

PSC 100-003:

Introduction to American Government

Fall 2023 | TR 11:00 am – 12:30 pm
Classroom: Brewer Hall 230

Professor: Dr. Benjamin Gross

Office: Brewer Hall 205D

Office Hours:

Physical – M/W: 1:00 – 2:45 pm

T/R: 2:15 – 3:00 pm

Virtual – M/W: 10:00 am – 12:30 pm

Appointment – contact for mutually agreed upon date and time

E-mail: Bgross@jsu.edu

“Let reverence for the laws, be breathed by every American mother, to the lisping babe, that prattles on her lap – let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges; – let it be written in Primers, spelling books, and in Almanacs; –let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the political religion of the nation...When I so pressingly urge a strict observance of all the laws, let me not be understood as saying there are no bad laws, nor grievances may not arise, for the redress of which, no legal provisions have been made. I mean to say no such thing. But I do mean to say, that, although bad laws, if they exist, should be repealed as soon as possible, still while they continue in force, for the sake of example, they should be religiously observed...There is no grievance that is a fit object of redress of mob law...Passion has helped us, but can do so no more. It will in future be our enemy. Reason, cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason, must furnish all the materials for our future support and defense. Let those materials be molded into general intelligence, sound morality and, in particular, a reverence for the constitution and laws...”

- Abraham Lincoln, “The Perpetuation of our Political Institutions” (January 27, 1838)

Course Description & Rationale:

Why should we study American government? You already live in the United States; what is there to study? To answer this question, we must reflect on our situation. During your lifetime, public (and private) education has [decreased](#) its focus on civic education. This extends to higher education, as one study [finds](#) only 18% of universities require students to take an American government or history course. While [some](#) are trying to reverse this trend, it does not seem likely to change any time soon.

As quoted above, [Abraham Lincoln](#) thinks if the American experiment of free government will continue, then a type of political religion must be taught. In essence, Americans must develop a reverence for the laws, which will be taught in the family, holy houses, the government itself, and – perhaps most importantly to us – the schools and colleges. If [voting rates](#) are any indication, then Lincoln may be correct that a people without a civic education are a risk to free government. Thus, it seems we need this course as a way educating us, the citizens, to maintain free government.

But is Lincoln correct; do we need this political religion to maintain American government? Do we need to study American government to be good citizens? Luckily for us, through our studies, we will be able to examine questions such as this and others through developing our [civic knowledge](#). Thus, this course is designed to examine fundamental questions concerning American government that are important for citizens of that government. The rationale of this course, therefore, is to provide students with a civic education concerning their national government to assist them in becoming educated citizens of that government.

To facilitate this rationale, the course will examine the origin and development of the [U.S. Constitution](#), the structure of the national government (including the departments/branches of the government), federalism, civil liberties and rights, the role of political parties, interest groups, and the media for political life, political socialization and participation, campaigns and elections, and public policy. Through examining these topics, this course provides you with information to examine your opinions regarding what is required to support free government in the United States.

Course Goals:

By the end of the course, you will be able to...

- ...explain the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation and how the Constitution addresses these.
- ...describe the departments, actors, powers, and relationships of the Federal Government.
- ...understand the difference between a civil liberty and civil right.
- ...comprehend how political values & ideologies shape our understanding of government.
- ...clarify how parties, interest groups, & media assist American government.
- ...recognize how current sources of contention in economic, domestic, and foreign policies are rooted in debates from the foundations of the American political system.
- ...experience portions of American government through simulations.
- ...breakdown barriers preventing civic engagement.
- ...acquire a greater sense of your role in society and governing.

Required Texts:

* Patterson, Thomas E. 2024. *We The People: An Introduction to American Government*. 15th Edition. New York, NY: McGraw Hill. ISBN: 978-1265630669.

Assessments & Grading:

SmartBook	10%
Zombie Apocalypse	
Simulation	20%
In-class Simulations	15%
Representative Letter	10%
Three Exams	15% per exam

Grading Scale:

A = 90-100%
B = 80-89%
C = 70-79%
D = 60-69%
F = <60%

Assessment Details:

SmartBook:

Students are a responsible partner in their education. Every Thursday, at 12:01 am, a SmartBook assessment opens. This assessment highlights important concepts for the topic of the following week. All SmartBook assessments are due on the Tuesday following their release at 10:30 am.

