

**University of Kentucky
Department of Political Science
PS101: American Government
Term Fall 2020, Section 012**

Instructor: Dr. Travis N. Taylor

Contact Info: travisntaylor@uky.edu

Meeting Day & Time: MWF, 10-10:50 a.m.

Meeting Location: Online, Synchronous

Student Time: Monday, 1-3 p.m. and Thursday 10-11 a.m.; or by appointment, at the following link: <https://uky.zoom.us/j/94457487664>. Students who cannot meet during regular student time should e-mail me to begin the process of setting an appointment. I will not hold student time on days marked on the course calendar as “No Class.” I will, however, announce make-up student time for those dates the week before the cancellation.

University Course Description

A survey of national government and the political process in the United States, with emphasis on the Constitution, the President, Congress, and the judicial system.

Course Prerequisites

This course has no prerequisite or co-requisite obligations.

Course Purpose

The purpose of this course is to introduce the student to the foundation and origins of American government, its basic structures and institutional arrangements, the behavior of citizens and elites in the system of government, and the rights and liberties enjoyed by Americans. Working both individually and collaboratively, students will gain a basic understanding of the fundamentals – both theoretical and practical – of the American system of government.

Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes

1. Understand the origins and constitutional framework of American government.
2. Identify the structure of American governing institutions, including the concept and structure of federalism.
3. Understand the rights and liberties granted to Americans in the Constitution and through case law.
4. Understand how political ideologies and opinions are formed, how they are shaped over time, and how those opinions are translated into policy.
5. Understand the various mechanisms for participation in the American system of government and how they shape representation.
6. Participate in a civic learning opportunity.

Course Structure & Methods

This course is online and synchronous. What do I mean by “online and synchronous”? I mean simply two things: (1) rather than meeting in a physical location, the Instructor and students will meet via the Zoom platform; and (2) the Instructor and students will meet at the appointed time on the appointed days of the week.

Students will be responsible for checking Canvas, the online learning platform for UK, on a frequent basis; checking the site daily is highly encouraged. Students will submit all assignments, access resources such as additional readings, collaborate with classmates when necessary, check grades, and other activities using the Canvas platform.

This course follows a **team-based learning** (TBL) format that provides students the opportunity to approach and learn the course material in varying formats and to practice skills that are valuable both in academic and professional environments. In addition to preparing you with marketable skills, such as the ability to work in teams, think critically, and communicate effectively, scientific research has demonstrated that students in TBL classrooms enjoy their experience more, are more engaged in the classroom, and score higher on exams than non-TBL students.

Team-based learning functions differently than the traditional class. The Instructor will assign students to teams early in the semester, and students will work with that team throughout the course. This learning environment is structured to ensure that individuals are prepared for team work and that the team experience avoids typical “group work” problems, such as free-riding, dominant actors, and division of labor to avoid interaction, among many others. Individuals are responsible for learning basic materials by working outside the class, while class time is spent working both individually and in teams using the material in creative and sophisticated ways. All team work is done during class time. Course grades will be based on both individual and team work. **A supplemental handout on TBL will be posted on Canvas.**

