

INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN POLITICS

St. Lawrence University

Instructor:	Zachary McGee, Ph.D.	Class Time:	MWF, 10:30 - 11:30 a.m.
Email:	zmcgee@stlawu.edu	Class Location:	Hepburn Hall 21
Office Location:	Hepburn Hall 213	Office Hours:	Tu, Wed, 3:00 - 4:30 p.m.
Course Number:	GOVT 103-01		

Course Description:

The Founding Fathers of the United States of America foresaw a nation governed by the people and for the people. While this idea was certainly their aspiration, the reality is much less rosy. The U.S. government is the product of compromises that resulted in unequal representation and political institutions that purposefully slow the pace of public policymaking. How do the decisions made two centuries ago still affect the government today? Should our political institutions be made to work more efficiently? Does voting make a difference? What does it mean to be an American today? In this course, we will explore the ideas of American government both in theory and practice. The content we cover will allow us to explore both how our history as a country and contemporary factors have shaped, and continue to shape, our politics.

No background in political science is necessary to succeed in this course and thus there are no prerequisites for enrollment. Three primary objectives shape the design of this course. The first is to provide basic descriptive information about the American political system by examining and discussing important political processes, institutions, and actors. This course is meant to emphasize both the role of American political institutions and the realities of the contemporary policymaking process. We will certainly cover the role of voters, the media, and polling but they will take a back seat to the operation of political institutions and the constitutional framework that produced the political context we live in today. The second objective is to develop analytical skills by which to understand complex relationships and phenomena. Students' critical thinking skills will be tested and refined through a series of assignments meant to help students actively engage with the lecture material, assigned readings, and the perspectives of their classmates.

The final objective is to introduce the work of political scientists by concentrating on the paradigms and techniques of the discipline. Throughout the semester we will engage in discussions where students will be asked to apply contemporary scholarship or editorial perspectives to the content covered in class and debate the ideas therein. Additionally, the final few class days will be devoted to "political science perspectives." During these final days I have selected a few topics that students tend to be exceptionally interested in and have identified relevant academic articles and books related to the topic. These readings, while listed on the syllabus and available on Sakai, are totally optional. These final classes will be a mix of lecture on what we know about these areas in the academic discipline of political science and some time for question and answer at the end. While the readings for these days are optional, the material covered in these classes will be part of the final exam. Ideally, this course will shape students into more thoughtful citizens and consumers of political information. And, ultimately, it should help students attain a more sophisticated understanding of the politics of the United States both today and in the recent past.

Course Expectations & Policies:

I expect students to come to class prepared to engage the lecture material or the relevant discussion of the day. We have limited time together and every second counts. Readings listed on the course schedule are due the day they are listed. Students will note that there is not a formal attendance policy in this class, but participation in class discussions is critical to the learning process for you and your fellow classmates.

Moreover, at least half of each exam will be derived directly from material covered in lecture. Policies about preparedness for class and the required materials to be successful are detailed below.

| Sakai: All information for this course can be accessed on the St. Lawrence Sakai web page for this course. To navigate to it, go to [this link](#), log in, and select the tab for GOVT 103 01. All assignments should be turned in electronically via Sakai.

| Written Work: All written assignments should be turned in on Sakai and should be double spaced in 12-point Times New Roman font. Page margins should be 1 inch on all sides. Work can be submitted as Microsoft Word documents, PDFs, or Pages documents. I will not accept work via email or hard copy in class. Students should retain their own copy of all submitted work for at least one year following the completion of this course.

| Email & Appointments: The best way to contact me during the semester is via email (zmcgee@stlawu.edu). I cannot promise to respond to any messages sent via Sakai. I respond to emails during regular business hours (i.e., Monday - Friday 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.) and strive to respond to all emails within 24 hours. I cannot promise replies at night or on weekends. If you would prefer to speak in person, and my regularly scheduled office hours conflict with your schedule, please let me know and we can set up an appointment that fits both of our schedules.

Optional Materials:

The textbook listed below is optional but can serve as an aid if students feel as though they need additional context or instruction on a given topic. In some cases I may discuss topics or concepts not covered in this text and therefore the book alone will not serve as a substitute for attending class. I am sensitive to the realities of scholarly and textbook costs and because of this I have created PDF scans of all relevant books and articles to distribute to all students for free via Sakai at least one week prior to the class date listed on the course schedule.

