various behaviors that pose dilemmas for American representative democracy. Among the most important of these concepts are free riding, the prisoner's dilemma, and the tragedy of commons. As they engage these concepts, students will also review arguments that suggest that political institutions and practices, as well as social capital, provide possible solutions (albeit imperfect ones) to problems that citizens face when they need to act collectively. Again, examinations will assess students' knowledge of these various subjects.

Third, the course provides students with multiple opportunities to engage synchronously with fellow classmates in political discussion and civil debate on important questions in American politics. By

taking part in synchronous forums, students will enhance their ability to synthesize information that informs civic decision making on issues with multiple points of view.

At the conclusion of this course, students will be able to:

- Recognize that the U.S. Constitution was a product of the Framers' attempts to resolve values trade-offs, as well as address pressing political concerns.
- Articulate how differing preferences regarding values' trade-offs produce the ideological conflict(s) in contemporary American politics.
- Discuss landmark Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation, and landmark executive actions.
- Recognize the causes of the political polarization and frequent gridlock in contemporary national politics and apply a simple game theory model to explain and predict the outcomes of the lawmaking process.
- Recognize that citizens confront inherent problems when they need to act collectively, and apply the concepts of free riding, the prisoner's dilemma, and the tragedy of the commons both to identify the form of a specific collective action problem and to advance plausible policy responses.
- Engage in discussion and civil debate on American politics issues that are associated with multiple points of view.

Moreover, this course has been approved as meeting the Liberal Studies Social Science requirement and is designed to help students become critical appraisers of political theories and the facts that support them. Emerging from the course, students will be able to:

- Discuss the role of social factors in contemporary problems or personal experiences.
- Analyze claims about social phenomena.

Finally, this course has been approved as counting toward the Civic Literacy requirement, as outlined by the Florida state legislature.

Text (required):

Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck, and Timothy R. Johnson. 2021. *The Logic of American Politics*, 10th ed. Washington, DC: Sage | CQ Press.

Exams, Quizzes, and Assignments

Exams (3 x 25% each = 75% of course grade)

There will be three exams, each worth 25 percent of the course grade. The exams will be non-cumulative and hold students responsible for the assigned readings from *The Logic of American Politics* textbook and the material presented in class. Exams will consist of multiple choice questions. **If you know in advance of an exam of a schedule conflict, you must take the exam before its scheduled date. I will not give a make-up exam unless the absence at the time of the scheduled exam has been excused. No make-up exams will be given until finals week.** At that time, if you have an excused absence, you may take the make-up immediately after you take the last exam. Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the immediate family and other documented crises, call to military duty or jury duty, religious holy days and official university activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

Canvas Reading Quizzes (4 (of 5) x 5% each = 20% of course grade)

In addition, there will be five multiple choice reading quizzes administered via Canvas across the course of the semester. The questions on these quizzes will be based on (excerpts from) selected scholarly writings. Each of your highest four quiz scores will be worth five percent of your final grade. If you complete all five quizzes, I will drop the lowest quiz score. Based on articles and essay excerpts posted at Canvas, each of these non-cumulative quizzes will consist of 10 or so multiple choice questions, administered on-line via Canvas. The window for taking a quiz will be open for the 24 hours of the date indicated on the syllabus. Students will have 20 minutes to complete a quiz. **I will not give a make-up quiz unless absence at the time of the scheduled quiz has been excused** under the same guidelines as indicated above regarding exams. **No makeup quizzes will be given until finals week.** If you have an excused absence, you may take a hard copy make-up quiz immediately after you have taken the last exam.

3 In-Class Civic Discussions (3 x 1.33% each = 5% of course grade)

As indicated on the class schedule, three class meetings have been set aside for students to take part in a political discussion and civil debate with fellow classmates on an important American politics question that is associated with multiple points of view. Prior to these class meetings, the required course reading and classroom presentations will cover material that is relevant to the question at hand. During the first 10 minutes of these class meetings, students will think about and write down the strongest argument(s) that they can make in support of each side. Following that, students will break into small groups (of no more than 10 students)—each small group will be tasked with 1) discussing arguments that support each side of the controversy, 2) arriving at the strongest argument(s) in support of each side, and then 3) selecting one group member to present those strongest argument(s) to the full class during the last 10 minutes of the class meeting. At the end of class, students will turn in the written product from their initial, individual brainstorming as a record of their participation in the exercise.

