

American Federal Government

POS 2041, UF Online Program | Credits: 3.00 | Spring 2026

January 12, 2025 – April 22, 2025

Instructor: Juliana Mucci

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 1:00 PM – 3:00 PM (or by appt.)

[Calendly Link](#) (Also available on Canvas Homepage)

Email: j.mucci@ufl.edu

Office: Anderson Hall 330

Course Description:

In this course, students will investigate how the national government is structured and how the American constitutional republic operates. It covers the philosophical and historical foundations of American government, including but not limited to the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution and all its Amendments, and the Federalist Papers. The course examines the branches of government and the government's laws, policies, and programs. It also examines the ways in which citizens participate in their government and the ways their government responds to citizens.

The course will address questions such as: How does government work in the United States? How do the three branches of government interact with the public and each other? What is a democracy, and how does the United States fit into this framework? What are some suggestions for how to better our institutions? Students will engage in thinking through these questions through a combination of lectures, civic discussions, and readings. Ultimately, students should leave with a better understanding of how to think critically about politics and government, how to understand our political institutions, and how to engage in civic life.

Note: This syllabus is subject to change as needed. Students are required to check Canvas and their UF email regularly to ensure they maintain the most current version of the syllabus, which may include changes deadlines or assigned readings. Please note that aspects such as the course's grading scheme, learning objectives, and University policies are not subject to change.

Required Texts

- *The Struggle for Democracy: 2020 Presidential Election Edition* by Greenberg et al.
 - ISBN-13: 9780136901051 | Referred to as “TSD” in course schedule below
- *Debating Reform: Conflicting Perspectives on How to Fix the American Political System* (4th Edition) by Ellis and Nelson
 - ISBN: 9781544390604 | Referred to as “DR” in course schedule below
- All other assigned readings are linked in this document and will be made available through Canvas.

Materials and Supplies Fee

N/A

Course Goals

Investigate how the national government is structured and how the American constitutional republic operates. Cover the philosophical and historical foundations of American government, including but not limited to the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution (the original text and all its amendments), and the Federalist Papers. Examine the branches of government and the government's laws, policies, and programs. Examine how citizens participate in their government and the ways their government responds to citizens.

Student Learning Outcomes & Civic Literacy Requirement:

By the end of the course, students will be able to do the following, per the state of Florida's Civic Literacy Competencies (as required by [Florida Statute 1007.25](#)):

Content

- Demonstrate an understanding of the basic principles and practices of the U.S.'s constitutional republic.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the nation's founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and its Amendments, and the *Federalist Papers*.
- Demonstrate knowledge of landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation, and landmark executive actions.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the history and development of the American Federal Government and its impact on law and society.

Critical Thinking

- Demonstrate an ability to apply course material to contemporary political issues and debates.

Communication

- Demonstrate the ability to engage in discussion and civil debate on American politics that are associated with multiple points of view.

Success with content and critical thinking SLOs will be assessed through all the assignments in the course: the 3 (three) exams, 6 (six) quizzes, 5 (five) debate reactions, and 7 (seven) synchronous Zoom discussions held throughout the course. Success with the communication SLO will be most directly assessed through the 7 (seven) synchronous Zoom discussions, though the debate reactions will also assess this outcome.

General Education

This course fulfills a Social and Behavioral Sciences (S) General Education requirement, and there is no prerequisite for this course. Please note that a minimum grade of C (73%) is required to obtain the general education credit. More information on general education requirements can be found [here](#).

UF's Student Learning Outcomes for General Education courses can be found [here](#), and the Subject Area Objectives for the General Education courses can be found [here](#). To review the Subject Area Objectives for this course, please read the section for Social Science (S).

