

GOVT 103 - 001: Introduction to American Government and Politics

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Class Hours: M/W 1:30 - 2:20 p.m. + Recitation

Office Hours (in person): M/W 3:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Office Hours (virtual): [virtual scheduler link](#)

Web: jvictor.gmu.edu

Course website: blackboard.gmu.edu

Classroom: Exploratory Hall L004

Office: Aquia Hall 325

Graduate Teaching Assistant: **Christine German**

Office Hours: M 2:30 - 4:30pm, W 11:00 am - 1:00 pm

E-mail: cgerman2@gmu.edu

Office: Aquia Hall 304

Recitation Section Instructors:

Molly Izer

Section #1 **Fridays @ 9:30 am**

Office Hours: W 9:00 - 10:00 am

E-mail: mizer@gmu.edu

Section Classroom: Horizon Hall 4012

Office: Starbucks, Northern Neck

Anna Garren

Section #2 **Fridays @ 11:30 am**

Office Hours: W 12:15 - 1:15pm

E-mail: agarren@gmu.edu

Section Classroom: Horizon Hall 4012

Office: Aquia Hall 337

Maaz Abbasi

Section #3 **Fridays @ 1:30 pm**

Office Hours: M 3:00 - 4:00pm

E-mail: mabbasi9@gmu.edu

Section Classroom: Horizon Hall 4012

Office: Johnson Center Room 3

Daksha Magesh

Section #5 **Fridays @ 1:30 pm**

Office Hours: F 12:30 - 1:30pm

E-mail: dmagesh9@gmu.edu

Section Classroom: Horizon Hall 4008

Office: Horizon Hall 4th floor (near 4008)

(document updated November 13, 2023)

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 Objectives

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

This course is being taught in person and may not be completed in a hybrid fashion. Students will attend two lectures each week and one recitation section meeting each Friday. 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 public health data. If you experience health or other personal emergencies during the course, you must communicate your situation and needs with the instructor, who will work with you to devise a contingency plan for completing the course.

Course Policies

Graded Components

1. *Quizzes (10%)* A weekly reading quiz is available on Blackboard. Quizzes must be submitted by 11:59pm on **Sundays**. You may take each quiz a maximum of twice and your highest score will be kept. Quizzes are untimed and open-book. Missed quizzes cannot be made-up. Correct answers to all questions will be available on the week after the quiz closes. The lowest two recorded quiz scores will be excluded from course grade calculations (but will remain visible in your grade record).
2. *Recitation participation (10%)* Attending Friday recitation is a required component of this course. The recitation section you attend the first week will be considered your "assigned" recitation, regardless of which section you are registered to in Patriot Web. If you need to attend a different recitation than your "assigned" (i.e., selected) one, you must email your TA and the TA whose section you want to attend prior to class time.
3. *Civic Engagement Activities (10%)* During the course of the semester, you must complete 10 Civic Engagement Activities (CEA) from the "menu" on Blackboard. You may choose items such as register to vote, write a letter to Congress, or tell a friend about a civil rights organization you learned about. **All CEAs must be submitted by December 3.** Late submissions are not accepted. TAs may provide opportunities for CEAs.
4. *Midterm Exams (20%) each* There will be TWO midterm exams. Exams will be conducted in-person, in the classroom, with scantrons and/or bluebooks. Students may bring one page of handwritten notes to the exam. 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 held

in recitation sections on **Friday, September 22 & Friday, October 20**. Make-up exams will only be offered under extraordinary circumstances.

5. *Final exam (30%)* There will be a comprehensive, in-class, final exam on **Wednesday, December 6th, 1:30 p.m. - 4:15 p.m.**

Extra Credit

As a general rule, I do not offer extra credit. If extraordinary circumstances occur, there is a small chance I will offer extra credit for an opportunity available to all students. I never offer extra credit to individual students.

Late Work

Quizzes cannot be submitted late. Uncompleted quizzes are scored as zero. CEAs can be submitted at any time during the semester and none will be accepted after December 3. Exams may only be taken late with advanced permission from Professor Victor.

Reading

Keeping pace with the assigned readings 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 before you come to class.**

Health Policy

If you are not feeling well, do not attend class. Let your TA know you will be absent and arrange to get course notes from them. If you will be absent from the lecture, you do not need to notify Professor Victor. If you will be absent for recitation, notify your TA. Illness is an excused absence. You may be required to present evidence to receive an excused absence. Follow university policies for vaccinations, including COVID-19 boosters, and do not hesitate to wear a mask in class, should you choose to do so for your protection or others'.

