

PSCI 454-001:
American Political Thought
Fall 2020 | TR 11:00 am-12:30 pm
Classroom: Brewer Hall 141 / Canvas

Professor: Dr. Benjamin Gross
Office: Brewer Hall 220B
Physical Office Hours:
T/R: 9:30-10:30 am & 2:30-3:30 pm
Virtual Office Hours:
M/W/F: 3:00-5:00 pm
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“The energetic administration of this government is said to be connected with this institution [The National Bank]. Mr. Madison here stated the principles on which he conceived this government ought to be administered—and added, other gentlemen may have had other ideas on the subject, and may have consented to the ratification of the constitution on different principles and expectations—but he considered the enlightened opinion and affection of the people, the only solid basis for the support of this government.”
- James Madison, “The Bank Bill, February 8, 1791” *The Papers of James Madison*

Course Rational:

Why should we have a course concerning the political thought of American government? We cannot say that American government is unique with regards to being founded through thought and revolution. Like most colleges, JSU does not offer courses concerning the political thought of the governments of [France](#), [China](#), or [Iran](#). Yet, all of these states experienced revolutions that were grounded upon theoretical thought, which has been developed and challenged over time. Thus, we must ask ourselves, why should we study the political thought of the American regime?

The simple answer is, we reside in the United States. Since we reside here, we should know about our government. Yet, this is too simple. If one owns a tractor, should they know about it only because they own it? The answer is no. They should know about the tractor in order to operate it to achieve their purpose/goal. Knowledge about the tractor is necessary because a purpose exists. This is why [Jefferson](#), [Madison](#), [Lincoln](#), [Anthony](#), [King Jr.](#), and others argue that, if we are to continue the goal of American government, we must educate ourselves about it.

Although this argument is not novel, Americans know little. [Formal education](#), as measured by completion of high school and/or college, has increased since the 1940s. Yet, a recent [survey](#) finds only 26% of Americans can name all three departments of government, more than a third cannot name any of their rights protected by the First Amendment, and four out of ten think the rights of the U.S. Constitution do not extend to those that enter the country illegally. These findings are not new. In [2011 and 2017](#), a third of Americans could not name any of the departments of government. A 1997 [survey](#), by the National Constitutional Center, finds one-third of Americans did not know the number of departments of the Federal Government, about 25% could not name a single right guaranteed to them by the First Amendment, and only five out of 100 people could correctly answer ten rudimentary questions about the Constitution.

If a popular and free government – [the end](#) of the American experiment – is to be achieved, then these findings should be extremely disturbing. This course is designed to introduce students to the thought concerning the purpose and, therefore, operations of American government. As the quote above demonstrates, even the [founders](#) have disagreement. This does not mean the founding is rooted in [relativism](#). Instead, we must critically examine the thought and arguments of those we read to see what is coherent. Thus, this course invites students to reflect on what the purpose of American government is, how this government should operate to achieve that purpose, and why this government embraces different parts of political theory and philosophy.

Course Goals:

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

- Recognize the difference between the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, as well as their importance to American political thought;
- Explain the shared and dissimilar ideas of what American popular government is;
- Describe how the offices of our government are elected via the Constitution and how these methods of election have or have not changed;
- Clarify how the right to vote is a political institution and how it has been extended;
- Understand what faction, multiplicity of interests, separation of powers, and federalism are and why they are important for American popular government;
- Comprehend how religion is both a political institution supporting American popular government, while also being a persistent problem and question;
- Acquire a greater appreciation of how the persistent questions of American popular government are rooted in previous debates;
- Read a complex book, documents, and speeches; be able to formulate and ask questions; and make, analyze, and criticize an argument;
- Clearly and concisely communicate arguments both verbally and written, which will develop and progress your critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

Required Texts:

- * Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. Harvey C. Mansfield (Trans.) University of Chicago Press. ISBN: [9780226805368](#).
- * Hamilton, Alexander, James Madison, and John Jay. *The Federalist*. Jacob E. Cooke (Ed.) Wesleyan University Press. ISBN: [9780819560773](#).
- * Lindsay, Thomas K. and Gary D. Glenn. *Investigating American Democracy: Readings on Core Questions*. Oxford University Press. ISBN: [9780195392111](#).