- Lowi, Theodore, Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere, "American Government: A Brief Introduction" (Brief 16th Edition). New York: W.W. Norton Company (2020).

Grading:

Facilitation Response Paper	20%
Critique Response Paper	20%
Discussion Participation	15%
Midterm #1	15%
Midterm #2	15%
Final Exam	15%

All items listed above are detailed below. I will utilize the following cutoffs when evaluating grades:

4.0 (A)	93%
3.75 (A-)	90%
3.5 (B+)	88%
3.25 (B+/B)	86%
3.0 (B)	83%
2.75 (B-)	80%
2.5 (C+)	78%
2.25 (C+/C)	76%
2.0 (C)	73%
1.75 (C-)	70%
1.5 (D+)	68%
1.25 (D)	64%
1.0 (D-)	60%
0.0 (F)	≤ 59%

Discussion Participation (15%):

Students are expected to engage in the (approximately) weekly discussions we will have on most of the topics covered in this course. I have done my best to find accessible reading material that should serve to stimulate interesting and informative discussions around the topics at hand. The discussions will be framed either as two sides of an argument related to the topic or will present an important idea or concept for students to ponder and react to. I will serve a facilitation role during discussions but each discussion will begin with the predetermined discussion leaders leading small group discussions wherein they summarize the arguments of the reading(s) and share initial thoughts and questions they have. After those small group discussions we will have a larger discussion with the entire class driven by the highlights of the small group discussions led by the discussion leaders.

Discussion leaders will be scheduled by the end of the first week of class. Adjustments will be made as students add and drop during the shopping period. Students may sign up on Sakai for any week to lead discussion, but all weeks must have at least two students leading discussion. If necessary, I will ask for volunteers to switch weeks to achieve this goal and ultimately move students if no volunteers emerge. All reading material will be posted on Sakai at least one week before the discussion occurs. As this is an introductory course, and for some students this may be their first college course, I am happy to meet with students in office hours to hear their thoughts about the readings before any given discussion. Of course, I cannot do the work for you. Instead, consider me as a reasonable sounding board for your thoughts and I will do my best to nudge students in productive directions to facilitate a meaningful class discussion for all.

To get full credit for participation in this class students will ask questions when necessary during lectures and contribute meaningful thoughts, arguments, and questions during the discussions of assigned readings. It is not merely a matter of raising your hand every class (we won't have time for everyone to participate every class period anyway), but demonstrating that when you do participate it is useful in clarifying a concept in lecture or advancing an argument in the discussion. The greatest benefit you can get from this class is not simply increased knowledge about American politics, but also hearing the perspectives of your peers and wrestling with arguments you might not agree with immediately.

Participation grades will be evaluated on Sakai after each exam. That is, participation is worth 5% of your grade during each third of the class. **For one week after participation grades are evaluated students can discuss any concerns they might have with me during office hours.** After the first week the participation grades will not be changed.

Facilitation Response Paper (20%):

As noted above, in the “Discussion Participation” section of the syllabus, there will be discussion leaders for most topics we cover. Discussion leaders sign up for their respective topic on Sakai during the first week of class. In addition to starting off discussion, on the day you are a discussion leader, you must also submit a response paper. The response paper should concisely articulate your position on the document(s) you read. Some weeks this may mean agreeing with one author over the other and explaining why. Other weeks, when we read only one piece, it may mean briefly summarizing the author’s argument and reacting to it. A broad range of responses and reactions will be accepted. When writing your draft keep in mind that the main goals of this assignment are to confirm you understood what you read and to evaluate your thoughts on the topic as they relate to our lectures in class, current events, or your personal experiences. An example of an “ideal” response paper (as well as the article and notes used to construct the paper) can be found on Sakai.

Students are encouraged to meet with me in office hours if they are struggling to understand the arguments being made or need help clarifying their thoughts. I will not summarize the article(s) for you, but I am happy to serve as a sounding board for your thoughts and nudge you in the right direction to stimulate an interesting discussion in class (and for your response paper). **Facilitation Response papers are due at 8 a.m. the day of the discussion.** Your submission should be 2-3 pages (excluding any title page or bibliography) and should include a bibliography for any works cited. See the instructions about submitting your work under “Course Expectations” in the syllabus.

