

# POLS 1101: American Government, Fall 2015

Dr. Christopher N. Lawrence <christopher.lawrence@mga.edu>

Assistant Professor of Political Science, Middle Georgia State University

Website: <http://www.cnlawrence.com/teaching> Twitter: @DrLawrenceMGA Phone: (478) 471-5325.

Office Hours: MW 2:00–4:15 p.m.; Tue 3:30–5:00 p.m., Jones 314

(Office hours may be held on other campuses; see Brightspace for dates.)

CRN	Section	Days	Times	Location
84262	13	TR	11:00 a.m.–12:15 p.m.	COAS 202
84263	14	TR	2:00 p.m.–3:15 p.m.	Jones 211

**Course Overview:** Welcome to the class! This course is a survey of the fundamental features of the American political system in the contemporary era. While some historical background and philosophical underpinnings will be presented along the way, this class focuses on the key aspects of our current political order. In addition to talking about the government in Washington, the course will also delve into how individuals and groups affect—and are affected by—decisions made by politicians at the federal and state levels.

► **Catalog Description:** This course is a study of the American political system which includes an examination of the U.S. and Georgia Constitutions. This course grants exemption from the U.S. and Georgia Constitutions examinations as required by the Georgia General Assembly.

► **Overall Model of the Course:** One way to understand the American government is to think of it much like a factory: it takes raw materials and turns them into finished goods. If we follow the analogy, the “raw materials” are what the public wants and demands from the political system; the “finished goods” are the laws and other policy outputs of government, like schools and roads and wars. Accordingly we can diagram the American political system (and, for that matter, the political system of Georgia) as follows:

The public → Linkage institutions → Formal political institutions → Policy outputs

While we won’t necessarily follow this model from left to right in our discussions, for now just note that *all* of these pieces matter—not just the formal institutions in Washington!

► **Course Structure:** Please note that this course is designed as a *partially flipped*, hybrid course. The core lectures for each chapter will be delivered online, via Brightspace. After reviewing the lecture and reading the chapter, you will complete and submit an online quiz for each chapter *before class*.

During the ensuing classes, we will go over the online quiz and engage in further discussion related to the chapter and lecture. Succeeding in class will require both attention to the online materials and regular attendance and participation in the classroom.

We will typically meet only on Tuesdays. On most Thursdays, the section tutor will be available in Jones 323; in addition, on the Thursdays before scheduled exams, I will hold optional review sessions in our regular classroom.

► **MGA Core Requirements:** This course satisfies the Political Science credit requirement in Area E, as well as the state legislature’s requirement that you complete a course covering the U.S. and Georgia constitutions.

► **Expected Learning Outcomes:** Students will be expected to achieve the following learning outcomes, common to all sections of this course, in order to receive a passing grade (D or above):

1. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the major institutions (Congress, the presidency, and the judiciary) of the U.S. national government.
2. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the processes linking citizens and the U.S. national government (elections, parties, and interest groups).
3. Students will demonstrate knowledge of the U.S. Constitution, including federalism, civil liberties, and civil rights.

Achievement of these outcomes will be assessed as part of a comprehensive final examination for the course.

**Required Materials:** There is one book required for this course:

Benjamin Ginsburg, et al. 2015. *We The People*, 10th Essentials Ed. ISBN 978-0393937053.

It should be available, new and used, at the Middle Georgia State University bookstore in Macon; you may also be able to rent or purchase it on-line at a discount. Digital copies are available at [http://www.coursesmart.com/IR/5341742/9780393937053?\\_\\_hvd=6.8](http://www.coursesmart.com/IR/5341742/9780393937053?__hvd=6.8).

**Note:** You are required to own, or have access to, a copy of the textbook for the duration of the course (through the final examination).

Additional readings may be assigned at my discretion; I will provide them for you at the library reserve desk, on the course's Brightspace site, or as handouts in class.

**Technology Requirements:** You are required to have access to Brightspace for the duration of the course. You will also need access to a computer, tablet, or smartphone that can read Portable Document Format (Adobe PDF) files and supports HTML5 technologies for browsing the Internet.

