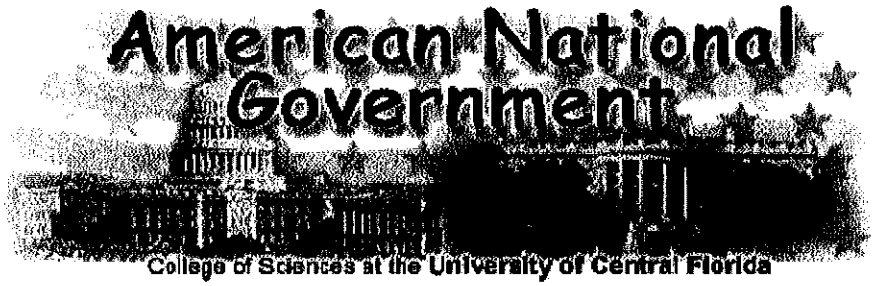

Course Overview

Instructor Contact:

Instructor	Dr. Jonathan Knuckey
Office	Phillips Hall 302L
Office Hours	TBD
E-Mail	Use the Email in Webcourses.

Course Description:

This is a course about the major forces in American politics. We will look at the constitutional foundations of the national government, and how the rules of the game figure so prominently in the current American political setting. We will look at debates about the nature of our civil liberties and civil rights - and why they are often the cause of controversey in contemporary American politics. We will look at the presidency - its symbolic power as an agenda-setter and why our expectations of those who hold the office are often not realized; the Congress - the setting of the institution, and how electoral incentives affect policymaking and representation; the Supreme Court and its unique role as the arbiter of our individual rights and liberties; the media and how they influence political campaigns and what we know about politics; political parties and their role as linkage institutions; the electoral process and how this process shapes our choices and influences political winners and losers; we will look at the public - the nature of public opinion, attitudes about politics who votes and what influences the

vote, and what happens when voter interest declines. Finally, we will address many of the "hot-button" issues in American politics today, such as gun control, abortion, race and religion and politics.

As this is an honors section, we will organize it somewhat differently than a normal American National Government class. To begin, since this is a small and select class, I will run it using both lectures and class discussions. This means that I expect all students to attend class regularly and contribute frequently to class deliberations, and that I will consider both the quality and quantity of participation in student evaluations. Second, in accordance with Honors College standards, there will be significantly more writing required in this class than in a normal section of American National Government. Most of this writing will take the form of several critical thinking and analytical-style assignments corresponding to various topics of the course.

While most people don't normally devote much thought to their government and to politics more generally, I hope that by the end of this course you will be different - that you will use ideas learned in this course to think critically about politics and most importantly the choices you face as a citizen.

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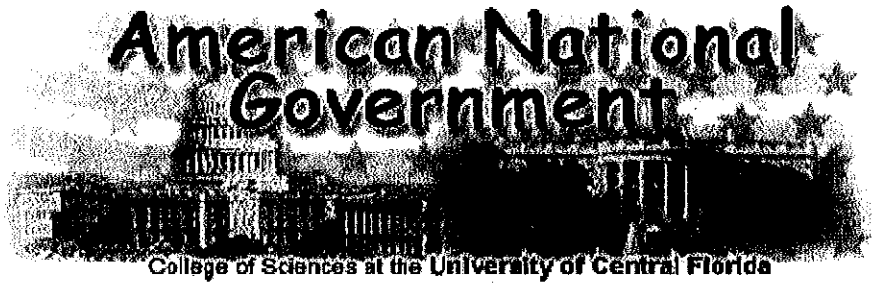


Course requiremetns

How do I do well in this class?

Ultimately your grade turns on my impression of how well you have done in this course. What impresses me? Think of this course as your job and approach it with professionalism. Take this course seriously and let me know that. How? Attend class; be prepared for class, read the assignments for understanding, be ready to ask and answer questions, take an informed role in discussions; arrive early to class; remain for the entire class (early departures will result in you being counted absent); be attentive in class without distracting me or your classmates with cell phones, text messages, listening to your ipods, side conversations, bathroom trips or any other reason for coming-and-going and so forth; take exams when scheduled and complete the paper when due; demonstrate your understanding of the course material through participation in class, exams and homework assignments.

