PSC101: Introduction to American government

Term: Fall 2022

Instructor: Dr. Nicholas T. Davis

Meeting times: Tuesday / Thursday, 11:00a – 12:15p

Location: 120 Farrah Hall

Contact: [ntdavis2@ua.edu](mailto:ntdavis2@ua.edu)

Office hours: By appointment with your TA

**Course overview**

PSC101 involves a wide-ranging exploration of the core features of American government. While this is a “political science” course, the material you will interact with this term also draws on insights from history, sociology, and mass communications to help you better understand the workings of American democracy. You will learn about the tensions involved in governing a socially and geographically diverse country, the actors that participate in this system, and the institutions and processes that shape public policy.

Throughout this course, you will be asked to critically analyze whether the simple mythologies we tell ourselves about American democracy are true. The United States is both an old and imperfect democracy, and we should speak honestly and frankly about its successes and failures. This course will encourage you to evaluate how well our democracy lives up to its aspirational goals.

**Course materials**

*Textbook*. We will use the following textbook this term.

* William T. Bianco and David T. Canon. 2021. *American Politics Today, 7th Edition.* WW Norton. ISBN-10: 0393539652.

Please **do not purchase** this book in advance of the course. The textbook is available to you as part of the Access Granted program here at UA, which means that access to a digital copy of the book is provided to you automatically through your fall tuition. To access the book, you will simply click on the “Textbook” link within our Blackboard course site and then follow the subsequent log-in instructions.

*Short readings*. Each week you’ll be assigned supplementary readings from various sources. These articles will be available on Blackboard within the corresponding folder assigned to each week. Simply click on the correct hyperlink, and you should have instant access to that reading.

**Student learning outcomes**

By the end of this course, students will…

* Understand the evolving nature of American democracy
* Recognize the roles and responsibilities of different government institutions
* Describe the tensions between public demands and elite behaviors and governmental outputs
* Analyze how public policy impacts ordinary Americans

**Course grading**

There are four different tasks for which you will be graded this term. Please be advised that grades on any given set of tasks are **weighted** when calculating your final grade. ***You cannot simply take your points earned in Blackboard and divide them by points possible to calculate your grade.*** Instead, to correctly estimate your grade you need to first assign the correct weights, which are listed below, to the score you earn across the assignments in a given category.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Assignment | Weight |
| Syllabus quiz | 3.0% |
| Writing journals (2) | 12.0% |
| Chapter quizzes (15) | 15.0% |
| Exams (2) | 70.0% |
| Total | 100.0% |

**Syllabus quiz**

After our introductory course session on 08/18/2022, you will have approximately one week to complete a brief syllabus quiz on Blackboard. Please do this assignment! The quiz is “open-book.” You should carefully read through this syllabus because you will answer questions regarding the expectations for this course. These are easy points, so please do this assignment. The syllabus quiz closes on 08/25/2022 at 11:59 pm; once it closes, I will not reopen it.

**Writing journals**

You are responsible for writing two (2) journal entries this term. These are 400 word (minimum) mini-essays that ask you to thoughtfully integrate the short-readings associated with a unit’s modules with the textbook material in a way that answers the prompt.

For these tasks, you will be graded according to how well you integrate the themes found in short readings with the textbook’s core content. I’m not looking for you to just repeat the material found in the textbook or supplemental readings. Instead, these are **analytical** tasks where you evaluate and craft an argument about the material that you’ve read. You will be graded on both substance and writing quality. Journal entries will be completed and submitted via the “journal” tab Blackboard. ***Please do not email me or your TA your journal assignments****.*

Journal 1 (Due 10/06/22): *How does federalism cause problems for the quality of Americans’ lives in the United States? Give at least one example of a way that federalism complicates a specific public policy or political issue. In your view, does federalism contribute to a “crisis” in American democracy? Does the “good” outweigh the “bad?” Explain why or why not.*

Journal 2 (Due 11/18/2022): *What is Congressional polarization? What factors contribute to it? Are the parties polarized equally and on the same issues? Have these divisions extended to respect for democracy? One consequence of polarization is that it empowers the presidency. Briefly define the “green lantern” theory of the presidency and describe an example where people engage in wishful thinking about the power of the presidency.*

