

POLS 1101-04: Introduction to American Government (CRN 83421)

Middle Georgia State University– Fall 2021

MW 2:00pm-3:15pm (3 credit hours)

Walker 308

Dr. Annie Watson

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Office: Wiggs 12 (also available virtually by request)

Office Hours: MW 9:00am-10:45am, TR 2:00pm-5:00pm (and/or by appointment)

Office Number: **TBD**

Catalog Description

This course is a study of the American political system which includes an examination of the U.S. and Georgia Constitutions. This course grants exemption from the U.S. and Georgia Constitutions examinations as required by the Georgia General Assembly.

Course Description and Objectives

This course is a study of the origins, principles, processes, and structures of U.S. government. Over the course of the semester, we will examine the institutional rules and elements of human behavior that shape our government—electoral rules, political parties, interest groups, public opinion, Congress, the presidency, the courts, the constitution, and the bureaucracy. We'll have a particular focus on current events and how they relate to the overarching topics of the class.

By the end of this course, students will be able to...

1. Identify the political institutions established by both the United States and Georgia constitutions, including the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, and their roles in governance.
2. Define those civil liberties and civil rights outlined in both the U.S. and Georgia constitutions and their amendments.
3. Describe the ways in which the U.S. and Georgia constitutions may be amended or changed.
4. Describe the processes linking citizens and the U.S. and Georgia governments, including elections, political parties, and interest groups.

Required Readings

This semester, we'll be using an open-access textbook, available in a digital format online:

Krutz, Glen. 2019. *American Government 2e*. Houston, TX: OpenStax.

<https://openstax.org/details/books/american-government-2e>

All other required materials will be shared with you on D2L/Brightspace. Please do not distribute these materials to people beyond this class.

Technology Requirements

Because materials will be distributed through D2L/Brightspace, communication will occur outside of class through e-mail, and some assignments may be submitted online, students must have internet access.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

Quizzes (15 points each for 45 points total)

After every other unit, we will have a quiz to check your comprehension of the course content (readings, videos, lectures, etc.). These quizzes will be primarily multiple choice, but I reserve the right to include matching, short answer, essay, and other types of questions. There will be a review day before each quiz.

Quiz Dates:

- September 8
- October 6
- November 3

Citizenship Exam (15 points)

At the end of the semester, as the final exam, everyone will take a test modeled on the US citizenship exam. The exam will have 50 questions; we'll discuss the format in greater detail as the time approaches.

Exam Date: December 2 (3:30pm-5:30pm)

Activity Reflections (10 points each for 30 points)

At the end of every other unit, we will have a full-day activity in class (election simulations, budget creation simulations, etc.), followed by a thorough, written reflection. More detailed instructions for these reflections will be provided on D2L/Brightspace and discussed in class.

Reflection Due Dates:

- September 27
- October 25
- November 29

Attendance and Participation (5 points each for 10 points)

Attendance and participation are a necessary condition for satisfactory achievement in this class. The best way for you to learn is to engage with the material and to debate and discuss it at length with your peers. Thus, excellence in participation means more than just talking a lot in class; rather, it requires that your participation be high in both quality and quantity.

As per university policy, students can have two unexcused absences (for any reason) without penalty. Additional unexcused absences will result in a 0 for attendance and participation for that day. Students with more than twice the number of class meetings per week (5 unexcused absences) may be assigned a failing grade for the course. Excused absences will be assigned according to university policy.

The MGA policy on attendance can be found in Section 5.04.05 of the Faculty Handbook and at <https://mga.smartcatalogiq.com/2020-2021/Undergraduate-Catalog/Academic-Policy-and-Information/Course-Policies/Attendance-Policy>.

Grading Scale

Grades are constructed to reflect university standards and are summarized below. Letter grades will be based on how many points you earn according to the following distribution:

A	90-100 points
B	80-89 points
C	70-79 points
D	60-69 points
F	Fewer than 60 points

Preliminary Course Schedule

Unless noted otherwise, assignments should be handed in at (or submitted online by) the beginning of the class period they are due. I may make changes to the reading to reflect new publications or current events; these changes will be shared with you in class and/or through e-mail.

