

POS2041 (3 CREDITS)
AMERICAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

General Education Core: Social Sciences (S)
Section(s): 13781, 13782, 13783, 13784, 16648, 16907,
17549, 17550, 17551, 22897, and 23561
(Spring 2026)

Instructor:	J.S. Truscott	Email:	jaketruscott@ufl.edu
Class Time:	MW 9:35-10:25	Class Location:	WEIM 1064
Office:	Anderson 317	Office Hours:	W 1:00-3:00

Course Description

In this course, students explore the structure and operation of the American constitutional republic. Topics include the philosophical and historical foundations of U.S. government – including the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and its amendments, and the Federalist Papers. Students will further examine the three branches of government, the policy-making process, and the ways citizens can collectively engage in civil society and influence government action.

State Core Student Learning Outcomes

Civic Literacy Competencies

	Students will demonstrate...	Evaluation
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understanding of the basic principles and practices of America's constitutional republic• Knowledge of the nation's founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and its amendments, and the Federalist Papers• Knowledge of landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation, and landmark executive actions• Knowledge of the history and development of the American federal government and its impact on law and society	Examinations, Quizzes, and CR Essays
Critical Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An ability to apply course material to contemporary political issues and debates	Discussion Sections and CR Essays
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The ability to engage in discussion and civil debate on American politics that are associated with multiple points of view	Discussion Sections and CR Essays

For additional details concerning general education subject objectives, please visit [HERE](#).

Textbook

The main text for this course will guide most of our weekly discussions. It is expected that you will have read all of the assigned readings prior to the start of each class.

- *We the People* (15th Edition) – by Benjamin Ginsburg, Caroline J. Tolbert, Andrea L. Campbell, and Megan M. Francis (ISBN: 978-1-324-08542-3)

Additional Notes:

- While I will be teaching from the 15th Edition, earlier editions would likely suffice. Page numbers, chapter organization, and examples used to articulate substantive concepts will likely be different across editions, though the substantive focus of the themes used to structure the text as a whole generally remains consistent.
- There is an array of different versions for each edition of *We the People* (Full Text, Core, and Essentials), please only purchase a *Full* version.
- The publisher (*W.W. Norton*) likewise facilitates different purchase options for the text (e-book, paperback, and hardcover). Although I do not have a preference re: what format you purchase, a purchase directly from the publisher will grant you access to their full suite of study materials and other supplemental guides. I do not assign quizzes through their InQuizitive platform, but these materials could be of particular use when studying for our quizzes and examinations.

Materials and Supply Fee

Not Applicable. However, students must download the [iClicker](#) app.

Grading Policy

Midterm Exam	25%
Final Exam	25%
Critical Response Essay	20%
Quizzes (4)	20%
Participation	10%

Grading Scale for Final Semester Grades

100-94 A	79.9-77 C+	63.9-60 D-
93.9-90 A-	76.9-74 C	59.9-0 F
89.9-87 B+	73.9-70 C-	
86.9-84 B	69.9-67 D+	
83.9-80 B-	66.9-64 D	

Note: A minimum grade of C is required for general education credit. For more information concerning the University of Florida's *Grades and Grading Policy*, see [Here](#).