Critique Response Paper (20%):

In addition to submitting a response paper the week that you are a discussion leader, students must also pick one additional week to submit a response paper. The criteria are identical to the Facilitation Response Paper except that there is not an expectation that students participate disproportionately in that week’s discussion (though it would be a missed opportunity not to!). Critique Response papers are accepted on a rolling basis (i.e., they can be submitted at any time after the first discussion). **For students choosing to respond to the final discussion of the class the paper will be due at 8 a.m. on Wednesday, December 1st.** Again, your submission should be 2-3 pages (excluding any title page or bibliography) and should include a bibliography for any works cited. See the instructions about submitting your work under “Course Expectations” in the syllabus.

Exams (15% each):

Each exam will be composed of a set of multiple choice questions and one essay. Students will have a choice of three prompts for the essay and they may select any one to respond to. The essay prompts may ask students to answer a question, define terms, justify a position, or any combination thereof. All exams are closed-note and must be completed independently. None of the exams are cumulative, but building knowledge about American politics throughout the course will certainly aid students in performing better as the course proceeds.

Short of extraordinary circumstances, students will not be allowed to make up exams in this course. If you have planned circumstances that you believe qualify as extraordinary (e.g., a non-flexible academic or university-sanctioned commitment), you must contact me regarding these circumstances *at least two weeks in advance* of the exam in question. Otherwise, students will only be allowed to make up an exam in the event of extreme and unpredictable circumstances (e.g., a hospitalization or a sudden death in the family) and then only if documentation is provided will a make up exam be scheduled.

Late Assignments:

Facilitation Response papers are due at 8 a.m. the day of the discussion you are leading. For students choosing to submit their Critique Response paper about the final discussion of the class (i.e., the policy process) papers must be submitted by 8 a.m. on Wednesday, December 1st. All assignments are to be

submitted electronically via Sakai. Assignments will **not** be accepted via email. In the absence of extreme circumstances (with documentation), assignments turned in after their due date will be accepted but penalized based on how late the assignment is. In other words, turning in an assignment at the beginning of class will receive a minor penalty, but an assignment turned in five days late could be penalized as much as a full letter grade (or more). **Assignments later than one week will not be accepted at all.**

Grade Appeals:

I understand the pressure many students are under to succeed in every single course they take. I am happy to meet with any student during office hours to discuss the appeal of any grade earned **within seven days of the grade being posted**. If a student feels a grade has been evaluated incorrectly they should come prepared with a substantive argument about why they feel they should have earned additional points. Once the appeal has been made and I render my final decision the grade I assign will be final.

COVID-19:

Despite the policies just listed, the ongoing global pandemic does call for a more flexible set of expectations for us all. As the semester goes on, you may find yourself in a situation where, due to multiple pressures on your time, you may consider taking a short cut in order to turn in an assignment by the deadline. If this is the case, the thing to do is to **drop everything and contact me via email immediately** regarding your situation. I can help relieve some of the pressure related to my class in a way that is equitable for the other students in the class as well. Always remember, to struggle is human, and I grade the assignments, not the person. However, I cannot do anything for you once you commit an act (knowingly or negligently) of academic dishonesty. So, again, if you find yourself in a panic, please get in touch with me- we will work through it together with no judgement.

Title IX:

Title IX mandates that all students, men, women and gender nonconforming, should be able to study in an atmosphere free of harassment, sexual violence, and gender discrimination. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted here on campus, you can find the appropriate resources here:

- SLU Advocates: 24/7 student-run Helpline. Conversations are confidential. (315) 244-5466
<http://www.stlawu.edu/volunteer-services/slu-advocates>
- SLU Title IX coordinator: Lisa Cania, (315) 229-5567, lcania@stlawu.edu
- Counseling Services, Sexual Assault Support Group: Tara Tent (315)229-5392, ttent@stlawu.edu

Personal Pronoun Preference:

Class rosters are provided to the instructor with students' legal names. I will gladly honor any request to address students by a different name. Please inform me of any preferred names, nicknames, or gender pronouns as early as possible so I can adopt them for the entirety of the semester and onward. For your reference, my pronouns are he/him/his. If there are further accommodations that will make you feel more comfortable in class, please come to office hours so we can discuss them.

