

GVPT 170, Sec.0101-0115
American Government and Politics
Spring 2008
MW 3:30pm, 0130 Tydings Hall

Wayne V. McIntosh
[3140 Tydings](#)

Office Hours: MW (2:30-3:30pm), or by appt
Phone: 405-4134
e-mail: wmcintosh@gvpt.umd.edu

Ms Katherine Baxter (Sections 0107, 0108, 0109) kbaxter@gvpt.umd.edu
Ms Melissa Bell (Sections 0101, 0105, 0106) mbell@gvpt.umd.edu
Ms Heather Creek (Sections 0110, 0114, 0115) hcreek@gvpt.umd.edu
Ms Blessing Okoroafor (Sections 0111, 0112, 0113) bokoroafor@gvpt.umd.edu
Mr. Matthew Spino (Sections 0102, 0103, 0104) matthewspino@gmail.com

COURSE DESCRIPTION

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, Courts, Bureaucracies. 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.

Course Requirements

In this course we shall collectively assess some of these questions, relying primarily upon information that we make available to you. Your active participation in this class is both vital **and** required. Specific requirements follow:

FIRST REQUIREMENT:

Read the remaining requirements thoroughly.

REMAINING REQUIREMENTS:

Books (Some material will be online, available on the Blackboard system):

Available at the bookstores:

- 1) O'Connor and Sabato, *Essentials of American Government*, 2008 edition
- 2) Wright, Richard. *Native Son*.

The following book is strongly recommended:

Hacker, Diana. *A Pocket Style Manual*. 4th Sprl edition

Computer Accounts:

Everyone **must immediately** make sure you have a valid computer account and e-mail capability. This will be essential to completion of the course.

Reading and Discussion:

Successful completion of this course will require careful preparation and active participation by me as well as each student. You are responsible for and will be tested on all assigned materials, including the novels, the academic texts, and several films. The format of the course will be lecture/discussion. To facilitate this goal and to promote understanding of the issues, small groups will meet weekly as discussion sessions under the direction of my graduate assistants. My assistants possess a great deal of expertise regarding the subject matter we are considering here, and they are interested in your progress. If at any time during the semester you would like to talk over the readings or other course-related issues with any of us, our doors are open to you (preferably during office hours or by appointment).

The readings are assigned in advance (see Course Outline), and I will expect you to come to class prepared to discuss them. My wish is to spend some of each class in general discussion, and devote the smaller group meetings each week more to give-and-take, open consideration of the material. However, if you have a question or a comment to make during one of our regular lecture meetings, please do not hesitate to raise it. Each of you can make valuable contributions to our general understanding of the materials, and no-one's perspective or opinion is any more, or less, important than any other. We will have to read, think, write, and compare our thoughts with each other. For these reasons, you will place yourself at a significant disadvantage if you

do not prepare for our class sessions and if you do not attend them. In order to help you think through the readings and supply material for discussion, I have provided at least one question for your consideration following each set of readings.

Attendance:

Although I do not intend to take attendance (your attendance is entirely voluntary), a premium is placed upon your class appearances. This also includes discussion section meetings. The course is structured such that the discussion group meetings constitute one-third of your class time. We have set things up this way for your benefit, to facilitate discussion and exchange of ideas in a small group format. 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 discussion section meetings.

Arriving late to class or discussion group 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 by February 15. No excuses will be accepted after that date.

Exam and Papers:

90% of your final grade will be determined on the basis of a mid-term exam, 3 short papers, and a final exam.

Exams:

The mid-term examination will present short-answer, essay questions and counts 30% 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 the exam, again to help you prepare. The date scheduled for the examination, **March 12**, 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 (30%) will follow a similar format with similar expectations, and it will be cumulative.

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 three of these. Each document will be electronically transmitted to your discussion section leader 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.

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>.

We 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.

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>

IMPORTANT DATES

February 8	Last Day for Schedule Adjustment
February 13	Paper 1 Due (midnight)
February 22	Paper 2 Due (midnight)
March 12	Mid-Term Exam
March 17-21	Spring Break
April 10	Paper 3 Due (midnight)
April 11	Last Day to Drop w/"W"
May 17	Final Exam, 1:30-3:30pm

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 and papers. I like to see and will reward effort and improvement. Therefore, in borderline situations, solid class and discussion group 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.

Recap: Evaluation:

Extra-Credit: None!

Participation (10%)

Mid-Term Exam (30%)

Brief Written Assignments (30%)

Final Exam (30%)

COURSE CALENDAR

1. Ideology: The Liberal Tradition

Questions: Ideologically, Americans are loosely bound together by their belief in certain core values. But different Americans emphasize the values differently. And, indeed, sometimes those values come into conflict with one another, with implications for the exercise of power. Is such conflict inevitable? By what means might such conflict be controlled?

January 28 & 30: Lecture: Introduction

Readings:

- 1) O'Connor & Sabato, Ch 1.
- 2) The Declaration of Independence

Discussion Groups: January 31 & February 1

Introduction

Readings: Same as above

2. The Constitution

Questions: Given their colonial experience, the Founders were understandably very concerned with the problem of power unchecked. Based upon your reading of the Constitution and Madison's essays in the Federalist, in what ways did the Founders intend to check the accumulation of power? Has their scheme been successful? Moreover, for the Founders, federalism was essential to liberty -- it meant both that power was further dispersed and that minority views could be aired in many additional forums. The system, however, has become lopsided, with the national government steadily accumulating more and more powers. In the long run, does it pose a threat to liberty? Or, is the growth of national power inevitable and/or desirable?

