

# U.S. GOVERNMENT & POLITICS

POL-110-001

Spring 2011

Monday, Wednesday, Friday  
11:30 am – 12:20 pm, Old Main 05

Instructor: Dr. Chris Gilbert  
Email: [cgilbert@gustavus.edu](mailto:cgilbert@gustavus.edu)

Office: Old Main 204B  
Office phone: 933-6093

**Chris's Office Hours:** Monday, 1:00 – 2:30 pm  
Tuesday, 12:30 – 3:00 pm  
Wednesday, 1:00 – 3:00 pm

**COURSE OVERVIEW:** This course introduces students to the institutions, policies, and processes that comprise the American political system. The course will address three central questions:

- What are the major characteristics of American political institutions (inside and outside government) and the people who run them?
- How has the American system of government changed over time, and what factors spark the continual evolution of key features in U.S. government and politics?
- **Why should we care** about any of this?

We will address these questions by focusing primarily on national politics and the federal government. We will give special attention to important historical events as well as contemporary political issues and debates. By the end of the course, you will be a more informed citizen, whether you want to be or not (and hopefully you will want to be!).

**AREA SOSCI:** This course satisfies the Gustavus general education Social Science requirement. Two aspects in particular make this course fit within the SOSCI area: 1) the subject matter – the nature of the political institutions that comprise the American system of government, and the actions of individuals within these institutions; 2) methods of inquiry – the readings and discussions will demonstrate the diverse perspectives from which political scientists study government and politics.

**BOOKS:** Both required books are available at the Book Mark:

- Karen O'Connor, Larry Sabato, and Alixandra Yanus, *Essentials of American Government: Roots and Reform (2011 edition ONLY)*. Abbreviated in syllabus as **OSY**. ISBN: 9780205825769
- Peter Woll, ed., *American Government: Readings and Cases (18<sup>th</sup> edition ONLY)*. Abbreviated in syllabus as **Woll**. ISBN: 9780205697984

**COURSE HOME PAGE:** <http://homepages.gac.edu/~cgilbert/p110/usgov.htm>

The course home page will have links to **all** class handouts, a daily schedule page that is regularly updated, information about exams and writing assignments, and other useful links for studying U.S. government. If you miss class, lose an important handout, or if our schedule changes, this is the place to go. Bookmark this page (or find the link via Moodle) and visit it on a regular basis!

**CLASS FORMAT:** This is **not** strictly speaking a lecture course, although I will be presenting material on most class days. A typical class period will cover material you have read in advance, elaborate on important topics the readings do not cover, and discuss the implications of this material. Occasional simulations/role-playing situations will also be used. You are expected to be prepared for class each day; see the attendance and participation section (page 4) for full details.

### GRADED ASSIGNMENTS

First exam (March 7)	20%*
Second exam (April 15)	25%*
* - the lower of the first two exam scores will count for 20% and the higher of the first two will count for 25%	
Final exam (May 20)	25%
News summaries (5 short papers)	15%
Woll brief summaries (2)	5%
Attendance and participation	10%

### GRADING SCALE

A =	93.000 average and above
A- =	90.000 through 92.999
B+ =	87.000 through 89.999
B =	83.000 through 86.999
B- =	80.000 through 82.999
C+ =	77.000 through 79.999
C =	73.000 through 76.999
C- =	70.000 through 72.999
D+ =	67.000 through 69.999
D =	60.000 through 66.999
F =	less than 60.000

### ASSIGNMENT DETAILS

**EXAMS:** Each exam will cover approximately one-third of the course; the final exam is **not** cumulative. Each exam will have a combination of multiple-choice, short paragraph identifications, and an essay question. At least one week before each exam, a study guide – with full details about question formats and topics covered – will be posted to the course website, to assist and direct your studying. **All students should expect to take all exams at the scheduled dates and times.**

**NEWS SUMMARIES:** This course covers contemporary U.S. politics, and therefore it is important for you to become familiar with current political events by regularly reading a good major national news source. Newspapers remain the best such sources; regularly reading the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, or the *Christian Science Monitor* will keep anyone very well informed about U.S. and international politics. Major news networks, cable news sources, and independent news organizations also have websites with a great deal of political content (for example, [politico.com](http://politico.com)). The leading national newspapers are available on campus, in the Gustavus library, and/or online (with most or nearly all content being free if you register).

To encourage you to foster the habit of regularly reading the newspaper or some other source that presents political news, and to make connections between our course material and today's political world, five times during the semester you will write short summaries of news articles on some designated topic. For each topic, I will provide you with some guidelines on what to look for in selecting articles; for some topics I will provide **one** of the articles as well. **Informational guidelines/initial articles will be posted on the course webpage.**

Your task for each news summary paper is to find two additional articles in addition to the one I give you, **or** to find three articles if you are not given an initial article. In a **short** paper (**one single-spaced page maximum**), *summarize all three articles* and *discuss one of them at more length* – explain the issue or problem at stake, describe what key political actors and institutions are doing/not doing, connect the article to what we have been reading and discussing in class, and (if you wish) offer some of your own thoughts on the issue in question.

