

## INTRODUCTION TO US GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

George Mason University, Schar School of Policy and Government  
GOVT 103--001 (CRN 70551)

Fall 2021

T/TH 10:30 -11:45am

Exploratory Hall L004

**Professor: Jennifer Nicoll Victor, PhD**

Email: [jvictor3@gmu.edu](mailto:jvictor3@gmu.edu)

Twitter: @jennifernvictor

Physical office: Aquia Hall, 325

In-person drop-in availability: T 1-3pm; Th 5-6pm

Virtual appointments: <https://calendly.com/jvictor3>

Course website: <http://blackboard.gmu.edu>

Faculty website: <https://jvictor.gmu.edu/>

**Teaching Assistant: Timothy Bynion**

TA email: [tbynion@gmu.edu](mailto:tbynion@gmu.edu)

TA Virtual office: <https://gmu.zoom.us/j/7670671326>

TA Virtual office hours: W 11am – 12pm

TA physical office: Aquia Hall, 336

TA drop-in hours: Th 1-3pm

### Course Description

This course provides students with an introduction to American political institutions and public policy formation. No prerequisite classes or prior knowledge are required to enroll. The course is divided into four sections. In the first section, we examine the history of the formation of American government and the theoretical explanations for the existence of government. In the second section, we examine the institutions of government, such as the U.S. Congress, the Supreme Court, and the Presidency. In the third section, we explore the behaviors associated with government and the mechanisms by which political behaviors are expressed (e.g., voting, public opinion, interest groups, political parties, etc.). In the final section, we will examine U.S. foreign, economic, and social public policy.

### Course Goals

This course is designed to meet three primary objectives. First, I hope to stimulate your **curiosity** about government and politics and provide you with a life-long desire to be an informed, critical, and active citizen. Second, I hope students will develop a base level of **knowledge** and understanding about the institutions that form our government, the incentives of political actors, and the interactions between the two. Third, the course is designed to help students improve their analytical and critical thinking **skills**.

## Course Format and Components

This course is being taught in-person and may not be completed in hybrid fashion. Students are required to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 before the course begins. In addition to following state, county, and university health policies, the class may vary policies and expectations regarding masks or other mitigation strategies depending on current data. If students experience health or other personal emergencies during the course, they must communicate their situation and needs with the instructor, who will work with you to devise a contingency plan for completing the course. The course includes the following graded requirements:

There are five graded requirements for this course, described below. Grades will be calculated on a non-curved typical A-F scale where,

> 93 A*	87-89 B+	77-79 C+	67-69 D+	< 60 F
90-92 A-	83-86 B	73-76 C	63-66 D	
	80-82 B-	70-72 C-	60-62 D-	

(\*A+ will be awarded at the instructor's discretion for extraordinary performance.)

*Quizzes (15%)* A weekly reading quiz is available on Blackboard. Quizzes must be submitted by 11:59pm on Fridays. **It is not possible to make up missed quizzes.** Quizzes are typically 10 multiple-choice questions, and open-book/open-note. You may take each quiz a maximum of twice and your highest score will be kept. Quizzes are not timed. After completing a quiz, Blackboard will tell you your score and which questions you got wrong. Correct answers to all questions will be available on Saturdays. The lowest *two* recorded quiz scores will be excluded from course grade calculations.

*Civic Engagement Activities (CEA) (15%)* Students must complete a minimum of 12 civic engagement activities. Bonus points will be awarded for completing more than 12 CEAs, but no student will earn extra points for completing more than 15 CEAs. You can earn a maximum of 6 percent extra credit for additional CEAs. CEAs may be submitted at any time during the semester, but weekly submissions are strongly encouraged. CEAs can be completed in one of two ways. **Option 1:** Complete the suggested CEAs on Blackboard, which are designed to complement course topics. **Option 2:** Contribute to [Democracy Squad projects via Magnify](#). Magnify is a public platform designed to help people solve collective problems using the tools of networks and social science. Students may contribute to projects already posted in Democracy Squad or submit their own Democracy Squad projects and encourage others to participate in them. Regardless of the option students select, CEAs are submitted the same way: upload a document in Blackboard that describes your CEA activity (Magnify or otherwise). The activities are designed to help students practice applying lessons from class into real-life situations of politics and government, and to encourage responsible civic political activity.

