

POLITICAL SCIENCE 261H
Principles of American Government – National and State
Professor Robert E. Biles – Fall 2009
Section 08, MWF 12-12:50, CHSS Room 242B, 3 Credit Hours

TEXTS: Ginsberg, Benjamin, and others. *We the People, An Introduction to American Politics*, 7th Essentials Edition. New York: W.W. Norton, 2009.

Brown, Lyle C., and others. *Practicing Texas Politics*. Updated 13th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2010.

Note: Buy the cheapest versions that fit your needs (but be sure to get the correct editions, 7th of Ginsberg and 13th of Brown). Your best buy may be used books. Note that the big edition of Ginsberg contains a different Texas book and is longer on the US material. Assignments will be based on the Updated version of the Texas book and the Essentials version of the US book, but you can get by with the “un-updated” 13th edition of the Texas book and the full US book if you need to save money. If you can understand all this, you should pass the course with no problem.

Blackboard and Electronic Reserve. Notices and course information will be placed on **Blackboard**. To get there, start at the SHSU homepage and use your Sam computer account info for access. Please **check the Course Information** section periodically. I may also email the class using your student computer account address. If you don't check it regularly, set it to roll over to the email you do check. Information may also be available on **Electronic Reserve**. I will notify you in class and/or Blackboard if there is info on Electronic Reserve. On the SHSU homepage, click Library, then Course Reserves, Electronic Reserve, and finally Electronic Reserves and Reserves Pages. Select Course Reserves by Instructor (Biles), POL 261, and finally the item you wish to download. The **password** is **govpol** (all lower case). You will need to use PDF (Adobe Acrobat) to download the material. It should come up automatically. **NOTE: You must take good notes yourself. Do not rely on just listening; that is a ticket to taking the course again next semester! When there are outlines, use them as a basis for outlining your own notes.**

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES: The purpose of this course is to assist the students in developing a better understanding of the basic political and governmental processes and institutions with which they will have to deal as citizens. As a result of the course, students should be better able to describe and analyze the political system. They should have an understanding of the background (historical, philosophical, and social) of the national and Texas state governments, the state and national constitutions, the mechanisms available for citizen participation, and the major institutions of government at both levels. Students should also improve their analytical and writing skills. This course meets the state requirement for instruction in the U.S. and Texas constitutions. No prerequisites for the class.

REQUIREMENTS: There will be three non-comprehensive exams, a comprehensive final, and two short papers. The first two exams will be essay in nature (choice of two of three essays and five of seven short answers). The last two exams will use objective questions. Exam questions

will be drawn from both the textbooks and class lecture-discussion. Note that certain court cases will be included by name; they are listed on the Course Outline below. Exam dates will be announced in class. Each exam will count for 15% of the grade and each paper 20%. The standard for the course is: 90 = A; 80 = B; 70 = C; 60 = D; 0-59 = F. Course grades are rounded up at .5 (e.g., 89.5 = A).

PAPERS. You will write two short papers – a position paper and an analytical book review. They are described below. Use *formal, correct writing* style, *but* do not be excessively formal and stilted. Write at a level other students could read and enjoy. Half of the **grade** will be determined by the substance of the paper: for example, is the information accurate and complete, is the thesis developed adequately, are arguments logical and substantive, are the sources adequate? The other half of the grade will be determined by the quality of the writing: grammar, spelling, organization, and smoothness of writing.

Do not plagiarize; if in doubt, give a citation. A good rule of thumb is that if you use three or more words in a row from a source, put it in quotation marks and cite it. The “source” includes anything from the Internet, as well as books, magazines, etc. **Plagiarizing will produce a grade of zero** that will count toward the class grade.

