

POL 1101 Syllabus

United States Government, MP, CRN 82292

Fall 2026

Instructor Information

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Office Hours: By appointment

General Course Information

Description

This course is an introduction to American government and politics and is a foundational course elective for all Georgia Tech undergraduate students. The U.S. government has one national government, 50 state governments, 573 sovereign tribal nations, and more than 100,000 local and other sub-levels of government. Across this vast system, there are dramatic differences in people and communities, economic conditions, geography, weather and natural settings, among many other things, meaning that policy issues and solutions also vary. As a former U.S. Speaker of the House once said, “all politics is local.”

While national level policy making, and governance is designed to address issues facing our nation as a whole, state and local governance addresses policy issues that affect our everyday lives. In order to truly understand American government, we must understand how these parts work – separately and together.

The class is divided into six components. The first six are lecture and speaker based. They include the U.S. Constitution/Georgia Constitution, the Federal Government, the Federal Supreme Court, Georgia State Government and Local Government (Cities, Counties, School Boards).

The last component is student policy engagement. The basis of this section, through group projects and speakers, is to teach students the importance and how to directly

engage in the policy making process to enact change. This section is divided into Aspire, Organize, Learn and Act assignments.

Course Learning Outcomes

The State of Georgia requires each student to have a sound understanding of the following:

1. Declaration of Independence
2. Articles of Confederation
3. U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights
4. Federalist Papers
5. Federalism
6. History of Civil Rights
7. Gettysburg Address
8. Emancipation Proclamation
9. John Lewis and the Letter from Birmingham Jail
10. The United States Supreme Court
11. U.S. Executive and Legislative Branches
12. Political Parties, Elections, Campaigning, and the Electoral College
13. Origins of the Georgia Constitution.
14. Differences between the Georgia Constitution and the U.S. Constitution,
15. Georgia legislative process
16. County and City Government
17. Civic Engagement

Required Course Materials

There are no textbooks required. There will be reading assignments from current news articles. Each student should sign-up for a free student subscription for the New York Times. Also, each student will be required to download “Point Solutions” from Canvas.

Grading Policy:

- Test 1 (20%)
- Test 2 (20%)

- Test 3 (20%)
- Assignments (10%)
- Class Participation (10%)
- Group Project (20%)
- Extra Credit Opportunities

Note: Grade allocation is a close approximation and may be modified by the discretion of the Professor.

Description of Graded Components

- **Assignments:** Assignments align with the lecture for that day. Assignments must be submitted by the due date. Otherwise, no credit will be given unless with a valid excuse. The date on Canvas for an assignment is the class day the assignment is assigned, NOT when it is due. There will be several in-class group assignments. Those assignments will only be posted during class.

If you cannot complete an assignment on-time or attend a required class due to an illness, academic conflict or personal issue, you **MUST** send an email or text to the Professor or the TA by 11:59pm of the day of the class you missed. Otherwise, you will be considered absent. The only exception will be if the nature of your issue prevented you from notifying the Professor or the TA the same day as your absence.

- **Tests:** The Tests are multiple choice delivered through Canvas, yet many questions have multiple answers. There are typically 60 – 70 questions for each test. Tests must be taken in class or in the testing center. Tests will include questions from the readings, in-class and assigned videos, lectures, power points and from Speakers. You are strongly encouraged to get together with other students to study for the tests as the lectures cover a lot of material.
- **Class Participation:** For class participation points and as an encouragement to attend class, students will post during class for 2 points on canvas/discussion section a "Policy/Political News of the Day" fact. (no points will be accepted if you miss the due time). Since this is added to your class participation grade, it is required that this exercise be done in class. This exercise will be done at various times during class. Class Participation also includes attendance for speakers, and group projects.

- **Extra Credit Opportunities:** There will be multiple opportunities during the semester to gain extra credit. Extra credit opportunities include attending political speakers or activities outside of the classroom.
- **Final:** There is not a final for this class, therefore, schedule your travel accordingly.

Course Policies

Attendance and/or Participation

Except for the exceptions below, attendance is optional yet strongly encouraged. It will help with your test scores, as many questions on the test will come from the lectures and Speakers. Attendance will also provide students class participation points.

Attendance is required for days when we have guest speakers, tests and group projects/activities. If you miss a group project class, that will also impact your final group project grade. There will be several classes that have in-class assignments, so missing those classes will also impact your grade. There will also be other in-class activities that will be added to your class participation grade.

Students are also encouraged to engage in discussion topics on current events. If you are on the edge between two grades, class participation will be essential.

Class participation is also important throughout a student's academic career to get to know their professor. This will help in the future if a student needs a letter of recommendation for internships, scholarships, graduate school etc.

If you cannot complete an assignment on-time or attend a required class due to an illness, academic conflict, Georgia Tech approved activity, or personal issue, you **MUST** send an email or text to the Professor or the TA by **11:59pm of the day of the class you missed**. Otherwise, you will be considered absent. The only exception will be if the nature of your issue prevented you from notifying the Professor or the TA the same day as your absence.

If a student does miss a class, please be sure to ask another student to take notes or schedule an appointment with the TA.

Collaboration, Group Work, and Use of Generative AI

There will be group assignments and a group project where each student is expected to equally participate. Equal participation is required especially for the group project. For the final project, the grade of the project will be based on journal entries, and feedback from other members of the group. It is unfair for the group, if students do not actively participate, as it will impact the entire group's grade.

