

**American Government—POLS 1101/002**  
**3-Credits**  
**Fall Semester 2009**  
**MW 4:30PM—5:45PM**  
**Room J-109**

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Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore J. Lowi, and Margaret Weir. 2009. *We The People: An Introduction to American Politics*. Seventh Edition (Shorter). New York: W.W. Norton and Company. ISBN: 978-0393-17952-1 (Georgia Edition)

In addition, I will refer you to several readings designed to enhance your understanding of concepts in the book and to facilitate discussions. You will be responsible for any information found in any of these extra readings on exams and in discussions.

You will choose books and articles, either biographies of a past or present political figure from Georgia or representing Georgia; discussing a crucial election in Georgia history; or discussing an aspect or structure of the Georgia political system for your term paper.

Course Description:

This course is a study of the structure and function of the federal government from its antecedents to its contemporary challenges, focusing on the people of the United States, the structure and process of their government, and philosophical underpinnings of Democracy in this country. The course satisfies the U.S. and Georgia History and government requirement.

Learning Outcomes: Students will be able to:

1. Define democracy and note variations in democratic systems: such as direct democracy and pluralist, elitist, and participatory theories of democracy.
2. Be able to understand and illustrate the basic organization of the U.S. government as laid out in the U.S. Constitution.
3. Describe the powers allocated to each branch of government, explaining the founders' belief in the necessity of a system of checks and balances and separation of powers, as well as federalism.

4. Explain the important civil liberties and civil rights granted to all citizens.
5. Describe the American political system, as it exists today, including the influence of political parties, interest groups, mass media, and new technology.

### Course Objectives:

1. The course will teach students to define and recognize democracy, noting variations both in theoretical understandings (such as pluralist, elitist, and participatory theories) and in practice.
2. Students will learn the philosophical and moral underpinnings of the American political system as seen in the *Declaration of Independence* and the *United States Constitution*.
3. Students will understand the basic organization of the political/governmental system laid out in the *United States Constitution*, including the role of the various branches, federalism, and the civil liberties and civil rights of citizens.
4. Students will learn about the formation, measurement, and role of public opinion as it relates to voting and other political behavior.
5. Students will examine the internal working of the political branches of the U.S. government, including the executive, judicial, and legislative branches in policymaking and politics.
6. Students will examine the influence of organized interests in policymaking and the political system.
7. Students will be introduced to the role of Georgia and Georgians in the American political system.
8. Students will learn to learn to organize their thoughts in order to present their knowledge in both discussion formats and in research papers, in addition to traditional examination settings.

### Course Evaluation

This course is a survey of American government with a component of Georgia state government, combining aspects of lecture, discussion, outside research, and evaluation of student performance. Students will be expected to read the textbook and any other materials provided, as well as attending every class. Students should be prepared to engage in class discussion as well.

Course requirements and grades act as a dialogue between students and their instructor. Students provide evidence of their knowledge and faculty members provide information as to the level of that attainment. Because students bring different strengths and weaknesses to their academic studies, it is the instructor's responsibility to provide an assessment of performance that uses as many criteria possible, such as they have bearing on the course. There are seven components to each student's grade:

Attendance—(10%). Each student will be allowed up to three absences to be used during non-exam class sessions. Students will not be asked why they missed, and explanations will not positively affect their grades. Any absence beyond three will require evidence of the necessity of the absence to be provided by the day the student's return. Even when excused, excessive absences adversely affect a student's grade by causing the student to miss the presentation of required material. Unexcused absences will result in a 2.5% reduction in a student's final grade with no maximum number of points deducted. No student will receive a passing grade unless he or she has completed all assigned quizzes (except one) and the exams, as well as the term paper. Absences from exams will require satisfactory proof of the necessity of missing the exam within three days.