**Chapter quizzes**

Each week there are quizzes associated with the textbook reading; cumulatively, they are worth 15% of your grade over the term. These quizzes are designed to ensure that you understand important material associated with our core text readings. They are open-book, and the answers are not a secret. If you don’t know an answer, then…just look in the textbook. Quizzes stay open for approximately 7 days; they “open” on a Monday and “close” the following Sunday. There is no “make-up” policy for these quizzes. They’re open for a week, and then they close permanently.

All quizzes can be found on Blackboard – there are direct links to them in the folder “Chapter quizzes.” Those links will take you to the *American Politics Today* eTextbook, which automatically initiates the quiz software.

**Examinations**

You will take two examinations over the course of this term – roughly a “mid-term” and a “final” (although, please be aware that the first exam is held ***after*** the university’s “mid-term” week on the academic calendar). Examinations are multiple choice, closed-book, in-class tests. You will need an appropriate #2 pencil and a Scantron sheet, which I will supply.

**Attendance**

There is no attendance policy for PSC101. I’ve tried automating attendance-taking ten different ways, and it never works. In fact, it usually just costs you extra money and me extra time – actually, we’ll come back to administrative burdens like that during our week on the executive branch. Anyways, come to class when you’re well. **Don’t come to class when you’re sick**. Literally all the research on attendance suggests that people who come to class do better on assignments and exams. YOLO, etc.

**Course outline**

Below, you will find a description of what to expect over the course of this term. Please be aware of key dates, which include exam and due dates for homework.

**Weekly tasks**

Structurally, you may see the following directions in a given week:

* *Read*: This material is required to be completed by the day it is assigned, and you should read it carefully and in full. You will be tested on this content. APT = *American Politics Today*, our textbook.
* *Skim*: This material is supplementary; you would benefit from reading it. These readings will help you understand and evaluate the material you will be tested over.
* *Do*: Signals you to complete a task. Often, this means taking the required chapter quiz associated with a given week. Again… quizzes stay open for approximately 7 days; they “open” on a Monday and “close” the following Sunday. There is no make-up policy for these quizzes. They are open for a week, and then they close permanently. **Please do not email me to re-open quizzes.**
* *Watch*: This material will be watched in-class together and discussed.

All told, you should expect to read about 50 pages in a week. None of these readings are “hard.” I have not assigned a single journal article or essays filled with complicated analyses. You can’t learn if you don’t read. It is what it is.

**Important dates**

Please take note of several important dates, including:

08/18/2022: First day of class

08/24/2022: Last day to drop without W

10/06/2022: Journal 1 due

10/11/2022: No class – Study break

10/13/2022: EXAM 1 (Midterm)

10/26/2022: Last day to drop with W

11/18/2022: Journal 2 due

11/21/2022: No class – Thanksgiving Break

12/09/2022: EXAM 2 (Final)

**Semester overview**

*Course Introduction*

1. Syllabus / Class Overview 08/18

*Unit 1: Fundamentals of US government*

1. Democracy / Constitution 08/23, 08/25
2. Federalism 08/30, 09/01
3. Civil liberties and rights 09/06, 09/08

*Unit 2: The public*

1. The public and public opinion 09/13, 09/15
2. News Media 09/20, 09/22
3. Interest groups 09/27, 09/29
4. Elections 10/04, 10/06

*Mid-term*

1. Exam 1 10/13 @ 11:00 am

*Unit 3: Formal and informal institutions*

1. Parties 10/18, 10/20
2. Congress 10/25, 10/27
3. Presidency / Executive branch 11/01, 11/03
4. Courts and CJS 11/08, 11/10

*Unit 4: Public policy*

1. Economic and social policy 11/15, 11/17
2. Thanksgiving
3. Foreign policy 11/29, 12/01

*Finals*

1. EXAM 2 12/09 @10:30 am

**Unit 1: The fundamentals of US government**

*Unit 1 explores the foundations of American democracy by critically examining (1) the early founding period, (2) the development of the power-sharing arrangement between states and the federal government, (3) the tensions that social, cultural, and economic diversity place on democracy, and (4) the track record regarding whether democracy has lived up to its promises.*

Week 1 – Democracy / Constitutional design

*Big Picture:* Democracy in the United States is complicated. This week’s material introduces the debates and tensions that contributed to this country’s founding and constitution. The decisions made by the Framers – the men who wrote the Constitution – have wide-reaching consequences, and we will evaluate just how “democratic” America has become over time.

