

COURSE SYLLABUS

University of West Georgia
Department of Political Science
AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
POLS 1101-08

Semester: Fall 2017

Instructor: Dylan S. McLean, Ph.D.

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Class Location: Boyd Lecture Hall

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Class Hours: M & W 3:30p – 4:45p

Office Hours: M & W 9:30a – 11a; 1:30p – 3:30p

Course Description and Objectives:

A study of government and politics, including the philosophical and constitutional foundations, governing institutions, political behavior and major public policy issues. This course satisfies the State legislative requirement concerning the United States Constitution and the Georgia Constitution.

Many Americans have very little interest in politics. Often politics is thought of as if it is just another reality TV show, just another distraction from life's drudgery. It even looks a lot like many other primetime shows: full of scandal, sarcasm, heated arguments, betrayal, and hilarity. The problem is that the actors are usually old and ugly. Why would anyone watch *that* when there are plenty of shows full of young and attractive back stabbers?

Of course the reality is that politics is much more than sub-par TV. If your favorite contestant doesn't get that final rose on the bachelor, your life won't change at all. However, when the American people hand out roses, in the form of their vote, your life *is* affected in profound ways! This course will show you some of the ways that politics and government affects your life and that those politicians and bureaucrats do more than just shout at one another.

Fundamentally, this course is designed to introduce the student to the government and politics of the United States and the State of Georgia. It will begin by covering some foundational elements, such as the significance of the American founding and the constitution that grew out of this era. The course will then proceed to discuss what the government can and cannot do and what determines these distinctions. Politics and political actors, such as the media and parties, will then be covered. Finally the course will outline the various institutions of government, their roles in the policymaking process, and some of the policy areas they must deal with.

Learning Outcomes:

Student completing POLS 1101 will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a knowledge of the U. S. Constitution.
2. Demonstrate a knowledge of the Georgia State Constitution.
3. Identify the institutions and processes of the three branches of U.S. government.
4. Recognize current political issues and explain the policy making process.
5. Analyze politics in terms of political behavior and linking institutions.

6. Demonstrate that they have developed an understanding of the political and legal processes of the U.S. and Georgia, and an understanding of the terminology of political science and U.S. politics, adapting written communication to specific purposes and audiences.

Required Texts:

All reading is *required* reading. You must do the reading if you wish to succeed in this course.

- 1) William T. Bianco and David T. Canon, *American Politics Today*, 4th Essentials Edition, ISBN: 978-0-393-63988-9. *Either the paper, in any binding, or electronic version is acceptable.* If you would like to purchase access to the eBook you may do so here: <http://books.wwnorton.com/books/webad.aspx?id=4294993203>
- 2) Download a copy of the Georgia State Constitution: http://sos.ga.gov/admin/files/Constitution_2013_Final_Printed.pdf

CourseDen

CourseDen will be this course's official companion website. The schedule, grades, and important announcements will be posted there and it is the student's responsibility to check it regularly. Also, mandatory components of the course, such as required quizzes and paper submission, will involve CourseDen.

Finally, CourseDen also contains a variety of exercises and practice quizzes that may be helpful for the student. These are all optional and do not directly contribute to the course grade.

The direct url is: <https://westga.view.usg.edu/d2l/home>

Technology note: it is the student's responsibility to maintain access to a reliable computer and internet connection. This is particularly important for the online quizzes. Students must reasonably ensure that their internet connection and computer are functional and reliable before attempting any quiz. In the event that a technology problem prevents a quiz or other assignment from being completed it is the student's responsibility to provide evidence to substantiate this. To avoid potential problems, it is expected that the student will plan properly and take advantage of all of the resources, especially campus resources, available to the student.

Course Requirements

The final course grades will be based off of the following criteria:

- 1) Exams (60%):

There will be *three* exams given in this course. Any and all material covered in this course may be included in the exams (lectures, textbooks, in-class discussions, etc.). Each is non-cumulative and only evaluates the material covered since the last exam. These will consist of multiple choice and true/false questions. The dates of these exams will be published on the CourseDen website.

2) Quizzes (20%):

There will be regular quizzes given throughout this course. They will be administered on CourseDen. These are also not cumulative and only evaluate the material covered since the last quiz. Each quiz is designed as if it is a mini-exam; the quizzes will contain the same *type* of questions, and cover the same types of material, as the exams. The primary purpose of these quizzes is to help the student prepare for the exam. Every quiz will be reviewed in class before the next exam (i.e. the exam that evaluates the material covered in that quiz). The lowest scoring quiz will be dropped from grade calculation.

3) QEP Writing Assignment (10%):

Please see below.

4) InQuizitive (10%):

These are online exercises help keep students on track with the course. Each chapter's InQuizitive tasks must be completed by the start of that chapter's lecture in order to receive credit.