These papers are due **in person, in class** on the designated due dates. Print your paper and bring it to class; we will be discussing the content of your papers during class on these due dates.

The **articles** on which these papers are based can be turned in two ways: 1) if the article(s) come from an actual newspaper or if you printed them out, attach the articles securely to your 1-page paper and turn in at class; 2) if you have only electronic articles and do not wish to print them, **e-mail Chris the links to each article by class time on the paper due date** (note that your 1-page paper is still due in class on these days).

Students who give advanced notice of an **excused absence** on paper due dates should turn in papers **prior to** (not after) the due date.

Late or incomplete papers (not turning in the 1-page summary, the articles/article links, or both) will lose 20 points (out of 100, equivalent to a two letter grade deduction) for the assignment and could lose more if not turned in within 24 hours of the due date.

To assist in writing these papers, the final page of this syllabus is a **style guide** for writing about government and politics. Please consult the style guide when writing your papers!!

**WOLL BRIEF SUMMARIES:** The Peter Woll-edited book *American Government: Readings and Cases* contains numerous reading selections – some old, some very recent – on U.S. government and politics. **TWICE** during the semester, you will be responsible for presenting to the class a **BRIEF** (2-3 minutes) oral summary of **one reading selection** from the Woll book, and for handing in a 1-page written version of your brief summary.

Your summary is due in written form at the end of the class period when you present. Papers should be **no more than one typed, double-spaced piece of paper**. If you present but do not have the written version completed, the paper loses 20 points (out of 100) and could lose more if not turned in within 24 hours. Failure to present on your assigned date will result in a 0 for this assignment.

You get to choose the reading for both of your summaries, by telling me in class or e-mailing me your choices. Sign-up for all summaries should be completed by **Tuesday, February 15**; as with all other assignments, the course webpage will maintain a complete list of who presents when, including these instructions.

Focus on two tasks with each summary: 1) **summarize** the reading's main points – think carefully about what the reading is about and pull out only the most important aspects to include in your summary; 2) **relate the reading to the class's main topic** – connect the reading to key points we've previously read

about or discussed, thus showing how this reading is relevant to the course.

**Everyone** is responsible for reading these selections, not just the presenter. We are using these summaries *to start a conversation* about these readings, not to be comprehensive in discussing all aspects of the readings.

**ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION:** Class attendance and class participation factor directly into your course grade (10%). This grade is based on how well you meet these expectations:

1) Please plan to attend every class session; attendance will be taken daily. If you are unable to attend, please advise me in advance when possible. Missing class due to illness is not going to adversely affect your grade. But accumulating more than 2 absences without some legitimate reason (e.g., being sick) and without making up the missed class will reduce this portion of your class grade. Absences may be made up by completing a short assignment of my choosing. ***I reserve the right to lower the final course grade of students who make it a habit of skipping this class, regardless of whether these repeated absences are made up.***

2) **Have the day's assigned reading completed before class, for every class.** This is the best way to maximize your learning (and your grade) in this course, and the best preparation for meeting all of the expectations that follow.

3) **Be prepared to show some understanding of what you have read.** If necessary, I will call randomly on people (not just volunteers) during class to answer questions. I expect you to be accountable by always being ready to answer, with the freedom to give less than a perfect answer, too – don't be afraid to be wrong and don't be afraid to be less than 100% right, either.

4) Feel free **to ask questions** (at any time), **to comment** (when appropriate) and **to have your comments challenged by others.** At all times I expect that all of us will respect one another's viewpoints when discussing political issues, ideas, and individual political figures.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CLASS POLICIES**

**CELL PHONES, IPODS, and other such electronic devices:** Turn them OFF when class is in session – no ringing/vibrating/texting/IM, no distractions for yourself, your classmates, or your professor. Using a laptop to take notes is acceptable as long as you perform NO non-class-related tasks while doing so (e.g. do not disrespect your professor and classmates by checking Facebook during class!!).

**SCHEDULE CONFLICTS:** Students with advance notice of schedule conflicts (e.g., school-related activities that conflict with our class time) should present a list of these to me at the beginning of the semester. There should be few or no schedule conflicts that cannot be resolved in ways acceptable to you and to me – the key is early notification. The Academic Schedule Conflicts policy found in the *College Catalog* exists to inform you of your obligations and to help us work out any problems.

