

PSCI 454-001:

American Political Thought

Fall 2022 | TR 12:45-2:15 pm
Classroom: Brewer Hall 231

Professor: Dr. Benjamin Gross
Office: Brewer Hall 205D
Office Hours:
Physical – T/R: 8-9 am & 2:30-4:00 pm
Virtual – W: 9:00 am – 2:00 pm
Appointment – contact for mutually agreed upon date and time
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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, or end goal, is first known. 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 the argument that it is necessary to understand our government is not new, Americans know little about it. [Formal education](#), as measured by completion of high school and/or college, has increased since the 1940s. Yet, a recent [survey](#) finds only 56% of Americans can name all three departments of government, almost a fifth cannot name any of their rights protected by the First Amendment, and just over a third know the term length of a U.S. Senator is six years. These findings are not new. In fact, they are [improvements](#). 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 are 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, however, that the founding is rooted in [relativism](#). Instead, we must 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. Cook (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](#).

Assessments and Grading:

Professionalism	10%
Tocqueville Lectures	10%
Weekly Reading Quizzes	10%
American Democracy Paper	5%
Short Papers	15%
Class Participation	5%
Interpretive Essay	15%
Midterm Exam	15%
Final Exam	15%

Grading Scale:

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

Assessment Details:

Professionalism:

All students begin the semester with 10% of their course grade completed. To keep this 10%, students need to engage in professional behavior within the setting of the course (although, hopefully this behavior extends beyond the boundaries of this class). A student loses points from her/his professionalism grade when she/he engages in unprofessional behaviors and activities. These behaviors and activities, as well as how many points are lost for engaging in them, are found in the professionalism addendum located in our Canvas shell.

Rationale for this assessment: Students are graded on professional behavior to prepare them their future career. I have spoken with individuals in numerous sectors

(e.g., accounting, mental health, logistics, construction, healthcare, and more). Consistently, these individuals inform me that recent college graduates either did not get a job offer or were fired quickly upon being hired due to unprofessional behaviors. The time to develop professionalism is now, not upon graduation.

Tocqueville Lectures:

Jacksonville State University is proud to host the Tocqueville Lectures Series. This series brings lectures to present on topics that foster the academic environment of the campus. These lectures relate to topics that are important with ideas in our course.

As a student in an upper-level political science course, these lectures are excellent an opportunity for exposure to new ideas, practicing engagement within the discipline, and developing a professional connection. All students are required to attend two Tocqueville Lectures. By attending a lecture, you earn 5% of your course grade.

These lectures will be presented via hybrid or virtual format. More information about the lecture modalities, dates, and registration process is shared during the course.

Rationale for this assessment: Students are graded on active participation in Tocqueville Lectures as this engagement demonstrates the ability to participate with the materials of this course in a professional setting. This will help to prepare students for how to engage with presentations in academic, business, and governmental settings.

Weekly Reading Quizzes:

To facilitate students with readings, there are weekly reading quizzes. These quizzes are five multiple choice questions. The intent of these quizzes is to guide your readings. They are not intended to be difficult if you have read the assigned readings.

Quizzes are administered via Canvas and are untimed. Quizzes are posted 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 is posted by 5 pm on the Thursday of Week 4 and is due by 8 am on the Thursday of Week 5. Each student has his/her the two lowest quiz grades dropped from his/her course grade.

Rationale for this assessment: Students are graded on the ability to read and comprehend foundational information from the text, as this is a necessary but not sufficient skill to successfully read complex writings. These quizzes help to ensure that students are achieving lower levels of Bloom's taxonomy as they prepare for class, which will allow the class session to focus on developing the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy.

American Democracy Paper:

Students have a special one-page paper to complete prior to class on Tuesday, August 30. Students will write a one-page paper answering the prompt: "What is the core principle of American democracy?" Students should provide their own thoughts, examples, and reflections to answer this question. There is **NO** outside sourcing used in this paper. This short paper is asking students to provide their opinion in response to the question through reflecting on their own observations, experiences, and insights.

Rationale for this assessment: Students are graded on the ability to follow the basic foundations of a short paper. This assessment introduces these foundations through a low-stake process. This assessment also begins students on the reflection process, as it requires a student to assess his/her initial understanding of American democracy prior to engaging with materials from the course.