Discussion—(10%). Each student will participate in at least five directed class discussions (out of ten scheduled), in addition to the week the student participates on the discussion panel. Students will receive an evaluation of their contribution for each class discussion in which they participate. Since all points are counted in a student's favor, it makes sense to participate in as many discussions as possible (at least until you get 25 points). Each student will be scored on a scale of 1-5 for each discussion session in which he or she participates. Students with a total of 25 discussion points or more (in up to nine discussions) will receive 10 of 10 points. Students with 22-24 points will receive nine of ten points; 17-21 points will receive an eight of ten; 13-16 points will receive a six of ten; and those with fewer than 13 points will receive two points for every five points scored.

Discussion Panel—(10%). Each student will participate on one discussion panel during the semester. This will involve writing a memo with ten talking points supporting a student's position, holding a discussion with the instructor in front of the class, and preparing at least three questions for the class as a whole. At the end of class, the student should turn in his or her memo. Panel membership will be established during the fourth week of the semester with the priority of a student's choice established by scores on the first quiz. Students who miss quiz #1 will be assigned randomly to an unfilled panel.

Term Paper on Georgia's Political System—(10%). Students will write a four to six page term paper on one of three possible topics involving Georgia politics. 1) Students may write a biography of a current or former Georgia politician who made a major impact on the American political system, evaluating the politician's impact, making a personal judgment about the politician backed up by evidence from at least three sources in addition to your textbook. 2) Compare one institution (branch of government, interest group community, etc.) in Georgia to that institution in some other state or group of states, using at least three sources in addition to the textbook. 3) Evaluate a political campaign in Georgia within the past ten years, using three sources other than the textbook. Whatever your choice, you should use concepts you found within the textbook to explain topics within your paper, you should not make assertions you cannot support with evidence, and you should avoid online encyclopedias (such as wikipedia). The term paper topic is due by the last class period of the third week of classes. You cannot start your term paper until your topic is approved, and you will lose one percent of your total course grade per week, if you do not have

an approved topic by the end of September. The term paper is due November 30<sup>th</sup>. More details to follow.

Quizzes—(20% total). Students will have six quizzes, using a fill-in-the-blank format. These quizzes will require students to know the definitions of key terms from their textbook. Any key term for any chapter since the most recent quiz will be fair game. Each student will have only his or her best five quizzes count. If a student misses one quiz, that grade will just count as the one dropped quiz. Additional missed quizzes (provided a student has missed three or fewer classes or his/her absence is excused) must be made up by the Catch-Up-Days (November 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>), or the student will be required to take a 0 for the assignment. Two missed quizzes by a student with three or more absences for the semester, where the absence is unexcused, will result in the student's failure of the course.

Exams—(20% each). Each student will take a midterm (During Week 7) and the Final (During the Exam Week). The exam will be in-class and consist of 40 multiple choice questions worth 50%, five short answer questions worth 25%, and one essay based on the class discussions worth 25%. Students must take both exams in order to pass the course. In the event of an excused absence the midterm can be taken at any time on or before the Catch-Up-Days. Not doing so will result in failure or an incomplete at the instructor's discretion. Students with an excused absence for the final must take the exam on or before December 12<sup>th</sup> or they will receive an incomplete or failure at the instructor's discretion.

### General Policies:

1. Students are given three absences in order to account for foreseen and unforeseen emergencies. These might include medical emergencies involving you or your family, religious holidays not on the university schedule, and problems involving work or transportation. Excused absences beyond those allotted, and for exams, quizzes, or panels, will be granted when students are able to document a problem requiring their immediate attention and in which inattention would result in a significant negative consequence. My interpretation of this policy suggests meetings with other people on campus, oversleeping, recurrent transportation problems, and job interviews do not qualify.
2. Disruptive and/or abusive behavior will not be tolerated. Any student who engages in repeated episodes or if the behavior is extreme, will be instructed to leave the classroom. The student's continuance in the course will subsequently be decided either in consultation with the instructor or through the normal university appeals process.
3. Academic dishonesty is defined as presenting the work of others as your own or knowingly presenting false information as factually true. For this course, plagiarism on the term paper or copying the work of others on exams or quizzes is the primary vehicle for academic dishonesty. Failure

to cite term paper sources is plagiarism, as is working with others (strictly, if you told me you were working with someone else it would not be plagiarism but it would be insufficient effort to pass the course). Any student found to be cheating or engaging in plagiarism will fail the course and be referred to the university.