- The paper is limited to three to five double-spaced word-processed pages (12 font and one-inch margins). (The works cited and cover sheet are in addition.) Longer and shorter papers will not be graded.
- Use of a **style manual** such as Kate L. Turabian, *A Manual for Writers*, or the *MLA Handbook* is required. In the works cited, **state the manual used and actually follow it.**
- Both papers must have a works cited page. For the **book review**, include a **full citation** of the book. This may be your only source. Include the citation for websites and all sources used. Citing Wikipedia is grounds for summary execution, or at least a bad grade.
- **Papers must cite page numbers.** In book reviews, the page numbers may be placed in the text without the author’s name – e.g., “He died “ (210).
- The paper **must be accompanied by a copy of all pages cited.** For the position paper, provide a copy of the parts of the bill you discuss taken from the website of the Legislature or Congress and other sources you consult in preparing the paper.
- Staple everything together and give to the professor. Students using pressure binders will be banned from the university for life.
- An electronic copy of the paper (not the supporting materials) **must be entered in Turnitin.com**, a plagiarism checker. You will be provided information on Blackboard for entering it.
- **Keep a copy** of the paper *for yourself* on disk or paper in case my copy gets lost.
- Papers **may be rewritten** and resubmitted provided that the student does not submit the dreaded *first draft*. Do a good job the first time. If you don’t like your grade, you can submit a rewrite **within two weeks** of receiving the paper back. The grade will be that received for the last version submitted. FYI, I have never had anyone present a worse paper the second time, although some papers have not been improved. If you rewrite, deal with the major problems indicated. Do not just correct the things I mark on the first page.

ANALYTICAL BOOK REVIEW. An analytical book review is one in which you read the whole book, write a page introducing the book and summarizing what it is about, and then spend the bulk of the paper responding thoughtfully to the book. Two common approaches are to list the major ideas and explain why you agree or disagree or to apply the book to something you know (or apply something you know to the book). “Analytical” covers a multitude of sins, but it does not involve just summarizing the book.

Books must be approved by the instructor. The *topic* should deal with some aspect of government or politics at the national, state, or local level. Pick something of interest to you, perhaps something related to your major. Intro government textbooks, diatribes, and the rantings of talk show hosts or comedians posing as political commentators are not acceptable. In choosing a topic, bear in mind that the paper should be *analytical, not descriptive* (e.g., why, what were the consequences?). Edited volumes containing articles by multiple authors are hard to review in a few pages. **Due Friday, September 25.**

POSITION PAPER: Students will write a paper analyzing a bill proposed or passed within the last two years by the U.S. Congress or the Texas Legislature. **The paper will explain** the likely consequences of the bill (or if a complex bill, of key parts of the bill), the likely beneficiaries, those likely to be hurt by the bill, the degree of help and harm, the groups supporting and opposing the bill, and the major arguments for and against the bill. You **may state a position** on the bill or not, as you wish. Taking a position or not and whether or not you favor the bill will not affect your grade. However, whether or not you state your preference, **give both sides of the bill their due.** Any serious bill has conscientious supporters and opponents. You may think the bill is very good or very bad, but do not simply dismiss the other side as knaves and fools. Similarly, do not just go after the other side’s strawmen. Take on their best arguments. I want a reasoned analysis, not a diatribe.

Indicate in the paper the bill number, its status (e.g., passed, defeated, in committee, etc.), if passed the date of passage, the committee(s) that considered it, and the sponsor(s). **Include with your supporting material copies** of the parts of the bill you discuss taken from the website of the Legislature or Congress. **Due Friday, October 30.**

ATTENDANCE, MISSED WORK, PARTICIPATION, & COMPORTMENT:

Students are expected to attend class regularly and punctually, to read the assignments, and to participate in class discussions.

- For each unexcused **absence in excess of three, a point will be deducted** from the course average. Students with **one or no absences** will receive a **two point bonus** on their average.
- It is the responsibility of the student to **report late arrival (at the end of the class)**, to provide written **documentation** of excused absences, and to arrange to make up any missed work, including examinations.
- Barring extenuating circumstances, **missed work** should be made up within two weeks of your return to school. All missed work must be made up by the last day of classes.
- **Excused absences include** official active participation in university functions (e.g., Sam sports, debate, or rodeo team or music group), illness of yourself or someone for whom you

are a primary caregiver, attendance at a funeral, religious holy days, and occasional work emergencies. I will consider other reasons in the spirit of the above. Sleeping late because you work late is not an acceptable reason.

- **Tardiness** will count as half an absence.
- Students **leaving class early** without prior clearance will be counted absent.
- Students physically but not mentally present in the class (e.g., reading newspapers, playing with their cell/computer, using earphones, studying for other classes, or sleeping), **disturbing the class**, or using tobacco products may be asked to leave, counted absent, and referred to the Dean of Students. Laptops may only be used on the first two rows of the classroom and are for activity related to this class only.
- **Turn off cell phones, pagers, etc. before class begins.**
- **Instructor Evaluations.** Students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form toward the end of the semester.

