

GVPT170: American Government  
2009 Summer Session I  
MW 9:00am-12:15pm  
Tydings 1101

Lecturer: Anne Cizmar  
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Office Hours: MW 1:30-3:30pm (and by aptmt.)

Course Description:

This course is designed to acquaint students with the institutions of American government. The first part of the course is dedicated to exploring the foundations of our American system of government, looking at the founding of our democracy, the Constitution, and the way these impact us today.

In the second and third parts of this course, we will examine the formal and informal institutions of American government. We will explore the roles of each branch of government and highlight the specific responsibilities of each as well as the tension between these branches.

In the final part of the course we will turn to the role of the American electorate. We will analyze how they participate in the system by looking at both how their preferences can influence government and how the institutions, laws, and political process can influence them.

Requirements & Grading:

Students will be evaluated via presentations, a short paper, several in-class assignments and midterms, and a cumulative final exam. Please note that the exams will draw on lectures, videos, class discussions, as well as required readings that may not be covered in class.

Assignments:

40% -- 4 mini-midterms (10% each)  
30% -- Final examination  
20% -- Presentation with Paper (10% each)  
10% -- In-class Writing Assignments

Grade Appeals: In the event students feel that their work has been graded unfairly, students will be allowed to appeal grades by providing a written memo detailing *specifically* where they believe more points are deserved. In doing so, students are expected to review their graded assignment with comments as well as the book and lecture materials.

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, plagiarism, or any other form of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Those students caught violating the standards by which University of Maryland students are expected to conduct themselves will be dealt with according to the rules of the University and could result in a student receiving a failing grade for the course, suspension, or expulsion from the University of Maryland. For more information, please see: <http://www.bsos.umd.edu/for-students/advising/academic-integrity-honor-pledge-and-legal-aid-.aspx>

Books:

*American Government: Roots and Reform* (2009 alternate edition), Karen O'Connor and Larry J. Sabato. ISBN-13: 978-0-205-65220-4.

\*Supplemental readings: These readings, or information for accessing them online, will be made available by me.

Disabilities: 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.

Course Policies:

While the following section is *not* an exhaustive list of expectations for student conduct experience has taught me that there are some common mistakes that should be addressed at the beginning of the semester.

- 1) Punctuality: Students are expected to arrive for class on time. While it is understood that sometimes events happen beyond our control that may cause tardiness, chronic lateness is inexcusable as it is disruptive to the other students.
- 2) Electronic Communication: You will be required to provide me with an email address on the first day of class. Whatever address you give me, you are responsible for checking that e-mail regularly. When you email me please make it a point to always address the e-mail, provide a proper subject, and sign your email.
- 3) Electronic Devices: Students should refrain from using laptops, ipods, cell phones, or any other electronic devices for outside of class purposes during the class.
- 4) Personal Responsibility: You are in charge of your education. If you are unclear about something it is up to you to: a) seek out the answer for yourself in a timely manner; and then b) follow up with me during office hours or through e-mail if you are still unclear.
- 5) Absences: There are no attendance/participation points awarded for this class. However, we will, from time-to-time, do in-class assignments and mini-midterms that will be graded and counted toward the final class grade. Therefore, missing classes is ill-advised.

No late work will be accepted and no make-up exams will be given except under exigent circumstances (illness warranting a missed exam, family emergency, etc.) In these cases, the Campus Senate policy requires students who are absent due to illness/injury furnish documentary support to the instructor. I require students to

contact me by email or by phone prior to class time in which you indicate that you have an illness or an injury. You must provide written documentation verifying your illness/injury immediately upon your return to class. You will not be allowed to turn in missed assignments or make up quizzes, tests, papers, etc. if you have not provided this documentation. Documentation not presented to me in a timely manner will not be accepted. In addition, if it is found that you have falsified the documentation provided, I will refer you to the University's Student Conduct Office. Please note: I do not—as a general rule—give incompletes.

- 6) Emailed Assignments: *No assignments will be accepted via email under any circumstances.* All must be turned in as a hardcopy.
- 7) Grade Discussion: Grades will not be discussed over email. Accordingly, grade appeals must be submitted as a hardcopy.
- 8) Extra Credit: There will be no extra credit assignments for the class. However, on each of the midterms there will be some bonus points available.