How the Class Works

Modules:

This course is organized into Canvas modules, with each week containing one module. Modules contain lecture videos, readings, and assignments. Each module contains one weekly assignment. Please see the course schedule below for which assignments correspond with which modules. Some modules throughout the semester will also be discussion weeks (please also see the course schedule below for which weeks these are). During the weeks in which discussions are held, students should familiarize themselves with the course material for that week ***before*** attending a discussion. Lastly, as this course is asynchronous, students are free to read the assigned readings, watch the lecture videos, and complete their assignments whenever and at whatever pace suits them. **All assignments for each week are due on Sunday by 11:59 P.M. Eastern Time.**

Assignment Due Dates:

As noted above, all weekly assignments are due by 11:59 P.M. Eastern Time on Sunday at the conclusion of each module. **Exams are different. Each exam is only offered for one day, and the entire exam must be taken at once, in a single sitting.**

- Exam 1: Friday, February 6
- Exam 2: Friday, March 13
- Exam 3: Friday, April 24

If you are not available on the day of the exam due to an excused absence, you will be given a retake in the same format (see make-up policy directly below). Please communicate with me in advance if you know that you will be unavailable on an exam day.

Make-Up Policy

Makeup exams will be given in the same format as the original exam for students with excused absences. **There will be no makeup exams for unexcused absences.** Excused absences require documentation from a physician, government agency, court, university, or other documentation on a case-by-case basis.

If a student is seeking an excused absence for a missed assignment or discussion, the documentation must indicate that the student is unable to perform their coursework **for the entire week**. Students with unexcused absences from discussion will receive a zero for that week. Late work without an excused absence will not be accepted.

Assignments and Evaluation

Attendance (5%) and Participation (10%) in Discussions (15% in total):

Students should be aware that discussion sections will be held as a synchronous component of this asynchronous course. **Students must attend 7 (seven) discussions hosted by the instructor via Zoom throughout the semester.**

This course's synchronous discussion component is a **requirement of the state of Florida as per section 1007.25(4)(b), Florida Statutes**. The addition of synchronous discussions into this asynchronous course is a requirement of the state and university. More information on Civic

Literacy Requirements can be found here: <https://undergrad.aa.ufl.edu/for-students/civic-literacy-requirement/faq/>.

The schedule for these discussions can be found in this syllabus in the schedule below, in the Canvas calendar, and in the Modules that coincide with a discussion week. For each discussion week, there will be an option to attend a meeting on Tuesday at 7:00 P.M. Eastern Time and on Thursday at 10:00 A.M. Eastern Time. These two discussion meetings will be identical (that is, students will not receive credit for attending both in one week). Holding two per discussion week ensures that students have a choice over when to attend. For more information on discussions, please be sure to regularly check the Canvas Announcements and your UF email!

Students are required to actively use their audio or chat feature in each discussion section and are required to stay in the Zoom meeting for the duration of the discussion to receive credit. Video usage is welcomed but not required. Student comments during discussions must be respectful and relevant to the topic, based on readings and other course materials.

Below is the grading rubric for discussion participation. This portion of your grade (10%) is based on the quality of your participation, including listening, preparation, and quality of contributions:

	Strong (A+ to B+)	Needs Development (B to C)	Unsatisfactory (C- or lower)
Listening (15 points possible)	Actively and respectfully listens to peers and instructor. (15 – 13 points)	Actively listens most of the time, though sometimes displays lack of interest in discussion. (12 – 11 points)	Projects lack of interest or disrespect for others (including browsing other materials during class). (10 – 0 points)
Preparation (20 points possible)	Arrives fully prepared for discussion and is eager to contribute observations and questions. (20 – 17.4 points)	Sometimes arrives unprepared or with only superficial preparation. (17.4 – 14.6 points)	Little evidence of having prepared or thought about the upcoming discussion. (14.6 – 0 points)
Quality of Contributions (45 points possible)	Comments are relevant and reflect understanding and insights about content and previous remarks of other students; comments and questions frequently help move the discussion forward. (45 – 39 points)	Comments and questions are sometimes irrelevant, betray lack of preparation, or indicate a lack of attention to previous remarks of other students; sometimes advance the conversation, but sometimes do little to move it forward. (38 – 33 points)	Comments reflect little understanding of either the content or previous remarks in class; comments and questions do not advance the conversation or are actively harmful to it. (32 – 0 points)

