

PSC101: Introduction to American Government

Term: Full Summer 2026

Instructor: Corinne Lyons

Meeting times: Online Asynchronous

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Office hours: By appointment

Course overview

PSC101 involves a wide- ranging exploration of the core features of American government. While this is a “political science” course, the material you will interact with this term also draws on insights from history, sociology, and mass communications to help you better understand the workings of American democracy. In PSC101, you will learn about the tensions involved in governing a socially and geographically diverse country, the actors that participate in this system, and the institutions and processes that shape how democracy works in practice.

Throughout this course, you will be asked to critically analyze whether the simple mythologies we tell ourselves about American democracy are true. The United States is both an old and imperfect democracy, and we should speak honestly and frankly about its successes and failures. This course will encourage you to evaluate how well your democracy lives up to its aspirational goals.

Course materials

Textbook. We will use the following textbook this term.

- William T. Bianco and David T. Canon. 2021. American Politics Today, 8th Edition. WW Norton. ISBN-10: 0393539652.

Please do not purchase this book in advance of the course. The textbook is available to you as part of the Access Granted program here at UA, which means that access to a digital copy of the book is provided to you automatically through your fall tuition.

To access the book, you will simply click on the “ eTextbook ” link within our Blackboard course site and then follow the subsequent log-in instructions.

Short readings. Each week you may be assigned supplementary readings from various sources. These articles will be available on Blackboard within the corresponding folder assigned to each week. Simply click on the correct hyperlink, and you should have instant access to that reading.

Student learning outcomes

By the end of this course, students will...

- Understand the evolving nature of American democracy
- Recognize the roles and responsibilities of different government institutions
- Describe the tensions between public demands and elite behaviors and governmental outputs
- Analyze how public policy impacts ordinary Americans

Course grading

There are two components to your grade. Please be advised that grades on any given set of tasks are weighted when calculating your final grade. **You cannot simply take your points earned in Blackboard and divide them by points possible to calculate your grade.** Instead, to correctly estimate your grade you need to first assign the correct weights, which are listed below, to the score you earn across the assignments in a given category.

Assignment	Count	Individual Assignment weight	Cumulative weight
Writing journals	4	10.0%	40.0%
Chapter quizzes	16	3.75%	60.0%
Total			100.0%

Short essays

You are responsible for writing four short essays this semester. You can find the prompts for these assignments under the “Journals” tab in Blackboard.

These are **analytical** tasks where you evaluate a supplementary reading and craft an argument about the material that you’ve read. You will be graded on both substance and writing quality. Journal entries will be completed and submitted via the “journal” tab Blackboard. Note that you are to rely on course materials when completing these, i.e., the course readings and other materials available, rather than to rely on AI, for example.

Journal 1: Federalism in the modern era

Due: 06/14/2026 at 11:59 PM

Read: [Trump's Threats to Withhold Disaster Relief Undermine Federalism Principles](#)

What is impoundment and is it legal? Why might a president want to impound monies? How does this impoundment affect federalism? Can you draw a connection between President Trump's threat to withhold aid relief and concerns that the Framers had about the power of the executive? What is an issue that involves federalism that concerns you personally?

Journal 2: News media in the modern digital age

Due: 06/28/2026 at 11:59 PM

Read: [TikTok let through disinformation in political ads despite its own ban, Global Witness finds](#)

Why is misinformation dangerous in democracy? What is TikTok such a threat for the spread of misinformation? Drawing from the chapters on public opinion and the media, what political role does social media play in the modern information environment? What is a specific example you can recall where you experienced misinformation on social media? Was it a problem? Did it concern you?

Journal 3: DOGE and the federal bureaucracy

Due: 07/12/2026 at 11:59 PM

Read: [Yes, DOGE failed – and it matters](#)

What is the bureaucracy? What evidence does the author give that DOGE failed in its efforts to reform the United States' bureaucracy? Why is this failure a problem? How might DOGE affect what Americans think about bureaucracy more generally?

Journal 4: Closing USAID

Due: 07/26/2026 at 11:59 PM

Read: [Obama and Bush call Trump's USAID closure a 'travesty' as report warns of 14 million extra deaths](#)

What is USAID? What implications does shutting off this international aid have for people living abroad? Drawing from your textbook, in what ways is USAID a classic example of "soft power?" Why is a loss of such soft power problematic? What are the human costs associated with it?