Presentations and Papers: The textbook provides a broad approach to the introduction of American Politics; however, supplemental reading will be needed to appropriately cover each topic. Because students are asked to read a lot per day I have decided it would be more efficient to ask each student to read and report on one supplemental reading as opposed to assigning a bunch of the supplemental readings to everyone. Students will be allowed to choose an article (or book chapter) from a list on the first day of class. If a student fails to sign up for a presentation during the first class s/he has until Wednesday, June 3 at 5:00pm to sign up for one (this can be done via email). Since you sign up for the presentation in advance, you are responsible for delivering the presentation on that day. If you miss your presentation without an excused absence (see above for acceptable reasons) you will forfeit the points for the presentation. Students will report to the class (5-8 minute presentation) about the reading. Students will also be asked to submit a 2-3 page paper. The paper will be due *in class* on the day of the presentation. The paper will be docked one letter grade for each day it is late (beginning with one letter grade for a paper turned in after class on the presentation day, two letter grades for the next day, etc.).

The paper and presentation will provide the class with background, summarize the main points of the reading, as well as include an assessment of the argument made in the reading or discussion of how it is relevant to the class. The list includes three general types of readings: documents surrounding our country's origin, the actual working documents of politics, and academic studies of American politics.

Important Dates:

June 10: Midterm #1

June 17: Midterm #2

June 24: Midterm #3

July 1: Midterm #4

July 6: No class, campus is closed

July 8: Final exam in class

**\*\*Note: I reserve the right to change the syllabus at any time. In the case of any issues not covered under this syllabus, the University of Maryland policies will be applied.**

Topics:

**Section I:** Foundations of American Democracy

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- A) Beginnings of American Democracy:
  - Different forms of political systems
  - Tradeoffs of different forms of government
  - American Democracy
  - Delegating power to agents

*\*American Government* chapter 1 (skim)
  
- B) The Constitution:
  - The Articles of Confederation
  - Debate over the ratification of the Constitution
  - Key rights granted by the Constitution
  - The Federalists and the Anti-Federalists

*\*American Government* chapter 2.  
*\*The Constitution*
  
- C) Federalism:
  - Different forms of Federalism
  - Constitutional powers given to states and federal government
  - Mandates

*\*American Government* chapter 3.

**Section II:** Institutions

- A) Congress:
  - Formal powers of Congress
  - How the rules and organization of Congress impact policymaking
  - Characteristics of people who serve in Congress
  - Being elected of Congress
  - Parties in Congress

*\*American Government* chapter 7.
  
- B) Presidency:
  - Formal powers of the President
  - Informal powers of the President
  - How the presidency has changed over time

- White House staff
- \*American Government* chapter 8.

C) Bureaucracy:

- Creating the Bureaucracy
- Previous patronage system
- Tools to control the bureaucracy
- Iron Triangle

*\*American Government* chapter 8.

D) Judiciary:

- Constitutionally granted powers
- Supreme Court and lower courts
- Who is on the Supreme Court
- Relationships between Congress, Executive, and courts

*\*American Government* chapter 10.

**Section III: Linkage Institutions**

A) Political Parties

- Functions of parties in our democracy
- Divided control of government
- Party labels for voters
- Current state of parties in our system

*\*American Government* chapter 12.

B) Media

- Role of the media as watchdog
- Relationships between media and politicians
- 24 hour news cycle and its impact on the electorate

*\*American Government* chapter 15.

C) Interest Groups

- Roots of American interest groups
- Kinds of organized interests
- Activities of interest groups

*\*American Government* chapter 16.

**Section IV: Political Participation**

A) Civil Rights and Civil Liberties:

- Bill of Rights
- Current debates in civil rights and liberties
- Express versus implied rights

*\*American Government* chapter 5.

\*Bill of Rights

B) Campaigns, Voting and Elections

- Why people don't vote
- Campaign messages
- The impact of laws on voting turnout

\**American Government* chapter 13.

C) Public Opinion and Political Socialization

- How people acquire opinions/make political decisions
- Survey research methods and information
- Why Americans pay little attention to politics
- Aggregate public opinion

\**American Government* chapter 11.