

# INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

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Hours: Tuesday 3-4, Thursday 1-2,  
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*The people of this country [will] by their conduct and example... decide the important question whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice [or] whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.*

--Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist Papers*

This course is an introduction to the foundations and workings of the American political system. The main focus is on the institutions and activities of the national government, however, there will be some discussion of state, local, and foreign governments.

## **The course has seven major objectives:**

1. To introduce the theoretical and practical considerations that inspired the founding of the American political system and informed the government's structure.
2. To discuss the evolution of fundamental political rights and liberties.
3. To examine the factors that support and perpetuate the political system.
4. To analyze the structures, functions, and activities of the major political institutions—the Presidency, Congress, the judiciary, the bureaucracy, political parties, and interest groups.
5. To examine different forms of political participation, including elections and nonmainstream forms.
6. To provide an overview of the policymaking process.
7. To inform students of the different ways individuals and groups influence American politics.

## **Required Reading:**

Karen O'Connor and Larry J. Sabato, *American Government*, 2009 Alternate Edition (Pearson 2009)

(Note: Available in several formats, including hardcover text, binder sheets, e-version. Any format is acceptable. Not all are available at the University Bookstore.)

Saul D. Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals* (Vintage, any edition)

Readings posted under Course Reserves on Elms at <https://elms.umd.edu>

A major newspaper, such as the *Washington Post* or *New York Times*

## **Course Requirements:**

Students are required to attend the lectures and discussion sections, to read the assigned materials, and to participate in discussion sections. Grades will be based on two in-class examinations (each worth 20%), a 10-page paper (worth 20%), a final examination (worth 30%), and performance in discussion sections

and on short assignments and quizzes (worth a total of 10%). The university code of academic integrity will apply to this course (see <http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/code.html>). Students are instructed to familiarize themselves with it and adhere to it.

All papers should be double-spaced, have one inch margins, and be printed in a 12-point font. The first essay requires no citations. The second is a research paper that should be approximately 10 pages long. It should use at least eight sources: six must be scholarly books or articles; the others can be journalistic reports from newspapers or magazine, but not opinion pieces.

All papers and other assignments are due at the beginning of class. Late assignments will be penalized three points for each day they are late. A make-up will be given only if justified by a university sanctioned excuse and accompanied by appropriate documentation. If at all possible, students should contact their TA or the professor prior to the scheduled exam date to request a make-up exam.

### *Copyright Protections and Note Taking*

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### **Students with Special Needs:**

Students with special needs who are registered with Disability Support Services (301-314-7682) are responsible for notifying the instructor and their TA seven days prior to each exam to arrange appropriate accommodations.

### **Assignments:**

Students should complete the readings and projects before class on the assigned dates.

September 1: Introduction

September 3: Foundations of American Government

O'Connor and Sabato, ch. 1 and Appendix I  
Government and Politics 170 Study Guide (ELMS)

\*September 4: 2-3 PAGE ESSAY TO BE HANDED IN FIRST DISCUSSION SECTION.

September 8: Foundations of American Government (cont'd)

September 10: The Constitution

O'Connor and Sabato, ch. 2, Federalist Papers Nos. 10 and 51  
Federalist Papers Nos. 47 and 48 (ELMS)

September 15: The Constitution (continued)

Readings by John Roche and Charles Beard (ELMS)

September 17: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

O'Connor and Sabato, chs. 5-6

Readings by John Stuart Mill, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and *Brown v. Board of Education* (ELMS)

September 22: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights (continued)

\*September 24: FIRST IN-CLASS EXAMINATION

Long session: arrive at 2:00 sharp with a pen and a pencil with an eraser

September 29: Voting Technology and Ballot Design

October 1: Political Culture, Political Socialization, and Public Opinion

O'Connor and Sabato, ch. 11

Readings by Alexis de Tocqueville, Samuel Huntington, and Morris Fiorina (ELMS)

October 6: Political Culture, Political Socialization, and Public Opinion (continued)

October 8: Political Parties and Elections

O'Connor and Sabato, ch. 12

Readings by APSA Committee on Political Parties (listed under Arthur Paulson) and Paul Herrnson (ELMS)

October 13: Political Parties and Elections (continued)

October 15: Political Participation and Voting

O'Connor and Sabato, ch. 13

Readings by Bernard Berelson et al. and Samuel Popkin (ELMS)

October 20: Political Campaigns

O'Connor and Sabato, ch. 14

Readings by David Dulio and Darrell West (ELMS)

October 22: Political Campaigns (continued)

\*October 27: SECOND IN-CLASS EXAMINATION

Long session: arrive at 2:00 sharp with a pen and a pencil with eraser

October 29: Career Seminar sponsored by the Center for American Politics and Citizenship

November 3: Congress

O'Connor and Sabato, ch. 7

Federalist Papers Nos. 55 and 57 and readings by David Mayhew, Richard Fenno, and Morris Fiorina (ELMS)

November 5: Congress (continued)

November 10: The Presidency

O'Connor and Sabato, ch. 8

Federalist Papers Nos. 68 and 70 and readings by Richard Neustadt and Samuel Kernell (ELMS)

November 12: The Executive Branch

O'Connor and Sabato, ch. 9

Readings by Max Weber, James Q. Wilson, and Robert Reich (ELMS)

November 17: The Judiciary

O'Connor and Sabato, ch. 10

Federalist No. 78 and William Brennan, Jr. (ELMS)

November 19: Interest Groups

O'Connor and Sabato, ch. 16

Federalist No. 10 (again) and readings by E.E. Schattschneider, Paul Herrnson et al., and Jonathon Rauch (ELMS)

November 24: The News Media

O'Connor and Sabato, ch. 15

Readings by James Hamilton (ELMS)

December 1: State and Local Politics

O'Connor and Sabato, ch. 4

December 3: Nonmainstream Politics

Alinsky, pp. 3-47, 98-196

Reading by Lori Montgomery (ELMS)

December 4: PAPER DUE IN DISCUSSION SECTION

December 8: Public Policy

Readings by Roger Davidson and Walter Oleszek, Michael Harrington, and Milton Friedman (ELMS)

December 10: Course Summary

\*Thursday, December 17, 10:30am-12:30pm: FINAL EXAMINATION