Reading, Attendance, and Participation

The scheduled reading comes from *The Logic of American Politics* (10th ed.) and articles and essays posted at Canvas. Reading assignments should be completed before class to gain maximum benefit from lecture and discussion. Heading into each class meeting, I will post directive questions at Canvas to preview the specific topics and issues that we will be covering in class. These questions should also aid exam preparations. Students should strive to become an active member of the course. At a minimum, this means that students should do the reading and attend class regularly. Beyond this, informed input is not only welcome, but strongly encouraged. Be forewarned that material presented in lecture does not necessarily appear in the textbook (and vice-versa). My experience with previous classes suggests that students tend to perform markedly better on exams and quizzes when they attend class regularly.

To encourage attendance and informed input, I will also announce *in class* several short in-class and several short out-of-class participation exercises throughout the semester. Students must complete the in-class participation exercises during that day's class meeting. The out-of-class exercises will be due at the start of the next class meeting, unless otherwise noted. Successfully completing an exercise will add one percentage point to a student's final course average. There will be at least five participation exercises across the semester.

A Note on Learning:

Attending lectures and doing the readings are a baseline, but you should strive to go beyond this. Discussion and exchange will make the course more enjoyable not only for you, but for me as well. Raise

questions. Help me locate the answers to questions to which I do not know the answers. Share ideas and explore the implications of points made in the readings and lectures. Do your best to keep aware of new developments in American politics. Read regularly a newspaper and a periodical respected for their political coverage. Good coverage of American politics can be found in such newspapers as the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post* and in such periodicals as *CQ Weekly*, the *National Journal*, *The Economist*, and *Time*. Most of these publications also maintain websites.

A Note on Classroom Conduct:

Be a courteous member of the class. At a minimum, this means that you do not engage in any behaviors that disrupt the learning environment and distract other members of the course. Get to class on time. Let me know in advance if your schedule dictates that you will be arriving late or leaving early. Disruptive talking, cell phone activity, text messaging, e-mailing, internet surfing that is not course-related, sleeping, disruptive eating and drinking, working on material for other courses, etc. constitute inappropriate classroom behavior. I reserve the right to determine what constitutes disruptive behavior and to ask you to cease. If the behavior persists, I will ask you to leave. Although I recognize that it may become necessary to excuse yourself during class for unforeseen reasons, keep this activity to a minimum. Finally, if you have concerns or preoccupations that are so important that they will prevent you from concentrating on lecture and discussion, I would simply prefer that you not come to class that day.

University Attendance Policy:

Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

University Academic Honor Policy:

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of students' academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to ". . . be honest and truthful and . . . [to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University." (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at <http://fda.fsu.edu/Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy>)

Academic Success:

Your academic success is a top priority for Florida State University. University resources to help you succeed include tutoring centers, computer labs, counseling and health services, and services for designated groups, such as veterans and students with disabilities. The following information is not exhaustive, so please check with your advisor or the Dean of Students office to learn more.

Americans with Disabilities Act:

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should:

- (1) register with and provide documentation to the Office of Accessibility Services; and
- (2) request a letter from the Office of Accessibility Services to be sent to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type; and
- (3) meet (in person, via phone, email, Zoom, etc...) with each instructor to whom a letter of accommodation was sent to review approved accommodations.

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request. For the latest version of this statement and more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the:

Office of Accessibility Services
 874 Traditions Way
 108 Student Services Building
 Florida State University
 Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167
 (850) 644-9566 (voice)
 (850) 644-8504 (TDD)
oas@fsu.edu
<https://dsst.fsu.edu/oas/>

Confidential campus resources:

Various centers and programs are available to assist students with navigating stressors that might impact academic success. These include the following:

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| Victim Advocate Program University Center A, Room 4100, (850) 644-7161, Available 24/7/365, Office Hours: M-F 8-5 https://dsst.fsu.edu/vap | University Counseling Center, Askew Student Life Center, 2ndFloor, 942 Learning Way (850) 644-8255 https://counseling.fsu.edu/ | University Health Services Health and Wellness Center, (850) 644-6230 https://uhs.fsu.edu/ |
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Free Tutoring from FSU:

On-campus tutoring and writing assistance is available for many courses at Florida State University. For more information, visit the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) Tutoring Services' comprehensive list of on-campus tutoring options - see <http://ace.fsu.edu/tutoring> or contact tutor@fsu.edu. High-quality tutoring is available by appointment and on a walk-in basis. These services are offered by tutors trained to encourage the highest level of individual academic success while upholding personal academic integrity.

