



NORTHWEST FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE

POS 1041, American Government CRN: 20198, 3 Credit Hours (Spring 2026)

Instructor: Veronica Sigcho Espinoza, M.A.

Email: sigchoev@nwfsc.edu

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursdays @ 12:30pm-1:30pm or by appointment via Zoom.

Class modality: Traditional, in-person.

Campus/Room: Niceville Campus, Science Bldg. S (350) 303

Class Times: Tuesday and Thursday (9:30 - 10:50 am)

Online Classroom with Gradebook: [Canvas class shell](#).

Final Exam: Last week of class

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 ways their government responds to citizens.

Student Learning Outcomes

- Students will demonstrate an understanding of the basic principles and practices of America's constitutional republic.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of the nation's founding documents, including the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution and its amendments, and The Federalist Papers.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of landmark U.S. Supreme Court cases, landmark legislation and landmark executive actions.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of the history and development of the American federal government and its impact on law and society.
- Students will demonstrate an ability to apply course material to contemporary political issues and debates.
- Students will demonstrate the ability to engage in discussion and civil debate on American politics that are associated with multiple points of view

Goals and Objectives

Course-Level Learning Goals

- Goal #1: Students will be able to explain the ideas and principles underlying our system of government and founding documents.
 - Objective 1.1: Understand the motivations and discussions of delegates at and prior to the Constitutional Convention, and how these discussions shaped various processes and institutions such as the constitutional amendment process, the Electoral College, the Bill of Rights, the structure of Congress, and our system of checks and balances.
 - Objective 1.2: Explain the principles of federalism, republican or representative government, popular sovereignty, the separation of powers, and checks and balances, and how each of these principles is incorporated in our system of government.
 - Objective 1.3: Comprehend the major sections and ideas of founding documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Federalist Papers.
- Goal #2: Students will understand the basic processes and functions of all of the major institutions of our government across the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.
 - Objective 2.1: Explain the institutions, historical development, processes, roles, responsibilities, and structure of the legislative branch.
 - Objective 2.2: Explain the institutions, historical development, processes, roles, responsibilities, and structure of the executive branch.
 - Objective 2.3: Explain the institutions, historical development, processes, roles, responsibilities, and structure of the judicial branch.
- Goal #3: Students will comprehend the political behavior and influence of various actors in our government, including political parties, interest groups, the media, and the public.
 - Objective 3.1: Examine the behavior and influence of political parties on our national government.
 - Objective 3.2: Examine the behavior and influence of interest groups on our national government.
 - Objective 3.3: Examine the behavior and influence of the media on our national government.
 - Objective 3.4: Examine the behavior and influence of the public on our national government.

Unit-Level Measurable Objectives

- Goal #1: Students will be able to explain the ideas and principles underlying our system of government and founding documents.
 - Objective 1.1: Understand the motivations and discussions of delegates at and prior to the Constitutional Convention, and how these discussions shaped various processes and institutions such as the constitutional amendment process, the Electoral College, the Bill of Rights, the structure of Congress, and our system of checks and balances.

- Discussion Board Posts (Canvas)
 - In-Class Participation
 - Test Questions
 - Objective 1.2: Explain the principles of federalism, republican or representative government, popular sovereignty, the separation of powers, checks and balances, civil rights, and civil liberties, and how each of these principles is incorporated in our system of government.
 - Discussion Board Posts (Canvas)
 - In-Class Participation
 - Test Questions
 - Objective 1.3: Comprehend the major sections and ideas of founding documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Federalist Papers.
 - Discussion Board Posts (Canvas)
 - In-Class Participation
 - Test Questions
- Goal #2: Students will understand the basic processes and functions of all of the major institutions of our government across the legislative, executive, and judicial branches.
 - Objective 2.1: Explain the institutions, historical development, processes, roles, responsibilities, and structure of the legislative branch.
 - Discussion Board Posts (Canvas)
 - In-Class Participation
 - Test Questions
 - Objective 2.2: Explain the institutions, historical development, processes, roles, responsibilities, and structure of the executive branch.
 - Discussion Board Posts (Canvas)
 - In-Class Participation
 - Test Questions
 - Objective 2.3: Explain the institutions, historical development, processes, roles, responsibilities, and structure of the judicial branch.
 - Discussion Board Posts (Canvas)
 - In-Class Participation
 - Test Questions
- Goal #3: Students will comprehend the political behavior and influence of various actors in our government, including political parties, interest groups, the media, and the public.
 - Objective 3.3: Examine the behavior and influence of the media on our national government.
 - Discussion Board Posts (Canvas)
 - In-Class Participation
 - Test Questions
 - Objective 3.1: Examine the behavior and influence of political parties on our national government.
 - Discussion Board Posts (Canvas)
 - In-Class Participation
 - Test Questions
 - Objective 3.2: Examine the behavior and influence of interest groups on our national government.

