

PSC 5500-001:

Teaching American Civics I
Summer II 2026 | M-F: 9:30-11:30 am CDT
& 1:00-3:00 pm CDT
Classroom: Zoom Webinar
Professor: Dr. Benjamin Gross

Office: Brewer Hall 205D

Office Hours:

Physical – By appointment
Virtual – M-F: 11:45 am – 12:45 pm
Appointment – contact for mutually agreed upon date and time
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A clear corollary is deducible from this demonstration, if the majority of a self-governing people are sober-minded, enlightened, studious of right, capable of comparing and balancing opposite interpretations of a fundamental law, or opposite views of a particular system of policy; then all appeals addressed to them in messages, speeches, pamphlets, and from the thousand tongued newspaper press, will be calm, dispassionate adapted at once to elucidate the subject under consideration and to instruct and elevate the mind of the arbiters. But, on the other hand, if the people are ignorant, fickle, averse to, or incapable of patient inquiry, prone to hasty decisions from plausible appearances, or reckless from prejudice or passion, then the demagogues who address, will adapt themselves to the dupes who hear, just as certainly, as the hunter adapts his lure to the animal he would ensnare; and flattery, imposture, falsehood, the vindication and eulogy of fellow partisans however wicked, and the defamation of opponents however virtuous, will be the instruments by which a warfare, destructive in the end alike to victors and vanquished, will be waged. Let the spirit and tone of our congressional and legislative speech-makers, and the language of the political press, throughout the country, decide the question, which of the above described classes they consider themselves as addressing.
- Horace Mann, Secretary to the Board of Education to the State of Massachusetts, “An Oration, Delivered Before the Authorities of the City of Boston” July 4, 1842.

Course Rationale:

In *What Universities Owe Democracy* (2021), Johns Hopkins University [President Ron Daniels](#) argues higher education has a responsibility to support democratic societies, including [a civic education](#) that prepares students for democratic citizenship. This renewed emphasis reflects a longstanding tradition in American political thought that understands education as essential to self-government.

Efforts to strengthen civic education at colleges and universities represent an important development, but their reach is inherently limited. Fewer than [two-thirds](#) of high school graduates pursue postsecondary education, and fewer than [40 percent](#) of Americans earn a bachelor’s degree or higher. Even when undertaken by leading research universities, college-based civic education can engage only a portion of the citizenry.

By contrast, nearly all Americans share one formative civic experience: K-12 education. More than [90 percent](#) of Americans earn a high school diploma or its equivalent. For leaders such as [Thomas Jefferson](#), Horace Mann, and [Abraham Lincoln](#), this common educational foundation was not incidental but essential. They understood education as the primary means by which a free people acquire the knowledge and habits necessary to sustain democratic institutions. On this view, civic education cannot be confined to the college classroom; it must be cultivated throughout K–12.

While education has long served economic and workforce purposes, its original public function in America has been to prepare citizens capable of understanding their government, evaluating its actions, and participating responsibly in public life. An informed citizenry is not a byproduct of democracy but a precondition for it.

Accordingly, this course is designed to equip educators and interested citizens with a deeper understanding of American government and its foundational principles through engagement with primary sources. By strengthening civic knowledge, the course supports the broader democratic purpose of education and enables participants to share this knowledge within their classrooms and communities.

Course Description:

An introduction to the foundational principles and thought of American government through the reading of primary sources and documents. Includes analysis of the Declaration of Independence, branches of the federal government, and principles of the U.S. Constitution. Includes a focus on improving civic literacy for elementary and secondary level (K-12) teachers and average citizens.

Course Prerequisites:

None

Credit Hours:

3 Credit Hours

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon completing this course, students should be able to:

1. Analyze primary sources and documents to understand the foundational principles of America's founding.
2. Evaluate theories of American government to understand their design and application.
3. Become familiar with interpretations of American government through different theorists, statesmen, and civic leaders.
4. Utilize knowledge of the foundational principles and thought of American government to develop a lesson plan or similar tool to improve civic literacy.

