



**Introduction to the U.S. Political System – GOVT-020
Georgetown University – Summer 2021**

Instructor: Prof. Joseph E. Hartman
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Class times/location: July 12 – August 12, 2021
Monday – Thursday, 10:45 AM-12:45 PM

Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays, 3:00-4:30 PM, by appointment

Class Description, Goals and Objectives:

This course offers an introduction to the American political system. We will explore the framework, institutions, influences and structural complexities of U.S. politics. We will have four main goals:

The first goal is to work together with integrity, by upholding the Georgetown Student Pledge

In pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life I commit myself to respect and to uphold the Georgetown University honor system:

To be honest in every academic endeavor, and

To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community as we live and work together.

I also commit myself to uphold this pledge and to work with you to meet these ideals.

A second goal is to help you become a more informed and competent citizen of our democracy. To accomplish this goal, you will need to build your knowledge about American politics and to learn how political knowledge can empower political activity. We will do this by reading, discussing, and reflecting on what we have read. Your knowledge will be tested through weekly content exams. At the end of the semester, you should have a strong grasp of the following:

1. Core Structural Elements of American Politics

- The U.S. Constitution
- Federalism
- Civil Rights
- Civil Liberties

2. Key Institutions of Government

- Congress
- The Presidency
- The Federal Judiciary
- The Bureaucracy

3. How the American Public Influences National Governmental Policy

- Public Opinion
- Voting, Campaigns and Elections
- Political Parties
- Interest Groups
- The News Media

A basic understanding of these core elements of our system of government is simply essential for effective citizenship and engaged political action.

A third goal is to develop your competency in interpreting and explaining the American political system. To accomplish this goal, you will participate in activities outside of our textbooks in which you will explore various aspects of politics in the US. You will attend political events, watch political videos, read articles, analyze data, and so forth.

A final goal is to develop your skills as a political analyst—that is, one who uses logic and evidence to make systematic statements about politics. For example, a careful study of voting behavior will allow us to make statements about the probability of certain outcomes (e.g., whether an individual will vote, how that individual will vote, and what the likely outcome of the election will be). You will develop these skills through three writing assignments in which you will seek to answer questions about American politics.

The latter two goals are related, although traditionally they have been separate. Activists often believed that they knew the ‘real’ world of politics, while scholars had an ‘ivory tower’ view of politics; political scientists may believe that activists were guided more by tradition, faith or superstition than a clear understanding of theory and evidence. Increasingly, however, the two worlds are merging as political actors and activists are learning that systematic political science can inform real-world decisions. For example: political scientists have conducted experimental research to determine ways to motivate citizens to vote. These results are now used by campaigns in voter outreach. So: (1)

integrity, (2) skillful citizenship, (3) knowledgeable analysis, and (4) systematic scholarship. Those are our goals.

After completing this course, you will have the **skills** necessary to pose your own questions about American politics (either through raising other general questions as, e.g., “How are political parties regulated in the United States?”, or in applying these questions to specific cases, e.g., “Was the media biased against President Trump in the 2016 presidential election?”), to collect evidence that attempts to answer those questions, and to explain your answers to a public audience.

After completing the course, you will have the **competence** necessary to provide a moderately sophisticated interpretation of American political phenomenon. Although political interpretations are often subjective, and although political phenomena are open to multiple and often competing interpretations, a sophisticated interpretation uses both factual knowledge and conceptual understanding.

Course Materials

The following texts are required for this class, and are available at the University Bookstore:

- Kernell, Samuel *et al.* (2020). *The Logic of American Politics* (9th edition). CQ Press: Thousand Oaks, CA. ISBN 978-1-5443-2299-5
- Kernell, Samuel and Smith, Steven S., eds. (2019). *Principles and Practice of American Politics: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (7th edition). CQ Press: Thousand Oaks, CA. ISBN 978-1-5063-9047-5

From time to time I may suggest or recommend supplemental readings relevant to the subject matter of the course, although those readings are not required.

Preparation for and Participation in Class

To master the field of American politics will require persistent effort, much as if you were seeking to become masterful in athletics, arts, or any other endeavor. You will be expected to complete the reading prior to each class meeting. Although this course is presented largely in lecture format, your participation in weekly discussion sections will play a significant role in the quality of the course and your mastery of the material. Accordingly, please come prepared. In addition, your written work product will be far better if you keep up on the readings.

Outside of class, I urge you to talk about this material with your classmates, friends, and acquaintances. *The material we are considering can be truly learned only by talking about it with others.*

Course Activities and Assignments

Quizzes

Our first task is to develop your substantive knowledge (facts, concepts, theories) about American politics. High performance requires persistence, focus, and skill.

To test your knowledge of the reading and lectures, you must complete five (5) in-class, multiple choice quizzes, one per week. I will not provide advance notice of when an in-class quiz will take place—it could occur any time during our class meetings. Your collective score on the quizzes will constitute 10% of your final grade.

Political Action - Georgetown and Beyond

Our second task is to build your skills in understanding and analyzing American politics through participation in various political activities. These activities will generally not be assessed in detail; you will get credit if you make a good-faith effort to attend/complete the activity.