**Tuesday, August 23: What is (American) democracy?**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 1 – Understanding American Politics
  + *Do:* Chapter 1 quiz
* Short readings
  + *Read:* [Political Scientists Turned a Blind Eye to America’s Democratic Failures](https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/01/18/political-scientists-turned-a-blind-eye-to-americas-democratic-failures/)
  + *Skim:* [The Pandemic Killed the Common Good](https://theweek.com/feature/opinion/1002821/the-common-good-is-a-pandemic-casualty)
* Video
  + *Watch:* [Why a US City is searching for mass graves](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x-ItsPBTFO0)

**Thursday, August 25: The Constitution – Promises and failures**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 2 – The Constitution and the Founding
  + *Do:* Chapter 2 quiz
* Short readings
  + *Read:* [A Conservative Counterrevolution: The Anti-democratic Origins of the Constitution](https://www.harvardmagazine.com/2017/01/a-conservative-counterrevolution)
  + *Skim:* [The ‘Founding Fathers’ Were Surprisingly Pessimistic](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/27/opinion/us-founding-fathers-constitution.html?referringSource=articleShare)

Week 2 – Federalism

*Big picture:* Managing a country is tricky business, so the federal government delegates much power to the states. In turn, the resulting power-sharing agreement between the national and state governments creates lots of opportunities for creative problem-solving. However, federalism also allows states to engage in behaviors that antagonize democracy. This chapter reviews the historical debates about federalism and how it functions at the present.

**Tuesday, August 30: What is federalism?**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 3 – Federalism
  + *Do:* Chapter 3 quiz

**Thursday, September 1: How federalism makes governing difficult**

* Short readings
  + *Read:* [Why Federalism Is Hard](https://www.vox.com/polyarchy/2018/2/27/17058498/federalism-hard)
  + *Read:* [Abortion May Cause a Federalism Crisis](https://www.law.com/therecorder/2022/05/10/abortion-may-cause-a-federalism-crisis/?slreturn=20220620153210)
  + *Read:* [The Independent State Legislature Theory Should Horrify Supreme Court’s Originalists](https://www.justsecurity.org/81990/the-independent-state-legislature-theory-should-horrify-supreme-courts-originalists/)
* Video
  + *Watch* (in class): *Whose vote counts?* short documentary

Week 3 – Liberties and rights

*Big picture:* In theory, Americans enjoy lots of freedoms and liberties. However, despite nice guarantees that “all men are created equal” in the Constitution, the actual extension of rights to the public happens slowly – so slowly, in fact, that the United States isn’t even a “full” democracy until the mid-20th Century with the passage of the Voting Rights Act. These chapters review how politics is used to constrain the rights that citizens possess.

**Tuesday, September 6: Liberties**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 4 – Civil Liberties
  + *Do:* Chapter 4 quiz
* Video
  + *Watch* (in class): [Prisoners reveal inhumane conditions inside Mississippi prisons](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQzDmrIGTuE)

**Thursday, September 8: Rights**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 5 – Civil Rights
  + *Do:* Chapter 5 quiz
* Video
  + *Watch* (in class): [Where the march for civil rights stands today](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1oOLZIR8_E)
  + *Watch* (in class): Excerpts from [The Vote](https://www.pbs.org/video/the-vote-part-1-3kph5d/)

**Unit 2: The public**

*Unit 2 explores the “inputs” of democracy: (1) who the mass public “is” and how they think about politics, (2) the institutions, like the media, that collect, evaluate, and deliver the news to ordinary people, (3) the groups that people form to engage the work of politics, and (4) the ways in which citizens participate in politics through campaigns and elections.*

Week 4 – “The public” and Public Opinion

*Big picture:* Who is the mass public? And what do they believe about politics? How can we be certain that we know something about their opinions? This week’s materials explore the scientific study of what people believe about government and wider world.