General Course Policies & Expectations

- Read and/or watch all assigned material prior to coming to class.
- Although I do not require attendance, coming to class is strongly encouraged. Class attendance provides you the opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge on the content, to learn from your peers, and to apply the material. Additionally, because this course adheres to a team-based format, your peers will evaluate your contribution to the team, which necessitates your presence. It is unnecessary to let me know if you will be/were absent from class unless the absence will occur on an exam day or other day when graded, in-class work is scheduled. For absences on those days, I follow the University policy on excused absences (found [here](#)) and require appropriate documentation. Additionally, although military (e.g., National Guard) drill and other training is not an excused absence under University policy, those absences will be excused with appropriate documentation (e.g., training orders). You should communicate absences to your teammates.
- Read and/or watch the news on a regular (preferably daily) basis.
- Learn, grow, and have fun!
- Improve upon your college-level academic writing. Resources, including the Instructor, are available to students who need to improve their writing. Writing includes proofreading.
- Late work will be accepted ONLY with prior authorization from the Instructor. A student wishing to submit a late assignment must contact the Instructor to request an extension *at least* 24 hours before the assignment is due. Submitting a request does not grant the student an extension; an extension is only granted once the Instructor has given it in writing to the student. Extensions will be granted only in extenuating circumstances and work submitted under the extension will be reduced by one letter grade per day. Late work submitted without an extension will not be evaluated and will earn an automatic grade of zero.
- Making up a missed exam will be subject to the same restrictions as late work. However, if an *emergent* or *urgent* situation arises that prevents making an advance request to miss an exam, the student should contact the Instructor as soon as practical to request a make-up exam. Any request to make up a missed exam must be accompanied by appropriate documentation about the absence (e.g., physician’s note). Make up exams will not be permitted without proper documentation from the student.
- Academic dishonesty in any form will not be tolerated and could lead to any number of consequences up to and including expulsion from the university. At a minimum, you will receive a zero (0) on any assignment found to be completed by means of academic dishonesty. Please refer to the university academic integrity policy located [here](#).

- While differences of opinion are inevitable and the expression of a diversity of opinions is strongly encouraged, intolerance, derogatory remarks, and personal attacks are strictly forbidden. Remember, politics is about relationships—make them, develop them, nourish them, and cherish them.

Communication Policy

Communication with me will be primarily through e-mail. I will check my e-mail once per business day at 3:00 p.m. and respond to all student e-mails during that time. A response is not guaranteed if you have not e-mailed me prior to 3:00 p.m. **Per University policy, I will respond to e-mails only from official UK e-mail addresses** (i.e., your.name@uky.edu).

Accommodation Policy

This course adheres to University policy with regards to students with disabilities. Details on University rules related to academic accommodations are available from the Disability Resource Center's website, located [here](#). With regards to a student presenting his/her letter of accommodation to me, the DRC recommends that you do so "as early in the semester as possible" to take full advantage of the accommodation; accommodations cannot be applied to coursework, including exams, that has/have already taken place. The DRC also recommends scheduling a meeting with me "to discuss how your accommodations will be addressed during the semester." I view accommodating your needs as a collaborative process, and having a discussion about your needs and how I can best accommodate them is the best way to begin that collaborative process. I strongly encourage you to abide by these DRC recommendations.

Beyond the University's disability accommodation policy, it is my policy to support and accommodate pregnant and parenting students who continue to pursue their education while bearing or rearing children. This accommodation will be student-specific, so please let me know as early as possible that you need to take advantage of this accommodation, preferably within the first week of the semester, if you are already pregnant or parenting, or as soon as you learn you are pregnant, if the pregnancy begins during the semester. It is my goal to work with you to ensure that both your responsibilities as a student and your responsibilities as a parent are met without any additional, undue burden.

Required Readings

The following textbook is required for the class. Other readings may be distributed from time to time, and will be provided in advance of when they are to be read.

Swanson, Rick. A. 2016. *The Big Picture of U.S. National Government*. Lafayette: University of Louisiana Press.

Hard copies of the Swanson book can be purchased directly from the [UL Press](#) website by entering "Swanson" in the search bar, and [Amazon](#) has a Kindle version.

Other readings not listed on the syllabus may be assigned from time to time and will be posted on Canvas, unless otherwise noted. Additional readings assigned throughout the semester will be announced in advance.

Note: You are at a research-intensive university, taking classes with the people who do the research. You may read journals articles published by your professors. It is cutting edge. No one gets money for these publications; they are how we disseminate scientific information for the scientific community. E-mail me a picture of a Boxer dog by 21 August at 11:59 p.m. to earn an extra five percent on your final exam score.

