

# PSC 100-004:

## Introduction to American Government

Spring 2021 | 100% Online  
Classroom: Canvas

**Professor:** Dr. Benjamin Gross

**Office:** Brewer Hall 220B

**Office Hours:**

T: 11:00 am-12:30 pm & 2:30-4:00 pm

R: 11:00 am-12:30 pm & 3:30-4:00 pm

Virtual: M/W/F: 3:00-5:00 pm

And by appointment

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“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 But I do mean to say, that, although bad laws, if they exist, should be repealed as soon as possible, still while they continue in force, for the sake of example, they should be religiously observed...There is no grievance that is a fit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 14% 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 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, & the 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:

\* O'Connor, Karen, Larry J. Sabato, and Alixandra B. Yanus. 2016. *American Government Root and Reform: 2014 Elections and Updates Edition*. 12<sup>th</sup> Edition. Boston: Pearson. ISBN: [978-0133913309](https://www.pearson.com/us/higher-education/9780133913309)

## Assignments & Grading:

Zombie Apocalypse Simulation	22.5%
Online Simulations	5% per simulation
Representative Letter	10%
Three Exams	12.5% per exam

## Grading Scale:

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

## Assignment Details:

### Readings & Virtual Presentations:

While not graded, students should read their textbooks. A tentative schedule of the readings is at the end of the syllabus. By reading, you will come to the virtual presentations prepared. This will also assist you in your simulations.

Like readings, virtual presentations are not graded. These presentations, however, highlight key materials from the readings. In addition, they add updated and supplemental material that is not within the readings. Each virtual presentation is between five- to twenty-minutes in length (the average is around twelve minutes).

Students should do their best to follow the pace of the course (i.e. readings and virtual presentations). This will assist in learning the material for and preparing you for the exams. I do not advise cramming readings and virtual presentations.

### Zombie Apocalypse Simulation:

We will engage in 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. In order to do so, we require a new Constitution. You are part of a state delegation producing a plan to bring to the convention (like Virginia in 1787).

This simulation will help you to discover, understand, and apply foundational concepts of a written Constitution. Handouts and additional discussion of this

simulation will occur during the semester. 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 in order to improve their grade on that portion of the simulation. Please review the Zombie Apocalypse Important Dates handout on Canvas for a schedule of initial due dates and revision due dates.

### **Online Simulations:**

There are six online simulations. Each simulation takes place via [www.icivics.org](http://www.icivics.org). To complete the online simulations, you must join our course through this website.

Once at the website, click “Register” in the upper-right hand corner of the page. Then click “Register As A Student.” Our class code is Waite78809 and our password is GoGamecocks. You cannot pick a Username; you, however, can generate a new random name until you find one that you like. Next, enter your First and Last name. Add your e-mail account too. This will allow you to access your account if you forget your password. Then click “Next.” This will bring you to the page to create your password. Write down your password somewhere safe (e.g. password keeper in your phone). Congratulations, you are a member of our course’s online simulations!

Each of the six online simulations connect with topics from virtual presentations. While you can complete a simulation prior to a virtual presentation, the online discussion board does not open until the corresponding virtual presentation goes live. I advise you to complete the online simulation after you have completed this virtual presentation. **Otherwise, your answers to the questions from the discussion board will not incorporate necessary information, which will lower your grade.**

Students complete the simulation and corresponding discussion board post on Canvas, by the due dates. You have nine days to complete an online simulation. Please use your time wisely, as the deadline for these assignments are non-negotiable. Below is the time and dates for when your simulations open and are due by:

- Race to Ratify – Opens: 12:01 am January 25 // Due: 11:59 pm February 3
- LawCraft – Opens: 12:01 am February 5 // Due: 11:59 pm February 14
- Executive Command – Opens: 12:01 am February 24 // Due: 11:59 pm March 5
- Argument Wars – Opens: 12:01 am March 8 // Due: 11:59 pm March 17
- NewsFeed Defender – Opens: 12:01 am April 5 // Due: 11:59 pm April 14
- Win the White House – Opens: 12:01 am April 16 // Due: 11:59 pm April 25

### **Representative Letter:**

This class offers students a civic education. Our writing assignment invites students to engage with real-world politics. Students will write an appropriate letter, concerning any topic interesting them, to one of their elected representatives.