Copyright Statement:

Some of the materials in this course are possibly copyrighted. They are intended for use only by students registered and enrolled in this course and only for instructional activities associated with, and for the duration of, the course. They may not be retained in another medium or disseminated further. They are provided in compliance with the provisions of the Technology, Education, And Copyright Harmonization (TEACH) Act (refer to the 3/7/2001 TEACH Act at www.copyright.gov/legislation/archive/).

Evaluation Criteria (i.e., basis for grades):

- 3 Exams (25% each, 75% total)
- 4 (of 5) Canvas Reading Quizzes (5% each, 20% total)
- 3 In-class Civic Discussions (1.33% each, 5% total)

Grading Scale:

- A (93-100); A- (90-92); B+ (87-89);
- B (83-86); B- (80-82); C+ (77-79);
- C (73-76); C- (70-72); D+ (67-69);
- D (63-66); D- (60-62); F (<60).

Syllabus Change Policy:

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this

syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

Class Schedule:

(I reserve the right to adjust the class schedule, but, unless I notify the class otherwise, the dates for exams and quizzes and the data analysis assignment will remain the same.)

I. Introduction

date: Course Overview and Brief Introduction to Political Science

II. Principles and Foundations of American Government

date: The Role of Government in Society (read *The Logic*, ch. 1)

date: Review of Collective Action Concepts (read Mancur Olson Jr.'s *The Logic of Collective Action* and Garrett Hardin's "The Tragedy of the Commons" (available at Canvas))

date: Introduction to Social Capital (read Robert D. Putnam's "The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life" (available at Canvas))

Quiz #1 available at Canvas on date (covers Canvas readings by Olson, Hardin, and Putnam))

date: American Political Culture

dates: The Constitution (read *The Logic*, ch. 2; James Madison's *Federalist* Nos. 10 and 51 (Appendices 4 and 5 in *The Logic*))

dates: Federalism (read *The Logic*, ch. 3)

Quiz #2 available at Canvas on date (covers Federalist Nos. 10 and 51))

dates: Civil Rights (read *The Logic*, ch. 4)

dates: Civil Liberties (read *The Logic*, ch. 5; Jonathan Rauch's "In Defense of Prejudice: Why Incendiary Speech Must Be Protected" (available at Canvas))

date: **In-class Civic Discussion (Question: Should Americans be able to say whatever they want in a public space?)**

date: **EXAM #1 (in class)**

III. National Institutions

dates: Congress (read *The Logic*, ch. 6)

dates: The Presidency (read *The Logic*, ch. 7)

date: **In-class Civic Discussion (Questions: Has the U.S. presidency become too powerful and does it place too much power into the hands of one person?)**

dates: The Federal Judiciary (read *The Logic*, ch. 9; excerpts from Supreme Court of the United States, *Roe v. Wade* (1973) (available at Canvas))

Quiz #3 available at Canvas on date (covers *Roe v. Wade* excerpts)

date: The Federal Bureaucracy (read *The Logic*, ch. 8)

date: Wrap-up and Review for Exam #2

date: EXAM #2 (in class)

IV. Links Between the Public and National Institutions

dates: Democracy and Public Opinion (read *The Logic*, ch. 10; excerpt from Morris Fiorina et al.'s *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America* and Alan I. Abramowitz's "The Polarized Electorate" (available at Canvas))

Quiz #4 available at Canvas on date (covers Canvas readings on polarization by Fiorina and Abramowitz)

dates: Voting, Campaigns, and Elections): (read *The Logic*, ch. 11; excerpt from Samuel L. Popkin's *The Reasoning Voter* (available at Canvas))

date: **In-class Civic Discussion (Question: Should the United States eliminate the Electoral College and elect the president based on the winner of the national popular vote?)**

dates: Political Parties (read *The Logic*, ch. 12)

date: Interest Groups (read *The Logic*, ch. 13)

dates: The News Media (read *The Logic*, ch. 14; Alexis C. Madrigal's "What Facebook Did to American Democracy" (available at Canvas))

Quiz #5 available at Canvas on date (covers Canvas readings by Popkin and Madrigal)

date (time): EXAM #3 (in classroom)