Short Papers:

Each student composes three one-page papers. Prompts are provided one week in advance of the due date. Papers are due on the Thursday of the assigned week. Students submit their short paper through Turnitin on Canvas. I suggest the student composing the paper bring a physical copy to the class session to assist leading small group work.

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

To facilitate small group participation, each group has four members: A, B, C, and D. One student per group completes a short paper per week. The student completing the short paper for that week serves as the group’s discussion leader. Students will pick their group letter during the first course session. The calendar for short papers is below:

	Member A	Member B	Member C	Member D
Paper 1	Due 9/1	Due 9/8	Due 9/15	Due 9/22
Paper 2	Due 9/29	Due 10/13	Due 10/20	Due 10/27
Paper 3	Due 11/3	Due 11/10	Due 11/17	Due 12/1

Rationale for this assessment: The intent of this assessment is for students to gain practice composing interpretations of political thought. Interpreting political thought is a different type of writing, which many students are unfamiliar with. Instead of assigning multiple large papers, we use these small papers to practice, improve, and develop our skills of communicating our interpretations clearly, concisely, and coherently. Developing this writing ability is a cornerstone of a liberally educated individual and will be a worthwhile skill set for any future career path.

Class Participation:

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

I invite everyone to engage in participation during the class sessions. I know, however, that some students lack the confidence, courage, and motivation to do so. To increase the likelihood of learning, I do not grade general class participation.

Participation within your short paper groups, however, is graded. This is a peer-graded assessment. Your group will create its own rubric to assess each members participation (as a leader and a member). You will use this rubric to determine the participation grade of your group members within the confines of small group work.

Rationale for this assessment: To navigate your life, which includes the dimensions of your professional, social, spiritual, intellectual, philanthropic, familial, and physical life, you need to be able to communicate your ideas, opinions, and thoughts. You also need to be able to have a dialogue, which requires truly listening to others. To develop this skill, a small portion of your participation in this course is graded. The grade comes from your peers so you and your classmates can determine a fair standard given your current abilities. This class, however, should help you to develop your ability to orally communicate your ideas beyond your initial assessment of this skill.

Interpretive Essay:

Students will complete one 1,000- to 1,500-word interpretive essay. The interpretive essay is due Thursday, November 10. The essay, in many regards, is a longer and larger version of a short paper. More information regarding the essay prompt and requirements is provided in a hand-out on Thursday, October 13.

Rationale for this assessment: I evaluate students through this assessment to determine their ability to communicate complex information clearly, concisely, and coherently to other reasonable individuals. These abilities are the hallmark of a liberal education, which fosters your critical thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills. This assessment demonstrates a student's competency with regards to evaluating and even creating knowledge as described within Bloom's taxonomy.

Exams:

The midterm exam contains 20 multiple-choice questions. The final exam is comprehensive and contains 20 multiple-choice questions. These questions require students to apply, analyze, and evaluate materials presented from the course. Thus, these questions are not simply remembering who said what or identifying the key idea in a passage.

The exams are open book. They are **not** open note or open technology exams. There are no study guides for the exams. **Once the first exam is submitted to the professor, a student cannot begin an exam.** Additional rules about the exam are included on the exams themselves. I will share more information about the exams during the semester.

Rationale for this assessment: Students are assessed on their ability to retain and apply important information from the course, as this demonstrates their competency of the course material. In addition, these exam questions prepare students for the types of questions they will encounter if they plan to take a test such as the LSAT.

Classroom Behavior:

Courtesy and regard 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 the viewpoints of your fellow students.

Students are expected to 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 any other use than note taking (although due to [findings](#), I strongly suggest against this) or are otherwise inattentive/disruptive in class will be asked to leave the class, lose professionalism points, and will be 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 is because 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:

Only written assessments are accepted after a due date. Every business day a written assessments is late, the assessments losses three percentage points (e.g., 89% to 86%). One week after its due date, the professor no longer accepts late written assessments. Any student, who does not submit a written assessments on time, or within one week after its due date, will receive a zero for that assessment.

Make-up Quizzes & Exams:

Since students drop their two lowest quiz scores, there are no make-up quizzes. If you are unable to attend an exam period for a religious observation, university approved reason, or emergency, please inform the professor immediately. Students must have proper documentation for a make-up exam. Make-up exams must be scheduled at a date and time mutually agreed upon. Make-up exams will be comprised of short answer and essay questions that evaluates students on the same material comprising the multiple-choice exam.