I will provide specific details regarding this assignment in an additional handout on Wednesday, February 10. The letter is due on Friday, March 12. In general, there are four-major steps to the assignment:

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 contact. This can be a municipal, county, state, or federal representative;
3. Write a letter to this representative and place it in a **properly** addressed **sealed** envelope, with the **appropriate postage**;
4. Submit the digital file of your letter and a photo of the sealed envelope to Canvas. The professor will review both in grading your assignment.

## **Exams:**

There are three section exams during the semester. Each section exam consists of 50 multiple-choice questions covering the material from the textbook, virtual presentations, and online simulations of that section of the course.

The final exam consists of 50 multiple-choice questions. It differs from the section exams only in that the 50 questions cover material from the entire semester. The 50 questions come directly from the section exams. Thus, you can use your section exam study guides to prepare for the final exam.

Section exams take place via Canvas on February 15, March 19, and April 23. The final exam is on May 3. Exams are available from 12:01 am to 11:59 pm on these dates.

Each student has one hour to complete an exam once she opens it. To use the full hour, students must begin the exam prior to 10:59 pm. The professor is available from 8 am to 5 pm during exam days. If you encounter a technology issue, please e-mail the professor immediately. He will find a resolution to your error. If an error occurs outside the 8 am to 5 pm timeframe, the student is responsible for her grade on the exam (i.e. the professor will not change the grade).

Students can use their textbooks, notes, and the internet during the exam. With only 60 minutes to complete 50 questions, however, students need to prepare for this exam as if it was closed book, no notes, and technology free to be successful.

Students **CANNOT** share preparation materials. If the professor finds students shared information before, during, or after the exam, through any medium, those engaging in the behavior will receive an “F” in the course (e.g., Quizlet, Kahoot!, Google Document, so forth). *Such a violation will also cause all future exams to be essay exams for the entire course.* Stated simply, **DO NOT CHEAT.**

I know test taking is not everyone’s forte. Furthermore, it is possible we have a bad day, get sick, experience a technological error, or have something that prevents us from fully preparing for an exam. Thus, of the four exams, only three apply to a student’s course grade. I automatically drop a student’s lowest exam score from their course grade. If a student is satisfied with their course grade from their three section exams, they can forgo the final exam (as the final exam is then the lowest exam score). **Since students drop their lowest exam score, there are no make-up exams.**

## **Classroom Behavior:**

I expect all students to act with courtesy for one another. Since our course investigates politics, online discussions can get passionate. During these discussions, we will treat everyone with respect. This means reading and reflecting on a classmate’s thought before responding. In our responses, we debate ideas (not people), use a civil tone, and refuse to engage in personal attacks. During our dialogues, we must respect the ideas of our fellows. Ideas, however, are fair to investigate and challenge.

Multiple [studies](#) suggest the key to success in an online environment is treating it like a physical course. I have designed the pace and assignment schedule as if we were in a face-to-face traditional course. Please treat this course as if we meeting in-person on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for one-hour per day. I have done my best to break up the activities for each day into segments, however, to provide flexibility.

In addition, time management is a critical part of success (especially within an online environment). Other common [findings](#) for success in online environments includes establishing a good workspace, seeking help when needed, and eliminating distractions. Please, the moment you are feeling lost, reach out to me. I am happy to help those that communicate.

Finally, I suggest all students take physical notes as they read and engage with virtual presentations. Research [shows](#) that taking physical notes helps us to learn.

## Other Policies:

### **Late Work:**

I accept the Representative Letter and components of the Zombie Apocalypse simulation after their due dates. Every business day an assignment 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 assignment on time or within one week after its due date, will receive a zero on that assignment.

**Online simulations and exams are not be accepted after their due dates.**

### **Make-up Online Simulations & Exams:**

As explained in the Assignment Details section of this syllabus, there are no make-up exams.

In addition, there are no make-up online simulations. Finding high-quality online simulations is a time-consuming endeavor. The professors does not have additional resources to use. Students need to complete simulations in the planned timeframe.

### **Academic Integrity:**

This course does not tolerate academic dishonesty. The professor adheres to and enforces JSU's policy on academic honesty (e.g. cheating, plagiarism, forgery, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, and sabotage). I address violations of academic integrity in compliance with the procedures laid out in JSU's [student handbook](#) (see page 93).

### **Accommodations:**

I am more than happy to accommodate any student with a documented disability. If you have a disability that affects your work in this class, and for which you require adjustments or accommodations, please see a staff member in [Disability Support Services](#) (139 Doughty Hall // (256) 782.8380 // [dss@jsu.edu](mailto:dss@jsu.edu)) so your accommodations can be considered.