**POLICY ON EXCEPTIONS:** Plan on taking all exams at the appointed time and completing all other

work by the indicated due dates. Because of events beyond your control (e.g. illness), I realize that sometimes this is not possible despite good-faith efforts on your part. Therefore, exceptions and extensions will be considered on an individual basis. **In general, nonacademic personal commitments and end-of-semester travel plans are NOT valid reasons for requesting extensions or exceptions. Nor are activities scheduled well in advance, e.g. extracurricular activities or obligations for other classes.** As with class attendance, please inform me well in advance of such conflicts. This policy is consistent with the Academic Schedule Conflicts policy found in the *College Catalog*.

**ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DOCUMENTED DISABILITIES:** Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990) work together to ensure “reasonable accommodation” and non-discrimination for students with disabilities in higher education. A student who has a physical, psychiatric/emotional, medical, learning, or attentional disability that may have an effect on the student’s ability to complete assigned course work should contact Laurie Bickett, the Disability Services Coordinator in the Advising Center ([lbickett@gustavus.edu](mailto:lbickett@gustavus.edu) or x6286), who will review the concerns and decide with the student what accommodations are necessary. Following this review, the student and I will determine specific, reasonable accommodations for our course, maintaining confidentiality throughout the process. **I am very happy to discuss this process and specific individual needs with any student who qualifies.**

**ASSISTANCE FOR STUDENTS WHOSE FIRST LANGUAGE IS NOT ENGLISH:** The Writing Center has on staff a part-time tutor with professional training in ESL/ELL instruction. Students can schedule work with this tutor by contacting the Writing Center. Students may bring documentation concerning their ELL status. Where it is appropriate, I may choose to allow such students more time to complete either in- or out-of-class writing assignments. For further information, contact the Academic Advising Office. **I am very happy to discuss this process and specific individual needs with any student who qualifies.**

**ACADEMIC HONESTY:** Plagiarism or cheating in any form corrupts the intent of all that we do as a community of scholars. Consistent with the Gustavus Academic Honesty Policy (found in the *College Catalog*) and the Honor Code (also in the *College Catalog*), the policies and procedures for this course are as follows:

- Violations of the Academic Honesty Policy will result in at least a grade of 0 for the specific assignment, and failure for the course in the case of egregious violations. Students accused and/or penalized for these violations, AND students who become aware of such violations, have specific rights and responsibilities, as outlined in the Honor Code section of the *College Catalog*.
- Each exam and graded paper will contain the statement "**On my honor, I pledge that I have not given, received, or tolerated others' use of unauthorized aid in completing this work.**" Students are required to sign on each exam or paper; typing the statement on a paper submitted electronically is equivalent to signing.
- Students CAN consult with each another and with the professor while working on assignments and preparing for exams; these are examples of "authorized aid."
- Under the Honor Code, proctoring of exams is at the instructor's discretion. I plan to be there.

## DAILY SCHEDULE: TOPICS, READING ASSIGNMENTS

The course web page has a continuously updated version of this schedule grid, with links to all handouts distributed in class ("Topics covered" column) as well as links to additional readings, exam study guides and other materials. If the course schedule changes for some reason, the web version will be changed and should be considered the "official" schedule.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topics covered</i>	<i>Readings/activity/announcements</i>
M February 7	Key characteristics of U.S. politics; major themes of the course	No reading, yet
W February 9	Foundations: the Declaration of Independence	Declaration of Independence (OSY pp. 436-437); Woll reading #1
F February 11	American political culture	OSY 1; Wood, "Republicanism"
M February 14	Roots of the Constitution	OSY 2 (including the Constitution, pp. 52-79); Woll 2, 3  <b>Sign-up for Woll summaries (2 per student) should be completed by Tuesday, February 15</b>
W February 16	<b>No class – Chris is gone today</b>	
F February 18	Constitutional ratification: arguments for & against	Woll 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
M February 21	Constitutional structure: separation of powers, checks and balances	Woll 4 (#47 and #48); <i>Federalist</i> #10, #51 (OSY pp. 438-444 OR Woll 4 and Woll 31)
W February 23	Federalism, in theory and practice	OSY 3; Woll 11, 12, 13
F February 25	News summary #1: contemporary issues in federalism	Woll 15, 16  <b>News summary #1 due in class</b>
M February 28	The legislative branch	OSY 6; Woll 60, 62  <b>First exam study guide posted by today</b>
W March 2	Congress in action, or inaction?	Woll 58, 59, 61, 63
F March 4	Presidential power: a first look	OSY 7; Woll 46, 47
M March 7	<b>FIRST EXAM</b>	

