

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
George Mason University
GOVT 103--002 (CRN 10864) Spring 2021
Tuesday/Thursday 10:30am – 11:45am

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[Virtual Office Hours via Zoom. Choose a meeting time with this link.](#)
Course Website: <http://blackboard.gmu.edu>

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I. 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.

II. 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**.

III. Course Requirements and Graded Evaluation

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. When you start a quiz, you must complete it in one hour. 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%) Each week students will be responsible for performing and describing one civic engagement activity, with the exception of exam weeks (no CEA). CEAs can be completed in one of two ways. **Option 1:** complete the activity described on Blackboard and upload a document that describes or documents your participation. **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 network and social science. Students may contribute to projects already posted in Democracy Squad, or create their own. Document and report your weekly Magnify activity and upload it to your CEA assignment. 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. Late assignments will be accepted with a 5% per-day late penalty.

Midterm Exams (20% each) There will be TWO midterm exams. Each exam will be multiple-choice, taken in a timed format on-line. The exams are open-book but, are not designed such that students should expect to look up many answers during the test. 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 **Tuesday, February 23 & Tuesday, March 23**. Exams will be available for a 24-hour period, only. Make-up exams will only be offered under extraordinary circumstances.

Final Exam (30%) This will be a comprehensive exam covering material from the entire course. The exam will be multiple-choice, taken in a timed format on-line. The exam is open-book but, are not designed such that students should expect to look up many answers during the test. Exam questions will be based on material presented in class and in the readings and will include factual and analytical questions. The exam will be on **Tuesday, May 4, 10:30am – 1:15pm**. This time has been designated by the University and cannot be changed; it is the **ONLY** date and time to take the exam.

IV. Extra Credit, Missing and Late Work

There are NO opportunities for earning extra or bonus credit in this course. Quizzes cannot ever be made up. Civic Engagement Activities may be submitted late for a 5% per day late penalty. If you are aware that you will miss an exam you must notify the instructor *at least two days* prior to the due date or exam date. Make-up exams are conducted at the instructor's discretion and are granted only in extraordinary circumstances, such as a verified illness (with doctor's note) or family emergency (be prepared to provide documentation).

V. 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. Synchronous class meetings will include a segment called "What's happening in politics?" (WHIP), where students will be expected to have information about current events. 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 in any sense. 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

Vox, The Weeds

NPR, Up First
NPR, Politics Podcast
The Economist Radio
The Ezra Klein Show
5 on 45, Brookings

Mischiefs of Faction
Slate, Political Gabfest
NYT, The Daily
Political Research Digest, The
Niskanen Center

VI. 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](#)

VII. Class Policies

- A. *Class Attendance and Participation.* Learning is an *active*, rather than *passive*, exercise. To succeed in this class, complete all the activities each week: readings, watching lessons, attending synchronous sessions, quizzes, and activities. Attendance and participation are not credited for points, but students who do not participate may struggle to perform well on graded assessments.
- B. *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.

- C. *Technology.* This is a Distance Learning (DL) class. Students must have a laptop or desktop computer and a high-speed internet connection to adequately participate in all aspects of the course. If you have difficulty obtaining adequate technology, or require training for using technology in the course, please contact the instructor. When watching lectures or attending synchronous meeting, do so from a quiet space, and eliminate distractions (electronic and otherwise) from your environment.
- D. *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 appropriate Dean's office. 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.*
- E. *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. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.
- F. *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.
- G. *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.](#)

H. *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.

I. *Dropping or withdrawing.*

February 1	Last day to add
February 12	Last day to drop (no tuition penalty)
February 13 – 16	Drop with 50% tuition liability
February 17 – March 1	Drop with 100% tuition liability
March 2 – April 1	Selective Withdraw opportunity (results in “W” grade)

After April 1 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 withdrawal 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--Government and International Politics majors, or puad@gmu.edu--Public Administration majors).