Student Accessibility Services:

If you have a specific learning profile, medical and or mental health condition and need accommodations, please be sure to contact the Student Accessibility Services Office right away so they can help you get the accommodations you require. If you need to use any accommodations in this class, please meet with me early and provide me with your Individualized Educational Accommodation Plan (IEAP) letter so you can

have the best possible experience this semester.

Although not required, I would like to know of any accommodations that are needed at least 10 days before a quiz or test. Please be proactive and set up an appointment to meet with someone from the Student Accessibility Services Office.

Color Vision Deficiency:

If you are color vision deficient, the Student Accessibility Services office has on loan glasses for students who are color vision deficient. Please contact the office to make an appointment.

For more specific information about setting up an appointment with Student Accessibility Services please see the options listed below:

Telephone: 315.229.5537

Email: studentaccessibility@stlawu.edu

For further information about Student Accessibility Services, you can check the website at:

<https://www.stlawu.edu/student-accessibility-services>

Writing Assistance:

The WORD Studio offers both online and face-to-face tutorials for your papers, speeches, posters, and reading assignments. They are here want to make you the best writer and speaker you can be at SLU. Their tutors are thoroughly trained and friendly peers who can:

- Help you understand an assignment
- Help you build an argument or structure in papers and oral presentations
- Help you expand your vocab and work on sentence structure
- Work with you on a powerpoint or poster
- Refine your reading skills
- Help you learn to avoid plagiarism through proper citation

The WORD Studio offers ESL and science writing specialists, but all of their tutors are trained to assist with any communication assignment. The WORD Studio is open until 9 p.m. Sunday-Thursday and until 2 p.m. on Fridays, but appointments are required (no walk-ins). Schedule a tutorial by going to the WORD Studio website. If you have any questions about their services, please email them at wordstudio@stlawu.edu

Academic Integrity:

I expect everyone to conduct themselves with integrity and honesty in this class. All of the work you do in this class must be your own original work. Please don't cheat. Don't plagiarize. Don't take short cuts. As stated in SLU's Constitution of the Academic Honor Council, all of the work that you submit in this course must have been *written for this course and not another, and must originate with you in form and content* with all sources fully and specifically cited.

If you commit an act of academic dishonesty, I am bound to follow the procedures outlined in the St. Lawrence University Student Handbook. The Handbook describes what constitutes academic honesty and penalties for violation on pages 104-110. If you have a question about what is considered plagiarism or how to cite sources properly, come talk to me or visit The WORD Studio in ODY.

Course Outline:

The table below shows the course outline, including reading assignments, assignment deadlines, and the dates for all exams. Everything is required unless otherwise noted. All non-book readings will be available on Sakai, under Files. You should do each day's readings before that day's class.

Date	Topic	Readings Due/Notes
W 8/25/21	<i>Course Introduction</i>	- Syllabus
F 8/27/21	<i>The Founding</i>	- Lowi et al. Chapter 2 “The Founding and the Constitution” <i>Note: The textbook is optional for this course but these readings will be listed for any students who opted to purchase it for additional context or assistance. All other readings not by “Lowi et al.” are required.)</i>
M 8/30/21	<i>Discussion: The Founding</i>	- Jasanoff, Maya. 2007. “Loyal to a Fault.” <i>The New York Times Magazine</i> . July. - The Declaration of Independence
W 9/1/21	<i>The U.S. Constitution</i>	- The Articles of Confederation - The U.S. Constitution
F 9/3/21	<i>Federalism & Separation of Powers</i>	- Lowi et al. Chapter 3 “Federalism and the Separation of Powers”
M 9/6/21	<i>Federalism & Separation of Powers</i>	
W 9/8/21	<i>Discussion: Constitution, Federalism, & Separation of Powers</i>	- “Brutus II.” 1787. In <i>The Complete Anti-Federalist</i> . Ed. Herbert J. Storing. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. 1981. Volume Two. Part 2. pp. 372-377. - “Federalist No. 45.” 1788. In <i>The Federalist: The Gideon Edition</i> . Eds. George W. Carey and James McClellan. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund. 2001. pp. 237-242.
F 9/10/21	<i>Civil Liberties</i>	- Lowi et al. Chapter 4 “Civil Liberties and Civil Rights”
M 9/13/21	<i>Civil Rights</i>	
W 9/15/21	<i>Discussion: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights</i>	- Alexander, Michelle. 2012. <i>The New Jim Crow</i> . The New Press. Introduction Only - Alexander, Michelle. 2018. “The Newest Jim Crow.” <i>The New York Times</i> .
F 9/17/21	MIDTERM EXAM #1	
M 9/20/21	<i>Congress</i>	- Lowi et al. Chapter 5 “Congress”
W 9/22/21	<i>Congress</i>	- Sinclair, Barbara. 2012. <i>Unorthodox Lawmaking</i> . Washington, D.C.: CQ Press. Ch 10, pp. 258-261
F 9/24/21	<i>Congress</i>	
M 9/27/21	<i>Discussion: Congress</i>	Willis, Jay. 2018. “The Case for Abolishing the Senate.” <i>GQ</i> . page 8 of 11