Assignment Grading and Evaluation

Student-Instructor Meeting (within first three weeks):	5% of final grade
iRATs (4 x 3.75% each; I drop lowest earned grade):	15% of final grade
tRATs: (4 x 3.75% each; I drop lowest earned grade):	15% of final grade
Peer Assessment (2 x 5% ea.):	10% of final grade
Midterm Exam:	20% of final grade
Final Exam:	25% of final grade
Civic Learning Project:	10% of final grade

- **STUDENT-INSTRUCTOR MEETING:** Each student will be required to meet one-on-one with me at least one time before the end of the fourth week of class (i.e., before 11 September). This meeting allows us to get to know one another and gives you the chance to ask any questions you might have. Expect this meeting to last between 10 and 15 minutes. You must make an appointment for this meeting.
- **iRATs and tRATs:** At the beginning of each module, you will take readiness assessment tests, or RATs, each of which is taken twice, once as an individual (iRAT) and a second time as a team (tRAT). RATs assess your comprehension of the main concepts of the course material presented to you in the readings or other before-class preparation. RATs are used to ensure readiness to proceed to the application activities. Although you will take 5 total RATs, only four (4) of them will count toward your final grade. I will drop the score for the RATs you have taken. If you have an unexcused absence during a RAT, you have two options: (1) take the missed RAT for a 0 and have it dropped, or (2) not take the RAT for a 0 and have it included in your scores. If you miss a RAT with an excused absence, you may make it up and the iRAT score will also count toward your tRAT score for that module. **Please note** that in order to earn the team score for a RAT, you must score a 50% or higher on your iRAT. If your iRAT score is below 50%, that score will also count as your tRAT score for that module.
- **APPLICATION ACTIVITIES:** Application activities are real-world (or at least plausible in the real world) problems for which your team must provide a solution. The problems will make application of the material presented in that module or a previous one. Once all teams have developed a solution, all teams will simultaneously report their solution to the class. Teams will then defend their solution in a spirited (hopefully) and respectful (I will enforce this) debate. Note that these activities are not formally graded, but are described here so you will know what they are when you see them on the course calendar.
- **PEER ASSESSMENT:** Participation in your teams will be evaluated by your peers. Before the first peer assessment, we – as a class – will develop a rubric, or a set of criteria, on which you will evaluate your peers and by which your peers will evaluate you. This peer evaluation will serve as a non-trivial percentage of your final grade. It also serves as an accountability device to ensure you come to class prepared and that freeloading is not tolerated by others on the team. Peer evaluations will be conducted twice – once before each exam.
- **EXAMS:** You will take one midterm exam and a final exam. The final exam will be cumulative and will be administered in-class during the time designated by the university for our class' final exam. Your performance on exams will be evaluated based on your ability to provide comprehensive and correct answers to the questions on the exam.
- **CIVIC LEARNING PROJECT:** The civic learning project will provide you with an opportunity to take your knowledge outside the classroom and see the concepts in action. The type of project you undertake will be largely up to you provided you get the chance to see our course topics come to life. Some examples of acceptable projects include attending a city council meeting, volunteering for a political campaign, or talking to a congressional staffer or Member of Congress or state legislator. Following the project, you will be required to write a one-page reflection memo on how your experience relates to some course concept or learning outcome listed above in this document.

Final letter grades will be assigned according to the university standard grading scale, which is as follows:

Letter Grade	Percentage
A	90-100
B	80-89.9
C	70-79.9
D	60-69.9
F	Below 60

General Assignment Regulations

- When an assignment is submitted via Canvas, you are responsible for making sure the file is uploaded properly and contains no technical or file errors.
- Assignments completed in class (e.g., tRATs) are not eligible for makeup without appropriate documentation of an excused absence.
- Grades will be posted on Canvas, so you will have an idea of what you have been evaluated on and your current standing in the course, but they should not be considered definitive as they are not weighted properly. If you are missing a grade in Canvas and more than 14 days have passed since the assignment was due, it means I do not have your submission for that assignment. It is your responsibility to bring this to my attention if you think I have erred. If you would like a more accurate idea of your grade in the class (i.e., one that is correctly weighted), e-mail me or come see me during student time.
- I have a mandatory “cooling off period” of 24 hours after an assignment is returned to you. This mandatory waiting period provides you the opportunity to process your grade, objectively examine feedback provided, and avoid saying or e-mailing something you may regret. I will not respond to grade or feedback inquiries sent during this period of time. If, after the passing of 24 hours, you still have questions regarding your grade or the feedback I provided, please e-mail me with your questions. If you wish to have the assignment regraded, you must submit to me in writing your reason for the reconsideration, using the assignment prompt as the basis for your argument. I will reassess your work with that argument in mind, and whatever grade is assigned after this reconsideration (whether this grade is higher or lower than the original grade) will be final.