Assessment and Grading

Item	Description
Examinations (2)	Your exams will consist of a Midterm and Final exam, both of which will be in person. The Final Exam will not be strictly cumulative – i.e., the final examination will only include material discussed after the midterm. They will both include a combination of multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank questions.
Quizzes (4)	There will be (4) quizzes scheduled throughout the term. They will be made available on Canvas at 5:00pm on Fridays and due by 11:59pm on the Sunday immediately following. For example, Quiz 1 will release on Friday, September 5 and be due on Canvas by 11:59pm on Sunday, September 7 . Similar to your examinations, quizzes will include a combination of multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank questions.
Critical Response Essays (2)	During the course of the term, you will be required to complete (2) critical response essay prompts that will be submitted to Canvas. Prompts are listed below with the <i>Course Schedule</i> , and a general rubric and essay tips are available at the conclusion of this syllabus. Each essay will be due by 11:59pm on the Sunday following that week's material. For example, although we will discuss Federalism from January 26-30 , the essay prompt for that week is not due on Canvas until 11:59pm on Sunday, February 8 . While you are required to submit at least two essays, only the one given better marks will count towards your final grade.
Participation	<p>Your participation will be graded by attendance and participation during:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <u>Lecture Periods</u>: I encourage thoughtful participation in lectures. We will use the iClicker technology to enable snap polling, stimulate discussion, and track lecture participation and attendance. 2. <u>Discussion Sections</u>: Attendance is recorded weekly for your discussion section meetings, though I do allow for two unexcused absences during the semester (more information in <i>Attendance Policy</i>). Absences recorded beyond those two will result in a 1-point reduction of your participation grade (<i>see</i> table below). <p><u>Participation Grade Scale (Points):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10: Active participation and attendance during lecture (discussion section) meetings and no absences apart from those excused or two allowed 9: Generally same as above but at least one unexcused absence beyond the two allotted 8: Often same as above but two unexcused absences beyond free allotment 0-7: Varying participation and/or several unexcused absences

Attendance Policy

Meeting	Policy
Lectures	I will not be recording attendance during every lecture meeting. However, as noted above, I will be soliciting responses to prompted questions using iClicker (available free to UF students) during most classes. For more information related to iClicker , please see <i>Assessment and Grading</i> → <i>Participation</i> .
Discussion Sections	<p>Your discussion section leaders will be taking weekly attendance at your discussion section meetings. That being said, I am fully aware that you likely have other things going on in your lives – and the universe has an unfortunate tendency to introduce challenges and obstacles that significantly disrupt your usual schedules at the least opportune times. I provide (2) unexcused absences for your breakout sections without justification – i.e., you do not need to tell your instructor why you are missing class. Additional unexcused absences will result in a reduced participation grade for the semester.</p> <p>Excused absences will not count towards your free absence – these include (for example): <i>...illness; Title IX-related situations; serious accidents or emergencies affecting the student, their roommates, or their family; special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences); military obligation; severe weather conditions that prevent class participation; religious holidays; participation in official university activities (e.g., music performances, athletic competition, debate); and court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena). Other reasons (e.g., a job interview or club activity) may be deemed acceptable if approved by the instructor.</i></p>

For more information concerning the University's policies towards attendance and subsequent grace periods to accomplish missed work and other assignments, please visit [here](#).

Communication with Instructor

If you need to contact me for whatever reason (E-mail: jaketruscott@ufl.edu), I ask that you first contact your section's discussion leader. Given the size of the course, they are best suited to promptly answer your immediate questions or concerns related to the course – e.g., assignments, attendance, grades, or other course-related inquiries.

Discussion Leaders (E-mail):

Hunter Tierman (h.tierman@ufl.edu)

Roshaun Colvin (r.colvin@ufl.edu)

Abida Sultana (sultana.a@ufl.edu)

Jane Rolland Grady (gradyjanerolland@ufl.edu)

James Justus (justusj@ufl.edu)

Discussion Sections and Discussion Leaders

I deeply appreciate our outstanding team of graduate discussion leaders who will be facilitating your weekly discussion sections. Each week, you will meet with your assigned discussion leader — the table below lists section numbers, meeting times and locations, and instructor information for your reference. Your discussion leader will also post a section-specific syllabus on Canvas during the first week of the semester, which will include other pertinent information related to your section. In these discussion sections, you will participate in meaningful discussions that connect to the broader themes of that week's material.