**Grades:** Your final grade in this course will be based on the following elements, weighted as follows:

Term Exams (3)	60%	Participation	5%
Cumulative Final Exam	15%	Reading/Lecture Quizzes	20%

The overall average posted in Brightspace throughout the semester will also be weighted as above. *Your grade is not simply based on "adding up points" as it may be in some of your other courses.* You can review your current grades at any time in D2L.

The final grade in the course reported to the registrar will be converted based on this scale:

Final Weighted Average	Grade	Grade Points	Catalog Description
90.0 or above	A	4.0	Excellent work
80.0–89.9	B	3.0	Good work
70.0–79.9	C	2.0	Satisfactory work
60.0–69.9	D	1.0	Passing work
59.9 or below	F	0.0	Failing work

Numeric grades will only be reported for students in dual enrollment programs. At the college level, only the final letter grade in the course is part of your permanent record.

Although a "D" is the minimum passing grade in undergraduate courses, any grades below a "C" may jeopardize your continued eligibility for federal and state financial aid. Please refer to the "Satisfactory Academic Progress" policy on the Financial Aid website for details.

► **Midterm Grades:** Per university policy, a midterm grade will be posted to SWORDS for all students in this course one week before the withdrawal deadline. The midterm grade is strictly advisory and will not be part of your permanent student record. The grade posted in this course will reflect your current course average as posted in the Brightspace gradebook according to the grading scale found elsewhere on this syllabus. You should be aware that midterm grades do not guarantee a particular final grade in the course, as future assignments will also affect the final course grade you earn.

► **Grading Philosophy:** Your grades will be earned based my judgment of your performance in meeting the learning objectives of the course, and not on the basis of good intentions, whether or not you agree with my political or ideological views (you probably don't), or how much effort you put in to the course. To judge your performance comprehensively, my grading may include both objective and subjective assessments; sometimes there is a clear "right" answer, sometimes there is no one "right" answer, and sometimes there are a number of potential responses that vary in completeness and correctness, and so my approach to grading differs based on that reality. My commitment to you is that I will assign fair and appropriate grades, in a reasonably timely manner,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Some assignments, such as the reading quizzes online, are automatically graded, so you can expect fairly quick feedback on those. You should expect the grading of written work to generally take between 5 and 10 business days.

according to this philosophy, based on the work that is presented for grading. If at any time you believe I have not met that standard, see the section on “Grade Appeals” below.

► **Exams:** There will be three closed-book, in-class examinations on the dates that are indicated on the syllabus, covering the assigned materials. The three term exams will be drawn from the material covered in the most recent section of the course: for example, Exam 2 will mostly cover material studied after Exam 1. Per departmental policy, the final examination is *comprehensive* and will cover *all* of the course materials.

Exams, including the final exam, may include multiple-choice, short answer, and essay questions. No exam grades will be dropped under any circumstances.

During exams, no discussion among students is permitted of any kind, and all electronic devices (cell phones, calculators, pagers, computers, etc.) must be **switched off and stored away**.

► **Reading and Lecture Quizzes:** For each module of the course, there will be a reading quiz posted in Brightspace. The quiz will be available online at least 48 hours prior to the first class scheduled for that module, marked (Q) on the schedule below. *No quizzes will be accepted after the quiz deadline, which is ten minutes before the start of class. No exceptions.* You will have two opportunities to complete the quiz, with the higher grade counting in your average. At the beginning of class, I will review the overall quiz results with you, so we can see what areas need to be further emphasized when discussing the chapter.

The online quizzes are open-book. You may work with other students in the class on the online quizzes, although it is probably *not* in your best interest to simply copy someone else’s answers without understanding *why* they chose those answers.

Additionally, I may give announced or unannounced quizzes or other brief assignments in-class that will count toward this grade. These quizzes will be closed-book, without any opportunity for discussion.