- Discussion Board Posts (Canvas)
- In-Class Participation
- Test Questions
- Objective 3.4: Examine the behavior and influence of the public on our national government.
 - Discussion Board Posts (Canvas)
 - In-Class Participation
 - Test Questions

Course Prerequisite

A passing score on the standardized placement test measuring communications/verbal/reading achievement, successful completion of any required developmental English and Reading coursework with a grade of “C” or better, or exemption from placement testing

Course Materials

Our course text is the [OpenStax textbook on American Government](#). The book is available at no cost at the provided link. Additionally, a PDF version of the textbook has been included in Canvas. This course will examine the chapters of this book; however, the course will not follow the order of the chapters in chronological order. Additional readings will be added to Canvas under each module. Unless readings are labeled as recommended, you are expected to read them before each class.

Class Attendance

Attendance will be taken at the beginning of each class. Students who stop attending class or are not able to pass the course due to attendance expectations stated in the syllabus, may receive a failing grade which may impact the receipt of federal aid in subsequent courses. Students absent for military deployment/TDY or official college approved activities will not be penalized academically but will be responsible for missed work. This class involves frequent graded class participation and graded group work; students will neither benefit from these activities nor contribute to the class as a whole if students are frequently absent. Therefore, missing 2 or more unexcused class sessions may result in the penalty of zero points in the participation element of the final course grade.

Attendance Confirmation

Active participation and academic engagement are expectations of enrollment in this course. Faculty confirm each student’s attendance in class after the drop-add period ends. Students who have not attended class or otherwise engaged academically in the course through the submission of an academic assignment or through participation in a curricular activity will be withdrawn from the course for nonattendance.

Students who are withdrawn for nonattendance or nonparticipation early in the course may request to be reinstated in the course by contacting their instructor by email. Reinstatement in the course is at the instructor’s discretion during the first three weeks of class and is not guaranteed. Reinstatement requests occurring after this three-week period may be submitted to the instructor for consideration; however, additional administrative approval will be required to grant the reinstatement. If you are

withdrawn from a course due to nonattendance and are not granted reinstatement in the course, please contact a Student Success Navigator for assistance.

Preparing for Class / Participation

This course requires your active and consistent engagement. Success depends not only on attending class but on preparing thoroughly for each session. **You are required to complete all assigned textbook chapters and any supplementary readings**—such as primary sources—before class. Reading is not optional; it is foundational. Your ability to engage with the material, participate in discussions, and submit thoughtful written work depends on it.

American Government is more than just a list of facts—it is a living, evolving system that affects every part of our lives. In this course, we will explore it not only through the textbook but also by reading and analyzing key primary sources. Understanding government means learning how to read critically, think independently, and participate in thoughtful, respectful discourse.

The format of this course includes a combination of lectures and guided discussion. I expect everyone to come to class having **read the assigned material**. You should be prepared to ask questions, answer questions, and actively contribute to discussions. **Class participation is part of your grade.**

You are also expected to:

- Take detailed notes during class—tests will draw on both readings and lectures.
- Treat this subject not as a requirement to check off, but as part of a broader commitment to being an informed, engaged citizen. **There is a lot to learn. Make it a life-long goal.**

This is a participatory environment. We will sometimes tackle topics that are sensitive or controversial. That's part of what makes political science vital. Disagreement is expected—but disrespect is not. Our classroom should be a space for open inquiry, critical thinking, and mutual respect. Therefore, I expect you to engage in all discussions respectfully and thoughtfully, listen actively, even when you disagree; avoid disruptive behaviors, including side conversations, raised voices, or dismissive or impolite attitudes; and speak from your own perspective and allow space for others to do the same.

Classroom Conduct

Any opportunities to earn credit in the course will be equally available to all students.

No late work will be accepted without both 1) a valid excuse and 2) proactive communication. Proactive communication requires students reach out to me 24 hours before the assignment is due to let me know why they cannot complete the assignment before the specified deadline and request an extension. If 24 hours' notice is infeasible (e.g. in a genuine emergency situation), you must let me know as soon as possible and before the deadline passes.