For example, on the Thursday of Week 2 (i.e., Thursday, August 24), the SmartBook assessment for Week 3 opens (i.e., Chapter 2). This SmartBook assessment is due at 10:30 am on the Tuesday of Week 3 (i.e., Tuesday, August 29), as we will discuss Chapter 2 that day.

Students have unlimited attempts, within their assigned start and end dates, to earn 100% on these assessments. There are 14 SmartBook assessments. This course drops the student's four lowest scores from the course grade.

Rationale for this assessment: By reading your textbook, you come to class prepared to ask questions about topics, ideas, and concepts that you need help understanding. Furthermore, by reading your textbook our course can focus class time on simulations, activities, and group projects. Additionally, these assessments are designed to assist students in developing [key skills](#) of a college education, such as time management, organization, work ethic, and the ability to research and critical think.

Zombie Apocalypse Simulation:

We will complete a semester-long simulation. The simulation takes place in the year [2112](#), after a zombie apocalypse. Having recovered since the disaster, the United States is rebuilding itself. To do so, we require a new Constitution. You are a representative preparing to attend this convention.

This simulation will help you to discover, understand, and apply foundational concepts of politics. Handouts and additional discussion of this simulation will occur during class. All groups submitting their work **by the due date** will receive feedback within 72-hours. These, and only these, groups can then resubmit their work by the revision deadline. Please review the *Zombie Apocalypse Important Dates* handout on Canvas for a schedule of initial due dates and revision due dates.

Rationale for this assessment: Instead of quizzing students on concepts of American government, this simulation allows students to investigate these concepts while creatively exploring other ideas. In addition, the simulation puts into practice elements of politics, such as civil discourse, conflict resolution, compromising, and more.

In-Class Simulations:

There are seven in-class simulations during the semester. Students must actively engage in five of these in-class simulations to receive full points for this portion of their grade (i.e., attendance during an in-class simulation does not constitute active engagement). Furthermore, students must have earned 100% on their SmartBook assessment for that week to receive full points. Please see the *In-Class Simulations* handout for details on how these activities are assessed.

Each in-class simulation is worth 3% of your course grade. By fully participating with five in-class simulations you fulfill this component of the course. Since you are allowed to miss two in-class simulations without any penalty, the professor does not offer make-up simulations.

Rationale for this assessment: These in-class simulations provide students with a hands-on experience concerning a topic we are investigating. Each simulation helps to make concepts relatable and increase [retention](#) of this information.

Representative Letter:

This class focuses on providing a civic education. Thus, our writing assessment invites students to engage with real-world politics. Students will write an appropriate letter, concerning any topic that interests them, to one of their elected representatives.

Details for this assessment are provided in an additional handout on September 14. The letter is due on October 26. In general, there are four steps to the assessment:

1. Find a subject that interests you. This letter can be critical, complementarily, information seeking, or persuasive in nature.
2. Based on this interest, find **your** appropriate **elected** representative to write **your** letter to. This can be a municipal, county, state, or federal representative.
3. Write a letter to this representative and place it in a **properly** addressed **unsealed** envelope, with the **appropriate postage**.
4. The professor then reviews your assessment (without marking it for errors, to preserve your work for the representative) and mails these letters.

Rationale for this assessment: To engage in political life, you need the ability to explain your ideas clearly, concisely, and coherently through writing. This assessment practices these skills while also lowering barriers to a form of political participation.

Exams:

There are three section exams during the semester. Each section exam consists of 50 multiple-choice questions covering material from class work and the textbook

These exams occur on Canvas. They are open book, open note, and open technology exams. As such, these exams are designed to mimic real-world conditions regarding the preparation and retrieval of information. **You are not allowed to receive help during the exam from another person.** If any student receives help during an exam, all involved in this violation will receive an “F” in the course.

A final exam is administered via Canvas during our final exam period (**December 5 at 10:30 am**). This exam consists of 50 multiple-choice questions. This exam differs from section exams only in that the 50 questions cover material from the entire semester.

