

## **GVPT 170, FC01**

Racek  
American Government and Politics  
Tydings: Room 0102

Fall 2009

Office Hours: By appt

MW 6:00-7:15 pm  
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This course is a general introduction to the American Political System and the Politics of American life. It is designed to acquaint students with some basic facts and theories so that you may begin to formulate a personal understanding of how our society functions. In addition, a broad perspective is presented as an introduction for those wishing to study political matters in more detail.

The course has two components. The first part surveys the major institutions of American national government: Presidency, Congress and the Courts. The second considers the setting within which government operates, and examines what we want or expect from government and how we go about getting it. A concern throughout the course is the relationship between the various aspects of the political environment and the policies produced by the system.

**Books** (Some material will be online, available on the Blackboard system):  
Available at the bookstores:

- 1) Karen O'Connor and Larry Sabato, *Essentials of American Government, Continuity & Change*, 2009 edition
- 2) Course Reader: Reader will be emailed to you.  
You must have a reliable email address that you will check almost every day in order to get course material.
- 3) John Jay, James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, *The Federalist Papers*. You are welcome to buy a copy at any bookstore, but is readily available online.

### **Attendance:**

I will take attendance every class and a premium is placed upon your class appearances. I would like this course to be as interactive as possible. If you choose not to attend, you do so at your own risk. Examination questions will be based largely upon class discussions of the course materials. Moreover, 10% of your final grade depends upon your active participation in classes. If you have a reasonable excuse for being absent, please email me so that I know.

Arriving late to class is much better than not arriving at all. However, if you must arrive after a session has started, please show consideration to your colleagues by entering quietly and discretely finding a seat near the door. Similarly, if you must leave a class session early, please be kind enough to anticipate this, and locate yourself in a seat that will allow a non-disruptive exit.

If you have a conflict with either of the exam dates because of religious observance, please inform me of this conflict as soon as possible. No excuses will be accepted on the day of exams. Additionally, missing class for religious reasons is acceptable as long as reasonable notification is provided.

### ***Exam and Papers:***

90% of your final grade will be determined on the basis of a mid-term exam, 2 short papers, 8 quizzes and a final exam.

### ***Exams:***

The mid-term examination will present short-answer, essay questions and counts 20% toward the final grade. I will provide you with a list of potential examination questions in the week preceding the designated test date to help you prepare. In addition, we will also schedule a review session prior to each exam, again to help you prepare. The date scheduled for the examination, **October 19th**, is fixed. Make-up exams are possible only under very unusual circumstances. If, for good reason, you must re-schedule the examination, be prepared to provide me with documentation as to why it is necessary. The final exam (25%) will follow a similar format with similar expectations, and it will be cumulative.

### ***Quizzes:***

On announced dates, there will be a sort written quizzes on the reading material for that topic. It might cover two weeks of reading but will be structured as broadly as possible. The goal is for you to show the instructor that you read that week.

### ***Short Papers:***

Through a substantial portion of the semester, you will be responsible for brief written papers in response to a set of questions about the readings. There will be two of these and they will be 3-4 pages in length each. Each document will be electronically transmitted to me as an e-mail attachment. Papers must be neatly typed, with standard font and margins, and fully documented. Your answers must clearly reflect that you have read the assigned material. **Papers are due by 6 pm on September 28<sup>th</sup> and November 23<sup>rd</sup>.**

Grammar, style, and usage are very important and your instructors take this element of paper writing very seriously. Thus, your papers should be completely free of typos, misspellings, and grammatical errors. In this regard, you will likely find Hacker, *A Pocket Style Manual*, quite useful. You may also wish to make reference to the following two web sites: William Strunk, Jr., "Elements of Style,"

<http://www.bartleby.com/141/index.html> and "Common Errors in English,"  
<http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/errors/index.html> .

I will return the papers with comments electronically. **These assignments will cumulate as 30% of your final grade. A missed assignment will result in an automatic "F" for the course.**

If you require assistance with writing assignments the Writing Center offers individual assistance for all undergraduates.

***Weather Issues:*** The University website will have information about closing and delays. Please pay attention to these announcements. Expect classes and exams missed due to weather closings to be made up.

