

POL 261: Principles of American Government – National & State
3 Credits
Fall 2009
CHSS 070

Tuesday & Thursday: 9:30 – 10:50am

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Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday, 11-12:30pm and by appointment

Course Description

This course deals with the origin, development, and Constitution of the American governmental system, citizenship and civil rights, suffrage, the national party system, the national executive, organization of congress, national judiciary, federal-state relations, and the Constitution of the State of Texas. This course meets the legislative requirement for a course on the Constitutions of the United States and Texas.

Course Objectives

This course provides an overview of American national government and Texas state government. In this class, we will explore the rules, institutions, participants, and products of American politics. The specific course objectives are: (1) introduce you to basic principles, institutions, and processes in American national government and Texas state government, (2) to help you observe and consider the ways that politics directly affects our lives, and (3) to encourage you to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view about important political issues.

Required Text

Required reading for the class comes from:

- Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore J. Lowi, Margaret Weir, and Robert J. Spitzer, We The People: An Introduction to American Politics. Seventh Edition (2009).
- Texas Politics Multimedia Textbook <http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/>

For the WTP textbook, be sure you get the paperback Essentials edition, not the hardcover. (If you have a deal on the hardcover version and want to use it, go ahead. It's the same book with a couple of extra chapters we won't use. But it costs more so if you are buying new, get the Essentials.) The book is required and available for purchase at the bookstore.

Attendance

Regular and punctual class attendance is expected of each student at Sam Houston State University. Regular attendance is important because we will cover information in class that is not found in the texts, and this extra information will appear on the exams. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to become informed on what was covered in class. Please get class notes from a fellow student. It is not my policy to give out my lecture notes.

Grading

Grades in this course will be based on four exams (worth 20% each) and four short exercises (worth 5% each). Students are expected to read the materials assigned in conjunction with class lectures, participate in class discussions, and demonstrate their comprehension of the material in writing.

Exams

The exams will be held in class on September 17th, October 15th, November 10th, and December . These exams will be multiple choice, true/false and I.D. type questions, drawn from the readings and the lectures. The exams are designed to keep you current in the reading and to help you keep track of the detailed material that you will learn in this class. These questions will be descriptive and analytic. That is, they may ask something as simply descriptive as how many members are in the House of Representatives, or they may ask you to draw some analytic conclusions about the respective functions of the House and the Senate, or to determine the importance or significance of an institution or policy. Memorization alone will not suffice for these quizzes; you will have to think about the material as well. I would suggest visiting www.norton.com/studyspace, which has practice quizzes as well as flashcards that will help you review the book's key terms.

To minimize distractions for your fellow students, exams will start promptly and once admitted you will remain seated until the end of the class period. Please do not wear hats or headphones to the exams. There is to be absolutely no talking from the time exams are handed out until they are collected. It is indistinguishable from cheating and it disturbs other students. Anyone who talks during an exam will receive a 0 for that portion of the final grade.

Exercises

In addition to the exams, you will write four short (usually no more than two pages) assignments (each worth 5% of your grade). These exercises are due **IN CLASS** on September 3rd, October 6th, October 29th, and December 1st. Details regarding each exercise will be posted on Blackboard.

Late exercises will lose points unless they are late because you are observing a religious holiday. If this is the case, you must speak with me during the first week of the course. If your exercise is late because you are ill, you must have an authentic, verifiable medical excuse.

Make-Up Exams

Make-up exams will be granted to students who can provide formal documentation of a medical or family emergency. If a student fails to provide this documentation, he or she will receive a zero on the exam. Please note that visitation slips issued by the University Health Center are not considered formal documentation, unless the slip clearly indicates that the student was too ill to attend class. Make up exams will be short answer exams.

Extra Credit

Under **NO** circumstances will extra credit be offered in this course.

Scored Scantron Sheets

There are 250 students enrolled in this course. Four exam scores, will be entered for each student. There is the possibility that a data entry error may be made when entering exam scores. Thus students must keep their scored scantrons until final grades are assigned. A student cannot challenge their final grade unless he or she has copies of all scantron sheets.

Instructor Evaluations

Students will be given the opportunity to complete a course/instructor evaluation form near the end of the semester.

Academic Dishonesty

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

Americans with Disabilities Act

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center.

Religious Holidays

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

"Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.

Classroom Rules of Conduct

Students are expected to abide by the Classroom Rules of Conduct as outlined by the Dean of Students: http://www.shsu.edu/students/StudentGuidelines2007_2008.pdf.

Course Outline:

Week 1:	August 25	Introduction to the Course
Week 1-2:	August 27- September 3	Introduction to Politics, Government, and Culture Read: WTP Chapter 1 Exercise 1 due on Thursday, September 3rd
Week 3-4:	September 8 - 15	Politics of the Founding and the Constitution (U.S. & Texas) Read: WTP, Ch 2; TP, "The Constitution" (Sections 1-3, 6-7) Exam 1 - Thursday, September 17
Week 5:	September 22 - 24	Federalism Read: WTP Chapter 3
Week 6-7:	September 29- October 6	Civil Liberties and Civil Rights Read: WTP Chapter 4 Exercise 2 due on Tuesday, October 6th
Week 7-8:	October 8-13	Public Opinion Read: WTP Chapter 5 Exam 2 - Thursday, October 15
Week 9:	October 20-22	U.S. Congress and Texas Legislature Read: WTP Chapter 9; TP, "Legislative Branch" (Sections 1-3, 6)
Week 10:	October 27-29	The Executive Branch: U.S. & Texas Read: WTP Ch. 10; TP "Executive Branch" (All Sections) Exercise 3 due on Thursday, October 29th
Week 11:	November 3-5	The Courts Read: WTP Ch. 12 Exam 3 - Tuesday, November 10
Week 12-13:	November 12- November 17	Interest Groups Read: WTP Ch. 8
Week 13:	November 19	Parties & Elections Read: WTP Ch. 7
Week 14:	November 24 - November 26	Thanksgiving Break
Week 15:	December 1	Parties & Elections Read: WTP Ch. 7 Exercise 4 due on Tuesday, December 1st
Week 15-16:	December 3-10	Media Read: WTP Ch. 6
Week 17	December 14-18	Final: Exam 4 Please see SHSU homepage final exam schedule for the time and date of EXAM 4.