Assignments and Grading:

◆ Weekly Reading Quizzes	10%
◆ Short Weekly Papers	15%
◆ American Democracy Paper	5%
◆ Participation	
◆ Session Question Leader	15%
◆ Session Discussion Leader	15%
◆ Interpretive Essay	20%
◆ Final Exam	20%

Grading Scale:

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

Assignment Details:

Weekly Reading Quizzes:

To facilitate students with readings, there are weekly reading quizzes. These quizzes are five multiple-choice questions. Quizzes are accessible via Canvas and are untimed. Quizzes open on Canvas by 5 pm on Thursday prior to the weekly readings. Quizzes are due by 8 am of the Thursday for that week's readings. Thus, the reading quiz for Week 5 opens by 5 pm on the Thursday of Week 4 and is due by 8 am on the Thursday of Week 5. There are 12 weekly reading quizzes. Students have their two lowest quiz grades dropped from this assessment area.

The professor includes these quizzes to help guide your readings. I am assessing you in this area to develop your ability to extract information from reading the text.

Short Weekly Paper:

Each student will compose three one-page paper. Release of prompts happen one week prior to the paper. Papers are due at 11:00 am on the Thursday of the assigned week. Students must submit a digital copy of their weekly paper (via Turnitin on Canvas). If submitted after 11:00 am, papers are late (see Late Work)

Students can sign up for their member letter starting at 5:00 pm on Thursday, August 20th. Students must select a member letter by 11:00 am Tuesday, August 25th. The calendar for short paper assignments is below:

	Member A	Member B	Member C	Member D
Paper 1	Due 8/27	Due 9/3	Due 9/10	Due 9/17
Paper 2	Due 9/24	Due 10/1	Due 10/8	Due 10/15
Paper 3	Due 10/22	Due 10/29	Due 11/5	Due 11/12

The intent of these assignments are for students to gain practice interpreting political thought. Interpreting political thought is a different type of writing, which many students find unfamiliar. Instead of assigning multiple large papers, we will use these small papers as a way to practice, improve, and develop our skills of communicating our interpretations clearly and concisely.

To achieve this intent, the assignment is **limited to a one-page**, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins, and one-sided document. Students will put their identification information in the header of their document. The professor will not grade any material going beyond one-page to maintain fairness for all students.

The professor includes this assessment to improve your critical thinking, analytical ability, and communication skills.

American Democracy Paper:

All students have a special one-page paper to complete prior to class on Tuesday, August 25th. Students will write a one-page paper answering the prompt: “What is American democracy?” In answering this question, students might want to reflect on the secondary question of, “When did America become a democracy?”

Students should provide their own thoughts and reflections to answer this question. There should be **NO** outside reading, sourcing, or materials. The short paper is asking students to provide their opinion in response to the question through reflecting on their own observations, experiences, and insights.

The professor includes this assessment to help you better understand your opinion of American political thought prior to the beginning of the course.

Participation:

We come to best understand political thought through examination, questions, and conversations. As such, this course demands active participation from all students. We all have some insights regarding questions of what is democracy, what is good, and what is justice. Reading, analyzing, and interpreting will not only show us how our authors understand these questions but also force us to confront our own understanding.

The professor includes this assessment to develop your critical thinking, communication skills, and confidence in public speaking.

Participation grades are exists in two portions:

Session Question Leader

Three times during the semester, students will serve as the Session Question Leader. Students can begin to sign up for this position at 5:00 pm on Thursday, August 20th.

As Session Question Leader, a student prepares two thoughtful, theoretical, and explanatory questions about the readings for that day. These questions can examine a specific part of one reading, connect readings to each other, relate the readings to current observations, or engage in other meaningful explorations. **Students must submit their questions to Canvas 48-hours in advance of the day they are Session Question Leader.** This allows the professor to post their questions so the entire class can prepare responses.

A STUDENT CANNOT BE A SESSION QUESTION LEADER ON THE SAME DAY THAT THEY ARE SERVING AS A SESSION DISCUSSION LEADER.

A student will serve as Session Question Leader three times during the semester. Thus, a single Session Question Leader submission is worth 5% of a student's final grade. Therefore, this form of participation accounts for 15% of a student's final grade in the course.