Those Indispensable Cell Phones: While I'm as big a fan as anyone of hearing Lady Gaga's "Just Dance" as a ringtone, the fact is that cell phones are a distraction.

As a courtesy to me and your classmates, please turn off yours before entering class. If you don't, the rule is this: If your phone rings in class, I get to answer it and talk to whomever is on the line—whether it's your mother, brother, or that person you met at a bar last night. So leave it on at your own peril!

A Special Note on Laptops: I know that many of you like to take notes on your laptop, however I would like you to take notes the "old-fashioned" way in this class. There are three reasons for this. First, you will often learn more by listening

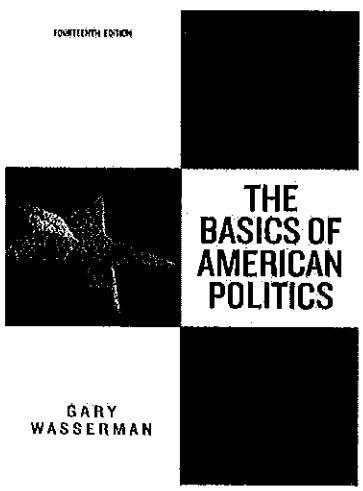
and writing some key points and ideas, rather than becoming a stenographer and writing down every single word that is spoken in class. You can always type up your written notes on your laptops after class if you wish, and I guarantee you will find you have much better notes. Second, communication between us in is easier when we are talking to each other directly rather than some of us "hiding" behind lap-tops. And third, you will not be tempted to be using your laptops for emailing, instant-messaging, updating your Facebook profile, checking stock market prices, bidding for junk on eBay or looking at English Premier League football results!

Power Point Slides: I use Power Point in my class lectures and will make these slides available to you in Webcourses after each class. As you will find out during the first week of class I tend to use Power Points for visuals more than anything else.

I'm sure you have been in many classes where Power Points simply contain the professor's lecture notes which he or she spends the class period reading out. This is not teaching and is certainly not anyway for you to learn. So in this class consider the Power Point slides as a supplement to rather than a replacement for your own class notes. If you are used to taking notes by writing down three or four bullet points per slide....you are going to be disappointed with this class!

Textbook:

This course will use a single text, which is available from the university bookstore: Gary Wasserman, *Basics of American Politics* (14th edition)



Make sure you buy the latest edition (cover shown above) as older editions of the

book will not be of any use to you for this class.

Please note: I reserve the right to add, delete or change readings. I will, of course, give you advance notice of any such changes.

Attendance Policy

I expect you attend class and will take attendance each day by circulating a class roll during class.

You should be aware that you will not be getting the most out of the class - and your education in general - when you have frequent absences. Moreover, your performance on exams will likely start to suffer once you start missing several classes, given that a lot of information on the exams comes from the class. For information purposes, the last time I taught this class no student who had more than four absences from class (excused or unexcused) in the semester got over a "C" for their final grade.

If your overall grade falls on the borderline between grades, I will take your attendance into account deciding whether to move up the overall grade.

Students arriving late are a distraction to everyone, so please ensure you are in class once we begin at 10.30am. Be aware that parking places will be at a premium at this time of the day, so plan ahead.

If a student is habitually late to class I will send a written warning about tardiness. If late arrivals persist after this warning I will reduce your overall grade by one letter grade.

If you need to leave class within the last 15 minutes, you should inform me at the start of class. If that is not possible, I expect to be informed of the reason for your early departure within 24 hours. Failure to do either will result in you being counted absent for that class. If you need to leave a class earlier than 11.00am don't come to class that day.