Section	Meeting Location & Time	Instructor	Office Hours
13781	Matherly 0103 (F 9:35-10:25)		
13782	Matherly 0005 (Th 3:00-3:50)		
13783	Matherly 0010 (Th 12:50-1:40)		
13784	Matherly 0103 (F 10:40-11:30)		
16648	Matherly 0118 (F 4:05-4:55)		
16907	Matherly 0118 (Th (9:35-10:25)		
17549	Matherly 0114 (F 8:30-9:20)		
17550	Matherly 0118 (Th 10:40-11:30)		
17551	CS & Eng. E222 (Th 11:45-12:35)		
22897	Little 0233 (Th 1:55-2:45)		
23561	Matherly 0006 (Th 3:00-3:50)		

Student Evaluations (Gator Evals)

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

Syllabus Policy

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, if necessary. I will give you fair notice (at least a week) if something, such as a reading assignment, is to change. However, it should be noted that these changes only include items that serve to benefit student learning – these do not include alterations to the grading scheme, attendance policy, student learning objectives, among other things.

University Policies & Resources

This course complies with all UF academic policies. For information on those policies and for resources for students, please see [HERE](#).

Key Dates

- Monday, January 19 – No Class (Holiday)
- Sunday, January 25– Quiz 1 Due
- Sunday, February 15 – Quiz 2 Due
- Wednesday, March 11 – Midterm
- Sunday, March 29 – Quiz 3 Due
- Sunday, April 19 – Quiz 4 Due
- Wednesday, April 29 – Final Exam

Course Schedule

Please have all readings completed before coming to class each week. Each chapter is approximately 20-30 pages and includes an assortment of tables, figures, and other images. I would estimate approximately one hour to sufficiently read and take notes on each chapter.

Week 0 (1/12-1/16)

Topic: Syllabus (Introduction) & Americans and Their Political Values (Pt. 1)

Readings: Syllabus & *We the People* (Ch. 1, p. 2-35)

Week 1 (1/21-1/23)

Topic: Americans and Their Political Values (Pt. 1)

Readings: *We the People* (Ch. 1)

Week 2 (1/21-1/23)

Topic: The Founding & the Constitution

Readings: *We the People* (Ch. 2, p. 36-69); (Federalist 10 and 51, p. A25-A36)

Critical Response Topic: Examine the relationship between the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. To what extent does the Constitution address the grievances outlined by the Continental Congress in the Declaration? Which concerns were effectively resolved, which were only partially addressed, and which remain unaddressed (if any)? In addition, consider the modern context: Are there issues or principles from the Declaration that you believe still require attention from Americans today? (Due 2/1)

Week 3 (1/26-1/30)

Topic: Federalism

Readings: *We the People* (Ch. 3, p. 70-97)

Critical Response Topic: Consider yourself a policy analyst researching the modern immigration debate, which often places state and federal government agencies at odds in terms of enforcement and deterrence. Provide a discussion outlining the contemporary debate, as well as whether immigration and border policy should be addressed at the state or national level. Justify your decision. You might wish to acknowledge how state-level preferences towards this issue are not universal. (Due 2/8)

Week 4 (2/2-2/6)

Topic: Civil Liberties & Civil Rights

Readings: *We the People* (Ch. 4-5, p. 98-182)

Week 5 (2/9-2/13)

Topic: Public Opinion

Readings: *We the People* (Ch. 6, p. 182-223)

Critical Response Topic: Take the Political Compass test at www.politicalcompass.org or the Pew Research Center's political typology quiz at www.people-press.org. These sites rate your political ideology based on your opinions of social and policy issues. Reflect on your results: Were they consistent with how you perceive your own beliefs? Did anything surprise you? In your response, consider whether your individual opinions or your broader ideological label better captures who you are politically. Which matters more in defining your political identity, and why? (Due 2/22)

Week 6 (2/16-2/20)

Topic: The Media & Political Information

Readings: *We the People* (Ch. 7, p. 224-259)

Critical Response Topic: Pick a current political topic and compare how it is reported by one of the national news outlets (ABC, CBS, or NBC), one of the cable news outlets (CNN, MSNBC, or FOX NEWS), and one newspaper (*New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, or the *Washington Post*). Identify the different frames and describe their impact. (Due 3/1)

Week 7 (2/23-2/27)