**Tuesday, September 13: Polling and public opinion**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 6 – Public Opinion
  + *Do:* Chapter 6 quiz
* Short readings
  + Read: [Sympathy for the Devil: In Defense of Horse-Race Election Polling](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/defense-horse-race-political-polling.html)
* Video
  + *Watch* (in-class): [Here’s How a Poll of 1,000 People Represents the Entire Country](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fNqy2jMMewU)
  + *Watch* (in-class): [Are Polls Trustworthy?](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxpHI53T3zs)

**Thursday, September 15: Radical political views and support for democracy in the public**

* + Short readings
* *Read:* Radical Partisan Psychology (Blackboard)
* *Read:* Support for Democracy (Blackboard)

Week 5 – News Media

*Big picture:* There is no single entity known as “the media.” Instead, the media involves many actors and organizations that, together, combine to form a significant political institution that delivers information about current events to the mass public. This week’s materials do several things: (1) review the historical developments that created the news media, (2) explain how this system shapes what people believe and how they behave, and (3) evaluate how the media affects democracy.

**Tuesday, September 20: The evolution of the news media**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 7 – The Media
  + *Do:* Chapter 7 quiz

**Thursday, September 22: How the media contributes to political dysfunction**

* Short readings
  + *Read:* [News consumption in a digital age](https://www.journalism.org/2020/12/08/measuring-news-consumption-in-a-digital-era/')
  + *Read:* [If you’re worried that journalists have learned nothing from the Trump years](https://pressthink.org/2021/03/if-youre-worried-that-journalists-have-learned-nothing-from-the-trump-years/)
  + *Read:* [“Number soup”: Can we make it easier for readers to digest all the numbers journalists stuff into their stories?](https://www.niemanlab.org/2022/08/number-soup-can-we-make-it-easier-for-readers-to-digest-all-the-numbers-journalists-stuff-into-their-stories/)
* Video
  + *Watch* (in class): [Journalism Is Struggling](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bq2_wSsDwkQ)

Week 6 – Interest Groups

*Big picture:* Interest groups harness the power of ordinary citizens to influence public policy. These associations of individuals or organizations usually coalesce around one or more shared concerns to benefit themselves and their members through the process of lobbying. This chapter analyzes the role that these groups play in politics and how they shape the policymaking process.

**Tuesday, September 27: Interest groups and politics**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 10 – Interest Groups
  + *Do:* Chapter 10 quiz
  + *Watch* (in-class): [How Lobbying Became a $3.5 Billion Industry](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZVfTCBUkgM)

**Thursday, September 29: How lobbying affects politics**

* Short readings
  + *Read:* A Scandal for Our Time
* Video
  + *Watch* (in class): *Can you buy an election?* short documentary

Week 7 – Campaigns and Elections

*Big picture:* The United States is awash in campaigns and elections. This week’s materials explore how elections are administered and regulated, as well as how campaigns motivate turnout and persuade people to vote for certain candidates or parties.

**Tuesday, October 4: Elections in the United States**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 9 – Elections
  + *Do:* Chapter 8 quiz
* Video
  + *Watch* (in-class): [People Saying the Last Election Was Stolen Want to Run the Next One](file:///C:\Users\13093\AppData\Roaming\Microsoft\Word\People%20Saying%20the%20Last%20Election%20Was%20Stolen%20Want%20to%20Run%20the%20Next%20One)

**Thursday, October 6: Campaigns and the persuadable voter**

* Short readings
  + *Read:* Chapters 1 and 2 from *The Persuadable Voter* (Blackboard)
* Journal 1 due at 11:59 pm