Session Discussion Leader

Three times during the semester, students will serve as the Session Discussion Leader. Students can begin to sign up for this position at 5:00 pm on Thursday, August 20th.

As Session Discussion Leader, a student must prepare thoughtful, supported (i.e. textual evidence), and logical responses to two of the Session Question Leaders' questions. **Students must submit their responses to Canvas prior to the beginning of class on the day of their Session Question Leader's material.** In addition, the student must clearly indicate what questions they are responding to (i.e. name and question number of the Session Question Leader they are responding to).

A STUDENT CANNOT BE A SESSION DISCUSSION LEADER ON THE SAME DAY THAT THEY ARE SERVING AS A SESSION QUESTION LEADER.

A student will serve as Session Discussion Leader three times during the semester. Thus, a single Session Discussion Leader submission is worth 5% of a student's final grade. Therefore, this form of participation accounts for 15% of a student's final grade in the course.

Interpretive Essay:

Students will complete one 1,000-1,500 word interpretive essay. The interpretive essay is due at 11:00 am on Thursday, November 12th. In many regards, this assignment is a longer version of a short weekly paper. I will share more information regarding the interpretive essay in a handout on Thursday, October 8th.

The professor includes this assessment to develop your writing skills, ability to explain information clearly and concisely, and interpretation proficiency.

Final Exam:

The final exam consists of several questions from different formats. Due to current world dynamics, the professor will create the final exam. Students will receive a study guide with possible final exam questions on Tuesday, November 10th.

The professor includes this assessment to evaluate if students have mastered the content of the course.

Readings:

While not graded, students are required to complete the assigned readings for class. If you do not read, it becomes impossible to be successful in class.

Classroom Behavior:

Courtesy and regard for one another will guide classroom behavior. Since this is a course concerning politics, discussion can be passionate at times. We will always treat everyone with respect, especially during debates. 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 these discussions, I ask you all to respect the ideas of your fellow students. This does not mean, however, that you must agree with these ideas. Political philosophy challenges ideas and ideals; thus, you are welcome to ask your classmates to explain their ideas, to ask them questions you see in their ideals, and so forth.

Students must be attentive during all aspects of class. I will remove students who sleep, read the newspaper, persistently talk with other students, text, use their cell phones, surf the internet, use computers for any other use than note taking, or are otherwise inattentive/disruptive from the class session. Students that engage in these behaviors repeatedly are subject to dismissal from the course, at the professor's request.

Other Policies:**Late Work:**

I only accept writing assignments (American Democracy Paper, Short Papers, and the Interpretive Essay) after their due date. Every business day a writing assignment is late, the assignment loses three percentage points (e.g., 89% to 86%). One week after its due date, the professor no longer accepts late writing assignments. Any student, who does not submit their writing assignments on time, or within one week after its due date, receives a zero for that assignment.

Make-up Quizzes, Session Question Leaders, Session Discussion Leaders, & Exams:

Since students drop their two lowest quiz scores, there are no make-up quizzes.

Since students sign up for their session question leader and discussion leader slots, make-ups are rare. Only under extreme situations (e.g., diagnosis of COVID-19) will the professor offer a make-up. Documentation is required for a make-up opportunity.

If you are unable to attend the final exam for a religious observation, university approved reason, or emergency, please inform the professor immediately. Students must have proper documentation for a make-up exam. We will schedule a make-up exam for a mutually agreed upon date and time. Make-up exams are comprised of different questions that evaluate students on the same material as the final exam.

Academic Integrity:

This course will 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). Violations of academic integrity in this course will be addressed in compliance with the procedures laid out in JSU's [student handbook](#) (see pages 57 & 71-76).

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 Daugette Hall // (256) 782.8380 // 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 the office at (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 me no later than the first week of the course. The professor may make accommodations for this absence or suggest that you take the course at another time.

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 Skype or 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 final grade will only change if there is a mathematical error.

Withdraws:

Please be advised, the last date to withdraw from the course without academic penalty is Friday, November 6th. There are other important dates regarding withdrawing from the course, which are [here](#). If you choose to withdraw from the course, it is your responsibility to complete the process. The professor will report the final grade to the university for all students enrolled in the course.