Date	Topic	Readings Due/Notes
W 9/29/21	<i>The Presidency</i>	- Lowi et al. Chapter 6 "The Presidency"
F 10/1/21	<i>NO CLASS</i>	NO CLASS
M 10/4/21	<i>NO CLASS</i>	NO CLASS
W 10/6/21	<i>The Presidency</i>	
F 10/8/21	<i>Discussion: The Presidency</i>	- Garnett, Richard W. 2012. "Executive Overreach: How Both Parties Have Ignored the Constitution." <i>Commonweal Magazine</i> . - Lach, Eric. 2019. "Elizabeth Warren Against the Filibuster." <i>The New Yorker</i> .
M 10/11/21	<i>The Executive Branch</i>	- Lowi et al. Chapter 7 "The Executive Branch"
W 10/13/21	<i>The Executive Branch</i>	
F 10/15/21	<i>Mid-semester Break</i>	- NO CLASS
M 10/18/21	<i>Discussion: The Executive Branch</i>	- Samuelson, Robert J. 2017. "The administrative state is huge, and it's only getting bigger." <i>The Washington Post</i> . - Taylor, Astra. 2016. "Why It's So Hard to Regulate Payday Lenders." <i>The New Yorker</i> .
W 10/20/21	<i>The Federal Courts</i>	- Lowi et al. Chapter 8 "The Federal Courts"
F 10/22/21	<i>Discussion: The Federal Courts</i>	- Sunstein, Cass R. 2018. "Kavanaugh Confirmation Won't Affect Supreme Court's Legitimacy." <i>Bloomberg</i> . - Severino, Carrie. 2019. "The Left's Secret Judges List." <i>National Review</i> .
M 10/25/21	MIDTERM EXAM #2	
W 10/27/21	<i>Public Opinion & the Media</i>	- Lowi et al. Chapter 9 "Public Opinion and the Media"
F 10/29/21	<i>Elections</i>	- Lowi et al. Chapter 10 "Elections"
M 11/1/21	<i>Elections</i>	
W 11/3/21	<i>Discussion: Public Opinion & Elections</i>	- LISTEN: "Is Fox News Really All That Powerful? A debate over who has power in American society." on <i>The Argument</i> podcast by <i>The New York Times</i> Opinion Section (34 mins)
F 11/5/21	<i>American Political Parties</i>	- Lowi et al. Chapter 11 "Political Parties"