VIII. Course Materials

There is one primary textbook for this course: *The Logic of American Politics*, 9th ed. In addition, we will read ONE chapter (ch. 15) of *American Democracy in Context*, during the last week of the course where we will discuss public policy. These two books come from the same publisher, Sage, and they can be purchased together as a bundle, in either electronic or hardcopy format. ***Use the ISBN links below to acquire these materials through the Mason bookstore.***

Please order your materials from the [bookstore's official website](#) in advance of the start of classes to ensure delivery prior to classes beginning. The in-store pickup option will be available online just before school starts and students will be able to acquire their orders inside the bookstore.

Kernell, Samuel H., Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck. 2019. *The Logic of American Politics*. 9 edition. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press.

Maltese, John Anthony, Joseph A. Pika, and W. Phillips Shively. 2020. *American Democracy in Context*. 1 edition. Los Angeles: CQ Press. **CHAPTER 15 ONLY**

Bundled **eBook** of *Logic* and chapter 15 of Maltese, *et al.* (\$80): ISBN [9781071833650](#)

Bundled **hardcopy** of *Logic* and chapter 15 of Maltese, *et al.* (\$179): ISBN [9781071833681](https://www.amazon.com/dp/9781071833681)

IX. Course Schedule and Assignments

The following schedule follows a weekly pattern. It includes the same general activities each week:

1. Do the readings first.
2. Watch the pre-recorded short video lessons.
3. Join the synchronous meetings Tuesdays and Thursdays.
4. Complete the weekly reading quiz.
5. Complete the weekly Civic Engagement Activity (NOTE: no CEA in exam weeks).
6. Repeat.

Week	Lessons	Assignments & Due Dates
Week 0 Pre-Jan. 25	<i>Welcome to Introduction to US Government</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0.1 Course introduction • 0.2 What is politics? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain textbooks • Read the syllabus • Watch video lessons
Week 1 Jan 25 – 31	<i>Why government? Why democracy?</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.1 What is government? • 1.2 How does Covid-19 create a collective action problem? • 2.1 Public goods • 2.2 Articles of Confederation • 2.3 US Constitution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: <i>Logic</i>, preface & Chs. 1 & 2, Appendix 1-3 • Watch: video lessons • Synchronous Sessions @ T/Th 10:30 – 11:45 • Reading Quiz by Friday at 11:59pm • Civic Engagement Activity 1 (CEA1): Register to vote
Week 2 Feb. 1 – 7	<i>Federalism</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.1 Prisoners' dilemma, defined • 3.2 Solving prisoners' dilemma • 3.3 Federalism, defined • 3.4 Liberty versus security • 3.5 Federalist Papers No. 10 & 51 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 3; Appendices 4 - 5 • Watch: video lessons • Synchronous Sessions @ T/Th 10:30 – 11:45 • Reading Quiz by Friday at 11:59pm • CEA2: Identify a CA problem in your midst

Week	Lessons	Assignments & Due Dates
Week 3 Feb. 8 - 14	<i>Civil Rights</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4.1 Civil rights, defined 4.2 Slavery, reconstruction, and Jim Crow 4.3 Civil Rights Movement 4.4 Women's suffrage 4.5 Latinos, Asians, Native Americans, LGBTQ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 4 Watch: video lessons Synchronous Sessions @ T/Th 10:30 – 11:45 Reading Quiz by Friday at 11:59pm CEA3: Report about a local or national civil rights group
Week 4 Feb. 15 – 21	<i>Civil Liberties</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5.1 Bill of Rights 5.2 Freedom of religion 5.3 Freedom of speech and press 5.4 Civil liberties versus collective action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 5 Watch: video lessons Synchronous Sessions @ TUESDAY ONLY 10:30 – 11:45 Reading Quiz by Friday at 11:59pm CEA4: Engage in free speech
Week 5 Feb. 22 – 28 Midterm I Feb. 23	<i>Congress</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6.1 The US Congress 6.2 How a bill becomes a law 6.3 House versus Senate 6.4 The filibuster 6.5 Strategic legislating 6.6 Gerrymandering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 6 Watch: video lessons Synchronous Sessions @ T/Th 10:30 – 11:45 Reading Quiz by Friday at 11:59pm Midterm Exam TUESDAY
Week 6 Mar. 1 – 7	<i>Presidency</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7.1 Presidential powers 7.2 The modern presidency 7.3 Going public 7.4 Forecasting presidential elections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 7 Watch: video lessons Synchronous Sessions @ T/Th 10:30 – 11:45 Reading Quiz by Friday at 11:59pm CEA5: Connect with your House Rep, Senator, or the White House.
Week 7 Mar. 8 - 14	<i>Bureaucracy</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8.1 Bureaucracy, defined 8.2 Cabinet departments, I 8.3 Cabinet departments, II 8.4 Independent agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 8 Watch: video lessons Synchronous Sessions @ THURSDAY ONLY 10:30 – 11:45 Reading Quiz by Friday at 11:59pm CEA6: Find a public meeting of interest