Introductions and Expectations

August 11: Introductions and Expectations

- Syllabus

Unit 1: Constructing a Government

August 16: What do governments do?

- Textbook pgs. 10-17

August 18: Good Governance

- UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (UN OHCHR). 2019. “Good Governance and Human Rights.” (PDF provided)
<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Development/GoodGovernance/Pages/GoodGovernanceIndex.aspx>

August 23: The Constitution

- Textbook pgs. 43-64
- US Constitution (Textbook pgs. 665-679)¹
- GA Constitution (available [here](#))

August 25: Federalism

- Textbook pgs. 72-102²

Unit 2: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

August 30: Civil Liberties

- Civil liberties packet (provided on D2L)

September 1: Civil Rights

- Civil rights packet (provided on D2L)

September 6: Review Day

- Quiz guide (provided on D2L)

September 8: **Quiz 1**

¹ If you prefer having the above documents read to you, check out this video of the 113th Congress reading the Constitution and its Amendments (including the Bill of Rights) instead:

- Eric Cantor. 2013. “Reading of the United States Constitution by Members of the 113th Congress.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7OgymkTxAM> (1 hour)

For the Preamble in the world’s most annoying (and catchiest) song form, check out this video (This is optional, but if I’m going to have this song stuck in my head for the rest of my life, it’s only fair that you do, too):

- us chronicle. 2012. “The Preamble of The Constitution Schoolhouse Rock.”
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqvLi7qZ_yU (3 minutes)

If you find yourself particularly interested in the Constitution, Khan Academy has a series of videos discussing the Preamble, each of the articles, and the Bill of Rights that you might like. You can find the first of these (optional) videos here:

- Khan Academy. 2018. “The Preamble to the Constitution | US Government and Politics | Khan Academy.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V3tTnqznYwk&list=PLSQI0a2vh4HBRAKWIPNIJEZw8sT0TF5Jk> (15 minutes)

² Alternatively, if you like Crash Course, they have a video on federalism, and it will teach you the same necessary terms (with thought bubble animations! You can pick whichever one you prefer.

- CrashCourse (2). 2015. “Federalism: Crash Course Government and Politics #4.”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J0gosGXSgsI&t=23s> (9 minutes)

Unit 3: Public Opinion, Political Parties, and Elections

September 13: Public Opinion

- Textbook pgs. 202-208, 219-236

September 15: Political Parties

- Textbook pgs. 352-360³

September 20: Elections

- Election packet
- Textbook pgs. 249-257

September 22: Election Activity

- Activity materials (provided on D2L)

Unit 4: The Media and Media Literacy

September 27: The Media

- Textbook pgs. 288-295, 302-320

Due: Activity Reflection 1

September 29: Biases and “Fake News”

- Biases and fake news packet (provided on D2L)

October 4: Review Day

- Quiz guide

October 6: **Quiz 2**

Unit 5: Congress and Interest Groups

October 11: Overview of Congress

- Textbook pgs. 403-428⁴

³ It is also recommended (but **optional**) that you check out the main US parties’ platforms:

- Republican Platform: https://prod-cdn-static.gop.com/docs/Resolution_Platform_2020.pdf
- Democrat Platform: <https://democrats.org/where-we-stand/party-platform/>

⁴ If representation in Congress is something you’re interested in, you might consider checking out some of the following (**optional**) articles:

- Zhou, Li. 2019. “A historic new Congress will be sworn in today.” *Vox* (January 3). <https://www.vox.com/2018/12/6/18119733/congress-diversity-women-election-good-news>
- Kliff, Sarah. 2017. “The research is clear: electing more women changes how government works.” *Vox* (March 8). <https://www.vox.com/2016/7/27/12266378/electing-women-congress-hillary-clinton>
- Dittmar, Kelly, Kira Sanbonmatsu, and Susan Carroll. 2017. “You can try to silence women of color in Congress, but it won’t work.” *Vox* (June 20). <https://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2017/6/20/15840006/women-of-color-congress-silenced-no>