Frequency of Participation (20 points possible)	Actively participates at appropriate times. (20 – 17.4 points)	Sometimes participates, but at other times is “tuned out.” (17.3 – 14.6 points)	Seldom participates and is generally not engaged or absent. (14.5 – 0 points)
---	---	--	--

As this grade is composed of both an attendance (5%) and participation (10%) component, the total 15% will be calculated in the following manner:

$$\left[\frac{\# \text{ Discussions Attended}}{\# \text{ Total Discussions}} \times (0.05) \right] + [\text{Participation Grade} \times (0.10)]$$

Debate Reactions (20%):

Students will write 5 (five) debate reactions throughout the semester. In each debate reaction, students will respond to a different chapter assigned from the *Debating Reform (DR)* textbook. Each debate reaction will therefore necessitate students reading the assigned *DR* chapter and reflecting on the debate they have read. Reactions should not regurgitate the debaters’ arguments. Rather, students should articulate which stance in the debate they agree with and why (or why the student disagrees with both stances).

These reactions must be between 2 to 4 pages (about 500 – 1,000 words), double-spaced in length, and submitted as a Microsoft Word or PDF document in 12-point font, Times New Roman (or another comparable font) with 1-inch margins. UF students can download the entire Microsoft Office suite, including Microsoft Word, free of charge at this link:

<https://it.ufl.edu/services/gatorcloud-microsoftoffice-online>.

The rubric below will be used to evaluate students’ debate reactions:

	Exceeds	Proficient	Competent	Below
Analysis & Critical Thinking (75 points possible)	Synthesizes new concepts and formulates evidence-based conclusions; makes connections to readings and/or current events. Key issues fully identified. (75 – 68 points)	Evaluates and analyzes the concepts and provides some examples. Most key issues are identified. (67 – 60 points)	Understands and discusses basic concepts. Minimal use of readings and examples. Some key issues were identified. (59 – 53 points)	Gathers and understands simple concepts related to the topic; discussion superficial; few or no examples given; key issues missing. (52 – 0 points)
Conventions (25 points possible)	Few spelling or grammatical errors; well organized. Key organizing thesis present. (25 – 23 points)	Occasional spelling or grammatical errors. Some sense of a thesis statement. (22 – 20 points)	Frequent errors; thesis not clear. (19 – 17 points)	Multiple grammatical and spelling errors; no thesis present. (16 – 0 points)

Quizzes (20%):

There will be 6 (six) timed quizzes throughout the semester. Quizzes will cover readings and lectures that correspond with the topics of the modules for which they are assigned. See the course schedule below for when the quizzes are assigned.

Exams (15% each):

There will be 3 (three) equally weighted exams throughout the course. A schedule of the exams and what content they will cover is below:

- Exam 1 (Feb. 6): Weeks 1 – 4
- Exam 2 (Mar. 13): Weeks 5 – 9
- Exam 3 (Apr. 24): Weeks 11 – 15

Exams will cover material from lectures, discussions, and readings. The exams are *not* cumulative. Please be aware, however, that while the exams are not cumulative, some information learned early in the semester may still be relevant and useful for understanding information covered later in the term.

Viewing Grades

Students will be able to view all grades and comments on their written work through UF's E-Learning platform, Canvas.

UF's Grading Policy

This course will follow UF's grading scheme. The following cutoffs will be used for grades:

93.0 – 100% (A)	83.0 – 86.9% (B)	73.0 – 76.9% (C)	63.0 – 66.9% (D)
90.0 – 92.9% (A-)	80.0 – 82.9% (B-)	70.0 – 72.9% (C-)	60.0 – 62.9% (D+)
87.0 – 89.9% (B+)	77.0 – 79.9% (C+)	67.0 – 69.9% (D+)	<60% (F)

Information on current UF grading policies for assigning grade points can be found [here](#).

How to Succeed

Taking a course online can be a lot of fun, but staying on top of course requirements and assignments is essential for success. Here are some tips that will help you get the most out of this course while taking full advantage of the online format:

- Schedule "class times" for yourself. It is important to do the coursework on time each week. You will receive 0 points for work that is turned in late!
- Read **ALL** the material contained in this Syllabus and on the Canvas site. There is a lot of helpful information that can save you time and help you meet the objectives of the course.
- Print out the Course Schedule located at the bottom of this Syllabus and check things off as you go or use whatever planner/calendar tool you find most helpful to stay organized and on track.