*Your lowest two quiz grades will be dropped from your quiz average.* Online quizzes not attempted prior to the established deadline will be scored a zero without further opportunity to take the quiz; if you have partially completed the quiz, you may receive credit for the portion you have completed as of the deadline.

► **Exam and Quiz Content:** Questions on examinations and quizzes may be drawn from the textbook, materials presented in lecture, and/or additional materials provided by the instructor as announced in class or in Brightspace.

► **Participation:** This portion of your final grade will be based on your level of participation in class. Your class attendance is a factor in determining this grade; see below for details.

**Contacting the Professor:** My regularly-scheduled office hours are listed at the beginning of the syllabus. During those times, I generally do not schedule appointments; rather, meetings are “first come, first serve.” When I am not busy with a student in-person, I will also be available “virtually” at these times by phone or web chat. If you wish to make a confirmed appointment to see me *outside* my scheduled hours, please do so at least two business days in advance.

If you do contact me outside my office hours, please bear in mind that my other work and personal obligations may be on a different schedule than what is convenient for you; for example, I may be in class, in the midst of research, or at a meeting. Except under extraordinary circumstances, if your email includes a question or otherwise requires a response, I will always get back to you within one business day, and frequently sooner; messages that merely inform me of a class absence may not be acknowledged.

If you call my office outside my office hours, please avoid leaving voice mail or messages with university staff; it is an incredibly unproductive and inefficient means of communication. You will usually receive a much quicker response by email.

To protect the privacy of your educational records, all discussion regarding grades or other confidential information must be conducted in person, via Brightspace, or via your official *mga.edu* email address; I will not discuss confidential information over the phone or via any non-school email address. If you have not yet activated your official university email address, please see <http://www.mga.edu/technology/email.aspx>.

**When contacting me outside of class, please be sure to specify both the course and section you are in, as it will allow me to respond more quickly to you.**

Finally, while you may find me in various guises on various social media sites, I won't "friend" current or past students who are still enrolled as undergraduates; please do not take this personally.

**Class Policies:** The primary expectations of all Middle Georgia State University students are integrity and civility. Each student should approach his/her academic endeavors, relationships and personal responsibilities with a strong commitment to personal integrity and interpersonal civility.

I believe that for our class to be successful, we must establish a supportive and respectful environment in the classroom and related settings (such as the class website on Brightspace). Accordingly, disruptive behaviors such as repeated tardiness, side conversations, reading materials unrelated to the course (such as the student newspaper), or use of communication technologies (e.g., web browsing/IMing/texting during class) will adversely affect your grade; repeated or egregious disruptive behavior may result in you being asked to leave class for the day, which will reduce your participation grade by one letter grade.

► **Electronic devices:** In the past I have found that while a few students are able to use laptops and tablets effectively as note-taking aids in the classroom, the vast majority find it difficult to avoid distractions from email, Facebook, and other sources online. Ordinarily this wouldn't cause much of a problem, but in the classroom setting this creates what social scientists refer to as "negative externalities"; specifically, when you're watching that funny YouTube video of the monkey washing a cat, everyone around you is also going to see it and be distracted too. Accordingly, you should mute or switch off your cell phones and any alarms during class, and refrain completely from using laptops, tablets, e-readers, "smart" or "dumb" phones, and other portable electronic devices during class.

There may be times in class when I *specifically* ask you to use your cell phone or a laptop or tablet (for example, to participate in a web-based activity); on these occasions, of course, it would be OK to do so.

► **Extra credit:** To be fair to all students, I do not offer individualized extra-credit opportunities. If you believe you might benefit from extra credit, I strongly advise you take advantage of any opportunities offered to the whole class as they are announced over the term.

► **Notes:** I do not provide lecture notes for students under any circumstances. If you miss class, you will have to rely on the generosity of a classmate or make use of any materials provided on the textbook website or its study guide, if applicable. (Students with disabilities who require notes or other learning environment accommodations should consult with me and the MGA Disability Services Office to arrange notetaking assistance.)

