

# American National Government

## POS 1041

### *Course Description:*

Government and politics touch every aspect of our lives. Yet many—indeed most—Americans lack even the most basic knowledge of how our national government operates. The goal of this course is to provide students with an understanding of the fundamentals of American government and politics as well as some of the analytical tools that students will need to acquire a more sophisticated understanding of political institutions and behavior. This course is designed to introduce students to the contemporary study of the institutions and processes of American national government.

First, students will acquire a factual understanding of American national government. Students will expand their knowledge and vocabulary regarding American politics. This will provide 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 knowledge 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 framework for understanding many of the conflicts and controversies in American politics—both contemporary and historical.

Second, students will engage both longstanding debates about the role 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.

***Course Learning Objectives (including liberal studies learning objectives assigned to the course):***

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 Legislature.

***Grading Assignments***

exams, discussions, writing assignments.

***Standard University and Liberal Studies Language***

**LIBERAL STUDIES STATEMENT**

This course has been approved to meet FSU's Liberal Studies Social Sciences requirements and helps you become a critical analyst of theories and evidence about social forces and social experience.

By the end of this course, students will:

1. Discuss the role of social factors in contemporary problems or personal experiences.

2. Analyze claims about social phenomena.

## **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.

## **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>)

## **AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT**

Florida State University (FSU) values diversity and inclusion; we are committed to a climate of mutual respect and full participation. Our goal is to create learning environments that are usable, equitable, inclusive, and welcoming. FSU is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities in a manner that is consistent with academic standards of the course while empowering the student to meet integral requirements of the course.

To receive academic accommodations, a student:

(1) must register with and provide documentation to the Office of Accessibility Services (OAS); (2) must provide a letter from OAS to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type; and, (3) should communicate with the instructor, as needed, to discuss recommended accommodations. A request for a meeting may be initiated by the student or the instructor.

Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodations to a student until appropriate verification from the Office of Accessibility Services has been provided.

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

For 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](mailto:oas@fsu.edu)  
<https://dsst.fsu.edu/oas>

## **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.

## **CONFIDENTIAL CAMPUS RESOURCES**

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

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>

Counseling & Psychological Services  
Askew Student Life Center, 2nd Floor  
942 Learning Way  
(850) 644-8255  
<https://counseling.fsu.edu/>

University Health Services  
Health and Wellness Center  
(850) 644-6230  
<https://uhs.fsu.edu>