*Midterm Exams (20% each)* There will be TWO midterm exams. Each exam will consist of 50 multiple-choice questions and 5 – 10 short answer questions. Exams will be administered in

Blackboard and are open-book. Students must take the exams in the allotted time. Students may elect to bring their laptop to class and take the exam in the classroom (recommended) or take the exam at home. Exam questions will be based on material presented in class and in the readings and will include factual and analytical questions. The exams will be on **Thursday, September 23 & Thursday, October 28**, during class time. Make-up exams will only be offered under extraordinary circumstances.

*Final Exam (30%)* There will be one comprehensive final exam covering material from the entire course. The exam will be approximately 100 multiple-choice questions and a few short answer questions. The exam is open-book but, is not designed such that students should expect to look up many answers during the test. The Final Exam will be administered in Blackboard. Students may elect to bring their laptop to class and take the exam in the classroom (recommended) or take the exam at home. Exam questions will be based on material presented in class and in the readings and will include factual and analytical questions. The only time to take the exam is in the University assigned slot allocated to our class: **Tuesday, December 14, 10:30am – 1:15pm.**

### **News, media, and consumption of political information**

As a part of this course, it is your responsibility to be well-informed about current events and political news. It is increasingly difficult to learn about political events in a way that is even-handed and non-partisan. Here are some tips about how to consume news in a way that will provide you with the most value:

1. Consume a variety of well-respected news sources. In general, for national political news I recommend *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and National Public Radio. Instructions for accessing subscription services through Mason are below.
2. Avoid television news altogether, except on election night.
3. Avoid getting your news exclusively from social media.
4. Avoid news sources that seek to provoke an emotional response. Try to consume news dispassionately. It's okay to have passion about politics, rights, justice, issues, etc. But try to consume news with a sense of curiosity, rather than an urge to be outraged, touched, or emotive. Train yourself to read a headline and response with, "Huh, that's interesting," rather than automatically clicking forward, like, retweet, etc.

*Instructions for access to news sources.* As a Mason student, your tuition provides you access to dozens of subscription-only resources through the Mason library. These include many expensive, high quality news sources.

1. Install the Duo Mobile app on your smart phone. For complete instructions on enrolling in Mason's two-factor authentication service (2FA) see [this](#).
2. Sign up for your own [New York Times](#) and [Financial Times](#) accounts using the Mason libraries. See <http://infoguides.gmu.edu/politics/news> for instructions.
3. Access [The Chronicle of Higher Ed](#) and [The Economist](#) through the links given here, as they route you through the Libraries' proxy server.

4. Access many national and local newspapers (including the *Wall Street Journal* and *Washington Post*) through the [Factiva News Pages](#).
5. Podcasts are also an excellent way to stay abreast of the news. Many podcasts also have written blog sites. I recommend the following politics and news themed podcasts, which you can find on iTunes, or your favorite podcast service: FiveThirtyEight Politics, The Weeds (Vox), Up First (NPR), Politics Podcast (NPR), Checks and Balances (The Economist), The Ezra Klein Show (NYT), Mischief of Faction, Political Gabfest (Slate), The Daily (NYT), Political Research Digest (The Niskanen Center), It's all Politics

### **Resources for Students**

College can be a stressful experience. It is normal to sometimes feel overwhelmed, out of place, or, insecure. Self-care strategies are important for maintaining your physical, emotional, and academic health. Developing self-awareness about stress, anxiety, or health issues is an important part of your development and success as a student. The following campus resources are available to you to help you learn to manage the complexities of your college:

[Center for Academic Advising, Retention, and Transitions](#)

[Compliance, Diversity, and Ethics \(including sexual misconduct and harassment; Title IX\)](#)

[Counseling and Psychological Services](#)

[Covid-19 Information Page from GMU](#)

[Disability Services](#)

[Financial Aid](#)

[International Programs and Services](#)

[Learning Services](#)

[Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning Resources](#)

[Mathematics Tutoring Center](#)

[Military Alliance Program](#)

[Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education](#)

[Online Learning Services](#)

[Safe Return to Campus Plan](#)

[Student Conduct](#)

[Student Emergency Assistance Funding](#)

[Student Health Services](#)

[University Career Services](#)

[University Life](#)

[University Writing Center](#)

### **Class Policies**

A. *Class Attendance and Participation*. Learning is an *active*, rather than *passive*, exercise. To succeed in this class, read all the assigned readings using an active and engaged reading

comprehension strategy, attend class prepared to engage with the material, and complete all assignments and exams in a professional and timely manner. Attendance and participation are not credited for points, but students who do not participate may struggle to perform well on graded assessments.

B. *COVID-19/Delta Mitigation.* In accordance with university policy, all students are required to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to attend this class. **Students are expected to remain masked while in class.** The vaccine is to protect you; the masks are to protect others. With some luck, our class will be uninterrupted by viral outbreaks during the course of the term. If you have concerns related to your health or the health policies in class, discuss them with your instructor.