In keeping with the UCF policy of respecting students' religious commitments all attempts will be made to accommodate conflicts arising out of religious observances. If you plan on missing scheduled class meetings due to religious holidays, you must notify me within the first two weeks of the semester.

Class Participation

As this class involves discussion, I view class participation as being very important. Participation involves both being called on in class to discuss the reading materials and voluntary participation. High quality participation includes:

1. Coming to each class prepared to discuss and analyze the readings (as opposed to providing uninformed opinion)
2. Providing comments that are relevant and insightful that build upon the readings
3. *Consistently* building upon other students' comments in a thoughtful, respectful, and productive manner.

Note: The easiest way for you to create an unfavorable impression this semester is to come to class and say nothing. If you do so I will assume that you have not prepared for class and have not done the assigned reading!

Students with frequent and high quality participation (based on the criteria above) may be eligible for a few extra credit points added to their grade at the end of the semester.

Meetings with Students

Each student is required to schedule a meeting with me at some point during the first two weeks of the semester. I will provide a sign-up sheet during our first class meeting.

Hopefully these meetings will give you a chance to ask me any questions about the course. Likewise it will help me put names to faces.

Office Hours

Students are encouraged to take advantage of office hours (these are posted under instructor contact on the Course overview). Don't just view office hours as the time you come and talk to me when you have done indifferently on an exam.

They are an opportunity to discuss issues relating to the course as well as to review exams or papers, or just to talk politics. In addition, appointments can be made to meet at other times.

Exams

There will be two exams given during the regular semester. There will also be a final exam given during the final exam week. All exams are non-cumulative. All exams will consist of short answer questions, where you will write about a paragraph for each part of a question.

I am always happy to meet with individuals or groups of students to address any questions while you are studying for the exams/

The Exams are scheduled as follows:

- First exam, Thursday, February 9th (regular class time)
- Second exam, Thursday, March 1st (regular class time)
- Final exam,Tuesday, April 24th (7.00am-9.50pm).

Please be on time for each exam. You will not be permitted to take the exam if you arrive more than fifteen minutes after the beginning of an exam or after the first student has finished.

Important: You must take each exam in order to receive a passing grade in this class.

Critical Thinking Exercises, Homework and Quizzes

A major part of this class is to hone your critical thinking skills. To that end I will assign several assignments during this semester. These assignments will encourage you to think systematically about political relationships and behaviors. Exercises focus on the analysis and interpretation of data, the discovery of basic relationships among variables, and the ability to read critically, to summarize information concisely, to formulate generalizations and hypotheses, and the draw logical inferences.

Critical thinking assignments will be handed out in class. They should be submitted to me no later than 5.00pm on the day before they will be discussed in class. You can submit your assignments physically or via email. If emailing please send via the email in Webcourses. These assignments will be used in class to inform our class discussions.

Unannounced quizzes will be given at my discretion on the assigned reading for any particular day. Other than doing the reading, there is no special preparation required for these quizzes. If class participation is strong, I may waive giving quizzes!

Academic Dishonesty

UCF faculty support the UCF creed. Integrity – practicing and defending academic and personal honesty – is the first tenet of the UCF Creed. This is in part a reflection of the second tenet, Scholarship: "I will cherish and honor learning as a fundamental purpose of membership in the UCF community." Course assignments and tests are designed to have educational value; the process of preparing for and completing these exercises will help improve your skills and knowledge. Material presented to satisfy course requirements is therefore expected to be the result of your own original scholarly efforts.

Violations of student academic behavior standards are outlined in The Golden Rule, the University of Central Florida's Student Handbook. See http://www.goldenrule.sdes.ucf.edu for further details.

Academic Dishonesty is defined as follows:

1. Cheating, whereby non-permissible written, visual or oral assistance including that obtained from another student is utilized on examinations, course assignments or projects, is prohibited. The unauthorized possession or use of examination or course related material shall also constitute cheating.