Week 8 – Exam 1

**Tuesday, October 11: No class; please review study guide**

**Thursday, October 13: Examination 1**

**Unit 3: Formal and informal institutions**

*Unit 3 explores the major institutional actors in democracy. It explains (1) what parties do and why they are useful in democracy and how (2) Congress, (3) the presidency, and the (4) judiciary function. Together, these are the core institutions of democracy that engage in a delicate dance of checks and balances.*

Week 9 – Parties

*Big Picture:* It is hard to imagine politics without parties. In the United States, parties play a vital role in helping citizens affect politics by organizing political conflict. While parties are helpful, they can also wreak havoc on the wellbeing of citizens because these groups are only weakly accountable to them. This chapter investigates the development of the two-party system in the United States and how it structures politics today.

**Tuesday, October 18: The party system**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 8 – Political Parties
  + *Do:* Chapter 9 quiz
* Short readings:
  + *Read:* [Women of Color Were Shut Out of Congress For Decades. Now They’re Transforming It](https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/women-of-color-congress-2020/)
* Video
  + *Watch* (in class): [Party switching explainer](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s8VOM8ET1WU)

**Thursday, October 20: Weak parties + strong partisans = bad news**

* Short readings
  + *Read:* [Weak parties, strong partisanship](https://www.vox.com/mischiefs-of-faction/2016/11/3/13512362/weak-parties-strong-partisanship-bad-combination)
  + *Read:* [Sham recounts and disinformation](https://www.npr.org/2021/06/03/1000954549/experts-call-it-a-clown-show-but-arizona-audit-is-a-disinformation-blueprint)
  + *Read:* [Are Republican-controlled states bad for democracy?](https://www.vox.com/2021/4/5/22358325/study-republican-control-state-government-bad-for-democracy)

Week 10 – Congress

*Big picture:*  Congress is responsible for policymaking. And, yet, it is often stuck in a nasty gridlock that produces very few material changes. This chapter analyzes the structure of Senate and House of Representatives and explains how policies are (or are not) made.

**Tuesday, October 25: Congress Part 1**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 11 – Congress
  + *Do:* Chapter 11 quiz

**Thursday, October 27: Congress Part 2**

* Short readings
  + *Read:* [The Fake History of the Filibuster](https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/fake-history-senate-filibuster-sinema-founders-constitution.html)
  + *Read:* [The Blight of Bipartisanship](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/01/19/power-congress)
  + *Read:* [The Power of Congress](https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/01/19/power-congress)

Week 11 – Presidency & The Executive Branch

*Big picture:* The modern presidency is a powerful branch in the federal government. It wasn’t always so important. In fact, the Framers had very different ideas about what the presidency should look like. Today, the president is responsible for a massive, powerful bureaucracy tasked with the implementation of policy. These chapters investigate the development of the presidency and the bureaucracy that they oversee.

**Tuesday, November 1: The Presidency**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 12 – The Presidency
  + *Do:* Chapter quiz
* Short readings
  + *Read:* [What Is an Executive Order and Why Don’t Presidents Use Them All the Time?](https://theconversation.com/what-is-an-executive-order-and-why-dont-presidents-use-them-all-the-time-150896)

**Thursday, November 3: The Bureaucracy**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 13 – The Bureaucracy
  + *Do:* Chapter quiz
* Short readings
  + *Read:* [The Time Tax: Why Is So Much American Bureaucracy Left to Average Citizens?](https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/07/how-government-learned-waste-your-time-tax/619568/)

Week 12 – Courts

*Big picture:* The judiciary has outlandish power within American democracy. It wasn’t always this way! This week’s material explores the historical development of the judiciary, along with the ways in which the modern court affects the scope of what is politically possible to achieve today. We conclude the week by evaluating recent Supreme Court nominations and whether the court has become an unelected partisan backstop that threatens the principles of democracy.