Health/Wellness:

Health is a necessary precondition for learning. Thus, if you are sick, please inform the professor and take the necessary steps to fully recover. The professor is reasonable and will work with you. If you communicate and provide documentation of your medical absence, then the professor will excuse these absences.

In addition, if you are experiencing issues or struggling with mental health, I suggest you contact [Counseling Services](#) at the university. This service is free to all currently enrolled students. In addition, this office offers additional [groups](#) that can support you.

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, 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 class to discuss the class attendance policy. I may make accommodations for this absence or suggest that you take the course at another time.

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 97). You can learn more about academic dishonesty [here](#).

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 [here](#).

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.

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.

Accommodations:

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.

Withdraws:

Please be advised, the last date to withdraw from the course without academic penalty is Friday, November 11. 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.

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>.

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.

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.**

COVID-19 Statement:

To protect the health and safety of all employees, visitors, and students during the COVID-19 pandemic, Jacksonville State University publishes its policies [here](#).

Currently, masking requirements in classrooms is optional for students. [Empirical evidence](#) shows that to contain the virus during the [length](#) of our class session, assuming some individuals are unmasked, you will need an N95 mask. The university continues to offer free surgical masks. It is suggested that students get vaccinated, invest in N95 masks, or double mask to protect themselves. There are no special accommodations that will be provided if a student misses class due to COVID-19.

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. 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
R-8/25	Introduction & Approach	IAD: 1-5
What is American Democracy?		
T-8/30	Democracy before the United States	IAD: 6-7 DA: 3-15 & 27-45 (w/ IAD: 19-20)
R-9/1	The Declaration and Founding	IAD: 281-84 F: #10 (w/ IAD 8) & #39 (w/ IAD 11)
T-9/6	Jefferson and Tocqueville on Democracy	IAD: 15-19 DA: 53-55 (w/ IAD 22- 23), 165, 235-37, 239- 45, 248-51
R-9/8	Slavery and Democracy	IAD: 28-44
T-9/13	Economic Democracy	IAD: 44-58
R-9/15	Civil Liberties and Civil Rights	IAD: 58-72
What Political Institutions Enable American Democracy to Exist?		
<u>Right to Vote</u>		
T-9/20	The Founding	The Constitution IAD: 119-23 F: #39
R-9/22	Universal Suffrage	IAD: 123-27 DA: 53-55, 187, 227-31
T-9/27	Extension to Women	IAD: 128-35 DA: 45-53, 479-82
R-9/29	Extension to African Americans	IAD: 140-46 See Canvas
T-10/4	Extension to Youth / Are there Limits?	IAD: 146-47, 150-52 DA: 187-93 (w/ IAD 147) See Canvas
R-10/6	Midterm Exam	NO READING
<u>What We Can Vote For</u>		
T-10/11	The Founding	The Constitution F: #63, #68, & #78
R-10/13	The Progressives	IAD: 232-38 See Canvas

<i>Representation, Interest Groups, and Political Parties</i>		
T-10/18	The Founding	F: #10, #52, #57, & #71
R-10/20	Democratic Representation, Great Parties, and Small Parties	DA: 165-172
<i>Separation of Powers</i>		
T-10/25	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-10/27	What is it supposed to do (Executive)?	F: #37 (w/ IAD 212) & #70 (w/ IAD 214) DA: 217-20
T-11/1	What is it supposed to do (Judicial)?	IAD: 219-22 & 230-31 F: #78 (w/ IAD 225)
<i>Federalism</i>		
R-11/3	What is it; why do we have it?	The Constitution F: #39 DA: 53-58 & 235-37
<i>Religion</i>		
T-11/8	As an institution	DA: 42-44, 274-88, & 417-19 IAD: 239-45
Persistent Questions within American Democracy		
R-11/10	Is religion a problem?	IAD: 253-266
T-11/15	What is the relation of the sexes?	DA: 274-75, 278-79, 563-65, 567-76 (w/ IAD 136) IAD: 138-140
R-11/17	What makes one a citizen?	IAD: 266-80
T & R-11/22 & 24	Thanksgiving Break (learn more here)	NO READING
T-11/29	Do constitutional rights belong to individuals, groups, or both?	IAD: 174-98
R-12/1	Why Should I Obey the Law?	IAD: 281-307 DA: 225-37
T-12/6	Reflection and Final Exam Review	NO READING
T-12/13	Final Exam (10:30 AM-12:30 PM)	NO READING

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