2. Plagiarism, whereby another's work is deliberately used or appropriated without any indication of the source, thereby attempting to convey the impression that such work is the student's own, is prohibited. Any student failing to properly credit ideas or materials taken from another has plagiarized.

Please note that any student who has assisted another in any of the aforementioned breach of standards shall be considered equally culpable.

Students who attempt to obtain unearned academic credentials that do not reflect their skills and knowledge can also undermine the value of the UCF degrees earned by their more honest peers. Any form of academic dishonesty will result in you automatically failing the class and referred to the University authorities. Also, please remember that those caught cheating will have a notation made in their University records that they have been found guilty of academic misconduct. This can and will keep you out of law school so do not be tempted too cheat in any way.

Grades

Although I try and give feedback on exams and assignments, please feel free to come and discuss any exam or assignment with me, but please come in person to discuss your grade - I will not discuss grades over the telephone or via email. Please note too that a grade will only ever be changed if there is an error in tabulating your grade by me.

Your final grade will be weighted as follows:

Two Midterm Exams	35%
Final Exam	35%
Critical Thinking Assignments/Homework/Quizzes	30%

Grade boundaries are as follows:

Grade	Percentage
A	90+
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69

F	Below 60

I reserve the right to use a plus or minus to "tweak" your grade at my discretion. I will only do so when the plus or minus actually is to your benefit.

I will be more than happy to discuss your grades and progress in this class at any time during the semester. Either drop by during my office hours or else schedule another day or time with me. If you think you are struggling in class PLEASE come and talk to me as often as you like during my office hours, or make an appointment for another time.

If you believe that you have been unfairly graded, you must follow this procedure:

1. Wait 24 hours after receiving the grade before contacting me.
2. Provide a brief explanation in writing for why the grade you received was unfair.

I will not discuss grades via email or on the phone.

Grade grievance procedures are outlined under the UCF Golden Rule

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Incompletes and Make-up Exams

- Incompletes: An incomplete standing will only be granted if requested in writing to me (an email or phone call is not acceptable). You must explain why you are requesting an incomplete standing and include, where appropriate, documentation that must be original and verifiable. Such documentation must be on a letterhead, and contain a contact name and telephone number. An incomplete will only be granted if you have a passing grade in the class. You should be aware that I rarely give incompletes, and only in the most exceptional circumstances.

- Make-up Exams: The time and dates for the exams are fixed in krypton-coated granite encased in a hydrogen bomb-proof vault! In other words, a make-up exam will only be given in the most exceptional circumstances that are beyond the control of a student - basically I am thinking of something that at least falls in the category of a double act of God!

  I do not consider vacations or other trips out of town (other than when the student is away from campus representing an official university function) to be exceptional circumstances. You know the dates of exams during the semester so you should not plan any major activities or events that would clash with the exams.

In no circumstances at all will an exam be given ahead of the time of the regularly scheduled exam.

Any requests for a make-up must be made in writing to me (an email or phone call is not acceptable) and be accompanied by original written and verifiable documentation, such as a doctor's note documenting a serious illness, or a police report of a traffic accident. When providing me with documentation you should assume that I will seek to verify the validity of the reason that has caused you to miss an exam. Please also be aware that a make-up exam will only be given if you notify me of your circumstance at least 24 hours prior to the time of the exam. If such notification is not possible, then you need to contact me as soon as possible on the day that the exam took place.

Disability Statement

The University of Central Florida is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for all persons with disabilities.

This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request.

Students with disabilities who need accommodations in this course must contact me at the beginning of the semester to discuss needed accommodations

No accommodations will be provided until the student has met with the professor to request accommodations Students who need accommodations must be registered with Student Disability Services, Student Resource center Room 132, phone (407) 823-2371, TTY/TDD only phone (407) 823-2116, before requesting accommodations from me.

Disclaimer

I reserve the right to change, add or modify any part of the syllabus and course requirements. Of course, advance notice will be given of any such changes.

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