Graduate and Doctoral Course Rigor

- The academic content of this course is progressively more advanced than undergraduate coursework in this discipline. Undergraduate coursework lays the groundwork for graduate/doctoral content covered in this course.
- The academic content of this course includes knowledge of the literature of the discipline that is indicative of graduate/doctoral work in this field.
- The academic content of this course ensures engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training for graduate/doctoral students in this discipline.

Required Texts:

* *Teaching American Civics I: A Primary Source Reader*. Benjamin Gorss (Ed.)

Assignments and Grading:

Reading Quizzes	20%
Class Participation	25%
Reflection Papers	25%
Final Project	30%

Grading Scale:

A = 90-100
B = 80-89
C = 70-79
F = <69

Assignment Details:

Reading Quizzes

Prior to each class session, a five-question multiple-choice reading quiz is due, which ensures students have extracted necessary information from the readings to engage in the class session. There are 20 reading quizzes. More information about these reading quizzes is in our Canvas shell.

Class Participation

The course sessions occur synchronously via Zoom. Information on how to join these sessions is provided via email prior to the beginning of the course and available in our Canvas shell. During these sessions, students are graded on their participation in these sessions. Examples of participation include answering questions from the professor, asking self-generated questions from the readings, answering fellow students' questions, engaging in dialogue about an idea or concept, and sharing strategies for how to implement the primary course in the classroom/community setting.

Reflection papers

There are five reflection papers during the two weeks we meet. These 300 to 500-word assignments require students to reflect on how they can incorporate the primary sources into their classroom or community activities. Students have time windows to submit these papers throughout the two weeks of virtual meetings. A rubric and further instructions are in our Canvas shell.

Final Project

All students must submit a final project by 11:55 pm CDT on Wednesday, July 29. Students will be able to submit the final project before this deadline.

If the student is a future or current teacher, the final project is a lesson or unit plan that demonstrates how to incorporate concepts and primary source readings from the course into a current or future course that will meet state standards.

If the student is not a future or current teacher, the final project is a series of Op-Ed pieces that incorporate concepts and primary source readings from the course to shed light on contemporary situations, discussions, and debates, which the student can then submit for publication.

More information about this final project is shared during virtual class sessions and available in our Canvas shell. This includes a handout and a rubric.

University Statements:

Faculty teaching this course will include all current required university verbiage and policies found in the Faculty Commons [Syllabi Guide](#).

Generative Artificial Intelligence Policy:

Red Light

The assignments in this class have been designed to challenge you to develop creativity, critical-thinking, and problem-solving skills. Using AI technology will limit your capacity to develop these skills and to meet the learning goals of this course.

Use of AI in ways that are inconsistent with the parameters above will be considered academic misconduct and subject to the JSU's Scholars' Code. If you have any questions about what constitutes academic integrity in this course or at Jacksonville State University, please feel free to contact me to discuss your concerns.

All work submitted for this course must be your own. Any use of generative AI tools, including, but not limited to ChatGPT, when working on assignments is forbidden. Use of generative AI will be considered academic misconduct and subject to investigation

Other Policies:

Late Work:

This course does not accept any late work.

Religious Observances:

If assigned work conflicts with your religious holidays, please tell me in advance so we can make alternative plans. Informing me of religious obligations after the fact, however, will not count as an excuse.

Withdraws:

Please be advised, the last date to [withdraw](#) from the course is Wednesday, July 22. If you choose to stop attending the course, it is your responsibility to withdraw from the course. If you do not withdraw from the course, the professor will enter the grade you have earned as your final grade.

Student Notifications:

I post all notifications on Canvas via the Announcements section of our course. Be sure to check these for all notifications.

