

Suzanne M. Robbins, Ph. D., @ The University of Florida



Lecture Meets:

9:35-10:25 am M/W

Weimer, Rm 1064

Sections meet Th/F as noted
on your One.UF schedule.
(Eleven Sections)

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Course Overview

This class provides a college-level introduction to American Federal Government. Students are expected to improve their knowledge necessary for informed civic participation. Each week introduces an important topic in American government to prepare you for further study in upper division Political Science courses.

This course explores how the logic of elections and our institutions shape outcomes in American politics. We'll examine the processes, conflicts, and compromises inherent in our system and highlight how politics permeates all aspects of society. We will emphasize the electoral incentive as we seek to explain why things function as they do—not necessarily how they *should*. By the end of the course, students will be equipped to critically evaluate claims about the U.S. political system, using empirical evidence to support their analysis.

This course satisfies a [Social and Behavioral Science \(S\) General Education](#) requirement providing instruction in the history, key themes, principles, terminology, and underlying theory or methodologies used in the social and behavioral sciences. Students will learn to identify, describe, and explain social institutions, structures, or processes. These courses emphasize the effective application of accepted problem-solving techniques. Students will apply formal and informal qualitative or quantitative analysis to examine the processes and means by which individuals make personal and group decisions, as well as the evaluation of opinions, outcomes, or human behavior. Students are expected to assess and analyze ethical perspectives in individual and societal decisions. Finally, it covers these Civic Literacy Competencies:

1. Understanding of the basic principles and practices of American democracy and how they are applied in our republican form of government;
2. An understanding of the United States Constitution and its application;
3. Knowledge of the founding documents and how they have shaped the nature and functions of our institutions of self-government; and
4. An understanding of landmark Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation and landmark executive actions and their impact on law and society.

GOALS

Differentiate between myths and reality of American politics

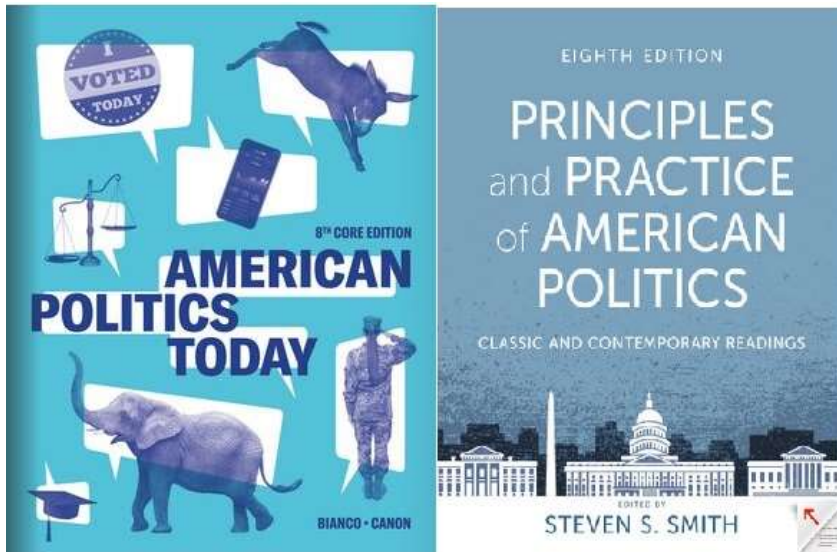
Distinguish between assumptions and evidence in evaluating arguments

Evaluate the credibility of public information

Assess the validity of assumptions

Apply what you learn substantively to other areas of civic life

Develop critical thinking skills



State Core Course Description:

POS 2041 – American Government

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.

State Core Student Learning Outcomes:

Students will demonstrate:

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

How to Succeed

Go to class. Lectures emphasize and explain important concepts and theories beyond the text. Discussion sections provide opportunities for students to engage synchronously in political discussions and civil debates with multiple points of view and to master the ability to synthesize information that informs civic decision making. **PowerPoints are available on Canvas but will not replace notetaking.**

Read assigned readings, including:

- Bianco, W. and D. Canon. 2025. *American Politics Today, Core 8th Core Edition*, Norton. ISBN: 978-1-324-08872-1
- Smith, Steven S, ed. 2025. *Principles and Practice of American Politics: Classic and Contemporary Readings, 8th Edition*, Sage ISBN 9781071847398.
- [The New York Times or Wall Street Journal](#).

Read *American Politics Today* for lecture (accessible via the Norton Link in Canvas); *Principles & Practice* book is for discussion (accessible via the Redshelf link in Canvas). **You must opt-in to UF All Access to read the books on Canvas.** UF provides free subscriptions to both newspapers.