Week	Lessons	Assignments & Due Dates
Week 8 Mar. 15 – 21	<i>Federal Judiciary</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9.1 Federal judiciary 9.2 Judicial review 9.3 How cases get to the Supreme Court 9.4 Judicial decision making 9.5 Court politics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 9 Watch: video lessons Synchronous Sessions @ T/Th 10:30 – 11:45 Reading Quiz by Friday at 11:59pm CEA7: Connect with a criminal justice organization
Week 9 Mar. 22 – 28 Midterm II March 23	<i>Public Opinion</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10.1 Public opinion, defined 10.2 Polarization 10.3 Sources of public opinion 10.4 Ideology and identity 10.5 Measuring public opinion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 10 Watch: video lessons Synchronous Sessions @ THURSDAY ONLY 10:30 – 11:45 Reading Quiz by Friday at 11:59pm MIDTERM EXAM II @ TUESDAY
Week 10 Mar. 29 – April 4	<i>Voting, Campaigns, Elections</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 11.1 Suffrage 11.2 Paradox of voting 11.3 Median voter theorem 11.4 Campaign finance 11.5 Electoral college 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 11 Watch: video lessons Synchronous Sessions @ THURSDAY ONLY 10:30 – 11:45 Reading Quiz by Friday at 11:59pm CEA Holiday
Week 11 April 5 – 11	<i>Political Parties</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12.1 Why political parties? 12.2 Duverger's Law 12.3 Party history, I 12.4 Party history, II 12.5 Partisanship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 12 Watch: video lessons Synchronous Sessions @ T/Th 10:30 – 11:45 Reading Quiz by Friday at 11:59pm CEA8: Connect with a local party organization
Week 12 April 12 – 18	<i>Interest Groups</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13.1 What's a group? 13.2 Inequality and organizing 13.3 Representation and organizing 13.4 Collective action reprise 13.5 Lobbying and marching 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read: <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 13 Watch: video lessons Synchronous Sessions @ T/Th 10:30 – 11:45 Reading Quiz by Friday at 11:59pm CEA9: Connect with a member organization, local or national

Week	Lessons	Assignments & Due Dates
Week 13 April 19 – 25	<i>Media and Politics</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14.1 History of media • 14.2 Media and polarization • 14.3 Social media • 14.4 Conspiracy and misinformation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 14 • Watch: video lessons • Synchronous Sessions @ T 10:30 – 11:45 • Reading Quiz by Sunday at 11:59pm • CEA10: Discuss a news item with a friend or family member, using principles from class.
Week 14 April 26 – May 2	<i>Public Policy</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15.1 Economic policy 101 • 15.2 Market failure • 15.3 Fiscal and monetary policy • 15.4 US poverty • 15.5 Entitlement programs • 15.6 Foreign policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read: Maltese, <i>et al.</i>, Ch. 15; <i>Logic</i>, Ch. 15 • Watch: video lessons • Synchronous Sessions @ T/Th 10:30 – 11:45 • Reading Quiz by Friday at 11:59pm • CEA11: Select an activity on-line
Tuesday, May. 4,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FINAL EXAM • May the Force be with you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FINAL EXAM, Tuesday, May 4, 10:30am – 1:15pm