***Feb 8- Last day of schedule adjustment**

February 4 & 6: Lecture

Readings: O'Connor & Sabato, Chs 2-3
U.S. Constitution

Discussion Groups (February 7 & 8)

Readings: Federalist 47, 48, and 51

3. The American People

Questions: How would you characterize the American people? Besides being American citizens, what commonalities are there in our great mass of people? When you distill it down to the very basics, what do people want and need from life? Do your answers to these questions have any implications for government?

***Email 1st paper to discussion leader by midnight February 13 (Wednesday)**

February 11 & 13: Lecture

Discussion Groups (February 14 & 15)

Reading: Wright, *Native Son* (in entirety)

4. Representation/Congress

Questions: 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?

February 18 & 20: Lecture

Readings: O'Connor & Sabato, Ch 6

Discussion Groups (February 21 & 22)

Readings: Federalist #10

5. Presidency

Questions: From the time of LBJ through George W. Bush, we have seen one failed presidency after another. Indeed, LBJ opted not to seek a second full term in 1968 in response to public outcry against his Vietnam War policies; Richard Nixon resigned in disgrace rather than face sure removal by impeachment; Gerald Ford finished out Nixon's second term but failed to win election in his own right because people saw him as a bungler; Jimmy Carter failed to resolve a hostage crisis and saw his presidency go down the drain, losing in a landslide when he attempted a second term. Ronald Reagan, the so-called "teflon President," narrowly escaped ignominy in the Iran-Contra Affair, and left a legacy of scandal in a number of major administrative agencies (e.g., HUD). George Bush, who in 1991 was riding high in the polls

with an approval rating in the 80% range, saw his popularity plummet with economic indicators and did not survive the election of 1992. President Clinton, who was elected with less than a majority of the vote, withstood ongoing investigations by special prosecutors and a Senate impeachment trial (only the 2nd in our country's history). The second president Bush was also elected initially with less than a majority of the popular vote, won re-election by a very slim margin, and has seen his popularity ratings fall to record lows for much of his second term. Do all these presidential failures have to do with the character of the men who have held that office? Or, has something gone dangerously awry with the institution of the presidency itself?

***Email 2nd paper to discussion leader by midnight February 27 (Wednesday)**

February 25 & 27: Lecture
Reading: O'Connor & Sabato, Chs 7-8

Discussion Groups (February 28 & 29)
Readings: Federalist 69 and 70

***Town Hall Meeting tentatively titled "Moving Toward Peace in the Middle East: A Town Hall Meeting with Senator Chuck Hagel, the Major Republican Opponent of the War in Iraq." Date: March 3, 2008, Time: 8pm, Location: Memorial Chapel.**

6. Judiciary

Questions: The judicial branch of government is often called "anti-majoritarian." Why? Overall, has the anti-majoritarian thrust of the courts been liberty enhancing or liberty detracting? What are the implications for democracy?

March 3 - 5: Lecture
Readings: O'Connor & Sabato, Ch 9

Discussion Groups (March 6 & 7)
Readings: Federalist 78

March 10 (Monday): review
March 12 (Wednesday): **** MID-TERM EXAMINATION ****
Discussion Groups: no meetings this week.

March 17-21, Spring Break!!!!!!!

7. The Socialization Process

Questions: Why is the process of socialization important to a state? What are the major influences in the process, and what are their effects? Is everyone affected in the same ways? Are there winners and losers? Can we really trust the results of political polling? Should political polls be determinative of politicians' policy stances?

March 24 & 26: Lecture
Reading: O'Connor & Sabato, Ch 10
Discussion Groups (March 27 & 28)
Reading: same

8. Participation

Questions: Why is voter turnout so low in the United States? What are the implications of these low levels of voting? What other forms of political activity do people engage in? Why?

March 31 & April 2: Lecture
Readings: O'Connor & Sabato, Ch 12

Discussion Groups (April 3 & 4)
Readings: same

9. Interest Groups

Questions: How did Madison intend to control the effects of faction? In what ways can it be said that Madison's fears about faction have been turned upside down in latter-twentieth century America?

April 7 & 9: Lecture
Readings: 1) Federalist #10
2) O'Connor & Sabato, Ch 11

Discussion Groups (April 10 & 11)
Reading: same

***Paper #3 due via email by midnight April 10.**

10. Political Parties

Questions: How has the role of political parties changed over the past two centuries? Are political parties necessary in a large-scale democracy?

April 14 & 16: Lecture
Reading: O'Connor & Sabato, Ch11

Discussion Groups (April 17 & 18)
Readings: same

11. Civil Rights and Liberties

Questions: What are the differences between civil rights and civil liberties? How and why do they conflict? Has the movement to expand both in 20th century America been successful? Is there room in our society for further expansion of rights and liberties?

April 21 – May 6: Lecture

Reading: O'Connor & Sabato, Chs 4-5

Discussion Groups

Reading: same

May 12: Lecture

Final Wrap Up and Concluding Remarks

Final Exam: Saturday, May 17, 1:30-3:30 pm