Topic: Political Participation & Voting

Readings: *We the People* (Ch. 8, p. 260-297)

Critical Response Topic: Despite widespread recognition of the importance of political participation, voter turnout and civic engagement remain uneven across populations and elections. Identify and analyze the key barriers that prevent or dissuade citizens from participating fully in democratic processes. Afterwards, propose and evaluate a potential strategy (or strategies) that could effectively increase political participation. Justify your answer. (Due 3/8)

Week 8 (3/2-3/6)

Topic: Political Parties

Readings: *We the People* (Ch. 9, p. 298-333)

Week 9 (3/9-3/13)

Topic: Campaigns, Elections, and Interest Groups

Readings: *We the People* (Ch. 10-11, p. 334-403)

Critical Response Topic: Consider the role of special interests in American politics. Choose (3) interest groups and describe how they can influence political behavior and public policy. (Due 3/22)

Week 10 (3/16-3/20)

No Class – Spring Break

Week 11 (3/23-3/27)

Topic: Congress

Readings: *We the People* (Ch. 12, p. 404-445)

Critical Response Topic: Investigate your representative's recent voting records and ideological placement ([Gov-Track](#)). Make a list of five issues he or she voted on, and state whether you would have voted the same way on behalf of your district – taking into account your district's economic and socio-economic characteristics. Justify your decisions. (Due 4/5)

Week 12 (3/30-4/3)

Topic: The Presidency & Bureaucracy

Readings: *We the People* (Ch. 13-14, p. 446-513)

Critical Response Topic: Choose (3) bureaucratic agencies/institutions in the American government and describe their roles and duties. In your response, consider why they were established, how their responsibilities have changed, and whether they should be reformed (or perhaps eliminated). Justify your answer. (Due 4/12)

Week 13 (4/6-4/10)

Topic: The Federal Courts

Readings: *We the People* (Ch. 15, p. 514-551)

Critical Response Topic: Consider the growing dependence on the federal courts to solve policy disputes. In your response, consider (3) policy areas where the Supreme Court has offered rulings in recent years that concern important social or political issues. Finally, discuss if the federal courts solving these policy disputes is a good thing. Justify your answer. (Due 4/19)

Week 14 (4/13-4/17)

Topic: Economic Policy & Social Policy

Readings: *We the People* (Ch. 16-17, 552-623)

Note: Quiz 4 Friday (4/18)

Critical Response Topic: Imagine you are a policy aide working in the White House. Write a policy memo that discusses the (3) most pressing issues in American domestic policy. These can include any assortment of policy areas. In your response, consider how these issues developed, why they are important, and propose solutions that might help fix them in the future. (Due 4/26)

Week 15 (4/20-4/22)

Topic: Foreign Policy

Readings: *We the People* (Ch. 18, 624-661)

Final Exam: (4/29) 3:00-5:00

Critical Response Essay Rubric & Help Guide

Critical Response Essays Rubric (20pts)

Points	Structure	Grammar & Syntax	Formatting	Evidence
5	Clearly identified thesis statement with body paragraphs that support (reinforce) core claims or positions.	No grammar or syntax concerns	Properly structured title page, page numbers aligned bottom-right, and properly structured works cited page.	Proper inclusion of necessary references that are cited both in-text and in a works cited page with proper formatting. Sources used to reinforce (support) author's contributions, rather than supplement.
4	Thesis statement (body paragraphs) is (are) identifiable but requires subtle improvement.	1-2 Grammar (Syntax)	1 Formatting Issue	Evidence is included but formatting is misconfigured or used to supplement contribution.
3	Thesis and body paragraphs not identified or need significant improvement.	3(+) Grammar (Syntax) Issues	2(+) Formatting Issues	Several concerns with inclusion and usage of outside sources.
2 (or Fewer)	Thesis not identified and body paragraphs need significant improvement	Several Grammar (Syntax) Concerns	Several Formatting Issues	No outside references or omission of necessary citations.