***Academic Honesty:*** The University expects all students to adhere to the accepted norms of intellectual honesty in their academic work. Any form of cheating, plagiarism, or dishonesty, or collusion in another's dishonesty is a fundamental violation of these norms. It is the student's responsibility to understand and abide by these standards of academic honesty. Intellectual dishonesty cannot be tolerated in an academic community. Any form of cheating, plagiarism, and collusion will result in failure for the course. For general University policy statements on academic honesty, and the University honor pledge see: <http://www.jpo.umd.edu/aca/honorpledge.html>

Students are expected to treat each other with respect. Disruptive behavior of any kind will not be tolerated. Students who are unable to show civility with one another, the teaching assistants, or myself will be subject to being referred to the Office of Student Conduct or to Campus Police. You are expected to adhere to the Code of Student Conduct.

I will make every effort to accommodate students who are registered with the Disability Support Services (DSS) Office and who provide me with a University of Maryland DSS Accommodation form which has been updated for the Fall 2009 semester. This form must be presented to me no later than October 1, 2009. I am not able to accommodate students who are not registered with DSS or who do not provide me with documentation which has been reviewed by DSS after October 1, 2009.

### ***Grades:***

Grades are calculated on a standard scale, including pluses and minuses (98-100=A+; 94-97=.A; 91-93=A-; 88-90=B+; 84-87=B; and so on). In fairness to all, there can be no extra-credit projects. Hence, your grade is contingent upon your performance on the examinations, quizzes and papers. I like to see and will reward effort and improvement. Therefore, in borderline situations, solid class participation, indicating preparation and interest, will tip the scale in your favor. Also, if in the final analysis your grade is on the border, a clear demonstration of effort and interest will work to resolve the ambiguity, again in your favor.

Participation (10%)  
Quizzes (15%)  
Mid-Term Exam (20%)  
3-4 Page Written Assignments (30%)  
Final Exam (25%)

## **COURSE CALENDAR**

### **August 31<sup>st</sup>: Introduction to American Government, Roots and Development.**

What are the roots of our government?  
Readings: None.

### **September 2<sup>nd</sup>: Introduction to American Development, Roots and Development Continued.**

Readings: O'Connor and Sabato: Chapter 1  
Declaration of Independence

### **September 9<sup>th</sup>: From a Colony to Piloting the Ship.**

Why did the U.S. choose a republican form of government? Why a democracy? To what extent were the Founders really committed to democracy? How about equality and individualism?

Readings: O'Connor and Sabato: Chapters 2 and 3  
The United States Constitution  
Federalist 47, 48, 51

### **September 14<sup>th</sup>: Article I: Congress**

Analyze the tension between majority rule and individual rights. How did the framers of the Constitution attempt to deal with this problem? Would it be a good idea today to broaden the scope of participation? Assess the quality of representation in the United States Congress today. Have changes in Congress abetted or been detrimental to effective representation and governance? Have those changes been consistent with the Founders' original intentions vis-a-vis representation and the governmental balance of power?

Readings: O'Connor and Sabato: Chapter 6  
Federalist #10

## **September 16<sup>th</sup>: Congress Continued- Quiz 1**

Readings: Perspectives on Congress: Course Reader.

## **September 21<sup>st</sup>: Article II: The Executive**

Why would the Founding Fathers place the Presidency in Article II? What were they concerned about with regards to power? Should there be two presidents? What elements did George Washington bring to the office? Has the President's power increased or decreased over the years?

Readings: O'Connor and Sabato Chapter 7  
Perspectives on the Executive: In Course Reader

## **September 23<sup>rd</sup>: The Executive- Continued- Quiz 2**

Readings: O'Connor and Sabato Chapter 8

## **September 28<sup>th</sup>: Article III: The Judiciary: Paper 1 Due.**

The Judiciary has been called the forgotten branch and one the Founders were least concerned with. Why would this be? Is the federal court system, especially the Supreme Court, still the same way? What about the idea that there are nine members of the Court, making rulings that effect 300 million Americans? To what extent the court system counter-majoritarian?