C. *Readings.* As is the case with attendance, keeping pace with the reading is essential to succeeding in this class. It is *your* responsibility to obtain copies of the readings prior to the date we will discuss them in class. I will do everything I can to make this task easier for you. **You will be much more successful in this course if you complete the assigned readings and *take notes* on them.**

D. *Technology.* Students will need regular access to computer and internet technology to complete this course; however, **students are strongly encouraged not to use laptops in class,** unless absolutely necessary. Laptops are a distraction in the classroom (to users and peers) and generally do not improve the learning, notetaking, or retention experience. Students are encouraged to take notes by hand during class and while completing readings.

E. *Cheating, Plagiarism, and Academic Integrity.* Students in this course will be expected to comply with the George Mason University Honor Code (see <https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code/>). There are three simple guidelines to follow with respect to academic integrity: (1) all work you submit must be your own; (2) when using the work or ideas of others, including fellow students, give full credit through accurate citations; and (3) if you are uncertain about the expectations for any assignment, ask for clarification. Any student engaged in any academic misconduct *will receive an F on the offending exam or assignment.* Egregious violations will result in an F grade for the course and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. These violations include cheating on an exam, using someone else's work as your own, and plagiarizing the written word. Plagiarism (using someone else's words or ideas without providing credit or citation) is a serious offense. *If you have any questions at all about what constitutes cheating, plagiarism, or academic misconduct, please ask the instructor.*

F. *Students with Disabilities.* If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the instructor and contact [Disability Services](#) at 703.993.2474 or [ods.gmu.edu](https://ods.gmu.edu). All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

G. *Diversity is a value.* George Mason University values diversity in its learning, research, and civic activities. All members of the Mason community are asked to show respect to one another at all times. The learning environment in this class respects a wide array of viewpoints,

and students of all cultural, ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds are welcome. More information about Mason’s policies surrounding diversity can be found at the [Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Multicultural Education \(ODIME\)](#). Should you need accommodations related to observing a religious holiday, please contact the instructor. For your reference, a list of [major religious holidays can be found here](#). It is students’ responsibility to communicate with the instructor if religious observations conflict with course requirements.

*H. Student Privacy.* The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) grants students continuous access to educational records upon their request, allows students to amend their record if errors are found, and restricts how and when educational records can be disclosed. Your instructor will not release information about your academic record in this course to anyone without the student’s permission. [More information about FERPA is here](#).

*I. Email.* Mason uses only Mason e-mail accounts to communicate with enrolled students. Students must activate their Mason e-mail account, use it to communicate with their department and other administrative units, and check it regularly for important university information including messages related to this class. *Email etiquette:* An email is a professional correspondence; do not write it as if it is a text message, snap, tweet, or IM. Always use a salutation and sign your name. Consider creating a signature that automatically inserts your name and basic contact information at the bottom of your emails. Use proper punctuation and grammar.

*J. Dropping or withdrawing.*

August 30	Last day to add
September 7	Last day to drop (no tuition penalty)
September 14	Last day drop with partial tuition liability
Sept. 15 – Sept 27	Unrestricted withdraw, with 100% tuition liability
Sept. 28 – Oct 27	<a href="#">Selective Withdraw</a> opportunity (results in “W” grade)

After October 27 there are no options for withdrawing from the course. If you have concerns about your performance in the course, or you find yourself unable to perform for any reason, you should discuss your concerns with your teaching assistant, professor, advisor, and Assistant Dean (in that order). Students seeking to drop or withdraw are responsible for doing so on their own in Patriot Web. If you need help or advice, please see your academic advisor ([gvip@gmu.edu](mailto:gvip@gmu.edu)--Government and International Politics majors, or [puad@gmu.edu](mailto:puad@gmu.edu)--Public Administration majors).

### **Required Texts**

There is one primary textbook for this course: *The Logic of American Politics*, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. Students are encouraged to purchase the electronic version of the textbook as a Vantage product from Sage Press. Students may purchase their Vantage text directly from Sage or from the Mason Bookstore. Students will receive an access code that will allow them to access their text directly from Blackboard, or from the Sage website. Students are not required to use the Vantage electronic text and may purchase a traditional hardcopy text.

Kernell, Samuel H., Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck, and Timothy R. Johnson. 2021. *The Logic of American Politics*. 10th edition. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press. ISBN: 9781071821411

To purchase from [GMU bookstore click here](#).