E-mail Policy:

I will respond to all e-mails within 24 hours. **All e-mails that can be answered via the syllabus will receive the response: “Please refer to your syllabus.” and a picture of Alf.**

To ensure you have read the syllabus prior to e-mailing me, the first e-mail you send me must include a picture of a [platypus](#). If your first e-mail does not have a picture of a platypus, I will respond to your e-mail with: “Please review the syllabus.” This policy ensures you have helped yourself by using the tools I have provided you.

To help response time, please include an appropriate subject line in your e-mail. Furthermore, please take time to construct a formal e-mail with proper etiquette and language. **E-mails constructed in a manner like, “Yo, Mrs B i will b submitting the thing late 2day” or using emojis to represent words/ideas will receive the response, “Please refer to your syllabus.” and a picture of Godzilla.**

Questions About Your Grades:

I am happy to answer questions about your during my office hours/appointments. I, however, do not discuss grades over e-mail or phone due to FERPA regulations and protecting your privacy. See [here](#) for more information.

How to be Successful in this Class:

The best way to be successful is to be prepared. Being prepared means reading the entire assignment carefully and, most likely, rereading the assignment prior to class. These texts are carefully constructed arguments, which sometimes only become visible after multiple interactions. By reading the assignments prior to class, you will be able to fully participate and get the most out of our classroom experience.

Furthermore, good note taking is vital. Take [physical notes](#). Learn to listen carefully. I find students who write down the questions being asked, and then the responses to these questions, are the most successful. If you only write down the answer the note is meaningless, as it lacks the context of the question.

After class, review your notes to see if they make sense. By reviewing them sooner than later you will be able to remember things from class to sort out any points of confusion in your notes.

Finally, get together with other students to form virtual discussion groups. If you get together periodically and go over notes, you are more likely to have a complete set of notes. You will not only be able to go over your notes together to fill in the gaps, but by discussing with each other the topics of the class you might come to new insights.

Tentative Class Schedule:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Session</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>
M-6/22	AM	Introduction & Classic Ideas of Government	<i>Politics</i> Book I, Ch. 1-2 <i>Politics</i> , Book III, Ch. 7-11
M-6/22	PM	Moder Ideas of Government	<i>Levithan</i> , Ch. 13-15 & Ch. 17-18 <i>Second Treatise</i> , ¶4, 6, 27, 95, 123-137, 222, & 225 <i>Spirit of the Laws</i> , Book II; Book III; Book XX, Ch. 1-2
T-6/23	AM	Foundations of American Political Thought	Mayflower Compact Virginia Resolves on the Stamp Act (1765) John Dickinson, “Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer” (1767) Declaration and Resolves of the First Continental Congress (1774) Mason, Virginia Declaration of Rights (1776)
T-6/23	PM	Foundations of American Political Thought	Declaration of Independence (drafts and final copy) Gettysburg Address Alexis de Tocqueville, Selections
W-6/24	AM	The Founding	Articles of Confederation Northwester Ordinance of 1787 Madison, Vices of the Political System of the United States” (1787) Lee to Mason on the Convention (1787) U.S. Constitution
W-6/24	PM	The Founding	Brutus #1 Centinel #1 Federalist #10, # 14, 15, and #23
R-6/25	AM	The Legislative Department	U.S. Constitution Rush, “On the Pennsylvania Constitution” (1777) Federalist #52, #53, #55, #62, and #63 Alexis de Tocqueville, Selections

