

POS2041: AMERICAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

General Education Core: Social Sciences (S)
Section: 26053 (Spring 2025)

Instructor:	J.S. Truscott	Email:	jaketruscott@ufl.edu
Class Time:	MWF 11:45-12:35	Class Location:	AND 0034
Office:	Anderson 317	Office Hours:	W 2:00-4:00

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.

State Core Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the basic principles and practices of America's constitutional republic.
- 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.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation, and landmark executive actions.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of the history and development of the American federal government and its impact on law and society.
- Students will demonstrate an ability to apply course material to contemporary political issues and debates.
- Students will demonstrate an ability to engage in discussion and civil debate on American politics that are associated with multiple points of view.

For additional details about general education subject objectives, see [HERE](#).

Textbooks

The main texts for this course will guide most of our weekly discussions. However, additional materials may be assigned weekly to supplement course material. These may include: journal and newspaper articles, podcasts, or videos. If there are required or recommended materials assigned for any week beyond the textbooks, they will be made available via Canvas. It is expected that you will have read all of the assigned readings prior to the start of each class.

- *By the People: Debating American Government* (6th Edition) – by James Morone and Rogan Kersh (ISBN: 978-0197670699)

Note: While I will be teaching from the 6th Edition, earlier editions would likely suffice.

Evaluation

Examinations: Your exams will consist of a Midterm and Final Exam, both of which will be in person. The Final Exam will not be strictly cumulative – i.e., the Midterm will only encompass material learned prior to the Midterm date, and the Final will only encompass material learned after the midterm. However, given the natural progression of the course material, some content may be introduced in both the midterm and final examinations. They will both include a combination of multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank questions.

Quizzes: There will be (4) quizzes scheduled throughout the term. These quizzes will primarily include a few multiple choice questions and short answer prompts that will mimic how questions will be presented for your exams. These quizzes will serve as your best possible study tools to prepare for the exams.

Critical Response Essay: During the course of the term, you will be required to complete **one** critical response essay prompt that will be submitted to Canvas. A general rubric and essay tips will be made available in the Course Materials section of Canvas. Each response paper should be approximately 6-8 pages double-spaced (12 pt font, Times New Roman). The structure of the paper will ultimately depend on how the question is structured, but they should generally follow the traditional essay format (Thesis → Body Paragraphs → Conclusion → Works Cited). I have no preference for which citation style you use, so long as it is consistent and present. All I ask is that you only use reputable sources (aka, no Wikipedia, Encyclopedia Britannica, etc.). If you have specific essay questions, please don't hesitate to ask!

Please Note: Again you only need to complete **one** critical response essay from the list of prospective topics. More information will be provided during the first week of the semester.

Participation: Your participation will be gauged primarily by your participation in the weekly lecture periods.

My Advice: Make sure I know your name by the end of the semester. Especially when it comes down to those moments where you are teetering between thresholds for different grades, it really helps if I know who you are because you are an active participant in the course.

Grading Policy

Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	25%
Critical Response Essay	20%
Quizzes (4)	20%
Participation	10%

Grading Scale for Final Semester Grades

100-94 A	79-77 C+	63-60 D-
93-90 A-	76-74 C	59-0 F
89-87 B+	73-70 C-	
86-64 B	69-67 D+	
83-80 B-	66-64 D	

Communication with Instructor

If you need to contact me for any reason, I do ask that you aim to primarily use your UF email address rather than Canvas. I am generally very good about responding to emails quickly, but please understand that I likely will not respond until the next day if the message is sent late in the night.

Email: jaketruscott@ufl.edu

Attendance Policy

I will not be taking attendance every day, but I will at random periods throughout the semester. That being said, I am fully aware that people have other things going on in their lives. If you happen to be absent on a day that I take attendance, please recognize that I allow (2) free absences without justification – i.e., you do not need to tell me why you are missing class. If you would like to receive an excused absence – e.g., things related to personal or family emergencies, please be sure to email me and we will handle those situations on a case-by-case basis. Excused absences will **not** count towards your (2) free absences.

