

**Honors American Federal Government (POS 2041)  
Fall 2024**

**Instructor: Beth Rosenson**

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**Anderson Hall 202**

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**Class meets Tuesdays Period 5-6 and Thursdays Period 6**

**Office hours: Thursdays 11:15 a.m.-12:15 p.m., Fridays 11 a.m.-1 p.m. in Anderson Hall 202. If you cannot make these times, email me about an alternative.**

**Course Description**

In this course, students will investigate how the national government is structured and how the American constitutional republic operates. It covers the philosophical and historical foundations of American government, including but not limited to the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution and all its amendments, and the Federalist Papers. The course examines the branches of government and the government's laws, policies, and programs. It also examines the ways in which citizens participate in their government and ways their government responds to citizens.

This course provides an overview of American politics: its political culture, the attitudes and political behavior of its citizens, the operation of its key institutions, and its enduring debates. We will cover the three main branches of government — executive, legislative, and judicial — and other important political actors such as parties, interest groups, and the media. We will be concerned with several themes, especially the nature and distribution of political power and the role of elections.

Among the questions we will address are: Who has power in American politics and how is that power used? How does the Constitution structure the distribution of power? We will consider the role played in American politics by citizens, elected officials, appointed officials in the bureaucracy, and unelected power-holders outside the government such as journalists and lobbyists. What political beliefs shape citizens' participation in the political process? How do interest groups wield power? What informal and formal powers do the three branches have? What factors limit their ability to achieve their goals? How do the three branches work together or against each other? How is public policy

made?

This course satisfies a Social and Behavioral Science (S) General Education requirement and is required of all Political Science and College of Journalism majors. It is a prerequisite for many courses in the Political Science department.

By the end of the course, students will be able to identify how various political institutions such as Congress, the presidency, and the Supreme Court operate (as well as “linkage” institutions such as interest groups and the media). Students should be able to critically evaluate claims about the U.S. political system using empirical evidence.

For details about general education subject objectives, see <https://undergrad.aa.ufl.edu/general-education/gen-ed-program/subject-area-objectives/>

### **Civic Literacy Competencies 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 elements of American democracy. These elements include: 1) the Constitution, 2) federalism, 3) American political culture, 4) public opinion and political participation, 5) campaigns and voting behavior, 6) the role of political parties and interest groups, 7) the powers and operation of Congress and the presidency, 8) the role of courts, bureaucracy, and media, and 9) the basics of public policy making with regard to the federal budget, economic and social welfare, and health care, the environment and energy.

In so doing, students will achieve the following **Civic Literacy Competencies:**

1. Students will demonstrate an understanding of the basic principles and practices of America’s constitutional republic.
2. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the nation’s founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and its amendments, and the Federalist Papers.
3. Students will demonstrate knowledge of landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation, and landmark executive actions.
4. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the history and development of the American federal government and its impact on law and society.
5. Students will demonstrate an ability to apply course material to contemporary political issues and debates.
6. Students will demonstrate the ability to engage in discussion and civil debate on American politics that are associated with multiple points of view.

Achievement of this learning outcome (Content) will be assessed by 3 exams and 4 short essays.

**Communication:** Students will develop their skills in communicating knowledge and making clearly reasoned arguments in both written and oral form. Students will have opportunities to engage synchronously in political discussions and civil debates with multiple points of view and master the ability to synthesize information that informs civic decision-making.

This learning outcome (Communication) will be assessed by 3 exams with a writing component, 3 short essays and participation in structured discussions. Students' participation grade will reflect how well a student communicates during discussions.

**Critical Thinking:** Students will analyze information presented in the textbook and in lecture carefully and logically. They will evaluate “pro” and “con” arguments made in the debate reader, analyzing the strength of each side's arguments and empirical evidence provided.

Achievement of this learning outcome (Critical Thinking) will be assessed by exams, short essays, and participation in structured discussions. Grades on these will reflect how well students apply concepts, general principles and empirical evidence to the operation of American government and to current issues and debates in American politics.

### **Information About Class Meetings**

I will generally lecture for at least part of the class on both Tuesdays and Thursdays, with certain days as noted in the syllabus devoted to discussion of policy debates from the Ellis reader. During lecture time, participation is strongly encouraged. You will get more out of the class if you ask questions and offer comments.

