

POL 261.07 4085 PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

(3 credit hours)

Semester: Fall 2009
Time: 12:30-1:50 TUTH
Location: CHSS C070
Professor: Dr. John C. Domino
Office: CHSS 475
Office Hours: 9:30-12:00 TUTH or by appointment
Phone: 936/ 294-1463
E-mail: pol_jcd@shsu.edu (best way to communicate with me)

Course Objectives:

The objectives of the course are to examine, understand factual information about, and think critically concerning the following:

1. origins and development of the U.S. and Texas Constitutions.
2. the structure and function of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the U.S. and Texas government.
3. the nature of democracy, ideology, and citizenship and civil rights
4. the political process: that is, how we elect/select public officials at the national and state levels; and how such actors as interest groups, parties, and the media impact this process.
5. our rights and liberties as set forth in the U.S. and Texas Constitutions.

In sum, the course is a comprehensive introduction to the political systems of the United States and Texas.

Required Materials:

BOOK: Ginsberg, et al, We the People, 7/e, Essentials Edition

Note: It is the student's responsibility to obtain the course book at the beginning of the semester.

ONLINE TEXAS POLITICS MATERIALS: <http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/>

Course Requirements and Policies:

Exams: There will be *FOUR major examinations* consisting of multiple choice questions. Please bring a standard 100 question scantron for each exam.

Make up exams are given at the professor's discretion. If you miss an exam and have a documented legitimate excuse (illness, family emergency, university-related travel.) you may be able to take a make up exam (all essay); if you don't have a legitimate excuse, then a 0 will be averaged in with your other grades. "Work-related" excuses are **usually not** considered as legitimate.

Grades:

The final grade in the course will be based on the average of the three exams. No extra credit or additional assignments or grading curves are used. No re-grading or dropping of grades for extenuating circumstances or hardships. The following scale will be applied:

A=90-100 B=80-89 C=70-79 D=60-69 F=0-59

For status of your grade during the semester please check Blackboard or email me at pol_jcd@shsu.edu

How to do well on exams in this course:

Keep up with reading assignments: Everything you need to know about the reading assignments is on the syllabus. I will rarely make day-to-day reading assignments, so simply use the syllabus to keep up with me in class. Unlike some of your past experiences, I will not cover every bit of information contained in the texts in class. A major requirement of this course is "reading." So, it is not uncommon for me to take 60% of the exam items on a test from lectures and 40% from a particular chapter of a book. *This strategy is to encourage students to read and think about their reading independently.* Students who adjust to this fact will do very well on the exams. Use your study guides!

Taking Notes: Write down (or record) everything -- not just what I write on the board.

How to study: Reading is not studying. You would not sit through a class and not take notes on what the professor has said. Similarly, reading without taking notes is largely a waste of time. Critically interact with your book: Ask, "what is the author trying to say?" "What are the main

points?” “If I were the professor, what kinds of exam questions would I ask?” use the quizzes in each chapter and the book's website. Of course, study guides will be crucial. Prepare detailed answers for each item on the study guide and then study those answers.

Note to Freshman or first-time college students: With all due respect, unlike high school and your experiences with TAKS, I do not “teach to the test.” While all readings, lectures, study guides outlines, etc. are carefully crafted to be relevant to the exams and to guide you in studying, my goal is education -- and not to “train” you for the exams.

Attendance:

In accordance with University Policy regular attendance is required.

Academic Dishonesty :

All students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences in and out of the classroom. Copying answers from another student’s exam, collaborating on projects, or using unauthorized notes, “cheat sheets,” or electronic devices during an exam constitutes academic dishonesty and will result in swift disciplinary action by the professor. The professor may give a failing grade to the student for that assignment or exam or the course and report such action to the University and its official representatives who may initiate further disciplinary proceedings against a student who is accused of academic dishonesty.

Disruptive Conduct:

Any rude behavior in the classroom that intentionally or unintentionally disrupts the learning process (including texting, ringing cell phones, “playing” on notebook computers, IPODs, etc) thus, impedes the mission of the university, will be reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action in accordance with written university policy. If someone is disturbing you please tell me rather than being cool and suffering in silence. Students will often wait to the last day of class or on the evaluations to proclaim that others were bothering them. Tell them to be quiet, put the phone away, etc. After all you are paying for your education. Silence and stow the phones.

Students With Disabilities Policy

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 you have a disability that

may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Counseling Center. Student requests for accommodations must be initiated by the student. A student seeking accommodations should go to the Counseling Center and Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) in a timely manner.

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. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: “a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20....” 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. University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed.

Visitors in the Classroom

Unannounced visitors to class must present a valid SHSU ID to be permitted in the classroom and should not disrupt the educational process.

Instructor Evaluations

Inform students that they will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form toward the end of the semester.

Course Outline

(subject to change)

I. Democracy and American Politics: The section will examine the fundamental values of American ideology, politics, and governance. Read Ginsberg, chp. 1; BlackBoard (BB) outlines; and Texas online materials.

II. The Founding and the U.S. and Texas Constitutions: This section will explore the foundations and the specific provisions of the U.S. Constitution, including the political philosophy and events that motivated the framers. Read Ginsberg, chp. 2; BB materials; and Texas online materials.

III. Federalism: Defining the complex relationship between the national government and the states. Read Ginsberg, chp. 3; BB materials; and Texas online materials.

FIRST EXAM: date to be announced

IV. The Political Process: This section is about the process by which we (the people) influence the institutions of governance and the linkages between voters, groups, and parties and government.

A. Public Opinion, Socialization, and Ideology: Read Ginsberg, chp. 5; and BB materials.

B. Political Parties, Candidates, and Elections: Read Ginsberg, chp. 7; BB materials; and Texas online materials.

C. The Impact of the Media on Politics: Read Ginsberg, chp. 6; BB materials; and Texas online materials.

D. Interest Groups: Read Ginsberg, chp. 8; BB materials; and Texas online materials.

SECOND EXAM: date to be announced

V. The Legislative Branch: In this section we focus on the structure, function, organization, and politics of the U.S. Congress and Texas Legislature.

A. U.S. Congress: Ginsberg, chp. 9; and BB materials.

B. The Texas Legislature, Texas online materials; and BB materials.

VI. The Executive Branch: the focus in this section is the executive function of government exercised by the U.S. President and Texas Governor.

A. The Presidency: Ginsberg, chp. 10; and BB materials.

B. The Texas Governor: Texas online materials; and BB materials.

THIRD EXAM: date to be announced

V. The Judicial Branch: The judiciary encompasses not only the federal (national) court system but the fifty state court systems. In this section we examine the structure, organization, and power the courts.

A. The Federal Judiciary: Ginsberg, chp. 12; and BB materials.

B. The Texas Judiciary: Texas online materials; and BB materials.

VI. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights, Ginsberg, chp. 4; and BB material.

FINAL EXAM: see university final exam schedule