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 questions that the syllabus can answer will receive the response: "Please refer to your syllabus."

To ensure that you have read the syllabus prior to e-mailing me, the first e-mail you send to me must include a picture of ALF. If your first e-mail does not have a picture of ALF, 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 before coming to me for help.

In order to help response time, please include an appropriate subject line in your e-mail. Furthermore, please take time to compose an e-mail with proper etiquette and language. I will not respond to e-mails constructed in a manner like, "Yo, Dr B i will b 18 4 clas 2day" or using emojis to represent words/ideas.

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. For assistance with writing, The Writing Center is available through online appointments: <http://www.jsu.edu/english/jsu-writing-clinic.html>

Title IX:

Jacksonville State University 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 www.jsu.edu/titleix.

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, reread the assignment prior to class. These texts are carefully constructed arguments, which sometimes only become visible after multiple interactions. 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:

IAD = *Investigating American Democracy* **DA** = *Democracy in America* **F** = *Federalist*

Date	Topic	Reading
T-8/18	Introduction & Approach	IAD: 1-5
What is American Democracy?		
R-8/20	Democracy before the United States	IAD: 6-7 DA: 3-15 & 27-45 (w/ IAD: 19-20)
T-8/25	The Declaration and Founding	IAD: 281-84 F: #10 (w/ IAD 8) & #39 (w/ IAD 11)
R-8/27	Jefferson and Tocqueville on Democracy	IAD: 15-19 DA: 53-55 (w/ IAD 22- 23), 165, 235-37, 239- 45, 248-51
T-9/1	Slavery and Democracy	IAD: 28-44
R-9/3	Economic Democracy	IAD: 44-58
T-9/8	Civil Liberties and Civil Rights	IAD: 58-72
What Political Institutions Enable American Democracy to Exist?		
<i>Right to Vote</i>		
R-9/10	The Founding	The Constitution IAD: 119-23 F: #39
T-9/15	Universal Suffrage	IAD: 123-27 DA: 53-55, 187, 227-31
R-9/17	Extension to Women	IAD: 128-35 DA: 45-53, 479-82
T-9/22	Extension to African Americans	IAD: 140-46
R-9/24	Extension to Youth / Are there Limits?	IAD: 146-47, 150-52 DA: 187-93 (w/ IAD 147)
<i>What We Can Vote For</i>		
T-9/29	The Founding	The Constitution F: #63, #68, & #78
R-10/1	The Progressives	IAD: 232-38
<i>Representation, Interest Groups, and Political Parties</i>		
T-10/6	The Founding	F: #10, #52, #57, & #71
R-10/8	Democratic Representation, Great Parties, and Small Parties	DA: 165-172

<u>Separation of Powers</u>		
T-10/13	What is it; why is it necessary; what is it supposed to do (Legislative)?	F: #47 (w/ IAD 199), #48 (w/ IAD 204), & #51 (w/ IAD 207)
R-10/15	What is it supposed to do (Executive)?	F: #37 (w/ IAD 212) & #70 (w/ IAD 214) DA: 217-20
T-10/20	What is it supposed to do (Judicial)?	IAD: 219-22 & 230-31 F: #78 (w/ IAD 225)
<u>Federalism</u>		
R-10/22	What is it; why do we have it?	The Constitution F: #39 DA: 53-58 & 235-37
<u>Religion</u>		
T-10/27	As an institution	DA: 42-44, 274-88, & 417-19 IAD: 239-45
Persistent Questions within American Democracy		
R-10/29	Is religion a problem?	IAD: 253-266
T-11/3	What makes one a citizen?	IAD: 266-80
R-11/5	What is the relation of the sexes?	DA: 274-75, 278-79, 563-65, 567-76 (w/ IAD 136) IAD: 138-140
T-11/10	Do constitutional rights belong to individuals, groups, or both?	IAD: 174-98
R-11/12	Why Should I Obey the Law?	IAD: 281-307 DA: 225-37
T-11/17	Reflection and Final Exam Review	NO READING
R-11/19	Reflection and Final Exam Review	NO READING
R-12/3	Final Exam (10:00 am-12:00 pm)	NO READING

Additional readings may be added via .PDF files on course Canvas page.