Academic Honesty (General & AI)

I recognize the importance and benefits of using generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools and large language models (LLMs) like ChatGPT, which is why my position is to embrace and integrate them into certain course activities with full transparency about their use. However, using any AI tools during an exam or quiz is never permitted. It is also important to note that algorithmic structures of generative AI tools – particularly ChatGPT – are built to return responses to queries. **However**, this does not mean that they are always correct. Be sure to pay special consideration to the information returned from queries – there are several recent examples of individuals finding themselves in bad situations after assuming these tools are infallible.

You are responsible for knowing and complying with the policy and procedures relating to academic honesty. To understand what constitutes dishonest work, as defined by the University, please carefully review the policy here: <https://teach.ufl.edu/resource-library/academic-integrity-at-uf/>

Syllabus Policy

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, if necessary. I will give you fair notice (at least a week) if something, such as a reading assignment, is to change.

Disability Resource Center

If you anticipate needing accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you must register for services with the Disability Resource Center. Additional information can be found here: <https://disability.ufl.edu/>

Withdrawal Policy

Undergraduate students can only withdraw from four courses and receive a withdrawal-passing (WP) grade while enrolled at the University. Students can drop any class without penalty during the drop/add period at the beginning of every semester. Dropped courses during the drop/add period do not qualify as withdrawals. Instructors have the ability to withdraw a student from the class due to excessive absences (see course attendance policy). Please review the policy here: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/dropping-courses-withdrawals/>

Key Dates

- Friday 1/31 – Quiz 1
- Friday 2/14 – Quiz 2
- Friday 3/7 – Midterm
- Friday 4/4 – Quiz 3
- Friday 4/18 – Quiz 4
- Tuesday 4/29 – Final Exam

Course Schedule

Week 1 (1/13-1/17)

Topic: Introduction & Ideas that Shape American Politics
Readings: Syllabus & *By the People* (Ch. 1)

Week 2 (1/22-1/24)

Topic: The Founding & the Constitution
Readings: *By the People* (Ch. 2)
No Class Monday 1/19

Week 3 (1/27-1/31)

Topic: Federalism
Readings: *By the People* (Ch. 3)
Note: Quiz 1 Friday (1/31)

Week 4 (2/3-2/7)

Topic: Civil Liberties & Civil Rights
Readings: *By the People* (Ch. 4-5)

Week 5 (2/10-2/14)

Topic: Public Opinion & Participation
Readings: *By the People* (Ch. 6)

Note: Quiz 1 Friday (2/14)

Week 6 (2/17-2/21)

Topic: Media

Readings: *By the People* (Ch. 7)

Week 7 (2/24-2/28)

Topic: Campaigns & Elections

Readings: *By the People* (Ch. 8)

Week 8 (3/3-3/7)

Topic: Interest Groups & Parties

Readings: *By the People* (Ch. 9)

Note: Midterm Friday (3/7)

Week 9 (3/10-3/14)

Topic: Congress

Readings: *By the People* (Ch. 10)

Week 10 (3/17-3/21)

No Class – Spring Break!

Week 11 (3/24-3/28)

Topic: The Presidency

Readings: *By the People* (Ch. 11)

Week 12 (3/31-4/4)

Topic: Bureaucracy

Readings: *By the People* (Ch. 12)

Note: Quiz 3 Friday (4/4)

Week 13 (4/7-4/11)

Topic: The Federal Courts

Readings: *By the People* (Ch. 13)

Week 14 (4/14-4/18)

Topic: Domestic Policy

Readings: *By the People* (Ch. 14)

Note: Quiz 4 Friday (4/18)

Week 15 (4/21-4/23)

Topic: Foreign Policy

Readings: *By the People* (Ch. 14)

Final Exam: (4/29) 3:00-5:00