Technology

Students will need regular access to computer and internet technology to complete this course. Students may bring laptops or tablets to class for the purpose of referencing or taking notes; however, **I strongly recommend students minimize screen usage in class and take notes by hand.**

AI Use Policy

Student may benefit from engaging with large language model artificial intelligence (AI) tools during their studies and preparation for this course. The course will not provide direct instruction in best-practices for using AI. Students who use AI to augment their work are expected to acknowledge, cite, or explain AI contributions to their work product.

Plagiarism

Students in this course will comply with the [George Mason University 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
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.

Students with disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please contact the instructor and contact [Disability Services](#), (703) 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

Diversity, equality, and inclusion

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. 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, Equity, and Inclusion](#). Should you need accommodations related to observing a [religious holiday](#), please contact the instructor. It is your responsibility to communicate with the instructor if religious observations conflict with course requirements.

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.

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.

Dropping or Withdrawing

August 28	Last day to add
September 5	Last day to drop with no tuition penalty
September 12	Last day to drop with 50% tuition penalty
September 13 - September 26	Unrestricted withdraw with 100% tuition penalty
September 27 - October 23	Selective withdraw (undergrads only)

After October 23 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.

Consumption of Political News

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.
5. Generally, read news in formats that offer content longer than a few sentences.
6. Podcasts are also a great way to keep up with news. Some podcasts I enjoy include *Politics Podcast (NPR)*, *Politics (FiveThirtyEight)*, *Checks and Balances (The Economist)*, *The Ezra Klein Show (New York Times)*, *Political Gabfest (Slate)*, *The Daily (New York Times)*, *Political Research Digest (The Niskanen Center)*.

Instructions for accessing subscription news sources with your Mason login credentials: As a Mason student, your tuition provides you access to dozens of subscription-only news services. You can find a list of some of the best ones, and instructions on how to access them from [this great library source](#). In most cases, you will need to access sources using the Mason [Virtual Private Network](#).

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:

- [Academic Advising](#)
- [Center for Culture, Equity, and Empowerment](#)
- [Compliance, Diversity, Ethics \(including sexual misconduct and harassment; Title IX\)](#)
- [Counseling and Psychological Services](#)
- [COVID-19 campus policies, services, and data](#)
- [Disability Student Services](#)

- [Financial Aid](#)
- [International Programs and Services](#)
- [Learning Services](#)
- [Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning+ Resources Center](#)
- [Mason Library](#)
- [Math Tutoring Center](#)
- [Military Alliance Program](#)
- [Online Learning Services](#)
- [Student Conduct](#)
- [Student Emergency Assistance Fund](#)
- [Student Health Services](#)
- [Student Support and Advocacy Services](#)
- [University Career Services](#)
- [University Life](#)
- [Writing Center](#)

Required Readings

Reading Load

There is one primary textbook for this course: *The Logic of American Politics, 11th ed.* Students may purchase the hardcopy book or an ebook.

Kernell, Samuel H., Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, Lynn Vavreck, and Timothy R. Johnson. 2023. *The Logic of American Politics.*, 11th edition. Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press. ISBN: 978-1-07-186125-7

Reading Tips

Regardless of whether you are reading something online or hard-copy, if you are reading a borrowed text or something you own, are reading a text you're willing to mark on or not, the following tips will help you retain the information you read and recall it when you want to.

1. Have a notebook that is dedicate to note-taking for this course. Only use this notebook for this course—nothing else goes in it.
2. Start a fresh page of notes for each new item you read.
3. Write the complete citation at the top of page.
4. As you read, write down main ideas, questions, interesting tid-bits, things you'd like to remember, or things you can connect to something else.
5. Every time you write a note, write the page number the note refers to.
6. Try not to write down direct quotes from what you are reading, but if you do, be sure to "put it into quotation marks" so you know the note is not your own words. This habit will help you from committing incidental plagiarism. Refer to your notes with confidence that any note not in quotation marks are your own words.
7. Consider using different colored pens for different kinds of notes. For example, you might use *black* ink for quotations, *red* ink for questions, *blue* ink for your own thoughts, summaries, and ideas, and *green* ink for references to other texts.

8. You may or may not want to highlight your text, or make notes in the margins. Regardless of whether you make in-text marks, your notes in your notebook should always be your primary source of personal reference for your reading.