**Tuesday, November 8: The court system**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 14 – The Courts
  + *Do:* Chapter 14 quiz
* Short readings
  + *Read:* [What happens when the public loses faith in the Supreme Court?](https://www.vox.com/23055620/supreme-court-legitimacy-crisis-abortion-roe)

**Thursday, November 10: Recent Supreme Court developments**

* Short readings
  + *Read*: [Making the Supreme Court Safe for Democracy](https://newrepublic.com/article/159710/supreme-court-reform-court-packing-diminish-power)
* Video
  + *Watch* (in class): [*Supreme Revenge*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Yt2xUJfdyw)PBSFrontline documentary

**Unit 4: Policy and policymaking**

Unit 4 explores the “outputs” of democracy. Having examined how the various branches conspire to create or kill public policy, this unit investigates different *types* of policies. It explores both (1) domestic economic and social policy, as well as (2) foreign policy. In the process, it spends more time discussing the implications of policy and how these rules shape the experiences and lives of ordinary citizens.

Week 13: Public Policy

*Big Picture*: Having discussed *how* politics works, this module examines the types of policies that shape social and political life in the United States. It tackles difficult policy topics ranging from climate change to abortion to financial regulation and investigates why some policies succeed and others fail.

**Tuesday, November 15: Economic policy**

* Textbook
  + *Read:* APT, Chapter 15 – Economic Policy
  + *Do:* Chapter 15 quiz
* Short readings
  + *Read:* [The Weekly Planet: An Outdated Idea Is Still Shaping Climate Policy](https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2021/04/an-outdated-idea-is-still-shaping-climate-policy/618652/)
  + *Skim*: [The Inflation Reduction Act: What Democrats’ Big New Bill Would Actually Do](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2022/7/28/23282217/climate-bill-health-care-drugs-inflation-reduction-act)

**Thursday, November 17: Social policy**

* Textbook
  + *Read*: APT, Chapter 16 – Social Policy
  + *Do*: Chapter 16 quiz
* Short readings
  + *Read:* [The Lasting Legacy of Redlining](https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/redlining/)
* Video
  + *Watch* (in-class): [Policing the Police 2020](https://www.pbs.org/video/policing-the-police-2020-ko2tft/)excerpt
* Audio
  + *Listen* (optional): [The City that Disbanded Its Police](https://open.spotify.com/episode/1P0NX10dyalsSZOxnUp8ef?si=hcQB_yoRR22p0pjXoqF4xg&nd=1)

Week 14 – Thanksgiving Dead Week

**NO CLASS: Tuesday (11/22) OR Thursday (11/24)**

Week 15: Foreign policy

*Big Picture*: The United States is one of the most powerful countries in the world. That role comes with significant responsibilities. This chapter investigates the interactions that America has with its neighbors, and the public policies that shape its behavior on the world stage. It also raises hard questions about whether its active role in international politics always makes the world a better or safer place.

**November 29: Foreign policy – a brief primer**

* Textbook
  + *Read*: APT, Chapter 17 – Foreign Policy
  + *Do*: Chapter 17 quiz
* Short readings
  + *Read:* [The Disasters in Afghanistan and Haiti Share the Same Twisted Root](https://newrepublic.com/article/163329/afghanistan-withdrawal-haiti-earthquake-crisis)
  + *Read:* [Russia’s Ancestral Lands and Putin’s Justification to Invade Ukraine](https://www.thedefensepost.com/2022/03/03/putin-justification-invade-ukraine/)

**December 1: What the past tells us about the present: Putting US foreign policy in historical context**

* + Video
  + *Watch*: [Cuban Missile Crisis – Three Men Go to War](https://www.pbs.org/video/three-men-go-war-full-episode)

Week 16 – Exam 2

**December 9: Examination 2 @ 10:30 am**

**Additional course information**

In addition to myself, there are three excellent teaching assistants for this course: FILL IN HERE. They will assist us in grading exams, meeting with you during office hours, and may occasionally pop into lecture to deliver presentations about certain topics. Please treat them with the kindness and respect that you give me.

**Office hours and general communication advice**

*Office hours.* Please consult the following information, along with our course’s Blackboard site to schedule a virtual office hours appointment with one of our teaching assistants. Meetings are scheduled in 15-minute increments. Students have been assigned via last name to one of the TAs below.