To purchase from [Sage Press click here](#).

### Course Schedule and Assignments

Complete all assigned readings *before* weekly class sessions.

Week	Topic	Assignment
<b>Week 0</b> Pre-August 22	Welcome!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore Blackboard course site</li> <li>• Read syllabus</li> <li>• Obtain required text</li> <li>• Watch welcome video</li> </ul>
<b>Week 1</b> Aug. 23 & 26	Why government? Why democracy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Logic</i>, preface, Ch. 1</li> <li>○ Victor, Jennifer Nicoll. "A Simple Model of Political Engagement." <i>Mischiefs of Faction</i> (blog), November 13, 2019. <a href="https://www.mischiefsoffaction.com/post/model-of-political-engagement">https://www.mischiefsoffaction.com/post/model-of-political-engagement</a>.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Class Tues. &amp; Thurs.</li> <li>• Reading quiz 1 (due Friday @midnight)</li> <li>• CEA 1</li> </ul>
<b>Week 2</b> Aug. 31 – Sept. 2	Federalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read <i>Logic</i>, Chs. 2 &amp; 3</li> <li>• Class Tues. &amp; Thurs.</li> <li>• Reading quiz 2 (due Friday @midnight)</li> <li>• CEA 2</li> </ul>
<b>Week 3</b> Sept. 7 & 9	Civil Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 4</li> <li>• Class Tues. &amp; Thurs.</li> <li>• Reading quiz 3 (due Friday @midnight)</li> <li>• CEA 3</li> </ul>
<b>Week 4</b> Sept. 14 & 16	Civil Liberties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 5</li> <li>• Class Tues. &amp; Thurs.</li> <li>• Reading quiz 4 (due Friday @midnight)</li> <li>• CEA 4</li> </ul>
<b>Week 5</b> Sept. 21 & 23	<b>Midterm I</b>	Tuesday is catch-up and review. <b>Thursday is Midterm Exam I.</b>

<b>Week 6</b> Sept. 28 & 30	Congress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 6</li> <li>• Class Tues. &amp; Thurs.</li> <li>• Reading quiz 5 (due Friday @midnight)</li> <li>• CEA 5</li> </ul>
<b>Week 7</b> Oct. 5 & 7	Presidency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 7</li> <li>• Class Tues. &amp; Thurs.</li> <li>• Reading quiz 6 (due Friday @midnight)</li> <li>• CEA 6</li> </ul>
<b>Week 8</b> Oct. 12 & 14	Bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>No class Tuesday; fall break</b></li> <li>• Read <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 8</li> <li>• Class Thurs.</li> <li>• Reading quiz 7 (due Friday @midnight)</li> <li>• CEA 7</li> </ul>
<b>Week 9</b> Oct. 19 & 21	Judiciary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 9</li> <li>• Class Tues. &amp; Thurs.</li> <li>• Reading quiz 8 (due Friday @midnight)</li> <li>• CEA 8</li> </ul>
<b>Week 10</b> Oct. 26 & 28	<b>Midterm II</b>	Tuesday is catch-up and review. <b>Thursday is Midterm Exam II.</b>
<b>Week 11</b> Nov. 2 & 4	Public Opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 10</li> <li>• Class Tues. &amp; Thurs.</li> <li>• Reading quiz 9 (due Friday @midnight)</li> <li>• CEA 9</li> </ul>
<b>Week 12</b> Nov. 9 & 11	Voting & Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 11</li> <li>• Class Tues. &amp; Thurs.</li> <li>• Reading quiz 10 (due Friday @midnight)</li> <li>• CEA 10</li> </ul>
<b>Week 13</b> Nov. 16 & 18	Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 12</li> <li>• Class Tues. &amp; Thurs.</li> <li>• Reading quiz 11 (due Friday @midnight)</li> <li>• CEA 11*</li> </ul>
<b>Week 14</b> Nov. 23 & 25	Interest Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 13</li> <li>• Class Tues.</li> <li>• <b>No class Thursday; Thanksgiving break.</b></li> <li>• Reading quiz 12 (due Friday @midnight)</li> <li>• CEA 12*</li> </ul>
<b>Week 15</b> Nov. 30 & Dec. 2	Media & Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 14</li> <li>• Read Maltese, <i>et al.</i>, Ch. 15 [on Blackboard]</li> <li>• Class Tues. &amp; Thurs.</li> </ul>



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reading quiz 13 (due Friday @midnight)</li><li>• CEA 13*</li></ul>
<b>Tuesday, December 14, 10:30am – 1:15pm</b>	<b>**FINAL EXAM**</b>	