

# INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT: Political Science 101 Spring Quarter 2006

*“If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.”—James Madison*

*“It is not the function of the government to keep the citizen from falling into error; it is the function of the citizen to keep the government from falling into error.”— Justice Robert Jackson*

## **Dr. Brett Curry, Lecturer**

Class Hours: 1:30-3:18, Tu, Th

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## **Course Description**

This course is an introduction to American government and politics. Over the course of the quarter, we will be concerned with several major themes. First, we will consider the basic structural and theoretical underpinnings of the American system of government—notably the U.S. Constitution and the principles it contains. Second, we will examine the key components of political behavior in the American system. In examining that behavior, we will discuss the role of such concepts as public opinion, the mass media, political parties, interest groups, and electoral participation in the workings of the American national government. We will also be analyzing the major governing institutions in the United States—Congress, the Presidency and the Executive Bureaucracy, and the Courts. Finally, our investigation of American government will consider two areas in which these broad themes of constitutional principles, political behavior, and governmental institutions have intersected: civil liberties and civil rights.

## **Course Goals**

1. This course’s primary goal is to convince students that American government—its policies, its actors, and its foundations—is worth knowing something about, primarily because it affects so many aspects of our lives.
2. Another important goal of this course is to equip students with a basic understanding of our national government by investigating its origins, political behavior in the

American system, and the work of the government's most important institutions and policymakers.

3. Finally, this course has been designed around the important goal of stimulating students to think critically about various aspects of American government and politics.

### Course Readings

Two relatively inexpensive books are required for this course, and each is available for purchase at SBX or from any number of online sources. (Since we will not be reading Lewis until later in the quarter, you may want to look for it online—where you will likely find it at a cheaper price than in the campus bookstores. The story hasn't changed in more than 40 years, so any edition you can get your hands on will be fine).

- **America's New Democracy (2006; 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition)**, by Morris P. Fiorina, Paul E. Peterson, D. Stephen Voss, and Bertram Johnson. New York: Pearson-Longman. (Referred to hereafter as AND)
- **Gideon's Trumpet**, by Anthony Lewis. New York: Vintage Books.

### Course Requirements

Examination I: 25% (125 points)  
Examination II: 30% (150 points)  
Examination III: 30% (150 points)  
Quizzes: 15% (three, at 25 points each)

### Examinations and Quizzes

There will be three examinations in this course—two in-class midterms during the fourth and seventh weeks of the quarter as well as a **non-comprehensive** final examination that will be held on Tuesday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, from 1:30pm to 3:18pm. Examinations will generally be multiple choice, but may also contain identification terms and/or concepts or short essay questions. I will inform you as to the exact format of each examination at least one week prior to the exam.

There will also be four unannounced quizzes given throughout the quarter. Quizzes will be brief, and will not be difficult if you have done the assigned reading for that class session. (They will also be a way for me to periodically check class attendance). The lowest of your quiz scores will be dropped. **Missed quizzes CANNOT be made up—no exceptions. If you should miss a quiz due to absence, that will be the quiz score dropped at the end of the quarter.**

Any conflicts must be discussed with the instructor **prior** to all examinations. Further, if you happen to miss an exam due to an emergency that makes it impossible for you to consult with me beforehand, the burden of proof will be on **you** to demonstrate the legitimacy of your absence. **I am quite serious about this—college is not a sanctuary**

**from responsibility, and making special provisions for students who act irresponsibly is not fair to the vast majority who “play by the rules.”** (If an emergency does arise, discuss it with me as soon as possible! For instance, do not miss the midterm and come to me a week or two afterward and casually mention that you need to make it up sometime—I will NOT be sympathetic).

### **Extra Credit Opportunities**

You will have an opportunity to earn a small amount of extra credit (up to 2%) for this course. Details will be provided later in the quarter.

### **My Obligations to You**

As your instructor, I have several obligations to you. First, I hope to create a classroom atmosphere that is pleasant, relaxed, and conducive to learning and discussion. I am committed to grading and returning your work promptly (typically within a week). You will also find that I am very approachable, should you have any questions or concerns. Finally, because two uninterrupted hours is far too long a period to expect anyone to be fully engaged in lecture or discussion, it will be my usual practice to take a brief break midway through class whenever possible.