Participate. I encourage thoughtful participation in lectures. We will use iClicker, available free to UF students, to enable snap polling, stimulate discussion, and track lecture participation and attendance.

Visit me or your TA during office hours if necessary.

Complete all the assignments on time.



Assessment & Grading

To achieve our course goals and civic literacy competencies, students will acquire knowledge of the structural foundations of American politics, including the Constitution, the fragmentation of political power, political behavior, elections, institutions, and civil rights and liberties. Assessment of those goals occurs as follows:

Exams: You will take three machine-graded multiple-choice exams. Exams cover material from lecture, discussion, readings, and current events. While exams are not cumulative, some issues are revisited later in the semester and could appear on a later exam. **Exams must be taken on the scheduled date, except in documented emergencies. This includes the Final Exam.** The first exam is 15% of your grade; the second two are 20% each.

Lecture Participation/Attendance: Attendance in the lectures is required and is taken via iClicker Student – an app on your phone or tablet. These cannot be made up but may be waived with a documented excused absence; the lowest two scores are dropped. Lecture participation, the percentage of points earned out of those available, is worth 5% of your course grade.

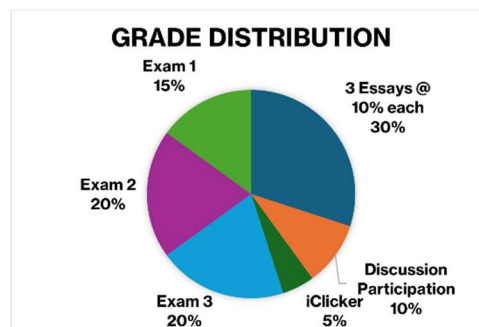
Essays: You will write three essays this semester, due by 11:59 pm on Canvas. These essays will allow you to draw connections from discussion and lecture and improve your critical thinking skills. Your TA will grade these using the rubric on page 4. Together, these essays are worth 30% of your course grade. The use AI (e.g., ChatGPT) is not permitted.

Discussion Sections: Weekly discussion groups are not mini lectures, but active discussions of the assigned readings (from *Principles & Practice*). In addition, most classes will consist of a case study workshop. For each class you will turn in a short reflection to help assess your participation in class; these will not be accepted late and cannot be submitted if you did not attend class. Your TA will assign 10% percent of the course grade based on participation, reflection, and attendance in discussion sections. Please see grading rubric for participation on page 4.

To receive SBS general-education credit, you must earn a C or better in the course.

iClicker, UF All Access, & Free News

iClicker Student: Go to your device's "store" to download the iClicker Student App and search for UF and the course (American Federal Government). Upon arriving to the MW lecture, open the app and check in. Please use your UFL email address when signing up (or it won't send your scores to Canvas). **UF All Access:** Our main text is available via UF All Access, delivered through Canvas. You must first opt-in; click [here](#). You must opt-in early in the semester or you won't be able to later. The *Principles & Practice* reader is an ebook available from the bookstore and readable in Canvas via Redshelf. **New York Times & Wall Street Journal are free for students!** Click [here](#) for free access.



GRADING SCALE

A	93.0 -100%
A-	90.0-92.9%
B+	87.0-89.9%
B	83.0-86.9%
B-	80.0-82.9%
C+	77.0-79.9%
C	73.0-76.9%
C-	70.0-72.9%
D+	67.0-69.9%
D	63.0-66.9%
D-	60.0-62.9%
F	below 60.0%

Grading Rubric: Discussion Section Participation

This portion of your grade (10%) is based on the quality of your participation in discussion group (Th/F. Opinions held by other students, the instructor, the TA, and the guest speakers should be respected in discussion, and conversations that do not contribute to the discussion should be held at minimum, if at all.

	Strong (A+ to B+)	Needs Development (B to C)	Unsatisfactory (C- or Lower)
Listening/Preparation (20 points possible)	Actively and respectfully listens to peers and instructor. Is fully prepared with notes, questions on reading.	Sometimes displays lack of interest in comments of others. Sometimes arrives unprepared or with superficial preparation.	Projects lack of interest or disrespect for others (including browsing other materials during class); little evidence of having read the material.
Quality and impact of contributions (40 points possible)	Comments are relevant and reflect understanding of assignments, previous remarks of other students, and insights about assigned material; comments frequently help move discussion forward	Comments sometimes irrelevant, betray lack of preparation, or indicate lack of attention to previous remarks of other students; sometimes advances the conversation, but sometimes does little to move it forward	Comments reflect little understanding of either the assignment or previous remarks in class; comments do not advance the conversation or are actively harmful to it.
Frequency of participation (20 points possible)	Actively participates at appropriate times; Misses no more than 1 reflection.	Sometimes participates but at other times is "tuned out." Misses no more than 3 reflections.	Seldom participates and is generally not engaged or absent. Seldom submits a reflection if at all.
Attendance (20 points possible)	Attends regularly/no more than 2 unexcused absences	Missed 3-4 classes (unexcused).	Absent 5 or more times (unexcused).