Chapter quizzes

There are quizzes associated with the textbook reading; cumulatively, they are worth 60% of your grade over the term. These quizzes are designed to ensure that you understand important material associated with our core text readings. They are open-book, and the answers are not a secret. If you don't know an answer, then...just look in the textbook.

All quizzes can be found on Blackboard – there are direct links to them in the folder “Chapter quizzes.” Those links will take you to the American Politics Today eTextbook, which automatically initiates the quiz software.

Attendance

There is no attendance policy for PSC101. It is an asynchronous online course.

Policy on Missed Assignments

Do not wait until the last minute to submit your assessments. Work submitted after the due dates listed in Blackboard may result in a grade of zero. The instructor is solely responsible for determining whether provisions will be made for unforeseen circumstances. You must report these circumstances as soon as possible after the event. You may be required to produce documentation.

Please contact the instructor if there are questions about missed due dates.

Course outline

Below, you will find a description of what to expect over the course of this term. Please take note of important dates below. As you will see, you will benefit this term from several days where we will not hold class. 16 weeks is a long semester. I have planned our time together to maximize the coverage of material while not burning you out.

2026 Summer Semester overview

		APT Chapter	InQuizitive Deadline
<i>Unit 1: Democracy in America</i>			
Week 1	Democracy/ Constitution	2	06/12/2026
Week 2	Federalism	3	06/12/2026
Week 3	Civil Liberties	4	06/12/2026
Week 4	Civil Rights	5	06/12/2026
<i>Unit 2: The Public</i>			
Week 5	Public opinion	6	06/26/2026
Week 6	News media	7	06/26/2026
Week 7	Interest groups	10	06/26/2026
Week 8	Campaigns and elections	9	06/26/2026
<i>Unit 3: Democratic Institutions</i>			
Week 5	Parties	8	07/10/2026
Week 10	Congress	11	07/10/2026
Week 11	Presidency/ Executive Branch	12, 13	07/10/2026
Week 12	The Courts	14	07/10/2026
<i>Unit 4: Policy</i>			
Week 13	Economic and Social Policy	15, 16	07/24/2026
Week 15	Foreign Policy	17	07/24/2026

Grading matrix

UA Alpha-numeric Grading		
Grade	Numeric	GPA Points
A+	97-100	4.33
A	94>97	4.00
A-	90>94	3.67
B+	87>90	3.33
B	84>87	3.00
B-	80>84	2.67
C+	77>80	2.33
C	74>77	2.00
C-	70>74	1.67
D+	67>70	1.33
D	64>67	1.00
D-	60>64	0.67
F	00>64	0.00

Technology policy

Artificial intelligence

The course chooses this University policy among [University policies](#): *All submitted work must be produced by the students themselves, whether individually or collaboratively. Use of a generative AI tools such as ChatGPT to complete an assignment constitutes academic misconduct.*

Statement on the Academic Honor Code and Academic Misconduct

All students in attendance at The University of Alabama are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars. The University of Alabama expects from its students a higher standard of conduct than the minimum required to avoid discipline. Academic misconduct includes all acts of dishonesty in any academic or related matter and any knowing or intentional help, attempt to help, or conspiracy to help another student commit an act of academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following acts, when performed in any type of academic or academically related matter, exercise or activity.

- *Cheating*: Using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, study aids, or computer-related information.
- *Plagiarism*: Representing the words, data, works, ideas, computer programs or output, or anything not generated in an authorized fashion, as one's own.
- *Fabrication*: Presenting as genuine, any invented or falsified citation or material.

- Misrepresentation: Falsifying, altering, or misstating the contents of documents or other materials related to academic matters, including schedules, prerequisites, and transcripts.

Statement on Disability Accommodations

If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services and have an accommodation, then please let me know as soon as possible. If you have a disability, but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, then you can [visit the Disability Services website to make arrangements](#).

The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is the central contact point for UA students with academic disabilities. ODS works with faculty and other members of the University community to provide individualized academic accommodations and support services while promoting student responsibility and self-advocacy. It is the student's responsibility to make known a need for academic accommodations and services by (1) providing appropriate documentation of the disability to ODS, (2) formally requesting accommodations by meeting with an ODS accommodations specialist, and (3) meeting with each of his / her / their professors to present a formal ODS accommodation letter to discuss the implementation of accommodations.

Changes to the syllabus

Finally, some changes may occur to this syllabus, probably for reasons outside of our control. If that happens, then you'll receive advance and fair warning of any changes to the best of my ability.