CONTACT: Office: **CHSS 479.** Tel. 936-294-1460; fax 936-294-4172 (address the cover page to me; this number is for all of political science); e-mail **GOV_REB@SHSU.EDU.**

Classes TuTh 12:30-3:30; MWF12-1; and Monday evening 6-9 at the UCtr. **Office hours:** MWF 11-11:40, 1-2; TuTh 10:30-11:30, 4-5; M 5-6 (at the UCtr). (Please don't come to the office in the 10 minutes just before class; I am usually desperately trying to find notes and to remember where I left off last class. Any other time I am in, you are most welcome. After class is fine.) **Hours by appointment or drop-in.** I am in the office most days till 6. **Do not feel limited to official office hours;** come see me when you need help. **Finding my office** (not as easy as it sounds): On the fourth floor, from the elevator, angle ahead left to the unmarked door, enter bravely, make a left and a right, and look for 479 on your left. (Don't worry. We send out trained dogs every evening to find lost students and visitors.) **We also have a graduate assistant who can help/tutor you** (without charge).

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: I disapprove of cheating on exams, papers, or other assignments.

Those engaged in dishonest practices will be submitted to university disciplinary action. In addition, cheating will produce a zero on the assignment and will be part of the course grade.

Plagiarism is a particular problem. Don't do it! In writing a paper, cite the source of any ideas, facts, phrases, etc. that are not very common knowledge. **If you paraphrase** something (that is, take the ideas or information from a source but put it in your own words), cite the source. When you are learning, it is better to sin on the side of too many citations than too few. **If you use someone else's words (more than three in a row), put them in quotation marks** and provide a citation of where you found the material. This includes material from web sites, books, articles, interviews – **any** source that is not your very own words. A common form of plagiarism is using material patched together from websites. For additional information, see www.shsu.edu/syllabus/.

Cell phones must be off and out of sight during all examinations. If I see one on and in view, you fail the exam.

STUDENT ABSENCES ON RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS POLICY: Holy day absences are treated like other excused absences. Provide me documentation of the absence before or after the

absence and arrange to make up any missed work within two weeks of the absence. For additional information, see www.shsu.edu/syllabus/.

AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT: 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, 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.** For additional information, see www.shsu.edu/syllabus/.

COURSE OUTLINE

I. THE BACKGROUND OF POLITICS

- a. The American Political Environment: Political Culture, Ideas, and Ideology, US book, Chap. 1
- b. The Texas Political Environment: TX book, Ch. 1*

II. CONSTITUTIONS

- a. U.S.: US, Ch. 2 and in the Appendix, the Dec. of Independence, U.S. Constitution, including amendments, and the Federalist Papers
- b. Texas: TX, Ch. 2 beginning on pg. 64

- Know *Edgewood v. Kirby* (see the information on Blackboard).

EXAMINATION – Date to be announced in class

- c. Federalism and Separation of Powers: US, Ch. 3; TX, pp. 55-64.
- d. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights: US, pp. 91-92, 96-100

III. THE CITIZEN AND PARTICIPATION: Controlling Public Policy?

- a. Survey Research and Public Opinion: US, Ch. 5
- b. Participation and Elections: US, Ch. 7; TX, Ch. 5
- c. Political Parties: US, Ch. 7; TX, Ch. 4

- Know *McCulloch*, *Plessy*, *Brown*, *Miranda*, *Roe*, *Heller*, & the 1964 and 1965 Civil Rights Acts.

EXAMINATION – Date to be announced in class

- d. Interest Groups: US, Ch. 8; TX, Ch. 6.
- e. The Media: US, Ch. 6

IV. BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT

- a. Congress and Legislature: US, Ch. 9; TX, Ch. 7
- b. The Executives: US, Ch. 10 & 11; TX, Ch 8 & pp. 343-47. Be familiar with the Gov, Lt Gov, AG, Comptroller, the Railroad Commission (pp. 363-64), the State Board of Education, TEA/Commissioner of Education (pp. 350-54), Boards of Regents, and the

Coordinating Board (pp. 355-56). Additional information will be provided on Blackboard.

EXAMINATION – Date to be announced in class

c. The Courts: US, Ch. 12; TX, in Ch. 10 pp. 382-410, 422-end of chapter.

V. LOCAL GOVERNMENT – TX, Ch. 3

- Know *Marbury*. The other cases may reappear on the final.

COMPREHENSIVE FINAL -- Monday, Dec. 14, 2-4

*“Essays” at the end of Texas chapters may be omitted unless specifically assigned. Items such as Key Terms and Review Questions may be useful to study. You are responsible for boxed items and graphics; see the study guide.