GOVT 103 Fall 2023 Course Calendar

AUGUST							SEPTEMBER							OCTOBER						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5						1	2	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6	7	8	9	10	11	12	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
20	21	22	23	24	25	26	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
27	28	29	30	31			24	25	26	27	28	29	30	29	30	31				
NOVEMBER							DECEMBER													
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat							
				1	2	3						1	2							
5	6	7	8	9	10	11	3	4	5	6	7	8	9							
12	13	14	15	16	17	18	10	11	12	13	14	15	16							
19	20	21	22	23	24	25	17	18	19	20	21	22	23							
26	27	28	29	30			24	25	26	27	28	29	30							
							31													

Exam Date	Lecture Class	No Class	Reading Quiz Due	Recitation Class
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Class Schedule

Week 01: Why Government?

Lecture: : Aug. 21 & 23

Recitation: Aug. 25

Reading Assignment

1. *Logic*, Preface & Ch. 1
2. Victor, Jennifer Nicoll. "[A Simple Model of Political Engagement](#)", *Mischiefs of Faction* (blog), November 13, 2019.

Items due:

- Sunday, 8/27 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz (access on Blackboard)

Week 02: Prisoners' Dilemma

Lecture: Aug. 28 (*No class on Wednesday this week – Prof. Victor at APSA)

Recitation: Sept. 1

Reading Assignment

- *Logic*, Ch. 2

Items due:

- Sunday, 9/3 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz

Week 03: Federalism

Lecture: Sept. 6 (No class Monday this week due to Labor Day holiday)

Recitation: Sept. 8

Reading Assignment

- *Logic*, Ch. 3

Items due:

- Sunday, 9/10 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz

Week 04: Civil Rights

Lecture: Sept. 11 & 13

Recitation: Sept. 15

Reading Assignment

- *Logic*, Ch. 4

Items due:

- Sunday, 9/17 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz

Week 05: Civil Liberties

Lecture: Sept. 18 & Sept. 20

Recitation: Sept. 22 – **Midterm Exam I**

Reading Assignment

- *Logic*, Ch. 5

Items due:

- **Friday 9/25, Midterm Exam I, covering chapters 1 - 5.**

- Sunday, 9/24 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz

Week 06: Congress

Lecture: Sept. 25 & 27

Recitation: Sept. 29

Reading Assignment

- *Logic*, Ch. 6

Items due:

- Sunday, 10/1 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz

Week 07: Presidency

Lecture: Oct. 2 & 4

Recitation: Oct. 6

Reading Assignment

- *Logic*, Ch. 7

Items due:

- Sunday, 10/8 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz

Week 08: Bureaucracy

Lecture: Oct. 10 & Oct. 11 (GMU Fall Break– Monday classes meet on TUESDAY)

Recitation: Oct. 13

Reading Assignment

- *Logic*, Ch. 8

Items due:

1. Sunday, 10/15 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz

Week 09: Judiciary

Lecture: Oct. 16 & 18

Recitation: Oct. 20 – **Midterm Exam II**

Reading Assignment

- *Logic*, Ch. 9

Items due:

- **Friday 10/20, Midterm Exam II, covering chapters 6 - 9.**
- Sunday, 10/22 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz

Week 10: Public Opinion

Lecture: Oct. 23 & 25

Recitation: Oct. 27

Reading Assignment

- *Logic*, Ch. 10

Items due:

- Sunday, 10/29 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz

Week 11: Voting and Elections

Lecture: Oct. 30 & Nov. 1

Recitation: Nov. 3

Reading Assignment

- *Logic*, Ch. 11

Items due:

- Sunday, 11/5 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz

Week 12: Political Parties

Lecture: Nov. 6 & Nov. 8

Recitation: Nov. 10

Reading Assignment

- *Logic*, Ch. 12

Items due:

- Sunday, 11/12 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz

Week 13: Organized Interests

Lecture: Nov. 13 & 15

Recitation: Nov. 17

Reading Assignment

- *Logic*, Ch. 13

Items due:

- Sunday, 11/19 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz

Week 14: Politics of Media

Lecture: Nov. 20 (No class Wednesday due to Thanksgiving holiday)

Recitation: None Reading Assignment

- *Logic*, Ch. 14

Items due:

- Monday, 11/27 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz

Week 15: Public Policy

Lecture: Nov. 27 & Nov. 29

Recitation: Dec. 1

Reading Assignment

- *Logic*, Ch. 15
- Maltese, *et al.*, Ch. 15 [on Blackboard]

Items due:

1. Sunday, Dec. 3 (11:59pm): Reading Quiz
2. Sunday, Dec. 3 (11:59pm): Last day to submit CEAs

Final Exam

Comprehensive Final Examination

Wednesday, December 6, 1:30 - 4:15pm