Final Course Grades

All graded components of the course will combine in the manner outlined above and will result in a 0-100 percent score. This will be used to determine a student's final course grade as follows:

A: 90-100%

B: 80-89%

C: 70-79%

D: 60-69%

F: 0-59%

Attendance Policy

Class attendance is mandatory. Attendance will be taken for every class, in the form of a sign-in sheet or a piece of graded work such as an exam. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that he or she signs the sign-in sheet for every class they attend. It is likewise their responsibility to ensure that all graded work is turned in before the conclusion of that class and their name is on it. A student may miss *four* classes, except for classes in which an exam is being administered, before their grade begins to decrease. Every absence thereafter will result in a one percentage point deduction from the final course grade. Absences will not be *directly* used to reduce a student's course grade beyond *five percent of the total*. However, students should be aware that missing material that is presented in class will indirectly lower their grade below this five percent floor.

In the event of *any* absence, it is the student's responsibility to seek out the material they missed in class from the text and their student colleagues, not the instructor. The instructor will not inform students what they missed in class. That is what classmates, the text, the CourseDen website, and the syllabus are for.

Make-up Policy

Make-up exams or quizzes are available only to students with a documented medical or personal emergency (i.e. death in the family). In order for a make-up to be offered, the student must provide the instructor with documentation of the emergency that prevented them from being able to take the exam/quiz when it was originally scheduled. The student has two complete business days, beginning at the end of the scheduled exam/quiz period, to provide this documentation to the instructor.

Failure to comply with these requirements will result in the denial of a make-up exam or quiz and an automatic zero for that exam or quiz.

Supplemental Instruction

Supplemental Instruction (SI) study sessions are offered for this course. SI sessions meet two times a week, throughout the semester. Supplemental Instruction is an academic assistance program which provides peer-led group study sessions to assist students in traditionally difficult courses. SI sessions are led by a SI leader who has already mastered the course material and has been trained to facilitate group sessions where students can meet to improve their understanding of course material, review and discuss important concepts, develop study strategies and prepare for exams. SI is for everyone, and open to all students enrolled in this class; not just those students who are struggling. Attendance at SI sessions is voluntary. Students, who attend SI sessions weekly, typically earn higher final course and exam grades than students who do not participate in SI. Please bring your lecture notes, books, and questions with you. The time and location of your SI session will be announced in class.

Email Policy

Email is a valuable communication tool. Students are expected to check their University of West Georgia email address on a regular basis. Important course announcements will be distributed via email. The instructor will make every effort to respond to substantive questions via email as quickly and completely as reasonably possible. Some matters are better addressed during office hours. The instructor will not tolerate, and will not respond to, emails concerning matters *that are clearly addressed in this syllabus or on the course's companion website*.

The instructor will not provide grades over email. Scores for all graded material will be posted on CourseDen. The student can use this information, and the breakdown used for the final grades above, to determine their progress. Grades will only be discussed during office hours.

For the sake of efficiency and professionalism, the following guidelines must be followed for all email communications:

- DO NOT use the email utility in CourseDen!!! The instructor will not receive your message.
- Emails to the instructor must be sent from the student's official University of West Georgia email address (i.e. super.student@westga.edu). Emails from any other address will be ignored.
- Every single email sent to the instructor must have "POLS 1101-08" (exactly like what is between the quotation marks) in the subject line. Emails that do not include this exact subject line will not be read by the instructor.

- To be clear, cut and paste what is between the quotation marks above into every email you send the instructor.
- You may include more information in the subject line but you must include this.
- For example, a subject line may look like this: POLS 1101-08 Chapter 2?

Office Phone Policy

Students should only expect that the instructor will be available via phone during the scheduled office hours. It should be expected that emails will prompt a faster response than a voicemail. The instructor can often be found on Google Hangouts, use dmclean@westga.edu to locate him.

Extra Credit Policy

There will be no extra credit in this course.

Common Language for Course Syllabi

For important policy information, i.e., the UWG Honor Code, Email, and Credit Hour policies, as well as information on Academic Support and Online Courses, please review the information found in the **Common Language for Course Syllabi** documentation at <https://www.westga.edu/UWGSyllabusPolicies/>. Additions and updates are made as institution, state, and federal standards change, so please review it each semester.

Plagiarism and Academic Dishonesty

Cheating, plagiarism, or other forms of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any student found in violation of university policy will automatically receive a grade of “F” for the course. The university’s honor code can be found at the following link:

http://www.westga.edu/assetsDept/vpaa/Common_Language_for_Course_Syllabi.pdf

Classroom Etiquette

The classroom is a professional environment and must be treated as such. Please arrive to class on time and with your cell phone off or on vibrate. Students who are distracting their classmates, or the instructor, by inappropriately using technology will be asked to leave that class and will not be permitted to rejoin the class with that technology. The use of laptops or tablets for the purposes of note taking or to take part in legitimate classwork is permitted providing that such use does not cause a distraction to others. Feel free to bring beverages to class but please refrain from eating as a courtesy to your classmates.

Participation in class discussion is essential. However, it is probable that some of the topics discussed in this class will stir strong emotions among some students. *Class discussions must be kept civil and respectful at all times.* Any behavior to the contrary will absolutely not be tolerated and the offending student or students will be asked to leave. The classroom is not a cable news show and must not resemble one!