Library Services

You can get personalized or group research assistance from reference librarians at Young Library. The Political Science Librarian is Dr. Taylor Leigh (taylor.c.leigh@uky.edu).

Dr. Leigh can help you:

- Find sources for research projects
- Identify and evaluate different kinds of sources
- Navigate databases and the library catalog effectively
- Perform a literature review
- Brainstorm keywords and subject terms

Dr. Leigh also maintains the [Political Science Research Guide](#), which is full of useful resources to help you in this class. Please contact Dr. Leigh directly with any questions regarding the library or research assistance.

(Note: the language for this section was written and provided by Dr. Taylor Leigh for inclusion in Political Science syllabi.)

Course Calendar & Outline

What follows is a class-by-class outline for this course. While the Instructor will make every effort to abide by this guide, this outline is dynamic and subject to change based on a variety of factors. Should alterations to this plan become necessary, the Instructor will notify you of the changes.

Date	Readings (to be completed BEFORE coming to class)	Activity
Module 0: Course Administration		
17 Aug	None	Course Introduction
19 Aug	—	Introduction to TBL
21 Aug	—	Assessment of Prior Knowledge
24 Aug	Ideology Quiz	Team Formation
26 Aug	—	Civic Learning Project Discussion
Module 1: Foundations of Government		
28 Aug	Swanson, Chs. 1, 2	Foundations of Government RAT
31 Aug	—	Foundations of Government Application Activity
02 Sep	—	Foundations of Government Application Activity
04 Sep	—	Foundations of Government Application Activity
Module 2: Constitutional Framework		
07 Sep	Swanson, Chs. 3, 4, 5, 6	Constitutional Framework RAT
09 Sep	—	Constitutional Framework Application Activity
11 Sep	—	Constitutional Framework Application Activity Student-Instructor Meeting DUE
14 Sep	—	Constitutional Framework Application Activity
16 Sep	—	Constitutional Framework Application Activity
18 Sep	—	Constitutional Framework Application Activity
Module 3: Rights & Liberties		
21 Sep	Swanson Chs. 7, 8, 9, 10	Rights & Liberties RAT
23 Sep	—	Rights & Liberties Application Activity
25 Sep	—	Peer Assessment Rubric
28 Sep	—	Rights & Liberties Application Activity
30 Sep	—	Rights & Liberties Application Activity
02 Oct	—	Rights & Liberties Application Activity
05 Oct	—	Rights & Liberties Application Activity
07 Oct	—	Peer Assessment 1
09 Oct	—	Midterm Exam
Module 4: Institutions		
12 Oct	Swanson, Chs. 11, 12, 13	Institutions RAT
14 Oct	—	Institutions Application Activity
16 Oct	—	Institutions Application Activity
19 Oct	—	Institutions Application Activity
21 Oct	—	Institutions Application Activity
23 Oct	—	Institutions Application Activity
26 Oct	—	Institutions Application Activity
28 Oct	—	Institutions Application Activity
30 Oct	—	NO CLASS – CIVIC LEARNING PROJECT
Module 5: Political Behavior		
02 Nov	Swanson, Chs. 14, 15	Political Behavior RAT
04 Nov	—	Political Behavior Application Activity
06 Nov	—	Political Behavior Application Activity

09 Nov	—	Political Behavior Application Activity
11 Nov	—	Political Behavior Application Activity
13 Nov	—	NO CLASS – Study Day Civic Learning Project Reflection DUE
16 Nov	—	Final Exam
18 Nov	—	Course Wrap-up Peer Assessment 2
20 Nov	—	NO CLASS