You may make audio recordings of in-class lectures; recordings are for your own, personal use, and may not be shared with students who are not enrolled in this course.

► **Revisions to the syllabus:** While I will make every effort to follow the syllabus as-written, if unforeseen circumstances arise during the semester I reserve the right to amend any policy in this syllabus.

► **Attendance and absence policy:** To encourage regular attendance and participation in class, I will take daily attendance. Your attendance an important factor considered when evaluating your participation grades; however, perfect attendance does not guarantee a perfect participation grade, and it is possible, but perhaps unlikely, that you could receive a perfect participation grade if you have missed a class meeting. Unlike in some of your other courses, "attendance" is not directly computed in your grade and there is no grade penalty for an absence.

Arriving late, leaving early, or unexplained/frequent trips outside of the room during class time for non-medical reasons will adversely affect your participation grade.

► **Make-ups:** Make-up examinations must be scheduled in advance in the case of an unavoidable planned or reasonably-foreseeable absence; otherwise, make-ups will be given only in the case of an illness or other emergency that is properly documented, after the fact. To be fair to all students, make-up exams must be completed within two weeks of the originally scheduled exam date; also, make-up exams may be administered in a different format than the original exam offered to the rest of the class, at my sole discretion.

Make-up quizzes will not be arranged under any circumstances. There are also no make-ups for missed classes; however, students with an excused absence will receive credit for attending any classes missed with a valid

excuse (such as student illness or participation in class-related or sponsored activities), and any missed in-class quiz will be dropped from the grade.

To be fair to all students in the class, students are responsible for *all assignments*, regardless of their date of initial enrollment in the course.

► **Grade Appeals:** Like everyone else, I am fallible and sometimes make mistakes. If I simply misrecorded a grade (for example, if I enter “70” in the gradebook when you earned an “80”) or made an arithmetic error, please bring me the returned assignment, and I will immediately correct the error.

If you believe you received an *unjust* grade, I am happy to discuss the grading of the assignment with you, in-person during regular office hours or at a scheduled appointment; please bring the graded assignment with you so we can have a productive conversation. If you remain unsatisfied with my explanation of the grade, to give us both ample time to consider the dispute, you will need to type a brief (one-page) explanation of your position and turn it in, along with the original graded assignment, *at least one week after* the assignment was originally returned to you. I will then consider your appeal and make a determination. Appeals must be submitted in hard copy format; no appeals submitted via email will be considered. Please refer to the Student Handbook and Catalog for policies regarding appeals of *final letter grades*.

► **Academic Misconduct:** You are responsible for reading, understanding, and abiding by the Student Code of Conduct; this is included in the current edition of the Student Handbook, which is available online at [http://www.mga.edu/student-affairs/docs/MGA\\_Student\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.mga.edu/student-affairs/docs/MGA_Student_Handbook.pdf).

I take academic misconduct (including, but not limited to, cheating on exams and plagiarism of written work) very seriously. So does Middle Georgia State University. In this course the *minimum* penalty for academic misconduct is a grade of zero (0) on the assignment in question, with no opportunity to repeat the assignment, along with referral to the testing center to complete an examination on plagiarism, cheating, and the Student Code of Conduct. Second or subsequent violations, or egregious misconduct (for example, an organized effort to cheat involving multiple students, or academic misconduct that causes harm to other students), will automatically be referred to the Office of Student Affairs for a university-level resolution which may include a failing grade in the course, disciplinary probation, and/or academic suspension.

I offer some free advice, drawn from past experience as both a student and a professor: do not turn in plagiarized work because you have run out of time and feel as if you need to turn in *something*—taking the late penalty is better than the sanctions for academic misconduct. Similarly, if you forgot to study, it’s better to get a low grade on the exam than the zero you’ll get if you cheat.

One of the early computer programmers, Admiral Grace Hopper, is reported to have said that “[i]t’s easier to ask forgiveness than it is to get permission.” That advice *does not* apply in this situation. If you have the slightest doubt about whether something is academic misconduct, *ask me before handing in the assignment for grading*.