* ONE
* TWO
* THREE

*Communicating with me.* I am happy to trouble-shoot issues that you may have throughout the course. To make sure that I do not lose your email correspondence, **please begin all email subject lines with “PSC101”** so that I can search periodically to see if I have lost any emails.

**Grading matrix**

The full grading scale that UA uses can be found [here](https://catalog.ua.edu/undergraduate/about/academic-regulations/records/grades-grade-points-gpa/). As a general rule, an “A” conveys excellent

and exceptional work, a “B” suggests that you do (very) good work, and “C” communicates that your work was satisfactory**. I do not assign options for extra credit**. Instead, I give ample opportunities for you to earn “easy” credit. The syllabus quiz and participation are worth 10% of your overall grade, for example. The chapter quizzes are also very straightforward because they are open book. That is another 15% of your grade. All told, a full quarter of your grade is simply you showing up and doing the work! For those of you unfamiliar with the conversion of numeric to lettered grades, the university uses the following scale (see next page) for undergraduate grading.

Important note: Please do not write me passionate emails at the end of the term regarding the rounding of your grades. I do my best to be generous and “round up” for those of you on the 89.4 cusp, but I must draw the line somewhere. The workload in this class is fairly modest and the format is lecture driven – this means that I don’t get the chance to interact with you all like I do in my upper division seminars. It is easier in those courses to be a bit more lenient on marginal calls since I get to see your performance over the term. For better (or worse), however, the final grade calculations in this course are pretty simple: you do the work and you earn the grade associated with the work.

UA Alpha-numeric Grading

Grade Numeric GPA Points

A+ 97 - 100 4.33

A 94 >97 4.00

A- 90 >94 3.67

B+ 87 >90 3.33

B 84 >87 3.00

B- 80 >84 2.67

C+ 77 >80 2.33

C 74 >77 2.00

C- 70 >74 1.67

D+ 67 >70 1.33

D 64 >67 1.00

D- 60 >64 0.67

F 00 >64 0.00

**Technology policy**

The academic research is mixed to negative about whether computers or tablets help or hinder your learning experience because they can easily be a distraction. That said, we will occasionally use computers in-class, and I do not mind you using them. Please use your technology wisely and respectfully and do not disturb people around you with it. It should go without saying that you may not take phone calls in the middle of class.

**Statement on the Academic Honor Code and Academic Misconduct**

All students in attendance at The University of Alabama are expected to be honorable and to observe standards of conduct appropriate to a community of scholars. The University of Alabama expects from its students a higher standard of conduct than the minimum required to avoid discipline. Academic misconduct includes all acts of dishonesty in any academic or related matter and any knowing or intentional help, attempt to help, or conspiracy to help another student commit an act of academic dishonesty. Academic dishonestly includes, but is not limited to, the following acts, when performed in any type of academic or academically related matter, exercise or activity.

* *Cheating*: Using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, study aids, or computer-related information.
* *Plagiarism*: Representing the words, data, works, ideas, computer programs or output, or anything not generated in an authorized fashion, as one’s own.
* *Fabrication*: Presenting as genuine, any invented or falsified citation or material.
* *Misrepresentation*: Falsifying, altering, or misstating the contents of documents or other materials related to academic matters, including schedules, prerequisites, and transcripts.

**Statement on Disability Accommodations**

If you are registered with the Office of Disability Services and have an accommodation, then please let me know as soon as possible. If you have a disability, but have not contacted the Office of Disability Services, then you can [visit the Disability Services website to make arrangements](http://ods.ua.edu/).

The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is the central contact point for UA students with academic disabilities. ODS works with faculty and other members of the University community to provide individualized academic accommodations and support services while promoting student responsibility and self-advocacy. It is the student’s responsibility to make known a need for academic accommodations and services by (1) providing appropriate documentation of the disability to ODS, (2) formally requesting accommodations by meeting with an ODS accommodations specialist, and (3) meeting with each of his / her / their professors to present a formal ODS accommodation letter to discuss the implementation of accommodations.

**Changes to the syllabus**

Finally, some changes may occur to this syllabus, probably for reasons outside of our control. If that happens, then you’ll receive advance and fair warning of any changes to the best of my ability.