### **Required Textbooks**

There are two required books for the course. I may also share occasional news articles on topics relevant to the assignments.

1. Edwards, Wattenberg, and Howell, Government in America 2020 Presidential Election (Pearson, 2022, 18th edition).

You have three choices for how to purchase this book. If you want a print-only version (\$59.99), use this link:

<https://www.pearson.com/store/p/government-in-america-people-politics-and-policy-2020-presidential-election-edition/P100003053843/9780136966456>

If you want an ebook (etext) only (\$39.96), use this link:

<https://www.pearson.com/store/en-us/pearsonplus/p/9780137585038.html>

If you use financial aid and must purchase through the bookstore, the bookstore will stock the **print rental** of this text using **ISBN 9780136966456**. They will stock the **Pearson+ eText** using **ISBN 9780137585038**.

You need to sign in with your Pearson Account (create one if you don't already have one). Then choose your course under "My Courses" and choose an access option: either redeem an access code you got with the purchase of the textbook or you can purchase online.

2. Richard J. Ellis and Michael Nelson, Debating Reform (Sage: CQ Press, 2021, 4th edition) (available at the UF bookstore or through the publisher at <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/debating-reform/book259254> or you can hunt for a used edition on Amazon or other sites. Just make sure you get the latest (2021) edition, i.e. the 4th, not 3rd, edition.

### **Assignments/Grading**

**Exams:** There will be three exams, each worth 19% of the final grade, scheduled for **September 24, October 22 and December 3**. They will each be a combination of multiple choice questions and a short essay question. Study guides will be posted on Canvas at least one week before each exam.

**Papers:** You must also complete THREE 3-5 page short essay papers, each worth 12% of the final grade. Information on these essays is on the last 2 pages of the syllabus. You will have a choice of 10 topics to write on. Papers are due on Canvas by 8 am that day; details on the short essays are on the last two pages of the syllabus. I assume that all students have access to a computer that meets the UF minimum standards for students. When writing papers, make sure to use the spell-check function on your computer and **PROOFREAD** the entire document. Numerous sources on grammar are available, e.g. Turabian's A Manual for Writers of Term Papers or Student's Guide for Writing College Papers. Papers that contain numerous spelling or grammatical errors will receive a lower grade than they would have otherwise. Late papers will be penalized unless the student has a valid reason for handing a given paper in after the deadline.

Rubric for grading of papers is as follows:

**Criteria: Analysis and Critical Thinking** (6 points).

**Excellent** (5.4-6 points): Answers the question by choosing a clear side, formulates evidence-based conclusions drawing on concepts, ideas and arguments in the reader. Discusses multiple points within each (pro and con) side, addressing at least 2 arguments or pieces of evidence per side. Draws heavily from the reading rather than relying primarily on outside points not mentioned in the reading.

**Proficient** (4.8-5.4 points): Chooses a side, formulates evidence-based conclusions drawing on concepts, ideas and arguments in the reader. Does not discuss multiple points

within each (pro and con) side (less than 2 arguments or pieces of evidence per side).  
 Draws well from the reading.

**Competent** (4.2-4.7 points): Chooses a side, makes some use of points from the reading (pro and con), does not address the arguments of the opposite side in much depth and misinterprets some points made in the reading.

**Below** (0-4.1 points): Discussion is superficial, only one side addressed, little reliance on the points made in the reading.

Conventions (2 points)

**Excellent:** (2 points): Minimal spelling and grammar errors, well-organized, organizing thesis present.

**Proficient:** (1.5 points): Occasional spelling or grammar errors, some sense of a thesis statement, organization not as straight-forward and clear as it could be

**Competent** (1 point): Frequent errors, some organization of paragraphs.

**Below:** (0 points): Multiple errors, poor organization (paper jumps around rather than proceeding in an organized manner), paper is on the short side for length (below minimum number of pages).

**Attendance:** Worth 3% of the final grade. See p. 7 for attendance policy.

**Discussion/Participation:** Worth 4% of the final grade. Rubric for grading of discussion/participation is as follows:

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

Final grades will be calculated as follows. Note that a minimum grade of C is required for general education credit.

First Exam: 19% of course grade

Second Exam: 19% of course grade

Third Exam: 19% of course grade

Short Papers (3): Each worth 12% of course grade =36% of course grade.