► **Disability Accommodations:** While you are welcome to discuss any special needs with me in private, to be fair to all students, accommodations are only provided when supported by appropriate documentation from MGA Disability Services (478-471-2985; Student Life Building, Room 266; <http://www.mga.edu/ds>).

► **Tutoring:** Middle Georgia State University provides free tutoring services for political science courses. In Macon, tutoring is available from both the History and Political Science Study Center in 323 Jones and the Student Success Center in the Library; on other campuses, visit your campus Student Success Center. Hours when political science tutors are available are posted at the SSC website, <http://www.mga.edu/ssc>. Tutoring services are not a substitute for regular class attendance. All students are encouraged to take advantage of these *free* services.

► **Campus Emergencies:** In the event of a closure or delayed opening of the university due to inclement weather or other emergency, you should monitor the Knight Alert system for updates; sign up for these alerts at <http://www.mga.edu/police/alert.aspx>. You should expect communication via email and/or Brightspace regarding any assignments to be completed or revisions to the schedule while we are unable to meet.

► **End of Course Evaluations:** Student evaluations of faculty are administered online at the end of each term for all courses with five or more students. Students will receive an email containing a unique link to a survey for each course in which they are enrolled. All responses are anonymous and completion of evaluations are voluntary.

**Withdrawal Deadlines:** The last day to drop the course without it appearing on your transcript is Thursday, August 20. Students may withdraw from the course and earn a grade of “W” up to and including the midterm date, on Wednesday, October 14. After this point, students who withdraw will receive a grade of “WF,” which is calculated in the GPA as an “F.” The MGA Withdrawal Form is available online or in the Office of the Registrar.

**“No-Shows” and Informal Withdrawals:** Students who have not attended any classes as of the reporting period (generally, during the second week of classes) may be reported as a “no-show” and may lose financial aid as a result. In addition, if you stop coming to class without withdrawing, it may jeopardize your eligibility for financial aid in future terms.

**Course Outline:** Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class and will be posted to the course calendar and in Brightspace. We will not necessarily read chapters in the order they appear in the textbook; please be sure you read the correct chapters *in advance of* the designated class dates. While I may periodically remind students of upcoming scheduled events, it is ultimately **your responsibility** to be familiar with this schedule and any changes to it.

In the schedule below, *WTP* refers to chapters from the main text, *We The People*. The selected readings from the *Federalist Papers* can be found in the appendix of *We The People*, starting on page A33.

Date(s)	Topic	Reading(s) due
Aug 18	Introduction to the Course	(no reading)
Aug 25 (Q)	The Citizen and Government	WTP 1
Sep 1 (Q)	The Founding and the Constitution	WTP 2; <i>Federalist</i> 10
Sep 8 (Q)	Federalism	WTP 3; <i>Federalist</i> 51
Sep 10	Optional Review for Exam 1	
Sep 15	<b>Exam 1</b>	
Sep 22 (Q)	Public Opinion and the Media	WTP 5–6
Sep 29 (Q)	Parties, Participation, and Elections	WTP 7
Oct 6 (Q)	Interest Groups	WTP 8
Oct 8	Optional Review for Exam 2	
Oct 13	<b>Exam 2</b>	
Oct 20 (Q)	Congress	WTP 9
Oct 27 (Q)	The Presidency and Bureaucracy	WTP 10–11
Nov 3 (Q)	The Judiciary	WTP 12
Nov 5	Optional Review for Exam 3	
Nov 10	<b>Exam 3</b>	
Nov 17 (Q)	Public Policy	WTP 13–14
Nov 24	<b>No Class: Thanksgiving Break</b>	
Dec 1 (Q)	Civil Liberties and Civil Rights	WTP 4
Dec 3	Optional Review for Final Exam	

**Final Examination:** Scheduled as below.

CRN	Section	Day	Time
84262	13	Tuesday, December 8	10:30 a.m.–12:30 p.m.
84263	14	Tuesday, December 8	1:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.