October 13: How Bills Become Laws

- Textbook pgs. 428-438

October 18: Interest Groups

- Textbook pgs. 368-373, 379-395

October 20: Congress Activity

- Activity materials (provided on D2L)

Unit 6: The President and Foreign Policy

October 25: The President

- Textbook pgs. 445-479⁵

Due: Activity Reflection 2

October 27: Foreign Policy

- Textbook pgs. 627-654

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- Scott, Dylan. 2019. "There will be more non-Christians in the new Congress than ever before." *Vox* (January 3).
<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/1/3/18166762/116th-congress-swear-in-demographics-first-muslim-woman>
 - Zhou, Li. 2019. "The most diverse field of Democratic presidential candidates ever is hiring diverse staff, too." *Vox* (May 30).
<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/5/30/18644545/democrats-2020-diversity-staffers>
 - Zhou, Li. 2019. "How to close the massive gender gap in Congress." *Vox* (August 14).
<https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/8/7/20746147/congress-women-2019-gender-parity>
 - North, Anna. 2018. "America's sexist obsession with what women politicians wear, explained." *Vox* (December 3). <https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/12/3/18107151/alexandria-ocasio-cortez-eddie-scarry-women-politics>
 - Davidson-Schmich, Louise. 2017. "How does the US compare with other countries in terms of women's representation?" *Vox* (April 10).
<https://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2017/4/10/15239998/womens-representation-congress-america>
 - Lawless, Jennifer. 2017. "Congress 100 years later: what would Jeanette Rankin think?" *Vox* (April 6).
<https://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2017/4/6/15205192/congress-female-representation-rankin>
 - Lopez, German. 2019. "This is the most diverse Congress ever. But it's still pretty white." *Vox* (February 8).
<https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/2/8/18217076/congress-racial-diversity-white>
 - Geiger, A.W., Kristen Bialik, and John Gramlich. 2019. "The changing face of Congress in 6 charts." *Pew Research Center* (February 15).
<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/02/15/the-changing-face-of-congress/>

⁵ Looking for some more details on the differences between the US and UK styles of democracy? Check out this (optional) video:

- The Daily Conversation. 2015. "Parliamentary vs. Presidential Democracy Explained."
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4quK60FUvkY&t=331s> (7 minutes)

November 1: Review Day

- Quiz guide

November 3: **Quiz 3**

Unit 7: The Judiciary

November 8: Origins and Structure of the Courts

- Textbook pgs. 485-503

November 10: The Supreme Court

- Textbook pgs. 503-513⁶

November 15: Selected Supreme Court Cases

- TBD

November 17: Judiciary Activity

- Activity materials (provided on D2L)

Wrapping Up

November 22-26: **NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)**

November 29: Review Day

- Citizenship exam guide

December 2: Final exam period 3:30pm-5:30pm (Citizenship Exam)

⁶ Some additional (**optional**) material on the Supreme Court that you might find interesting:

- Millhisser, Ian. 2020. "The Supreme Court normally hands down its biggest cases in June. Here's what to expect." *Vox* (June 11). <https://www.vox.com/2020/6/11/21285171/supreme-court-abortion-daca-lgbtq-mazars-subpoenas-religion>
- Illing, Sean 2018. "The case for abolishing the Supreme Court." *Vox* (October 12). <https://www.vox.com/2018/10/12/17950896/supreme-court-brett-kavanaugh-constitution>
- Millhisser, Ian. 2020. "Justice Sotomayor warns the Supreme Court is doing special favors for the Trump administration." *Vox* (February 22). <https://www.vox.com/2020/2/22/21148529/justice-sotomayor-supreme-court-wolf-cook-county-public-charge-thumb-on-scale>

Campus Policies

Covid-19

The University System of Georgia recognizes COVID-19 vaccines offer safe, effective protection and urges all students, faculty, staff and visitors to get vaccinated; however, it is an individual decision to receive the vaccine and will not be required to be a part of our campuses. Everyone is encouraged to wear a mask or face covering while inside campus facilities. Unvaccinated individuals are strongly encouraged to get a vaccine, to continue wearing a face covering, and to continue socially distancing from others when possible. Updated protocols for isolation and quarantine will be in effect this semester in order to mitigate further spread of the coronavirus on our campuses. USG guidance is subject to change based on recommendations from GA DPH. MGA will remain flexible in their planning and be prepared to change course as necessary. MGA will continue to provide updated information at this website: <https://www.mga.edu/coronavirus/>.