### **Student Obligations**

Although I will attempt to foster a comfortable atmosphere in the classroom, I would appreciate your cooperation in the following ways:

1. Come to class on time and stay to the end. This is in your own best interest, since the introduction and conclusion of class are often the most important parts. Moreover, my examinations tend to place particular emphasis on material discussed in lecture—which may or may not be discussed in your textbook. That is my way of rewarding students who are diligent in coming to class. If you do not come to class, and rely solely on the textbook in studying for exams, you will miss a substantial amount of material that will be covered on the exams. In other words, **this is NOT a correspondence course.**
2. Beeping pagers and/or ringing cell phones are distracting and rude to both your instructor and fellow classmates. **Please switch them off before class.**
3. Because this course will involve a substantial amount of discussion and debate, please be attentive to and respectful of others’ views. Feel free to disagree with someone else’s position, but please do so respectfully. Most importantly, please do not be afraid to speak up if you have something to say. While class participation is not formally reflected in your overall course grade, the quality of an individual’s active class participation and attendance will be taken into account in borderline grade situations.

## **Academic Honesty**

Academic misconduct, as defined by the University in the Student Handbook, **will NOT be tolerated**. All the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. No cheating on examinations is acceptable, and any suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be immediately reported to the university committee on academic misconduct and dealt with according to University policy.

Plagiarism of written assignments—using someone else’s words or ideas without proper citation—will not be tolerated. If you are unsure whether your work meets standards of academic honesty, please feel free to discuss your questions or concerns with me.

Note: In order to maintain academic honesty, no late-arriving student will be allowed to begin a midterm or final examination **AFTER** the first person finishes and leaves the room.

## **University-Mandated Language for GEC Courses: Rationale and Learning Objectives**

“Courses in social science help students understand human behavior and cognition, and the structures of human societies, cultures and institutions.

### **Learning Objectives:**

1. Students understand the theories and methods of scientific inquiry as they are applied to the studies of individuals, groups, organizations, and societies.
2. Students comprehend human differences and similarities in various psychological, social, cultural, economic, geographic, and political contexts.
3. Students develop abilities to comprehend and assess individual and social values, and recognize their importance in social problem solving and policy making.”

## **Disability Services**

Students with disabilities who feel they may need special assistance should inform me of their needs in a timely manner (rest assured, these discussions will be kept confidential). Course materials are available in alternative formats upon request. For such materials, please contact Mr. Wayne DeYoung, 2140 Derby Hall, 154 North Oval Mall, 292-2880.

## Course Schedule and Assigned Readings

### **Week 1 (3/28, 3/30): INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT**

- Tu: Course Introduction
- Th: Democracy in the United States  
**AND Chapters 1 and 2 (pages 2-39)**

### **Week 2 (4/4, 4/6): THE FOUNDATIONS OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT**

- Tu: Federalism  
**AND Chapter 3 (pages 40-62)**
- Th: Diversity and American Political Culture  
**AND Chapter 4 (pages 64-90)**

### **Week 3 (4/11, 4/13): POLITICS, OPINION, AND THE MEDIA**

- Tu: Public Opinion  
**AND Chapter 5 (pages 91-113)**
- Th: Politics and the Media  
**AND Chapter 5 (pages 113-133)**

### **Week 4 (4/18, 4/20): FIRST MIDTERM EXAM**

- Tu: Examination I
- Th: NO CLASS

### **Week 5 (4/25, 4/27): INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP POLITICAL PARTICIPATION**

- Tu: Individual Political Participation  
**AND Chapter 6 (pages 134-156)**
- Th: Political Parties in America  
**AND Chapter 8 (pages 194-224)**

### **Week 6 (5/2, 5/4): PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**

- Tu: Electing the President  
**AND Chapter 7 (pages 157-167; 172-176; 178-181; 183-189)**

Th: Electing the President, part II  
**“The War Room”**

**Week 7 (5/9, 5/11): THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH/SECOND MIDTERM EXAM**

Tu: The Presidency  
**AND Chapter 10 (pages 253-283)**

Th: Examination II

**Week 8 (5/16, 5/18): CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS/THE CONGRESS**

Tu: Choosing the Congress  
**AND Chapter 7 (pages 168-172; 176-178; 182-183; 189-191)**  
**Gideon’s Trumpet, Chapters 1-5**

Th: The Congress  
**AND Chapter 9 (pages 226-252)**  
**Gideon’s Trumpet, Chapters 6-10**

**Week 9 (5/23, 5/25): CONGRESS AND THE COURTS**

Tu: The Judiciary  
**AND Chapter 12 (pages 318-346)**  
**Finish Gideon’s Trumpet**

Th: Civil Liberties, part I  
**AND Chapter 13 (pages 348-376)**

**Week 10: (5/30, 6/1): CIVIL LIBERTIES AND CIVIL RIGHTS**

Tu: Civil Liberties, part II  
**AND Chapter 13 (pages 348-376)**

Th: Civil Rights  
**AND Chapter 14 (pages 377-405)**

**Final Examination: Tuesday, June 6, 1:30-3:18pm**