The use of GenAI is also permitted as part of the research process, as long as citations are included. Yet, GenAI is strictly prohibited for final assignment submissions. A grade of “0” will be given to any student who uses GenAI to create an assignment submission.

Extensions, Late Assignments, & Re-Scheduled/Missed Exams

Understanding that core classes at Georgia Tech are demanding, consideration is given to a student to request an extension on any assignment or exam if they have a major exam or project in a core class and need extra time.

Inclement Weather and Digital Learning Days

The Professor will post an additional assignment for classes that are cancelled by the Institution.

Student Use of Mobile Devices in the Classroom

The use of mobile phones, except for research, is prohibited. If a mobile phone is used during a test, the student will receive a “0” for that test.

Guest Speakers

Looking at your laptops and phones while guest speakers are talking is distracting and disrespectful. Use your laptops and tablets sparingly to only take notes. The preference is to handwrite your speaker notes in a digital notebook or handwritten. Research has shown that students retain information better if notes are handwritten. **TAKE GOOD NOTES** as speaker comments will be on the tests. **ASK QUESTIONS to the Speakers.**

Arrive and depart on time

When you come to class, please be on time! Late arrivals and/or early departures are highly disruptive and disrespectful to your colleagues, and to me. If there is some reason (such as a job or internship interview) that you must arrive late or leave class early, please sit near the door.

Institute Policies

Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. [The Student-Faculty Expectations](#) articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and

cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

Honor Code

Please read the Georgia Tech Student Honor Code [Academic Honor Code | Policy Library | Georgia Institute of Technology | Atlanta, GA \(gatech.edu\)](#)Links to an external site.

Academic Integrity

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. Review [Georgia Tech's Honor Code](#) and the student [Code of Conduct](#).

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarism on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

In this course, the penalty for any violation of the Honor Code is failure in the course. Plagiarism means using someone else's words as though they were yours. You must put direct quotations in quotation marks and indicate the source.

Core IMPACTS

This is a Core IMPACTS course that is part of the [Social Sciences](#) area. Core IMPACTS refers to the core curriculum, which provides students with essential knowledge in foundational academic areas. This course will help students master course content, and support students' broad academic and career goals.

This course should direct students toward a broad [Orienting Question](#):

- How do I understand human experiences and connections?

Completion of this course should enable students to meet the following [Learning Outcome](#):

- Students will effectively analyze the complexity of human behavior, and how historical, economic, political, social, or geographic relationships develop, persist, or change.

Course content, activities and exercises in this course should help students develop the following [Career-Ready Competencies](#):

- Intercultural Competence
- Perspective-Taking Persuasion

Campus Resources for Students

Undergraduate Student Academic Success Resources:

A list of resources for undergraduate students' academic success and information about advising can be found at [Success at Tech](#).

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, [contact the Office of Disability Services](#) (404-894-2563) as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

Student Well-Being

Student mental health and well-being has been a focus of mine, personally, academically, and professionally. Therefore, please take care of yourself, and seek help if needed. I am also available to help. Any assignment not required by time of the next class will be no later than 8pm, as an encouragement to students to get their necessary sleep. Also, no assignments will be required during school breaks to encourage students to use that time to relax.

At Georgia Tech, you are recognized as a human being navigating life's ups and downs. You may experience stressors that can impact both your academic journey and your personal wellness. These may include academic pressure and challenges associated with relationships, mental health, alcohol or other drugs, identities, finances, etc.

If you are experiencing disruptive challenges, seeking help is a courageous thing to do for yourself and those who care about you. A list of student mental health services can be found at <https://mentalhealth.gatech.edu/Links to an external site.> . For immediate support, call 404.894.2575.

A comprehensive list of student well-being services has also been compiled by the Office of Student Engagement and Well-Being. You can find this information at <https://students.gatech.edu/Links to an external site.>

In an emergency, please call the GT Police Department at (404) 894-2500 or call 911. You can also call or text 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org for yourself or if you are worried about a loved one and a friend who may need crisis support.

Professor Background

Mike Polak has taught in the School of Public Policy since 2013. He has an undergraduate degree in Industrial and Systems Engineering from Georgia Tech and a master's degree in marketing from Georgia State. He received the designation as Professor of Practice in 2022. Professor Polak also served ten years in elected office. His political career began in 1993, when he was elected three times to the Georgia House of Representatives, representing DeKalb County in Metro Atlanta. In 1998, he was elected and re-elected to the Georgia State Senate. He retired from the State Senate in 2002.

While in the Georgia State Senate, he was Chairman of the Science and Technology Committee and Senate Sub-Committee Chairman of Appropriations for Science and Technology. His most notable legislative achievement was authoring and passing Georgia's Hope Scholarship. During his ten years as a legislator, he was the recipient of seventeen Legislator of the Year awards.

He has kept engaged at Georgia Tech since graduating by serving on multiple advisory boards including the Georgia Tech School of Public Policy, Georgia Tech Research Institute, Georgia Tech School of Engineering, Georgia Tech Economic Development Institute and serving as Vice Chairman of the Georgia Tech Savannah Campus. He is also a recipient of the Georgia Tech Outstanding Young Alumnus Award from the Georgia Tech School of Engineering.

Professionally, he has been in IT product management and product marketing for more than 20 years. He is currently the founder of Inovar Health, a healthcare IT company focused on wellness, and Inovar Real Estate, a vacation rental real estate company.