Assumption of Adulthood

This is a college course. All students are assumed to be adults and will be held to adult standards of accountability and decorum. You are expected to familiarize yourself with the requirements of the course. You are expected to meet the requirements of the course without having to be reminded of such clearly posted things as exam dates. It is expected that you will do the required reading for the course. It is expected that you will complete all required assignments. If you have questions, you are expected to ask the professor to seek clarification.

Students with Disabilities and Accessibility Policy

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal antidiscrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. This legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. *Please notify the instructor immediately* if you have a disability that requires accommodation.

Accessibility Services: Students with a documented disability may work with UWG Accessibility Services to receive essential services specific to their disability. All entitlements to accommodations are based on documentation and USG Board of Regents standards. If a student needs course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability or chronic illness, or if he/she needs to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, the student should notify his/her instructor in writing and provide a copy of his/her Student Accommodations Report (SAR), which is available only from Accessibility Services. Faculty cannot offer accommodations without timely receipt of the SAR; further, no retroactive accommodations will be given. For more information, please contact Accessibility Services: <https://www.westga.edu/student-services/counseling/accessibility-services.php>

Other Important Links

- UWG Online: <https://uwgonline.westga.edu/technology-requirements.php>
- Online Counseling - <https://www.westga.edu/student-services/counseling/online-counseling.php>
- Student Handbook - <http://www.westga.edu/handbook/>

Course Schedule

In general, this course will cover one chapter of the textbook for every two class days. The short term schedule and the chapters we are working on will be published on the course's CourseDen website. Upcoming quiz and exam dates will likewise be posted on CourseDen.

It is the student's responsibility to keep up to date with the schedule by checking the CourseDen page.

Department of Political Science

QEP-POLS 1101 Writing Assignment

Assignment (10% of course grade)

In this assignment, students are tasked with writing a position paper, in the form of **constituent letters**, to their representative in the **U. S. House of Representatives**.

Overview

Regular Americans routinely write letters to their representatives in Washington, D.C. The purpose of these letters is to express support for, or opposition to, particular policy issues that the U.S. Congress is dealing with. In other words, the letter is an attempt to persuade the congressperson that he or she should adopt the position of the letter writer. If the letter writer successfully does this, then the representative will cast votes in Congress that their constituent letter writer would agree with.

You will need to give some thought to what makes a strong position paper. First, you should choose your topic carefully. You will naturally write a stronger letter if it deals with an issue that you actually care about. You should select a very specific topic, in the form of a specific bill, or other specific piece of legislation, that the U.S. House of Representatives is currently considering. Second, effective persuasion will require more than your opinion; you will need to present at least two items of evidence that support your position. Third, you will need to ensure that your letter demonstrates an understanding of the American system of government and the role that your representative plays in it.

Requirements

The letter must:

- 1) Take a position and argue for/against a bill/legislation/public policy that is of a particular interest/concern to you as a constituent member and more importantly, a citizen-voter.
- 2) Offer a clear position statement supported by at least two facts or two items of evidence.
- 3) Demonstrate a clear and precise understanding of the roles of Congress vis-a-vis other branches of government, and the workings in a federal system of government.

Instructions

The letter must:

- 1) Be addressed to YOUR Member of Congress's proper Washington D. C. address. *The following links can assist in researching your U. S. House Representative and bills/legislation/public policy.*

<http://www.house.gov/representatives>

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members>

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/>

<http://www.contactingthecongress.org/>

<https://www.congress.gov/members>

<https://www.congress.gov/>

- 2) Be error free (spelling, capitalization, grammar usage, formatting etc.)
- 3) Letter submission/due date: **TBD**

Letters must be submitted in BOTH Courseden (assignments QEP folder) and in person (hard copy). Letters will not be graded unless submitted in both formats.

The paper copy of the letter is due at the beginning of class on the dates above.

The electronic copy is due in the dropbox folder by the beginning of class on the dates listed above.

Also be informed that Turnitin will be used to check for plagiarism, grammar, spelling, etc.

- 4) 500 words in length
- 5) Typed and in a formal letter format

For example:

<http://www.savvy-business-correspondence.com/BlockBizLetter.html>

- 6) Formatted: Times New Roman- 12 point font, single-spaced, and 1 inch margins.
- 7) Be turned in on or by the due date otherwise 30% will be deducted on all late work. Assignments that are over 24 hours late will not be accepted.

Grading Rubric

The Letters will be graded following the “**GRAS**” rubric as follows:

25% G Grammar; no grammar and other errors including spelling, capitalization, formatting etc.

25% R Rhetoric; a clear statement of position with two supporting facts/items of evidence; facts/evidence must clearly support the statement.

25% A Analysis; includes referencing the right Congress Member, and providing a strong explanation concerning the importance of the bill/policy with clear linkage to the political context and to the role of the official.

25% S Synthesis; demonstrates a clear and precise understanding of the role of Congress vis-a-vis other branches of government, and the workings of our federal system of government.