Students are responsible for ensuring that the correct, uncorrupted file version of assignments are uploaded by the stated due date. Technical error claims as excuses for late submissions must include: (1) a screenshot of the error message, (2) the assignment emailed as an attachment as soon as possible if the issue is with Canvas, and (3) the document's date last edited must show as prior to the deadline passing.

Students need to be proactive about determining whether they need accommodations. I will not adjust grades previously earned before documentation that a student will require accommodations.

Leaving early is disruptive, distracting, and damaging to the educational environment. If a genuine emergency occurs, please feel free to depart early and notify me as soon as possible. Stepping out to use the restroom does not count as an early departure, but please be mindful to leave and return as quietly as possible. Audible sighing, groaning, or other disrespectful verbal and non-verbal behavior is unwelcome and will not be tolerated.

I reserve the right to have continuously disruptive students leave the classroom to protect the educational rights of students who wish to learn and succeed in class

Electronic devices

Electronic devices must not distract from learning. Courtesy to the professor and other students requires that phones be on vibrate or silent mode during class. No student should initiate conversations, including texts, during class activities. Use of electronic communication devices during examinations or other graded activities may constitute grounds for disciplinary action; such devices must be completely out of sight during exams or other assessments. Do not take phone calls during class. If there is a dire emergency, step outside to take any calls.

Where emergency or employment situations require access to electronic communication services, please take these conversations outside the classroom. **Laptops are allowed for the sole purpose of notetaking or accessing class materials during class.**

Lecture Recordings

Students may, without prior notice, record video or audio of a class lecture for a class in which the student is enrolled for their own personal educational use. A class lecture is defined as a formal or methodical oral presentation as part of a College course intended to present information or teach about a particular subject. Recording class activities other than class lectures is not permitted. Except as detailed in the Catalog, recordings may not be published or shared without the written consent of the faculty member. To read and fully understand your rights and responsibilities when recording, visit the Catalog.

Grading Scheme and Procedures

All assignments must be submitted by the due date online listed in the “Assignments” module in Canvas. All submissions (writing assignments and exams) will be accepted until the listed due time (CST) on the due date listed in the individual assignment on Canvas. Please refer to either Canvas and/or the syllabus for due dates per assignment. If you need assistance in submitting assignments, please refer to the contact information in the “Welcome to NWF” folder posted on Canvas. The assignments are set to close and will NOT accept additional submissions after the listed due date and time. Emailed copies of assignments will NOT be accepted even if received (or time stamped) on or before the deadline. No exceptions. No substitutions will be accepted as replacement for the assignments as designed by the instructor. Only those assignments completed in Canvas by the due date by the due time will be accepted.

Course Assessments (percentage of overall grade):

- Exam #1: 20%

- Exam #2: 20%
- Final Exam #3: 20%
- Writing Assignment: 20%
- Discussion Posts: 10%
- In-Class Participation: 10%

Grades:

- 90% to 100% = A
- 80% to 89% = B
- 70% to 79% = C
- 60% to 69% = D
- 59% and below = F

Instructor Communication

Your NWFSC email is the official communication medium of the College. Please check your College email regularly for any class and College notifications. I will respond to student emails within one business day.

Before sending an email, check the syllabus and Canvas page. There are several useful guides posted to Canvas. If your question pertains to a course assignment, for example, please read the syllabus and refer to the posted guides and samples before emailing the instructor. Additionally, if your questions are regarding a due date – all due dates are in Canvas. Most student questions can be answered by reading all the materials as provided by the instructor.

If students have questions about a course assignment, students are expected to email at least 48 hours in advance of the due date to ensure they receive a response before the assignment is due. The instructor is not responsible for emails that are not received by the due date or due time of an assignment if students email their questions less than 48 hours before the assignment's due date. This is the student's responsibility to seek assistance in a prompt manner to address issues or concerns.

When sending an email, please follow the email protocol below:

- Email must be sent from your NWFSC email address.
- Use the subject line of the email to write your course number, CRN, last name, and purpose of the email. (Example: POS 1041-30481, Smith, Exam Question). PLEASE LOOK ON THE HEADING ON PAGE ONE OF THIS SYLLABUS FOR YOUR COURSE TITLE AND CRN. This is also your Canvas shell's course title.
- Begin your email with a formal address of the instructor
- State clearly and briefly the purpose of your email. Inform the instructor of the questions and/or concerns you may have regarding an assignment. Use formal writing. Do not use text jargon in emails.
- Conclude the message with an appropriate closing. (Example: Sincerely,)\State your full formal name. No nicknames should be used in emails.