R-6/25	PM	The Legislative Department	<p>Federalist #10 and #51</p> <p>Washington, Farwell Address (1796)</p> <p>Alexis de Tocqueville, Selections</p> <p>George Norris, "The Model Legislature" (1934)</p>
F-6/26	AM	The Executive Department	<p>U.S. Constitution</p> <p>Pacificus-Helvidius #1</p> <p>Federalist #47, #48, and #70</p> <p>Neutrality Act of 1793</p> <p>Jefferson, "Letter to Colvin" (1810)</p> <p>Alexis de Tocqueville, Selections</p>
F-6/26	PM	The Executive Department	<p>Lincoln, "Fourth of July Message to Congress" (July 4, 1861)</p> <p>Lincoln, "Proclamation Suspending the Writ of Habeas Corpus" (September 24, 1862)</p> <p>Lincoln, "Letter to Erastus Corning and others" (June 12, 1863)</p> <p>Lincoln, "Reply to the Ohio Democratic Convention/Birchard Letter" (June 29, 1863)</p> <p>Lincoln, "Letter to O.H. Browning" (September 22, 1861)</p> <p>Lincoln, "The Emancipation Proclamation" (January 1, 1863)</p> <p>Lincoln, "Letter to Treasury Secretary Salmon Chase" (September 2, 1863)</p> <p>Lincoln, "Letter to Albert G. Hodges" (April 4, 1864)</p> <p>Lincoln, "Exchange with Zechariah Chandler, from John Hay's Diary" (July 4, 1864)</p> <p>Wilson, "The Study of Administration" (1887)</p> <p>Theodore Roosevelt, "On the Stewardship Theory of the President" (1913)</p> <p>Taft, "The Limitations of the Presidential Power" (1916)</p> <p><i>Youngstown v. Sawyer</i> (1952)</p>

M-6/29	AM	The Judicial Department	U.S. Constitution Federalist #78, #80, and #81 <i>Marbury v. Madison</i> (1803)
M-6/29	PM	The Judicial Department	Brutus, #11, #12, and #15 Alexis de Tocqueville, Selections
T-6/30	AM	Separation of Powers (theory)	U.S. Constitution Federalists #37, #47, #48, and #49
T-6/30	PM	Separation of Powers (theory)	Federalists #50, #51, #70, #71, and #78
W-7/1	AM	Separation of Powers (practice)	<i>Marbury v. Madison</i> (1803) <i>Stuart v. Laird</i> (1803) Lincoln, “On Dred Scott” (1857 & 1861) Theodore Roosevelt, “The Heirs of Abraham Lincoln” (1913) Justice Robert Jackson, “Preface” to <i>The Struggle for Judicial Supremacy</i> (1941)
W-7/1	PM	Separation of Powers (practice)	Madison “Speech on the removal power of the President” (June 17, 1789) Jefferson to Spencer Roane (September 6, 1819) Jefferson to Judge William Johnson (June 12, 1823) Andrew Jackson, “Message on the Veto of the Bank Bill” (July 10, 1832) Chief Justice Roger Taney, “Ex Parte Merryman” (1861) Lincoln, “Message to Congress in Special Session” (July 4, 1861) Edward Bates, “Opinion of Attorney General Bates on the President’s Power to suspend the writ of Habeas Corpus” (July 5, 1861) Franklin D. Roosevelt, “The Court Disapproves” (1935)

R-7/2	AM	Federalism	<p>U.S. Constitution Federalist #39, #45, and #46 Hamilton in the New York Ratifying Convention (1788) Madison, on structural features of Constitution, <i>National Gazette</i> (1792) Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions (1798) James Madison to N.P. Trist (1830)</p>
R-7/2	PM	Federalism	<p>Alexis de Toqueville, Selections Douglass, “Reconstruction” (1866) Altgeld, “Address on the State of Illinois” (January 19, 1895) Lewelling, “Farwell Adress to the Kansas Legislature” (January 9, 1895) Hunt “Letters to Governors from AZ Gov. Hunt” (1931) Croly, <i>Promise of American Life</i> (1909) Roosevelt on Federalism (1929-1930)</p>
F-7/3	AM	The Bill of Rights	<p>The First 10 Amendments Federalist #84 Wilson, State House Yard Speech (1787) Brutus #2</p>
F-7/3	PM	The Bill of Rights	<p>Jefferson to Madison (December 20, 1787) Madison to Jefferson (October 17, 1788) Jefferson to Madison (March 15, 1789) Madison, Speech Proposing Constitutional Amendments (1789)</p>
W-7/29		Final Projects Due	NO READING