Critical Response Essay Help Guide

This document will serve as a general guide for prospective questions that you might have related to the critical response paper assignment. Please don't hesitate to ask if you have any questions or concerns!

Q: What is a critical response paper?

A: A critical response essay is an essay requirement that asks you to critically analyze and respond to a prompt that corresponds with the course material that we are discussing in a given week.

Q: How many papers will we need to complete throughout the semester?

A: You only need to complete one critical response paper throughout the term, though you are free to submit several. I will accept whichever is the best to count towards your final grade.

Q: When are the prompts available, and when are they due?

A: The prompts can be seen as entries under **Critical Response Topic** for an associated week. You are free to start working on a topic at any time, though each prompt is due at 11:59pm on the following Sunday.

Q: How will we know which response paper topic to complete?

A: The choice is entirely at your discretion. I am giving you the leeway and flexibility to consider your own subject interests and other commitments in deciding which slate and topic to complete. My advice on this is rather simple: *make sure to be strategic about selecting a topic*. If you choose to wait until the last slate of questions to submit a response essays – that is fine, but make sure you actually do it. The essay requirement is a pretty significant chunk of your grade, so don't put yourself in a position where you don't do it because your misjudged how busy you'd be when the last due date approaches.

Q: What is the page (word) requirement?

A: There really isn't a page (word) requirement. That being said, you are all intuitive enough to understand when you haven't done enough work. If you are able to look at your work and think that it is a substantive essay, then you are definitely in a good place. Alternatively, if you look at your work and think it is closer to a discussion board post, you probably haven't met the threshold yet. As a general rule, I would say to aim for 6-8 pages, but some prompts can be accomplished with less than that, or alternatively might require more. I am grading you on the substance of your submission – not whether you meet some arbitrary word or page count.

Q: What is the document formatting requirement?

A: For each submission I want a title page with your name, date, course number, and some indication of the slate and prompt you are writing on. Text should be Times New Roman (12pt), double-spaced, with standard 1-inch margins.

Q: Do we need to use sources, evidence, or other outside resources?

A: Absolutely. Please use any and all accredited sources that would be necessary to articulate your points or positions. Especially if information is not common knowledge – or if you are directly referencing a word, cite accordingly and include a references (works cited) page. I have no preference for which citation style you use (APA, MLA, Chicago, etc), so long as it is present and consistent.

Q: Are there sources we should avoid?

A: Yes. Make sure that you only include reputable, accredited sources. That is a very broad definition, but it essentially means that you are free to use just about everything except blog posts and online encyclopedias (*Wikipedia*, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, etc.). If you have any questions about your sources, or if you really just not sure if the source you want to use is legitimate, don't hesitate to ask!

Q: Is there a general essay format that we need to follow?

A: Yes and no. Every paper needs to have the basics (Introduction with thesis statement, body paragraphs, conclusion, and works cited). If your paper is solely an argumentative essay, then it should definitely follow the natural essay format. However, if yours is a policy memorandum, it will be a little different. Policy memos should still have the basic foundations of an essay, but rather than flowing from paragraph to paragraph with transition sentences, you are free to separate them a bit more and approach each policy topic as its own small paper.

Q: Are there any writing tips, insights, or other advice for things we should do or avoid when writing our response papers?

A: Great Question. Here are a few items you should be considerate of:

- Avoid semi-colons – It is very (very) rare that they're used correctly, so just avoid it.
- Avoid long, run-on sentences.
- Don't let citations serve as a substitute for your contribution – i.e., if you're going to pull a direct quote from a work, it should not be a stand-alone sentence in your paper. Quotations are meant to support your contribution, not supplement it.
- **Most Importantly:** Read your paper aloud before submitting. We all write with internal voices that tend to mask choppy syntax because, in our minds, we know how it is supposed to flow. Problem is, readers don't always share your internal meter. Your writing needs to be generalizably structured so that any reader could understand the natural flow without running into confusingly structured syntax. Reading the paper aloud, like a speech, will help you identify such sentences – because it mimics how an objective reviewer would read your work.