Plagiarism

Academic honesty is a core value of higher education. **Plagiarism of any kind is strictly prohibited.** Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to:

- Submitting someone else's work, ideas, or words as your own without proper citation.

- Copying or closely paraphrasing from sources (including textbooks, articles, websites, classmates, or AI tools) without attribution.
- Reusing your own past work (self-plagiarism) without prior, explicit permission from the instructor.
- Using generative AI tools for any course-related work **unless it is specifically authorized as part of an in-class activity or assignment**. Unauthorized use of AI will be treated as academic misconduct.

All written work in this course must follow **APA 7th edition format**, and all sources must be cited properly and consistently. **Only credible sources** should be used (e.g., peer-reviewed journals, academic books, reputable publications, reputable journalistic sources).

The consequences for academic dishonesty are serious. Any instance of plagiarism or misrepresentation may result in (but not limited to):

- A zero or failing grade on the assignment
- A failing grade in the course
- Referral to the college's administration, which may impose additional disciplinary action

When in doubt, **cite it**. Over-citing is always better than under-citing. Proper citation not only helps avoid plagiarism but also strengthens the credibility and academic value of your work.

If you are ever uncertain about whether something constitutes plagiarism, ask the instructor before submitting the work. Upholding academic integrity is a shared responsibility.

If you are struggling with writing or understanding how to properly format citations, the [Zoghby Learning Commons](#) in Niceville offers a Writing Lab, where you can receive tutoring and assistance.

Academic Integrity Tools

Northwest Florida State College subscribes to Turnitin, an online plagiarism detection and prevention service. By enrolling in this class, students are consenting to upload their papers to Turnitin, where they will be checked for plagiarism. Papers submitted to Turnitin may be saved as source documents within these databases solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in other papers. Please note: All assignments submitted in this course are analyzed for plagiarism and originality.

Academic Continuity Plan

Northwest Florida State College is dedicated to protecting the health and wellbeing of its students, staff, and faculty. The College is dedicated to working with faculty and students to ensure timely course and program completion during emergencies. In the event of a College closure, the format of this course may be modified to enable completion of the course through other means, including but not limited to online course delivery through online classrooms. Check your RaiderNet College email and LMS course online for any updates.

Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Academic Integrity

Students are responsible for adherence to all college policies and procedures, including those related to academic freedom, cheating, classroom conduct, computer/network/e-mail use and other items included in the Northwest Florida State College Catalog and Student Handbook. Students should be familiar with the rights and responsibilities detailed in the current Northwest Florida State College

Catalog and Student Handbook. Plagiarism, cheating, or any other form of academic dishonesty is a serious breach of student responsibilities and may trigger consequences which range from a failing grade to formal disciplinary action.

Dispute Resolution

NWFSC aims to deliver high-quality instructional experiences. In the event of a concern regarding a class, students should first attempt to resolve the matter with the instructor. If a resolution cannot be reached, students may seek out additional counsel in Academic Leadership through a formal process. Access the Formal Grievance/Appeal form.

Campus Resources The College is committed to offering quality resources to aid in your success as a student. Review the “Welcome to NWF” module in your LMS course online for information on these resources such as the Library, tutoring, testing, military and veteran services, etc.

Student Success Statement

Northwest Florida State College aspires to provide a quality, convenient, and affordable education by using data-informed decision making and industry best practices. Northwest Florida State College seeks to provide students with premiere learning experiences that create personal and professional connections that support students’ personal growth, and clear, inclusive, education pathways that help students to successfully engage in a diverse society.

Campus Resources

Accommodation Resources

To obtain disability-related academic accommodations, students with disabilities must contact the [Accommodation Resource Center](mailto:arc@nwfsc.edu) at arc@nwfsc.edu or call 850-729-6079. Upon request of accommodations, students will be asked to provide medical documentation that supports their disability request. If students are concerned that they may have an undiagnosed, disability-related condition that impacts their academic progress, it is recommended that they see a licensed medical professional for a diagnosis. Please contact the Accommodation Resource Center with any questions or concerns relating to permanent or temporary student disabilities.

Students who have been approved for accommodations through the ARC are encouraged to work with their professor on facilitation. All inquiries and discussions will remain confidential.

Student Counseling Services

Northwest Florida State College has partnered with Bridgeway Center, Inc. to provide mental health resources and counseling services to all actively enrolled students. All actively enrolled students are eligible to receive an initial assessment and up to five therapeutic sessions with a Behavioral Health provider at no cost to the student. A menu of services and resources is available at www.nwfsc.edu/studentcounselingservices. Bridgeway Center Confidential Helpline: (850) 833-7500, Select Option 1 - Open 24 hours/day.