As a Georgetown student, you are blessed to live and study in Washington, D.C., at the heart of national politics. Part of your education, then, is to take advantage of the opportunities to witness and participate in political events here at Georgetown and in Washington, D.C. You will be required to engage in two such events/activities this semester. For each engagement, you must both provide documentary evidence of your attendance (by taking a selfie, a picture of the program, etc.) and write a reflection of approximately 250 words in which you describe what the event was about and what you learned from it.

Examples of such engagements include:

1. Attend a political event, such as a campaign rally, attend a speech on campus or elsewhere, or participate in a voter registration effort.
2. Attend a governmental session. Ideal examples would be to attend a U.S. Supreme Court oral argument, a committee hearing on Capitol Hill, or a House of Representatives or U.S. Senate session.
3. Attend a rally, lecture, panel discussion or other event hosted by a think tank or interest group.
4. One--but only one--of your two engagement activities can be to watch a documentary or serious film about American politics (House of Cards, Veep, Scandal, etc., do not count).

All engagement events must concern the US political system in some way. If you have any questions as to whether an event or video qualifies, please contact me. And of course, in our current moment, your attendance may be “virtual.”

Research/Writing Component

Our third task is to develop your skills as a political analyst and political scientist. In this component, you will address questions about American politics and seek to answer them in longer-form writing. Your answers will be based, in part, on the research that has been conducted by other researchers.

You will be assigned two short (5-6 page) papers during the semester that will offer you an opportunity to address relevant political questions in more detail.

At the close of the semester you will also write a longer (10-15 page) paper which will be due on the date of the final exam. This paper should demonstrate your broader understanding of and engagement in American politics.

In each of these papers you will address interesting and important questions about American politics, seek to answer these questions as best you can, and present your answers in writing. In so doing, you **must** use social science research (through using, for example, Google Scholar or JSTOR) and also cite at least one scholarly book or article.

Format:

Your final paper should contain the following elements (the shorter papers may do so as well, but given your space constraints, are not required to do so):

a. Title page

b. Introduction: You should provide overview of the question presented, its importance, and what motivated you to conduct this study.

c. Research methods: You should describe what you did and why you did these things.

d. Literature review: You should synthesize and summarize the literature as it relates to your research question, considering what the literature shows and what it leaves open for further research.

e. Research findings: You should present and interpret the evidence used to answer your questions. This evidence may mainly come from your literature review.

Citation Style

You will provide citations and references for your Creation Project according to the American Political Science Association's (APSA) *Style Manual for Political Science* ([Links to an external site.](#))Links to an external site.

Grading

Your grade will be determined by your overall average, with each assignment graded on a 0-100-point scale. In addition to readings and attendance at lectures and discussion sections, you are required to complete 5 weekly quizzes, two 5-6-page papers and a final, longer research paper of 10-15 pages. The point distribution is as follows:

Quizzes: 10 percent

Class Participation and Engagement Activities: 10 percent

Short Papers: 40 percent (20% each)

Research Paper: 40 percent

I have the highest expectations for you in the course. Your grade will depend on your performance. To earn an A, you must demonstrate the highest performance in all categories. In general, I use the following scale to assign grades:

- 95-100 = A
- 90-94.9999 = A-
- 87-89.9999 = B+
- 83-86.9999 = B
- 80-82.9999 = B-
- 77-79.9999 = C+
- 73-76.9999 = C
- 70-72.9999 = C-
- 60-69.9999 = D
- < 60 = F

Technical Support

- **Canvas** - Students have 24/7 access to <http://canvas.georgetown.edu/getting-help>, including live chat and a support hotline at (855) 338-2770
- **Zoom** - For support with Zoom, email: zoom@georgetown.edu
- **Use of Georgetown University-issued accounts** for Google Mail, Calendar, Groups, Talk, Docs, Sites, Video, and Contacts is governed by the contract between Georgetown University and Google. For help managing your Google Documents, visit [Google Drive Help Center](#).
- **Contact the UIS Service Center** at help@georgetown.edu if you have a question regarding:
 - your GU netID and/or password
 - your GU email account
 - any connectivity issues

Academic Resources

Please note that the University offers a number of valuable academic resources, including:

- Georgetown University Writing Center (Lauinger Library, 217A; 202-687-4246; <http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/>)
- Academic Resource Center (Leavey Center, Suite 335; 202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; <http://ldss.georgetown.edu/>)

Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (ARC) (Leavey Center, Suite 335; 202-687-8354; arc@georgetown.edu; <http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm>) before the start of classes to allow their office time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

Academic Integrity, Classroom Conduct, and Extensions Policy

Students must follow the University Honor Code, which states:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

Failure to comply with the Honor Code will result in a grade of F in the course. Additional information concerning Georgetown's honor system is available at:

https://www11.georgetown.edu/programs/gervase/hc/honor_system.html.

While classroom discussions will often be spirited and intense, students should be respectful and considerate of others' views and opinions. Student communications through email and social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) should remain respectful and professional as well.