W March 9	Political and policy advantages of the presidency	Woll 48, 49, 50
F March 11	News summary #2: presidential-congressional relations today	<b>News summary #2 due in class</b>
M March 14	The federal bureaucracy: executive branch agencies	OSY 8; Woll 54, 55
W March 16	The judicial branch: structure and powers, selection process	OSY 9; <i>Federalist</i> #78 (OSY pp. 444-447 or Woll 65); Woll 66
F March 18	Supreme Court decision making	Woll 5, 67, 70, 71
M March 21	Political roles of the Supreme Court	Woll 14, 53, 68, 69
W March 23	Principles of civil liberties	OSY 4; Woll 18, 19, 20, 26
F March 25	Interpreting civil liberties principles	Woll 27, 28, 29, 72, 73, 74
March 26-April 3	<b>No class – Spring break</b>	
M April 4	Civil rights struggles	OSY 5; Woll 21, 22, 23
W April 6	Race and civil rights in America	Woll 24, 30
F April 8	News Summary #3: civil rights/civil liberties issues	<b>News summary #3 due in class</b>  <b>Second exam study guide posted by today</b>
M April 11	<b>No class – Chris at conference</b>	
W April 13	Public opinion: origins and consequences	OSY 10, pp. 276-290
F April 15	<b>SECOND EXAM</b>	
M April 18	Media roles in U.S. politics	OSY 10, pp. 290-305; Auletta article to be posted
W April 20	News Summary #4: public opinion and media coverage of U.S. politics	<b>News summary #4 due in class</b>
F April 22 M April 25	<b>No class – Easter break</b>	
W April 27	Political parties and interest groups; a closer look at interest groups	OSY 11; Woll 32, 40
F April 29	Parties and interest groups: a closer look	Woll 33, 35, 43, 44
M May 2	Electoral politics	OSY 12

W May 4	Electoral trends, voter preferences	Woll 36, 37, 38  Special Mayday! schedule: class today is from <b>12:10 to 12:40 pm</b>
F May 6	Candidates, voters, and rules: a closer look	Woll 41, 42; Pomper on the 2008 election, to be posted
M May 9	Public policy: concepts and goals	OSY 13
W May 11	Formulating public policy: a closer look	Readings on health care reform, to be posted; Page and Simmons "Is American Public Policy Effective?"
F May 13	Foreign and defense policy	OSY 14  <b>Final exam study guide posted by today</b>
M May 16	News summary #5: Meeting international challenges, the American future	<b>News summary #5 due in class</b>
W May 18	Final exam review, course evaluation	
<b>Friday, May 20</b>	<b>FINAL EXAM 1:00 – 3:00 pm Old Main 05</b>	Students with an exam conflict should notify Chris well in advance, in case an alternate time must be arranged

## WRITING ABOUT U.S. GOVERNMENT & POLITICS: A BRIEF STYLE GUIDE

These conventions and styles should be used when writing about U.S. government and politics. Please observe them and write accordingly! Consult *The Everyday Writer* or other style guides for more detail.

- people elected to the House of Representatives are **representatives** or **members of Congress**; people elected to the Senate are **senators**; the terms "congressmen" and "congresswomen" are **not** the preferred terms
- **Congress** is capitalized, but **congressional** is not!
- on first reference, it is standard practice to give the party affiliation and state of specific members of Congress in parentheses after their names; state names can be abbreviated or given in full  
Representative Michele Bachmann (R-MN), Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-Minnesota)
- capitalize **Senator** or **Representative** only when referring to a specific senator or representative  
Senator Collins visited a child care center in Augusta  
The senators debated the health care reform bill for 542 hours before adjourning for bean soup
- capitalize **President** and **Administration** only when referring to a specific one  
e.g. President Obama and the Obama Administration eat lunch in Baltimore on Fridays  
Most presidents see their popularity rise and fall during their administrations
- italicize Supreme Court case names; usually, the date of the **decision** is given in parentheses  
e.g. *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896)
- **Supreme Court** is capitalized; second and future references can be shortened to "the Court" (note that Court is capitalized when using this shorthand reference)
- members of the Supreme Court are **justices**, not judges; members of lower federal courts are **judges**
- capitalize **Justice** only when referring to a specific one  
Justice Scalia wrote the majority opinion. Seven justices voted to hear the appeal
- acronyms (initials that form a name) do **not** need periods in between; give the FULL name when referencing the acronym for the first time, then you can use the acronym thereafter  
e.g. CIA, FBI, IRS; "The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) said today..."
- Use periods with the abbreviation **U.S.**, and use **U.S.** or **United States** rather than **America** or **USA**
- the names of the parties **are** capitalized - Democratic Party, Republican Party, and all references to party labels are capitalized (the lower-case words **democratic** and **republican** mean something different than **Democratic** and **Republican!**); ideological labels (liberal, conservative) **are not** capitalized
- Do not use "we" or "us" in reference to the United States or any actions taken by the United States