I know test taking is not the forte of all. Furthermore, it is possible that we have a bad day, get sick, or have something that prevents us from fully preparing for an exam. Thus, of these four exams, only three apply to a student’s course grade. Students automatically drop their lowest exam score from their course grade. Students who are satisfied with their three section exam grades do not need to complete the final exam (as the final exam is then the dropped exam from the student’s final grade). **Since students automatically drop their lowest exam score, there are no make-up exams.**

Rationale for this assessment: Students are being evaluated on their ability to prepare, recall, and retrieve important information from this course, as this demonstrates competency concerning the knowledge areas of this subject.

Classroom Behavior:

Courtesy for one another will guide classroom behavior. Since this course concerns politics, discussion can be passionate at times. During class, we will treat everyone with respect, especially during dialogues. This means listening and letting a classmate finish their thought before responding, debating ideas (not people), speaking to each other in a civil tone, and refusing to engage in personal attacks. During our dialogues, I ask you all to respect viewpoints. Viewpoints, however, should be challenged.

Students must be attentive during all aspects of class. Students who sleep, read the newspaper, persistently talk with other students, text, use their cell phones, surf the internet, use computers for non-note taking activities (although due to [findings](#), I strongly suggest against this) or are inattentive/disruptive will be asked to leave class and are subject to being dismissed from the course at the professor’s request.

Other Policies:

Questions About Your Grades:

I cannot discuss grades over [e-mail or phone](#) due to FERPA regulations. These protect your privacy; see [here](#) for more information.

I post individual assessments grades on Canvas. I do not, however, display the grade summary (i.e., percentage in the course). This “grade” is misleading. The reported percentage includes dropped assessments and considers performance on submitted work without reference to the weight of those assessments to your course grade. Multiple times, students have thought they had a grade due to this “tool” only to discover their grade was different by a full letter grade.

To ensure students fully understand their course grades, I have created a grade calculator tool that can be downloaded from our Canvas page. **Please use this tool to**

understand your grade. If you need to discuss your grade, we can arrange a meeting during office hours. At the end of the semester, your course grade will only change if it can be demonstrated that there is a mathematical error in the calculation of your grade.

Late Work:

I accept the Representative Letter and components of the Zombie Apocalypse simulation after their due dates. Every business day an assessment is late, it loses three-percentage points (e.g., 89% to 86%). One week after its due date, I will no longer accept a late submission. Any student or group, who does not submit this assessment on time or within one week after its due date, will receive a zero on that assessment. Any late work will not receive written feedback or a chance for revision.

Make-up SmartBook chapters, In-Class Simulations. & Exams:

As explained in the Assessments Details section of this syllabus, there are no make-up in-class simulations. In addition, generally there are no make-up SmartBook chapters or exams.

If a student knows they must miss an exam due to a university required activity, the student needs to contact the professor at least **five days before** the exam date to schedule a mutually agreed upon date/time to take the exam prior to this university required activity.

Attendance:

You are allowed two excused absences that do not require documentation. To use these, you need to email the professor at least 15 minutes prior to the beginning of the class session you will miss. This email must also inform him why you are unable to attend class (e.g., sick, transportation issue, childcare was unavailable, and so forth).

You can also obtain excused absences with documentation. Not all forms of absences can be excusable. Unexpected events (e.g., illness) or required activities (e.g., NCAA athletic participation) are excusable. Vacations, musical festivals, and other such optional activities are not excusable.

Please use the policy of excused absences with documentation and excused absences without documentation wisely. There are no adjustments or exceptions to this policy. Please also remember that while you may be excused from a class session, this does not excuse you from the material and/or assessments of that session. An excused absence does not excuse you from learning the course material, a simulation, or submitting other work. There are no make-up assessments as explained above.

Health/Wellness:

This course does not grade attendance. Thus, if you are sick, please inform the professor and take the steps necessary to fully recover. The professor is reasonable and will work with you. Since the course allows a student to drop four SmartBook assessments, two in-class simulations, and an exam, a student cannot make-up these assessments due to illness.

Religious Observances:

If assigned work conflicts with your religious holidays, please tell me in advance so we can make alternative plans. Informing me of religious obligations after the fact, however, will not count as an excuse.