Late Assignments

Two 24-hour extension "coupons" are included in this syllabus, which you may use to obtain extensions on an assignment due date. You may use the coupons all at once, individually, or in any combination you choose. No student may use more than two coupons over the course of the semester. I will keep track of student coupon use. Other than death in one's immediate family or a Dean's excuse attesting to a medical emergency, I will not permit extensions beyond those available through the coupons. A coupon allows a paper to be turned in by 5pm the next **calendar** day after the original due date. Thus, a paper due on a Thursday may be turned in at 5pm on Friday without penalty, if a coupon is used. Note that a paper due on a Thursday must be turned in on Saturday by 5pm with two coupons in order to be considered on time. For papers that exceed the coupon extension, I will deduct **five points** for every day a paper is late.

Electronic Media Policy

Students should turn off all cell phones, pagers, or other communication devices while in class. ***Unless you have a need documented by the Academic Resource Center, you may not use laptop computers, phones, tablets or other electronic devices during class time.*** Recent studies have confirmed not only that laptops and tablets tend to be distracting, but also that taking handwritten notes rather than typing results in superior information retention and conceptual grasp of the material studied, as it requires students to process the material rather than simply take dictation. Moreover, this course seeks to develop your capacity to think with agility and analytical rigor, and not just to absorb information.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE OF TOPICS AND ASSIGNMENTS

- July 12 **Welcome and Introduction**
- July 13 **The Logic of American Politics**
Readings: *Logic* Ch. 1, pp. 3 - 34

I. THE NATIONALIZATION OF POLITICS

- July 14 **The Constitution: Part I**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 2, pp. 37 - 69
- July 15 **The Constitution: Part II**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 2, pp. 70 - 90;
Principles, Ch. 2: The Constitutional Framework, pp. 19-26
- July 19 **Federalism**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 3 pp. 93 - 133;
Principles, Ch. 3, pp. 43 - 59
- July 20 **Civil Rights: Part I**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 4, pp. 135 - 168
- July 21 **Civil Rights: Part II**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 4, pp. 169 - 183
Principles, Ch. 4, pp. 81-102
- Civil Liberties Part I**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 5, pp. 170 - 203
- July 22 **Civil Liberties Part II**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 5, pp. 203 - 228
Principles, Ch. 5, pp. 118-144

II. THE INSTITUTIONS OF GOVERNMENT

- July 26 **Congress**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 6, pp. 231 - 295
Principles, Ch. 6, pp. 145 - 160
- July 27 **The Presidency**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 7, pp. 297 - 342
Principles, Ch. 7, pp. 187 - 200
- July 28 **The Bureaucracy**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 8, pp. 345 - 387

Principles, Ch. 8, pp. 219-229

July 29 **The Federal Judiciary**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 9, pp. 389 – 429
Principles, Ch. 9, pp. 247 - 267

August 2 **Guest Lecture – TBD**

III. THE PUBLIC'S INFLUENCE ON NATIONAL POLICY

August 3 **Public Opinion**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 10, pp. 431 -472

August 4 **Voting, Campaigns, and Elections**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 11, pp. 475 - 511
Principles, Ch. 11, pp. 309 - 337
Guest Lecture: TBD

August 5 **Political Parties**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 12, pp. 513 - 560
Principles, Ch. 12, pp. 353 – 361, 372 - 381

August 9 **Interest Groups**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 13, pp. 563 - 604

August 10 **Media**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 14, pp. 607 - 642
Principles, Ch. 14, pp. 405 – 423
Guest Lecture: TBD

August 11 **Is There a Logic to American Policy?**
Readings: *Logic*, Ch. 15, pp. 645 - 671

IV. CONCLUSION

August 12 **Closing Remarks**
Online Class Evaluations; TBD

Syllabus Modification: In some instances, the syllabus might need to be altered, and the Instructor retains the right to do so. In those instances, the Instructor will give notice of those changes to the class in a timely manner.

Assignments

Thursday, July 15	<i>First Essay Assignment Handed Out</i>
Thursday, July 22	<i>First Essay Due</i>
Thursday, July 29	<i>Second Essay Assignment Handed Out</i>
Thursday, August 5	<i>Second Essay Due;</i>
DATE TBD	<i>Final Essay Due</i>

Syllabus Modification: In some instances, the syllabus might need to be altered, and I retain the right to do so. In those instances, I will give notice of those changes to the class in a timely manner.

Extension Coupons



COUPON #1 – INTRODUCTION TO THE U.S. POLITICAL SYSTEM (SUMMER 2021)

This coupon entitles you to an automatic, no questions asked,
24-hour (one calendar day) extension on any paper for
Introduction to the U.S. Political System, subject to limitations detailed in the syllabus.



COUPON #2 – INTRODUCTION TO THE U.S. POLITICAL SYSTEM (SUMMER 2021)

This coupon entitles you to an automatic, no questions asked,
24-hour (one calendar day) extension on any paper for
Introduction to the U.S. Political System, subject to limitations detailed in the syllabus.