Required Readings:

occasional internet readings to be assigned in class, discussion sections, and by email

This course attempts to survey, in the most general way, some of the topics that are important for an understanding of American politics and government. It begins with an examination of the context within which our political institutions and structures operate – especially the historical/cultural/constitutional/social forces that have helped to shape the kind of government under which we live. Next, we consider the major institutions (legislative, executive, judicial) of American government, looking not only at their formal responsibilities but also at some of the reasons why they do not always perform as the "textbook" model suggests that they should. Finally, we focus on citizens, with sections touching upon the nature of public opinion, voting and elections, and other forms of political participation; one of our main concerns here will be with the question of how "democratic" the United States really is – and, if the answer is not one that we're altogether comfortable with, does the fault lie with our leaders or with ourselves?

It is impossible in one semester to deal adequately with the wide range of topics relating to the processes of American government and politics. Like any other, this course emphasizes some subjects (political culture, our federal Constitution, the three branches of government, elections and public opinion) while treating the rest either lightly or not at all (political economy, mass politics and protest, interest groups, foreign and domestic policy). The ultimate goal, however, is to provide a reasonably broad overview so that you will be better able to understand and to evaluate your political leaders and the institutions they manage.

Grades in this class are based on the following:
- Midterm exam 35 percent (Monday, October 21, 1:55 p.m.)
- Written assignments 20 percent (TBA in discussion sections)
- Final exam 45 percent (Wednesday, December 18, 7:30 a.m.)

Tests are multiple choice, with the material you are responsible for to be specified in class. Anyone missing an exam without a valid excuse – usually medical – will receive a failing grade for that particular exam. No makeups will be permitted except in the case of extreme and fully documented emergencies.
I am in principle opposed to the buying and selling of course notes, primarily because they are often used as a substitute for – rather than a supplement to – students doing the assigned work. As if to prove my point, grades in POS 2041 have gone down since these notes became available here in Gainesville. On the other hand, since our judicial system does not permit me to stop the practice, I probably will make an outline of my lectures available for students to purchase. Buying this outline (or any other that might be on the market) will not assure you of a good grade; only coming to class and doing the required readings can accomplish that goal. But at least the outline you use will be less superficial and full of errors than most of those I have seen in the past. Details on where you can obtain the materials will be provided in class.

COURSE OUTLINE
There are no daily or weekly assignments, though you should try to pace your reading so that it corresponds to the subjects being discussed in class. You are responsible for assigned chapters even when they are not covered in class lectures.

1. The Historical and Constitutional Context of American Government
   Introduction: The Study of Politics
   Models of Politics
   American Political Culture
   The Constitution
   Federalism
   Readings: Fiorina and Peterson, Chapters 1-4, 16-17, Appendices 1-4.
   Ceaser and Busch, Chapters 1-2.

2. Institutions of American Government: Legislative, Executive, Judicial
   Congress
   The Presidency
   Bureaucracy
   The Courts
   Ceaser and Busch, Chapters 3-5.
   Dresang et al., pp. 1-75.

   Learning about Politics
   Social Conflict in American Politics
   Partisan Realignment
   Public Opinion
   Political Participation
   Elections and Campaigns
   Political Parties and Interest Groups
   Readings: Fiorina and Peterson, Chapters 5-11.
   Ceaser and Busch, Chapters 6-8.
   Dresang et al., pp. 77-189.