Please speak with Disability Support Services (DSS) and the professor, as early in the semester as possible. Students that receive accommodation letters or Individualized Post-Secondary Plans (IPP's) should meet with me to discuss the provisions of those accommodations as early in the semester as possible. All discussions will remain confidential.

### **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.

### **Military-Connected Student Statement:**

The Office of Veteran Services serves all active duty, guard, reserve, veteran, and dependent students at JSU. If you have any questions about Veteran Services please contact them at (256) 782-8838, [veterans@jsu.edu](mailto:veterans@jsu.edu), or at the physical location in the basement of Doughty 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 me no later than the first week of class to discuss the class attendance policy. I may make accommodations for this absence or suggest that you take the course at another time.

### **Title IX:**

JSU does not discriminate on the basis of sex in the educational programs or activities that it operates. JSU is required, by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Department of Education regulations to implement Title IX, not to discriminate in such a manner. This requirement to not discriminate in educational programs and activities extends to employment by the university and to admission thereto. This may 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. If an individual wishes to keep the information confidential, the individual 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 <http://www.jsu.edu/titleix>.

### **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 grades on Canvas. **Please use the grade calculator to understand your grade.** If you need to discuss your grade, we can arrange a Microsoft Teams meeting. You will have to show your student ID prior to the discussion of your grade. At the end of the semester, your course grade will only change if there is a mathematical error.

### **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](mailto:dmjames@jsu.edu). For assistance with writing, The Writing Center is available through online appointments: <http://www.jsu.edu/english/jsu-writing-clinic.html>

### **Withdraws:**

Please be advised, the last date to withdraw from the course without academic penalty is Friday, April 2. 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 24 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 that you have helped yourself by using the tools I have provided you.

In order 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, Dr B i will b 18 4 clas 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 all of the assignment carefully and, most likely, rereading the assignment prior to the virtual presentations. By reading the textbook prior to class, you will be able to get the most out of the virtual presentations, clearly see the information that is both the textbook and your professor are highlighting, and understand what changes have occurred to American government since the publication of your textbook.

Furthermore, good note taking is vital. Take [physical notes](#). Learn to listen carefully. I find students who write down the questions 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, if you start to think or feel that you are getting lost please contact the professor. It is easier to help you get back on track when issues are starting than after they have grown.

**Tentative Class Schedule:**

<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Topic</u></b>	<b><u>Textbook Reading</u></b>
1/13 & 15	Introduction/What is Government?	Chapter 1
<b>1/18</b>	<b>Martin Luther King Jr. Day</b>	<b>NO READING</b>
1/20, 22, & 25	The Constitution	Chapter 2
1/27 & 29	The Federal System	Chapter 3
2/1	Zombie Apocalypse Work Day	<b>NO READING</b>
2/3, 5, 8, & 10	Congress	Chapter 6
2/12	Simulation Work Day/Study Day	<b>NO READING</b>

2/15	<b>Section Exam 1</b>	<b>NO READING</b>
2/17 & 19	The Presidency	Chapter 7
2/22 & 24	The Executive Branch & Federal Bureaucracy	Chapter 8
2/26	Zombie Apocalypse Work Day	<b>NO READING</b>
3/1, 3, & 5	The Judiciary	Chapter 9
3/8 & 10	Civil Liberties	Chapter 4
3/12 & 15	Civil Rights	Chapter 5
3/17	Simulation Work Day/Study Day	<b>NO READING</b>
<b>3/19</b>	<b>Section Exam 2</b>	<b>NO READING</b>
<b>3/22, 24, &amp; 26</b>	<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	<b>NO READING</b>
3/29 & 31	Political Socialization and Public Opinion	Chapter 10
4/2	Zombie Apocalypse Work Day	<b>NO READING</b>
4/5 & 7	The News Media	Chapter 14
4/9 & 12	Political Parties	Chapter 11
4/14 & 16	Elections, Voting, and Campaigning	Chapters 12 & 13
4/19	Interest Groups	Chapter 15
4/21	Simulation Work Day/Study Day	<b>NO READING</b>
<b>4/23</b>	<b>Section Exam 3</b>	<b>NO READING</b>
<b>5/3</b>	<b>Final Exam</b>	<b>NO READING</b>