Grading Rubric: Essays

Your TA will use the following rubric to assess your three required essays; together they are worth 30% of your grade. Use of AI (e.g., ChatGPT) is not permitted.

Criteria	Exceeds (As)	Proficient (Bs)	Competent (Cs)	Below a C
Analysis & Critical Thinking (50 points possible)	Demonstrates insightful, original analysis; goes beyond surface-level understanding; presents a compelling, well-supported argument with substantial evidence and depth; effectively integrates multiple perspectives.	Provides clear, logical analysis with some depth; demonstrates a solid understanding of the topic with mostly well-supported arguments; some synthesis of perspectives but may lack comprehensive integration of complex ideas.	Basic analysis with limited depth; demonstrates general understanding but lacks sophistication in argumentation; relies on simple explanations and limited evidence; perspectives may be present but not fully developed.	Minimal analysis or critical thought; lacks coherent argumentation or logical support; superficial understanding or misinterpretation of the topic; perspectives are underdeveloped or irrelevant to the essay question.
Command of Topic (35 points possible)	Fully answers the question with depth and accuracy; thoroughly addresses all components of the prompt; demonstrates excellent understanding of the subject matter and its complexities; responses are precise and well-aligned with the prompt.	Mostly answers the question accurately; addresses most components of the prompt but may lack full depth or precision; demonstrates good understanding but may miss finer nuances of the topic.	Partially answers the question; addresses only some components of the prompt; shows general understanding but lacks detail or clarity in some areas; may include minor misinterpretations or omissions in addressing the prompt fully.	Fails to answer the question fully; little to no alignment with prompt requirements; significant misunderstandings or inaccuracies; lacks clear connection to topic or misses key points entirely.
Conventions (15 points possible)	Rare spelling/grammar errors; clear, organized; strong, focused thesis; appropriate, consistent use of citations; conforms well to academic writing standards.	Few spelling/grammar errors; logical organization; mostly clear thesis; mostly solid use of citations with minor errors; generally follows academic writing standards with occasional lapses.	Some spelling/grammar errors; basic organizational structure lacks coherence or flow; unclear or weak thesis; citations present but inconsistent; meets minimum academic writing standards but with noticeable errors.	Frequent spelling/grammar errors; disorganized structure; lacks a clear thesis; inconsistent or missing citations; does not meet basic academic writing standards, making the paper difficult to follow.

Reading & Assignment Schedule:

Rule of Law & Rights:		Reading
Jan. 13	Who Governs	Ch. 1, APT*
Jan. 15	The Constitution	Ch. 2, APT
Jan. 16/17	Discussion: The Spirit/Ideas	Ch. 1, 1-1, 1-3 P&P*
Jan. 20	--No Class MLK Day --	
Jan. 22	The Constitution	Ch. 2, APT
Jan. 23/24	Discussion: Constitution	Ch. 2, Federalist 10, 51; 2-3, P&P
Jan. 27-29	Federalism; Guest Speaker	Ch. 3, APT
Jan. 30/31	Discussion: States or Feds	Ch. 3, all, P&P
Feb. 3-5	Civil Liberties	Ch. 4, APT
Feb. 6/7	Discussion: Civil Liberties	Ch. 5, 5-3, 5-4, P&P
Feb. 10-12	Civil Rights Essay 1 due by midnight Feb. 12	Ch. 5, APT
Feb. 13/14	Discussion: Civil Rights	Ch. 4, 4-4, 4-5, P&P
Feb. 17	Exam 1 (covers Chapters 1-5)	
Policy & Governance:		
Feb. 19	Congress	Chapter 11, APT
Feb. 20/21	Discussion: Congress	Ch. 6, 6-1, 6-2, P&P
Feb. 24	Congress: Guest Speaker	
Feb. 26	The Presidency	Ch. 12, APT
Feb. 27/28	Discussion: Presidency	Ch.7, 7-2, 7-3, P&P
Mar. 3	The Presidency	
Mar. 5	Bureaucracy & Policy	Ch. 13, APT
Mar. 6/7	Discussion: Bureaucracy	Ch. 8, all, P&P
Mar. 10/12	The Judiciary Essay 2 due by midnight Mar. 12	Ch. 14, APT, Federalist #78, P&P
Mar. 13/14	Discussion: The Judiciary	Ch. 9, 9-1, 9-2, P&P
Mar. 17-21	--No Class Spring Break--	
Linking Citizens to Government:		
Mar. 24	Elections, Voting, Campaigns	Ch. 9, APT
Mar. 26	Exam 2 (covers Chapters 11-14)	
Mar. 27/28	Discussion: Voting	No new reading
Mar. 31- Apr. 2	Elections, Voting, Campaigns	
Apr. 3/4	Discussion: Campaigns, Elections	Ch. 11, 11-2, 11-3, 11-4
April 7-9	Political Parties	Chapter 8, APT
April 10/11	Discussion: Parties & Int. Groups	Ch. 12, 12-1, 12-3, Ch. 13, 13-1, P&P
April 14/16	Interest Groups: Guest Speaker	Ch. 10, APT
April 17/18	Discussion: Public Opinion	Ch. 10, 10-2, 10-4
April 21-23	Public Opinion Essay 3 due by midnight Apr. 23	Ch. 6, APT
May 2	Exam 3 (covers Chapters 6-10) NO EARLY EXAMS PERMITTED	10 am - 11:30 am

Key: APT = American Pol Today (Norton Illumine); P&P = Principles & Practice in Am Pol (Redshelf)

Contacting Prof. Robbins or Your TA

Please contact me or your TA if you need to discuss matters related to class. To protect your federal privacy rights, we cannot discuss your grade(s) over the phone, in front of the class or via non-official email. *Always email from Canvas or your UFL email.*

Prof. Suzanne M. Robbins

205 Anderson Hall
Suzanne.Robbins@ufl.edu
 Office Hours: M/F 12-3

Discussion Leaders (TAs):

TA office: Anderson 321

Hunter Tierman

h.tierman@ufl.edu
 Class Nos. 17819/18593
 Office Hours: TBD

Aidan Galloway

galloway13@ufl.edu
 Class Nos. TBD
 Office Hours: TBD

Rory Church

rwentworth.churc@ufl.edu
 Class Nos. TBD
 Office Hours: TBD

Timothy Stolz

stolzt@ufl.edu
 Class Nos. TBD
 Office Hours: TBD

Helena Koroshetz

helenakoroshetz@ufl.edu
 Class Nos. TBD
 Office Hours: TBD

Jason Justus

justusj@ufl.edu
 Class Nos. TBD
 Office Hours: TBD

The Fine Print: Course, Department, and University Policy in Brief

Attendance: Attendance is required. Students failing to attend class during the first week may be dropped from the course; excessive absences could result in a failing grade. Requirements for class attendance, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with [university policies](#). Please contact Dr. Robbins if you will miss lecture and your TA if you will miss discussion for documented absences (e.g., religious observances, illness, or academic/athletic competitions). Documentation for excused absences must be received within one week of absence.

COVID-19, Flu: Vaccines are readily available and have been demonstrated to be safe and effective against influenza and COVID-19. Visit one.ufl.edu for vaccination opportunities.

Late Work/Make up Exams: Canvas will assess a 5% per day penalty automatically to late work. **No late work will be accepted more than seven calendar days past due.** If you have an emergency on exam day, please email me immediately. Makeup exams are allowed with documentation, within seven calendar days. **No one will be permitted to take any exam early.**

Course Evaluations: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback and summaries of course evaluation results are available at [GatorEvals](#). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals or via Canvas.

Disability Services: Students who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the DRC by visiting their [webpage](#). Please share your accommodation letter (and discuss your needs) with Dr. Robbins as early as possible.

Plagiarism/Cheating: Cheating/plagiarism will result in zero for the assignment and will be reported to the SCCR. Students are bound by the [UF Honor Pledge](#). AI (e.g., ChatGPT) is not permitted in this course.

Current UF Grading Policies/Grade Points: Information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points is available in the [undergraduate catalog](#).

Recording lectures/discussion: 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. Students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

Extra-Credit: I do not offer extra credit on an individual basis. All opportunities for extra credit, if any, will be announced on Canvas at the beginning of the semester.

All these policies, as well as links to university resources, such as U Matter/We Care, are also on Canvas.