- Take advantage of office hours and ask for help or clarification of the material if you need it!
- Relatedly ... **do not wait to ask questions!** Waiting to ask a question might cause you to miss a due date for an assignment, or the question may come too late in the semester for me to help you out. My job is to answer your questions, so please never hesitate to reach out. As soon as something goes awry and you need help, **let me know**.
- Do your work well before the due dates. Sometimes things happen. If your computer goes down when you are trying to submit an assignment, you'll need time to get to another machine.
- To be extra safe, back up your written work and notes to an external hard drive, thumb drive, or through a cloud service (e.g., Google Drive, OneDrive, etc.).

Taking an online course has its benefits, but students need to be aware that online learning can also present significant challenges, particularly to individuals who are not 'self-starters' or those who do not possess good time management skills. The online classroom is available to you 24 hours a day. Unlike traditional instructional settings in which each student gets the same class and in-person access to the instructor, the online setting means that every student works when they want to work, and that communication with me is up to the student. In theory, this type of instruction should be more adaptable to a variety of schedules and learning styles. The reality is, however, that some students seem unwilling (though I believe all are able) to create their own virtual classroom. This can result in procrastination and low-quality performance. Recognizing that everyone learns differently, I'm not going to prescribe the 'best way' to approach the course. You must put in the work to discover what works best for you. You should note, however, that this course is not self-paced. You are expected to adhere to the weekly class calendar and due dates.

Resources Available to Students

Accommodations

Students who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs as early as possible in the semester.

Health & Wellness Resources

If you or someone you know is struggling with any crisis, including, but not limited to, gender, sexual, racial, or domestic violence, there are many community and University of Florida resources available. Some of these include:

- U Matter, We Care: 352-392-1575, umatter@ufl.edu, or visit their [website](#)
- Counseling and Wellness Center: 352-392-1575, counseling@ufl.edu, or visit their [website](#)
- Alachua County Crisis Center's Crisis Line: 352-264-6789
- Student Health Care Center: 352-392-1161 (24/7), shcc@ufl.edu, or visit their [website](#)
- UFPD Office of Victim Services: 352-392-1111, police@ufl.edu
- UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: 352-733-0111
- GatorWell Health Promotion Services: 352-273-4450, or visit their [website](#)

Academic Resources

The resources listed below are not exhaustive of all the academic resources that are available to students, but these encapsulate those that are helpful for students seeking library support or those looking for help with writing, tutoring, and general study skills:

- Library Support: 866-281-6309, ask@ufl.libanswers.com, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>.
- Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138, <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>.
- Academic Resources: provides services like tutoring, <https://academicresources.clas.ufl.edu>.
- UF IT Student Help Desk: 352-392-4357, learning-support@ufl.edu.

University Policies

Academic Integrity

"On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment."

As members of the UF community, we are all bound by the [Honor Pledge](#) above, which is required or implied on all work submitted for credit. The Student Honor Code and Conduct Code (Regulation 4.040) specify a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code, as well as the process for reported allegations and sanctions that may be implemented. All potential violations of the code will be reported to Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. If a student is found responsible for an Honor Code violation in this course, the instructor will enter a Grade Adjustment sanction which may be up to or including failure of the course. For additional information, see <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>.

As the Honor Pledge relates to the work in this course, plagiarizing written work (which includes having AI write for you) and cheating on exams are unacceptable. Honor code violations often occur when students feel rushed and overwhelmed. If this happens, do not panic, and instead reach out to me so we can address the situation together.

In-Class Recording

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures; however, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. **Please note that this means that any in-class discussions or student presentations cannot be recorded.** Students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. More information about in-class recording can be found [here](#).