Class Behavior Expectations

Middle Georgia State University students are responsible for reading, understanding, and abiding by the MGA Student Code of Conduct. The Student Code of Conduct, Responsibilities, Procedures, and Rights are found at https://www.mga.edu/student-affairs/docs/MGA_Student_Handbook.pdf#page=45.

Plagiarism

A plagiarism prevention service is used in evaluation of written work submitted for this course. As directed by the instructor, students are expected to submit or have their assignments submitted through the service in order to meet requirements for this course. The papers will be retained by the service for the sole purpose of checking for plagiarized content in future student submissions.

Accessibility Accommodations

Students seeking ADA accommodations must contact Middle Georgia State University Office of Accessibility Services in Macon at (478) 471-2985 or in Cochran at (478) 934-3023. <https://www.mga.edu/accessibility-services/>.

Withdrawal Policy

Students are encouraged to read the withdrawal policy found at <https://www.mga.edu/registrar/registration/drop-add.php> before dropping/withdrawing from class.

Delayed Opening or Closing of the University

In the event that the university is closed for unforeseen circumstances, we will coordinate making up the material over D2L/email.

Knight's Alert: <https://www.mga.edu/police/alert/index.php>

End of Course Evaluations

Student evaluations of faculty are administered online at the end of each term/session for all courses with five or more students. Students will receive an email containing a link to a survey for each course in which they are enrolled. All responses are anonymous.

Campus Carry Legislation

For students who prefer to bring concealed firearms to class, HB 280 provides you with the *possible* ability to do so. Please refer to the following URL to explore your possible right to bring a gun to the university: <http://www.mga.edu/police/campus-carry.aspx>

University Policy

Students are responsible for reading, understanding, and adhering to all Middle Georgia State University student policies, including those linked on the Syllabus Policy page: <https://www.mga.edu/faculty-affairs/syllabus-policy.php>.

Course Policies

An Inclusive Classroom

Political debates and discussions can become quite heated. This passion is part of what makes the study of politics fun! However, the fun ends where personal attacks and disrespect begin. Creating an inclusive, respectful, and safe classroom environment is integral to the success of this course. To this end, all class members are expected to treat each other at all times with respect, courtesy, tolerance, fairness, and justice.

Communicating with the Instructor

My primary method of communicating with you outside of class time/office hours will be through the university e-mail. You will be held responsible for regularly checking this account. Assignment changes, important dates, and other valuable information may be sent to this account over the course of the term. Please check it daily. I do my best to answer e-mails within 24 hours (but rarely answer e-mails at night or on weekends).

I have posted my office hours at the top of this syllabus. During these time period, you should feel free to come to my office and discuss any questions you may have about the class. If this

time does not work for you, I am more than happy to set up an appointment. Additionally, I am available for virtual office hours at this time by appointment.

Late Work

The late submission of assignments will result in a 10 percent reduction in points per day they are late, unless alternative arrangements are made with me. *If you are worried about meeting deadlines or if something comes up, please come talk to me as soon as possible.* I can't help if I don't know what's going on.

Changes to the Syllabus

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations by the instructor may be necessary. As such, I reiterate the absolute necessity that you (1) come to class and (2) regularly check your e-mail.