Date	Topic	Readings Due/Notes
M 11/8/21	<i>NO CLASS</i>	NO CLASS
W 11/10/21	<i>American Political Parties</i>	
F 11/12/21	<i>Discussion: American Political Parties</i>	- Drutman, Lee. 2018. "How much longer can the two-party system hold?" <i>Vox</i> . - Hawkings, David. 2016. "The House's Ideology, in Seven Circles" <i>Roll Call</i> .
M 11/15/21	<i>Interest Groups</i>	- Lowi et al. Chapter 12 "Groups and Interests"
W 11/17/21	<i>Interest Groups</i>	
F 11/19/21	<i>Discussion: Interest Groups</i>	- Drutman, Lee. 2015. "What we get wrong about lobbying and corruption." <i>The Washington Post</i> . - Brock, Clare R. 2018. "Book Review: Revolving Door Lobbying by LaPira and Thomas." <i>Perspectives on Politics</i> . 16(3), 859-860. - Drutman, Lee. 2015. "A Better Way to Rein In Lobbying." <i>The New York Times</i> .
M 11/22/21	<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>	- NO CLASS
W 11/24/21	<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>	- NO CLASS
F 11/26/21	<i>Thanksgiving Break</i>	- NO CLASS
M 11/29/21	<i>The Policy Process: Stages Theory</i>	- Public Policy Models and Their Usefulness in Public Health: The Stages Model (p. 1-4 only)
W 12/1/21	<i>The Policy Process: Subsystems & Punctuated Equilibrium Theory</i>	- Heclo, Hugh. 1978. "Issue Networks and Executive Establishment." In <i>The New American Political System</i> , Ed. Anthony King. Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute. pp. 262-287. - Jones, Bryan D. and Frank R. Baumgartner. 2012. "From there to here: Punctuated equilibrium to the general punctuation thesis to a theory of government information processing." <i>Policy Studies Journal</i> 40(1):1-20 Read only: Basics of Punctuated Equilibrium, Dynamics of Policy Change: Where Punctuated Equilibrium Fits, & The Standard Model
F 12/3/21	<i>Discussion: The Policy Process</i>	- Fagan, E.J. and Zachary A. McGee. 2020. "Yes, Congress Does Consult Non-Partisan Experts." <i>3Streams</i> . - Grossmann, Matt. 2018. "Voters Like A Political Party Until It Passes Laws." <i>FiveThirtyEight</i> .

Date	Topic	Readings Due/Notes
M 12/6/21	<i>Political Science Perspectives: Money in Politics</i>	<p>Skim if interested:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welch, W.P. 1982. "Campaign Contributions and Legislative Voting: Milk Money and Dairy Price Supports." <i>Western Political Quarterly</i>. 35(4):478-495. - Langbein, Laura I. 1986. "Money and Access: Some Empirical Evidence" <i>The Journal of Politics</i> 48(4):1052-1062. - Stratmann, Thomas. 1998. "The Market for Congressional Votes: Is Timing of Contributions Everything?" <i>Journal of Law & Economics</i>. 41(1):85-113. - Milyo, Jeffrey, David Primo, and Timothy Groseclose. 2000. "Corporate PAC Campaign Contributions in Perspective." <i>Business & Politics</i>. 2(1):75-88. - Ansolabehere, Stephen, John M. de Figueiredo, and James M. Snyder Jr. 2003. "Why Is There so Little Money in U.S. Politics?" <i>The Journal of Economic Perspectives</i>. 17(1):105-130. - Hall, Richard L. and Frank F. Wayman. 1990. "Buying Time: Moneyed Interests and the Mobilization of Bias in Congressional Committees." <i>The American Political Science Review</i>. 84(3). - McGee, Zachary A. and Philip R. Moniz. 2021. "Gift Travel in the U.S. House of Representatives." <i>Political Research Quarterly</i>. Forthcoming.
W 12/8/21	<i>Political Science Perspectives: Party Polarization in Congress</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FINAL CLASS DAY - Skim if interested: - Theriault, Sean M. 2008. <i>Party Polarization in Congress</i>. Cambridge University Press. - Theriault, Sean M. and David W. Rohde. 2011. "The Gingrich Senators and Party Polarization in the U.S. Senate." <i>The Journal of Politics</i>. 73(4):1011-1024. - Lee, Frances E. 2009. <i>Beyond Ideology: Politics, Principles, and Partisanship in the U.S. Senate</i>. University of Chicago Press. - Lee, Frances E. 2016. <i>Insecure Majorities: Congress and the Perpetual Campaign</i>. University of Chicago Press.
W 12/15/21	FINAL EXAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The exam will take place in our regular classroom from 8:30 - 11:30 a.m.
		<p><i>Note: This syllabus is subject to change at any time without written notice. Changes will likely be announced in class and via Sakai, but it is your responsibility to verify that you always have the most current version of the syllabus for this course.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">page 11 of 11 Version: 08-20-21</p>