Attendance: 3% of course grade

Discussion/Participation: 4% of course grade

A	93-100%	A-	90-92.9%	B+	87-89.9%
B	83-86.9%	B-	80-82.9%	C+	77-79.9%
C	73-76.9%	C-	70-72.9%	D+	67-69.9%
D	63-66.9%	D-	60-62.9%		

## **Policies**

### **Statement on Students with Disabilities**

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center at 352 392 8565. Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center. <https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>. 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 Evaluations**

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. These evaluations are important to merit committees and Department chairs in the evaluations of teaching, to future students who are looking for good classes, and to the instructor as he revises the course for future semesters. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at [gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/](http://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/).

### **Attendance**

Requirements for class attendance, make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with University policies: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>

### **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. Click here for more information on the Honors Code: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult the instructor.

**University Grading Policy:** Information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points can be found at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

## **Recording of Lectures**

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. 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 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.

## **Covid**

The following recommendations are in place to maintain your learning environment, to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions, and to further the health and safety of ourselves, our neighbors, and our loved ones. If you are not vaccinated, get vaccinated. Vaccines are readily available and have been demonstrated to be safe and effective against the COVID-19 virus. Visit [one.ufl.edu](http://one.ufl.edu) for screening/testing and vaccination opportunities. If you are sick, stay home. Please call your primary care provider if you are ill and need immediate care or the UF Student Health Care Center at 352-392-1161 to be evaluated.

Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work.



## **Academic Resources**

E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at [helpdesk@ufl.edu](mailto:helpdesk@ufl.edu).

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information.

## **Readings and Assignments: Schedule**

### **August 22: First Day of Class/Introduction**

### **August 27: Introducing Government in America**

Assignment: Edwards textbook (Government in America), Chapter 1

### **August 29, September 3: The Constitution**

Assignment for August 29: Edwards text, Chapter 2

Assignment for September 3: Ellis text (Debating Reform), Chapter 1

### **September 5: Federalism**

Assignment: Edwards text, Chapter 3

### **September 10, 12 and 17: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights**

Assignment for September 12: Edwards text, Chapter 4

Assignment for September 14: Edwards text, Chapter 5

Assignment for September 19: Ellis text, Chapter 4 for discussion in class (**PAPER OPTION - SEE LAST TWO PAGES OF SYLLABUS FOR TOPIC: PAPER DUE BY 8 AM ON CANVAS**)

**September 19: Public Opinion and Political Action**

Assignment: Edwards text, Chapter 6

**\*\*\*\*SEPTEMBER 24: FIRST EXAM (In regular classroom): on Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 of Edwards only. Nothing from Ellis debate reader.\*\*\*\***

**September 26: Campaigns and Voting Behavior**

Assignment: Edwards text, Chapter 9

**October 1: Media**

Assignment: Edwards, Chapter 7, and Ellis, Chapter 5 for discussion in class (**PAPER OPTION - SEE LAST TWO PAGES OF SYLLABUS FOR TOPIC: PAPER DUE BY 8 AM**)

**October 3, 8: Political Parties and Interest Groups**

Assignment for October 3: Edwards, Chapter 8

Assignment for October 8: Edwards, Chapter 10 and Ellis, Chapter 9 for discussion in class (**PAPER OPTION - SEE LAST TWO PAGES OF SYLLABUS FOR TOPIC: PAPER DUE BY 8 AM**)

October 10, 15, 17: Congress

Assignment for October 10: Edwards chapter 11

Assignment for October 15: Ellis, Chapter 11 and Chapter 12 for discussion in class **(PAPER OPTION - YOU CAN WRITE ON EITHER CHAPTER - SEE LAST TWO PAGES OF SYLLABUS FOR TOPIC: PAPER DUE BY 8 AM)**

Assignment for October 17: Ellis, Chapter 13 and 14 for discussion in class **(PAPER OPTION - YOU CAN WRITE ON EITHER CHAPTER - SEE LAST TWO PAGES OF SYLLABUS FOR TOPIC: PAPER DUE BY 8 AM)**

**\*\*\*\*OCTOBER 22: SECOND EXAM (In regular classroom): All assigned material since first exam (Edwards text chapters 9, 7, 8, 10, 11 nothing from Ellis debate reader).\*\*\*\***