Academic Resources

There are many academic resources available to you on campus throughout the semester. These include:

- The **D2L Help Center** provides 24/7 help for those having problems using the system. They can be contacted at 1-855-772-0423 or through a live chat (<https://d2lhelp.view.usg.edu/s/>).
- The **Technology Assistant Center (TAC)** provides help with passwords, email, SWORDS, and more general tech support. They can be contacted during business hours at 478-471-2023 (Macon), 478-934-3319 (Cochran), or helpdesk@mga.edu.
- The **Writing Center** is a free service that provides one-on-one consultations to assist students with all types of writing. They are open on the Macon, Cochran, Dublin, and Warner Robins campuses and offer both face-to-face and video-conferencing sessions. Check out their website here to sign up for a consultation: <https://www.mga.edu/student-success-center/writing-centers.php>.
- The **Student Success Center** offers tutoring free of charge on all MGA campuses for currently enrolled students. To view center contact information, subjects tutored, and tutor availability, go to the SSC website at <http://www.mga.edu/student-success-center/>. SSC tutoring sessions may be scheduled online and face-to-face through the "Book an Appointment" link on the Student Success Center website. Other services at the SSC include online academic workshops and a robust website with resources for academic assistance. The centers also have computer workstations, printing, and Internet access.

Hardship Resources

Being a student can be hard. Your lives are changing, and college can be a stressful environment. *There is no shame in struggling with this.* If you are feeling depressed or otherwise concerned about your mental health, please reach out to BeWell@MGA. The 24/7 support line for in-the-moment support and connections to next steps is 833-910-3362. Additional services are available through the MGA Counseling Center at 478-471-2985 (Macon), 478-934-3080 (Cochran), and counseling@mga.edu. More details can be found on their website: <https://www.mga.edu/counseling-services/index.php>.

Other important numbers/websites:

- **For a life-threatening emergency, always call 911 (or campus police at 478-471-2414).** For non-emergencies, MGA recommends this guide: <https://selfcareguide.readsh101.com/>.
- **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**
1-800-273-TALK (8255)
<https://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
- **Veterans' Crisis Line**
1-800-273-8255 (Press 1)
- **Georgia Crisis and Access Line**
1-800-715-4225
- **The Trevor Project (LGBTQ+)**
1-800-4TREVOR
<https://www.thetrevorproject.org>
- **National Sexual Assault Hotline**
1-800-656-HOPE
<https://online.rainn.org>
- **National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism**
<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov>
- **National Institute of Mental Health**
<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/>
- **Alcoholics Anonymous**
<https://www.aa.org/>
- **Narcotics Anonymous**
<https://www.na.org/>

- **MGA Non-Discrimination and Anti-Harassment Resources**
<https://policies.mga.edu/policy-manual/section-6-campus-affairs/6-5-nondiscrimination/index.php>

If you are experiencing other kinds of hardship, MGA has some services that may help. These include, but are not limited to, the provision of food and professional clothing, described in greater detail below.

- **The SHARE Pantry** is stocked with staple food items such as canned tuna, peanut butter and spaghetti sauce. Students, faculty and staff who show their MGA Knight ID cards can visit once per month during spring, summer and fall semesters to pick up five items each time. For hours of availability, contact:
 - Sha Parnell: gernisha.parnell@mga.edu (Cochran)
 - Ashleigh Jennings: ashley.jennings@mga.edu (Dublin)
 - Christy Faulk: christy.faulk@mga.edu (Eastman)
 - Devereaux Lindsey: devereaux.lindsey@mga.edu (Macon)
 - Ashley Thompson: ashley.thompson5@mga.edu (Warner Robins)
- **The Professional Closet** offers new and gently used suitable-for-work clothing and accessories, including ties and shoes, for purchase to MGA students, alumni, faculty and staff through Career Services offices on the Macon Campus (Student Life Center, Suite 254) and Cochran Campus (Sanford Hall, Suite 112). The cost of any single item does not exceed \$5, and all proceeds are reinvested into The Professional Closet. The Professional Closet is open during the University's normal business hours, 8:00-5:30 Mon.-Thurs. and 8:00-noon on Fridays.

My office door is also always open to you. Please keep in mind that I am a Title IX mandatory reporter.