Counseling Resources:

As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with academic performance and/or negatively impact daily life. If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health challenges, please contact Counseling Services at 256.782.5475 or visit <https://www.jsu.edu/ccservices/index.html> for more information or to request an appointment. Students may also stop by the Counseling Center at 147 Trustee Circle (located between Sparkman and Mason Halls) to request services. Additionally, the office offers self-help resources to explore ways students can independently support their mental health.

In the event of a crisis after hours, please contact the University Police Department at 256.782.5050 to be connected with the on-call counselor. The National Suicide Prevention hotline (988) is another resource and is available 24 hours a day. You may also reach out to Crisis Text by texting 741 741 where you will be connected to a trained responder.

Academic Integrity:

In a university community, true knowledge can be gained only through honest means. A Scholar's Code can be found in both the Undergraduate and Graduate Catalogs and the Student Handbook. Students who violate the Scholar's Code will be subject to disciplinary actions which could range from a zero on an assignment to failure of the course; repeated offenses can result in dismissal from the university. Records of academic dishonesty are kept in the Office of Community Standards and Student Ethics.

Student Success Center:

The Student Success Center provides an integrated network of support and meets students where they are while empowering and supporting lifelong learning. The Student Success Center is located on the Ground (Basement) Floor, 1st Floor, and 2nd floor of the Houston Cole Library and serves as your one-stop shop for student supports and services. Services include tutoring, supplemental instruction, academic and career support, success coaching, reasonable accommodations, leadership development, and peer mentoring through our Academic Support and Success, Academic and Career Advising, Learning Services and Analytics, First and Second Year Experiences, Disability Resources, and Student Athlete Development offices. To learn more about these services and supports and how to access them, visit <https://www.jsu.edu/studentsuccess/index.html>.

Campus Resources for Writing:

The Writing Center offers several free in-person and online services including writing and digital writing consultations, virtual presentation audiences, ESL conversation partners, and special-topics workshops for all JSU faculty, staff, and students. A team of undergraduate and graduate consultants are trained to assist with academic, personal, and professional writing. Appointments can be scheduled through the Navigate app. For more information, visit <https://www.jsu.edu/english/jsuwrites/index.html>.

Disabilities Resources:

Jacksonville State University is committed to creating an inclusive learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body. If you are currently experiencing or anticipate that you will have any barriers to learning in this course,

please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with me. It is my goal to create a learning experience that is as accessible as possible. If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, that may have some impact on your work in this course and for which you may require academic adjustments or accommodations, please work with a staff member in Disability Resources so that accommodations can be considered. Students that receive accommodation letters, or Individualized Post-Secondary Plans (IPPs) should meet with me to discuss the provisions of your accommodations as early in the semester as possible. You can find more information about the Office of Disability Resources on the web or by visiting the Student Success Center on the 2nd Floor of the Houston Cole Library. You may also call (256) 782-8380 or email at disabilityresources@jsu.edu. All discussions will remain confidential.

Military-Connected Student Statement:

The Office of Military & Post-Traditional Student Services serves all active duty, guard, reserve, veteran, and dependent students at JSU. If you have any questions, please contact (256) 782-8838, veterans@jsu.edu, or at the physical location in the basement of Daugette Hall. If you are a student currently serving in the military (Active Duty, Guard, or Reserves) with the potential of being called to military service or training during the course of the semester, you are encouraged to contact your course instructor no later than the first week of class to discuss the class attendance policy. The instructor may make accommodations for this absence or suggest that you take the course at another time.

Title IX:

Jacksonville State University does not discriminate on the basis of sex in any educational programs or activities and is required, by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Department of Education, to uphold Title IX standards. This requirement to not discriminate in educational programs and activities extends to employment by and admission to the university. Prohibited activities include sexual harassment, sexual misconduct, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking and other conduct that is addressed in our "Sex-Based Harassment and Misconduct Policy." Anyone with knowledge of this type of conduct is asked to immediately report such incidents to the University Police Department at (256) 782-5050 or the Title IX Coordinator at 256.782.5769 or titleix@jsu.edu. If an individual wishes to keep the information confidential, they should speak with a counselor at the Counseling Services office at (256) 782-5475 or a medical provider at JSU's Health Center (256) 782-5310. For more information about Title IX or to report a concern, please visit the JSU Title IX webpage at <https://www.jsu.edu/titleix>.