4. There is no extra credit.
5. There are two "Catch-Up Days" during the week of Thanksgiving. Students must have all missed assignments finished by those days, unless an extension has been approved. Each section will also take advantage of those days to catch up, if it has fallen behind other sections on the course schedule.
6. Students with disabilities who need special accommodations should contact the counselor working with students with disabilities at (678) 915-7244. I will endeavor to implement any suggested accommodations in consultation with the university.
7. The withdrawal deadline is October 13, 2009.

### Course Schedule

| Date | Class Topics | Graded Assignments | Readings |
|------|--------------|--------------------|----------|
|------|--------------|--------------------|----------|

|       |   |  |                            |
|-------|---|--|----------------------------|
| 8-24  | Course Introduction                           |  | Syllabus                   |
| 8-26  | American Political Culture                    | Discussion: Liberty, Equality, and Democracy | Chapter 1                  |
| 8-31  | Constitutional Democracy                      |  | Chapter 2                  |
| 9-2   | Georgia Politics                              | Discussion: Teach Me about Georgia           | Georgia Chapter            |
| 9-7   | <b>Labor Day</b>                              | No Class                                     | Handout                    |
| 9-9   | Federalism                                    | Term Paper Topic/Quiz #1                     | Chapter 3                  |
| 9-14  | Civil Liberties                               |  | Chapter 4                  |
| 9-16  | Civil Rights                                  |  | Chapter 5                  |
| 9-21  | Public Opinion                                |  | Chapter 6                  |
| 9-23  | The Myth of Ideology                          | Panel Discussion #1                          |                            |
| 9-28  | Political Parties                             |  | Chapter 9                  |
| 9-30  | The Future of Political Parties               | Panel Discussion #2<br>Quiz #2               |                            |
| 10-5  | The Media                                     |  | Chapter 7                  |
| 10-7  | <b>Exam</b>                                   | Midterm Exam                                 |                            |
| 10-12 | Political Participation and Voting            | <b>Withdrawal Deadline 10-13</b>             | Chapter 8                  |
| 10-14 | Is Turnout too Low?                           | Panel Discussion #3                          |                            |
| 10-19 | Campaigns and Elections                       |  | Chapter 10                 |
| 10-21 | Reforming the Electoral System                | Panel Discussion #4                          |                            |
| 10-26 | Groups and Interests                          |  | Chapter 11                 |
| 10-28 | Organized vs. Diffuse Interests               | Panel Discussion #5                          | Edelman (1960)             |
| 11-2  | Congress                                      |  | Chapter 12                 |
| 11-4  | Who is the Most Important Member of Congress? | Panel Discussion #6<br>Quiz #3               |                            |
| 11-9  | The Presidency                                |  | Chapter 13                 |
| 11-11 | Presidential Approval Truman to Obama         | Panel Discussion #7<br>Quiz #4               | Handout                    |
| 11-16 | The Bureaucracy                               |  | Chapter 14                 |
| 11-18 | The Federal Courts                            |  | Chapter 15                 |
| 11-23 | Catch Up Day (if Necessary)                   |  |                            |
| 11-25 | Thanksgiving Recess                           | No Class                                     |                            |
| 11-30 | Supreme Court Decision Theory                 | Term Paper Due                               | Handout                    |
| 12-2  | Supreme Court Confirmation Battles            | Panel Discussion #8<br>Quiz #5               | Handout                    |
| 12-7  | Reviewing the Course Discussions              | Term Paper Due                               | Talking Points from Panels |
| 12-9  | Review for Final                              | Quiz #6 (all key terms)                      |                            |
| Final | Final Exam                                    |  |                            |