**October 24, October 29, October 31: Presidency**

Assignment for October 24: Edwards, chapter 12

Assignment for October 29: Ellis, chapter 2 for discussion in class **(PAPER OPTION - SEE LAST TWO PAGES OF SYLLABUS FOR TOPIC: PAPER DUE BY 8 AM)**

Assignment for October 31: Edwards, chapter 15 for discussion **(PAPER OPTION - SEE LAST TWO PAGES OF SYLLABUS FOR TOPIC: PAPER DUE BY 8 AM)**

**November 5, 7: Federal Courts**

Assignment for November 7: Edwards, chapter 15

Assignment for November 9: Ellis, Chapter 18 for discussion in class **(PAPER OPTION - SEE LAST TWO PAGES OF SYLLABUS FOR TOPIC: PAPER DUE BY 8 AM)**

**November 12: Bureaucracy:**

Assignment: Edwards, Chapter 14 and Ellis, Chapter 17 for discussion in class (**PAPER OPTION - SEE LAST TWO PAGES OF SYLLABUS FOR TOPIC: PAPER DUE BY 8 AM**)

**November 14: Public Policy I (Economic and Social Welfare Policy)**

Assignment: Edwards, Chapter 16

**November 19: Public Policy II (Health Care, Environment and Energy)**

Assignment: Edwards, Chapter 17

**NOVEMBER 21: Public Policy III (Education)**

Assignment: Ellis, Chapter 19 for discussion in class (**PAPER OPTION - SEE LAST PAGE OF SYLLABUS FOR TOPIC: PAPER DUE BY 8 AM**)

**THIRD EXAM: December 3 in classroom during regular class time: All assigned material since second exam (Edwards Chapters 12, 15, 14, 16, 17). Nothing from Ellis debate reader.**

## **INFORMATION ON SHORT ESSAY PAPERS**

**You must write FOUR essay papers on the topics listed on the next page. You choose which of the ten offerings you want to write on. There will be four assignments listed on Canvas as PAPER TOPIC 1, PAPER TOPIC 2, PAPER TOPIC 3, and PAPER TOPIC 4. You decide which papers to submit, by 8 am on the due date listed on the next page.**

**Each paper should be 3-5 pages long, DOUBLE SPACED. Papers should not be shorter than 3 pages. You should have margins of 1.25 inches on each side (left, right, top and bottom). The cover page should have your name and a title for the paper; the cover page does not count toward the page limit.**

**The topics come from the assigned readings in the Ellis debate reader. Each chapter is a debate between two authors. No additional reading is necessary and for these papers, you should focus the assigned reading and the arguments made by each side.**

**The papers are intended to be critical essays. This means that you should evaluate the evidence and arguments provided by each author. Make sure to address the arguments of BOTH authors for each topic. YOU MUST TAKE A SIDE IN YOUR PAPER, stating and explaining which author you believe has the better arguments and why. An A paper addresses at least two elements of the argument of each author.**

**If you quote directly from the reading, just note which of the two authors in the reading the quote comes from and cite after the quotation as (“Ellis, p. ---).**

**The next page lists the paper topics and due dates.**

**1. Civil Rights and Civil Liberties: Ellis, Chapter 4**

Paper topic: Should States Enact Voter ID Laws and Reduce Early Voting?

**2. Media: Ellis, Chapter 5**

Paper topic: Should Congress Bring Back the Fairness Doctrine?

**3. Political Parties: Ellis, Chapter 9**

Paper topic: Should States Require Open Primaries?

**4. Congress: Ellis, Chapter 11**

Paper topic: Should Proportional representation Be Adopted for U.S. House Elections?

**5. Congress: Ellis, Chapter 14**

Paper topic: Should Senate Rule XXII Be Amended so That Legislative Filibusters Can Be Ended by a Majority Vote?

**6. Presidency: Ellis, Chapter 2**

Paper topic: Should Impeachment Be Normalized?

**7. Presidency II: Ellis, Chapter 15**

Paper topic: Should The Electoral College Be Abolished?

**8. Federal Courts: Ellis, Chapter 18**

Paper Topic: Should The Terms of Supreme Court Justices Be Limited to 18 Years?

**9. Bureaucracy: Ellis, Chapter 17**

Paper Topic: Should The President Be Able To Fire Anyone in the Executive Branch?

**10. Public Policy: Ellis, Chapter 19**

Paper Topic: Should Americans Receive Four More Years of Free Public Education?