Tutoring resources at JSU:

All JSU students can access online tutoring assistance through tutor.com. To access tutor.com, log into Canvas and click the tutor.com link in the navigation pane.

For more information about tutor.com contact Debra James at dmjames@jsu.edu.

Withdraws:

Please be advised, the last date to withdraw from the course without academic penalty is Friday, November 10. There are other important dates regarding withdrawing from the course concerning refunding your tuition and if you receive an academic penalty, which you can find [here](#). If you choose to stop attending the course,

it is your responsibility to withdraw from the course. If you do not withdraw from the course, the professor will enter the grade you have earned as your final grade.

Student Notifications:

I post all notifications on Canvas via the Announcements section of our course. Be sure to check these for all notifications.

E-mail Policy:

I will do my best to respond to all e-mails within 36 hours. **All e-mails that can be answered via the syllabus will receive the response: “Please refer to your syllabus.” and a picture of Alf.**

To ensure you have read the syllabus prior to e-mailing me, the first e-mail you send me must include a picture of a **platypus**. If your first e-mail does not have a picture of a platypus, I will respond to your e-mail with: “Please review the syllabus.” This policy ensures you have helped yourself by using the tools I have provided you.

To help response time, please include an appropriate subject line in your e-mail. Furthermore, please take time to construct a formal e-mail with proper etiquette and language. **E-mails constructed in a manner like, “Yo, Mrs B i will b submitting the thing late 2day” or using emojis to represent words/ideas will receive the response, “Please refer to your syllabus.” and a picture of Godzilla.**

How to be Successful in this Class:

The best way to be successful is to be prepared. Being prepared means reading the entire assignment carefully and, most likely, rereading the assignment prior to class. By reading the assignments prior to class, you will be able to fully participate and get the most out of our classroom experience.

Furthermore, good note taking is vital. Take [physical notes](#). Learn to listen carefully. I find students who write down the questions being asked, and then the responses to these questions, are the most successful. If you only write down the answer the note is meaningless, as it lacks the context of the question.

After class, review your notes to see if they make sense. By reviewing them sooner than later you will be able to remember things from class to sort out any points of confusion in your notes.

Finally, get together with other students to form study groups. If you get together periodically and go over notes, you are more likely to have a complete set of notes. You will not only be able to go over your notes together to fill in the gaps, but by discussing with each other the topics of the class you might come to new insights.

Tentative Class Schedule:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Textbook Reading</u>
8/17	Course & Zombie Apocalypse Introduction	NO READING
8/22	What is Government & Political Culture	Chapter 1
8/24	Simulation	NO READING
8/29	The Constitution	Chapter 2
8/31	Zombie Apocalypse Workday	NO READING

9/5	Federalism	Chapter 3
9/7	Simulation	NO READING
9/12	Congress	Chapter 11
9/14	Meet Your Government	NO READING
9/15-9/18	Section Exam 1	NO READING
9/19	The Presidency	Chapter 12
9/21	Simulation	NO READING
9/26	The Executive Branch & Bureaucracy	Chapter 13
9/28	Zombie Apocalypse Workday	NO READING
10/3	The Judiciary	Chapter 14
10/5	Simulation	NO READING
10/10	Civil Liberties	Chapter 4
10/12	Zombie Apocalypse Workday	NO READING
10/17	Civil Rights	Chapter 5
10/19	Zombie Apocalypse Workday	NO READING
10/20-10/23	Section Exam 2	NO READING
10/24	Political Socialization & Public Opinion	Chapter 6
10/26	Simulation	NO READING
10/31	New Media	Chapter 10
11/2	Simulation	NO READING
11/7	Parties & Candidates	Chapter 8
11/9	Zombie Apocalypse Workday	NO READING
11/14	Campaigns & Voting	Chapter 7
11/16	Zombie Apocalypse Workday	NO READING
11/21	THANKSGIVING BREAK	NO READING
11/23	THANKSGIVING	NO READING
11/28	Interest Groups	Chapter 9
11/30	Simulation	NO READING
12/1-12/3	Section Exam 3	NO READING
12/5	Final Exam (at 10:30 am)	NO READING