Readings: O'Connor and Sabato: Chapter 9  
Federalist #78

## **September 30<sup>th</sup>: The Judiciary Continued: Quiz 3**

Readings: The Supreme Court Reconsidered: Course Reader

## **October 5<sup>th</sup>: Civil Liberties**

What are the major differences between civil rights and civil liberties in American society? From the Civil Rights movement to the Women's Movement, civil rights have come a long way. To what extent is there more to accomplished? How should this be done?

Readings: O'Connor and Sabato: Chapter 4

## **October 7<sup>th</sup>: Civil Liberties Continued**

Readings: Court Cases, In Course Reader

### **October 12<sup>th</sup>: Civil Rights: Quiz 4**

Readings: Court case review, In Course Reader  
O'Connor and Sabato: Chapter 5

### **October 14<sup>th</sup>: Review for Midterm**

### **October 19<sup>th</sup>: Midterm**

### **October 21<sup>st</sup>: Elections and Campaigns**

How should elections be run? There is significant evidence that campaigns do not convert people from one side to another. Why campaign then? Does it make any difference in the outcome? Are all our elections in the future going to be as tight as Bush v. Gore and Bush v. Kerry? What does that say about our society?

Readings: O'Connor and Sabato: Chapter 12

### **October 26<sup>th</sup> Elections and Campaigns: Quiz 5**

Readings: Perspectives on Elections and Campaigns: Course Reader

### **October 28<sup>th</sup> Political Participation**

Why is political participation so low in our society? Should voting be mandatory? What other ways are people politically involved besides voting? Is low turnout always a bad thing?

Readings: Perspectives on Political Participation: Course Reader

### **November 2<sup>nd</sup>: Political Participation**

Readings: Perspectives on Political Participation: Course Reader.

### **November 4<sup>th</sup>: Interest Groups**

Madison saw interest groups, or factions, as being dangerous. To what extent was he accurate? Should they be limited or controlled? How much influence do they really have? To what extent can members of the government be influenced by interest groups?

Readings: O'Connor and Sabato: Chapter 11

### **November 9<sup>th</sup>: Interest Groups: Quiz 6**

Readings: Perspectives on Interest Groups, Course Reader

### **November 11<sup>th</sup>: Media**

There is significant debate about the role of the media on government. They like to believe they are the fourth branch of government. To what extent is this accurate? To what extent do the media have it's own agenda? What is that agenda? To what extent is there a liberal or conservative bias in the media? Explain.

Readings: O'Connor and Sabato: Chapter 10  
Perspectives on the Media, Course Reader

### **November 16<sup>th</sup>: Policy Making Process and the Bureaucracy**

How exactly are laws made? Is it the same process that you learned in *School House Rock*? What role does money play in the process? Can lawmakers be bought? Why has making laws often been compared to making sausages? What role does the Bureaucracy play in all this?

Readings: O'Connor and Sabato: Review Chapter 8

### **November 18<sup>th</sup>: Policy Making Process Continued: Quiz 7**

Readings: Perspectives on Policymaking, Course Reader

### **November 23<sup>rd</sup>: Economic Policy: Paper 2 Due**

We live in a capitalist society (although it generally is considered a mixed economy). How efficient and effective is this system? To what extent is our system set up as a competition between the have's and have not's? Should the winners be helping out the losers?

Readings: O'Connor and Sabato, Chapter 13  
Perspectives on Economic Policy, Course Reader

### **November 25<sup>th</sup>: Foreign Policy**

How effectively does the United States government conduct its foreign policy? To what extent should the U.S. act unilaterally in military matters (like in Iraq)? How is policy created within the walls of Congress and in the White House? How should the U.S. act within the world community?

Readings: O'Connor and Sabato, Chapter 14  
Perspectives on Foreign Policy, Course Reader

**November 30<sup>th</sup>: Foreign Policy Continued**

Readings: Perspectives on Foreign Policy, Course Reader

**December 2<sup>nd</sup>: General thoughts on the role of government in society: Quiz 8**

Readings: Thoughts on Government, Course Reader

**December 7<sup>th</sup>: Wrap-up and review**

**December 9<sup>th</sup>: Review for Final**

**December 14<sup>th</sup>: Final Exam 6 pm**