Procedure for Conflict Resolution

Any classroom issues, disagreements, or grade disputes should be discussed first between the instructor and the student. If the problem cannot be resolved, please contact Dr. Ben Smith (bbsmith@ufl.edu, 352-273-2345). Be prepared to provide documentation of the problem, as well as all graded materials for the semester. Issues that cannot be resolved departmentally will be referred to the University Ombuds Office (<http://www.ombuds.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1308) or the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu>; 352-392-1261).

UF Course Evaluation Process

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways: (1) the email they receive from GatorEvals; (2) their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals; or (3) the central portal at <https://my-ufl.bluera.com>.

Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Schedule

Week	Module Topic	Readings	Weekly Assignment
Week 1: January 12 – 18	Welcome to POS2041! Syllabus Overview & Democracy and American Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus • “Welcome to the Course” Canvas Page • <i>TSD</i> Chapter 1 • The Declaration of Independence • The Preamble to the Constitution 	<u>Quiz 1</u>
Week 2: January 20 – 25	The Constitution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>TSD</i> Chapter 2 • Federalist #51 • Brutus 1 (Anti-Federalist) 	<u>Quiz 2</u> <u>Discussion Week #1</u>
Week 3: January 26 – February 1	Federalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>TSD</i> Chapter 3 • <i>DR</i> Ch. 3, Should Marijuana Policy be Set by the States or Federal Government? [On Canvas] 	<u>Debate Reaction 1</u> <u>Discussion Week #2</u>
Week 4: February 2 – 8	The Structural Foundations of American Government & Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>TSD</i> Chapter 4 • “The changing face of Congress in 7 charts” (<i>Pew Research Center</i>) 	<u>Exam 1:</u> Friday, February 6
Week 5: February 9 – 15	Congress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>TSD</i> Chapter 11 • Article I of the Constitution • <i>DR</i> Ch. 11, Should Proportional Representation be Adopted for U.S. House Elections? [On Canvas] 	<u>Debate Reaction 2</u> <u>Discussion Week #3</u>

Week 6: February 16 – 22	The Presidency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>TSD</i> Chapter 12 • Article II of the Constitution 	<u>Quiz 3</u>
Week 7: February 23 – March 1	The Courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>TSD</i> Chapter 14 • Article III of the Constitution • <i>DR</i> Ch. 18, Should the Terms of Supreme Court Justices be Limited to 18 Years? [On Canvas] 	<u>Debate Reaction 3</u> <u>Discussion Week #4</u>
Week 8: March 2 – 8	The Executive Branch (the Bureaucracy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>TSD</i> Chapter 13 	<u>Quiz 4</u>
Week 9: March 9 – 15	Civil Liberties & Civil Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>TSD</i> Chapters 15 & 16 • The Bill of Rights (Amendments 1 – 10 of the Constitution) 	<u>Exam 2:</u> Friday, March 13
Week 10: March 16 – 22	** SPRING BREAK, NO WORK (YAY)! **		
Week 11: March 23 – 29	Political Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>TSD</i> Chapter 9 • Cohen Reading (2020) • Pew Research Center Report (2022) • Greenblatt Reading (2013) 	<u>Quiz 5</u> <u>Discussion Week #5</u>

Week 12: March 30 – April 5	Voting, Campaigns, & Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>TSD</i> Chapter 10 • <i>DR</i> Ch. 4, Should States Enact Voter ID Laws and Reduce Early Voting? [On Canvas] 	<u>Debate Reaction 4</u> <u>Discussion Week #6</u>
Week 13: April 6 – 12	Interest Groups & Social Movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>TSD</i> Chapter 7 • <i>TSD</i> Chapter 8 	<u>Quiz 6</u>
Week 14: April 13 – 19	Public Opinion & The News Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>TSD</i> Chapter 5 • <i>TSD</i> Chapter 6 • <i>DR</i> Ch. 5, Should Congress Bring Back the Fairness Doctrine? [On Canvas] 	<u>Debate Reaction 5</u> <u>Discussion Week #7</u>
Week 15: April 20 – 22	Where To Go From Here	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See materials on the Canvas page for Module 15! • Study for Exam 3! 	<u>Exam 3:</u> Friday, April 24

Last updated: November 10, 2025