Children in the Classroom

NWF State College values family life and has worked to develop policies that are supportive of families. However, it is the policy of NWF State College that students and visitors should not use the College in lieu of a childcare provider. Minor children are not permitted in labs, shops, construction/repair sites,

classrooms, offices, labs, or other areas where potential hazards exist, unless enrolled in classes or activities scheduled at the site. In an emergency or other compelling situation, students or staff may bring children to class or the workplace on an incidental, individual basis, provided the instructor receives advance approval from the department chair or program director. In such cases, the children must be directly supervised at all times by the parent/adult and must not disrupt or distract the flow of college work, services or instruction. The full Children on Campus policy statement appears in the College Catalog.

Student Handbook

The complete NWFSC Student Handbook can be found at <https://catalog.nwfsc.edu/>

Welcome to Class

Thank you for choosing NWFSC for your education—and welcome to class!

Class Schedule

This is a tentative schedule, which is subject to change. Students will be notified of any changes to the syllabus and/or this schedule.

Weeks	TOPIC	DUE DATES/ READINGS
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Introduction: Why Government? Social Contract and Collective Action - Democracy and Citizenship. - Forms of Govt/ Role of Citizens 	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapter 1.3, textbook. - Plato’s “Crito” - Hobbes’ “Leviathan” (Excerpt) - Rousseau’s “Social Contract” (Excerpt) - Locke’s “Second Treatise of Government” (Excerpt)
Week 2- Mon, January 19	No Class - MLK Jr Day	
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Foundations of American Government - Declaration of Independence 	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapter 2.1-2.2, textbook. - Declaration of Independence <p>Discussion Post #1 Due</p>
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Foundations of American Government (Part 2) - The Constitution and The Bill of Rights 	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapter 2.3-2.5, textbook. - Federalist No. 10 & 51 - Articles of Confederation (Excerpts) - U.S. Constitution (See excerpts in Canvas) - Federalist No. 51
Week 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Federalism, Checks and Balances, Separation of Powers - Review material for Exam 1 	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapter 3, textbook. - Federalist No. 45 - McCulloch v. Maryland (excerpts) - Gibbons v. Ogden (excerpts) <p>Discussion Post #2 due</p>
Week 4	EXAM 1	Specific Date TBD
Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Congress - The Legislative Process 	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapter 11, textbook. - Constitution, Article I.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Binder, S. (2015). <i>The Dysfunctional Congress. Annual Review of Political Science.</i>
Week 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Executive Branch - Federal Bureaucracy 	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapter 12 and 15, textbook. - Constitution, Article II - Washington’s “Farewell Address.” - FDR’s First Inaugural Address (or watch video) - Theory of Bureaucracy - Weber (Summary)
Week 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Judicial Branch 	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapter 13, textbook. - Federalist No. 78 - Marbury v. Madison (excerpts)
Week 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Civil Liberties 	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapter 4, textbook. - Court Cases (Excerpts in Canvas)
Week 9	EXAM 2	Specific Date TBD
Week 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Civil Rights - The Struggle for Equal Rights 	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapter 5, textbook. - Court Cases (Excerpts in Canvas) - Primary Sources (Excerpts in Canvas) <p>Discussion Post #3 due</p>
Week 10 (March 16-20)	No Class - Spring Break	-----
Week 11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Parties 	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapter 9.1-9.3, textbook. - McCarty & Schickler (2018), <i>On the Theory of Parties, Annual Review of Political Science</i>
Week 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political Parties Part 2. - Ideologies and Polarization - Public Opinion 	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapter 6 and 9.4, textbook. - Berinsky (2017), <i>Measuring Public Opinion with Surveys,</i>

		<i>Annual Review of Political Science</i>
Week 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Elections - Political Participation 	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapter 7, textbook. - Powell, G. American Turnout in Comparative Perspective. <i>American Political Science Review</i> <p>Writing Assignment due</p>
Week 14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Media - Interest Groups, Lobbying, Campaign Finance 	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapters 8 & 10, textbook. - Grose et al., (2021), Social Lobbying, <i>Journal of Politics</i>.
Weeks 15 & 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Domestic Policy - Foreign Policy - State and Local Government 	Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chapters 14, 16, 17, textbook. <p>Discussion Post #4 due</p>
FINALS - May 4-7	Final Exam	Specific Date TBD