POLS 2305.006: U.S. Government and Politics

COURSE OUTLINE

This is an introductory course in American government and politics. The course is designed to help students read, discuss, write about, and enjoy politics. The first section of the course begins with an analysis of the political culture of the United States, arguing that most Americans have a set of beliefs that are commonly held, and that these beliefs shape the nature of politics in the US. To begin our analysis of US politics, we will assess two competing theories, pluralism and elitism. These two theories will provide a “frame” for the following weeks. The course next turns to the construction of the Constitution and the operation of federalism in the United States. The second section of the course deals with the “participants” in the political process. We will discuss the role of public participation through an analysis of the formation of public opinion. Important in the formation of public opinion is the critical role of the media plays. The media may not always tell us what to think, but the media certainly tells us what to think about. The media is also important for the operation of interest groups, which have a considerable impact on the operation of elections in the United States. Parties, campaigns and elections will follow our discussion of interest groups. The third section of the course turns to the formal institutions of government. Here we will examine the “four” branches of government, the three traditionally associated with American democracy, the legislative, executive, and the judicial branches and the bureaucracy, often referred to as the “fourth branch.” Finally, the course will end with a shorter section dealing with the vitally important areas of civil rights and civil liberties, where issues concerning culture, politics and policy intersect.

The major goal of the course is to give students a broader understanding of how their government works. Additionally, students will gain an operating vocabulary of key concepts in political science. The acquisition of these terms will allow students to actively engage in analyzing current political discourse. Over the course of the semester, we will discuss current political events in light of text materials, assisting the students in understanding the history behind current political controversies as well as the implications of contemporary debates.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

On completion of this course students will be able to:

1. Recall basic facts related to the foundations of US national government.
2. Describe key political concepts related to US institutions such as Congress, the Presidency, and the Judiciary.
3. Demonstrate their understanding of key concepts relating to the US political behavior such as voting, elections, political parties, interest groups and the media.

CLASS EXPECTATIONS and ASSIGNMENTS

By necessity, the course must be largely lecture driven. However, there will be ample opportunities for class discussion. I encourage student opinions, as long as they are informed by reading or experience. Don't hesitate to ask questions. They should be asked whenever anything is unclear. Over the course of the semester we will also engage in group work to encourage more active learning and participation in the classroom. We will have three in class group exercises related. We will also do several in-class responses related to the Soomoo website. These responses will be collected in class and cannot be turned in late. We will also have ten outside class assignments related to the Soomoo website. These responses will be due the day we begin the lecture on that topic. I will discuss these in class. These can be turned in late, but at a penalty. We’ll have twelve of each of these (inside and outside assignments). Two can be missed without penalty, which makes for the ten graded assignments.
Over the course of the semester there will be four exams, each will be worth 100 points. You may miss an exam for whatever reason. However, make-up exams will only be given on the day of the final exam. I highly encourage you not to miss an exam at its regularly scheduled time. Please choose this route only in the case of an emergency. You may schedule to take exams early, provided you notify a week in advance. If you must be away when an exam is scheduled, it is best to take it early. Grading will be done on a conventional scale (90-80-70-60). It is usually not necessary to significantly “curve” the exam. A low exam cannot be dropped. However, there is the option of “replacing” a low exam score. On the day of the last exam, students will be allowed to take a comprehensive replacement exam. This means that on this day, a student would take two exams. I would then use the higher of the two scores. On the second exam, if a student received a 64 and wanted to replace this grade, he/she could take the comprehensive final. If the student received an 86 on the final, this grade would “replace” the second exam score of 64. If the student received a 60, the original 64 score would remain. To figure the final score, simply add your test scores, chapter response scores, and any extra credit you may have earned, and divide these by the total possible points of 450 (4 exams worth 100 points each plus 50 points for chapter responses) to get a percentage. As we know, a 93.65% would be an “A,” a 67.8% would be a “D.” Remember that if you need to make up an exam (or exams), you may need to write several that day. Please consider this when you plan the end of your semester. In the past students have needed to take three (or more) exams at a time. As one might expect, the exam results were not always what they had hoped for.

4 exams @ 100 points for 400
10 points for “Where Do I Fit?” survey
10 points for Generation Next response
25 points for Public Opinion exercise
10 Americans Governing responses for 100 points
10 in-class exercises for 100 points
645 total points

ATTENDANCE AND MAKE UP EXAMS

Again, make up exams will be given concurrently with the final. If you miss an exam you will make it up on the day of the final exam (which you must also take). The in-class assignments cannot me made up. Outside of class assignments that are turned in late will be deducted 10% per day. Please keep in mind that missed classes also detrimentally impact your class participation grades. Studies show that classroom attendance and class performance are positively correlated. I strongly urge you to work together in preparing for class. Working with others in an organized manner is a good way to discover new study strategies and a way to share information. Both of these can enhance performance. All written work, however, must be your own. Plagiarism is literally stealing someone else’s work, whether that person is a fellow student or another scholar. Plagiarism is serious and will result in failure of the work in question.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The Americans with Disabilities Act is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Disability Services Office at 825.5816 or visit the office in Driftwood 101.

ACADEMIC ADVISING

The College of Arts and Humanities requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. The Academic Advisor will set up a degree plan, which must be signed by the student, a faculty mentor, and the department chair. The College’s Academic Advising Center is located at Driftwood 203E and can be reached at 825.3466.

GRADE APPEAL PROCESS

As stated in University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the
A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. If the problem cannot be resolved at this level, the student may take the steps below.

1. Presentation of grievance to instructor. (This step must be taken within fourteen calendar days after the beginning of the next term.)
2. Appeal to department chair or area coordinator.
3. Written appeal to the University Academic Standards Grievance Committee.
4. Preliminary review and advising by an ombudsman appointed by the Provost.
5. Submission of file by department chair to the chair of the University Academic Standards Grievance Committee.
6. Review of file by committee chair and submission of case to committee.
7. Proceedings of the University Academic Standards Grievance Committee. (Committee holds hearing, reviews data, presents findings to all parties, and makes recommendation to Provost.)
8. Decision by Provost.
9. Final appeal in writing to the Provost if student or instructor thinks appropriate procedures have not been followed.

For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Rule 13.02.99.C2, Student Grade Appeals, and University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at http://www.tamucc.edu/provost/university_rules/index.htm. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Office of Student Affairs.

COURSE TEXTS and MATERIALS

*Keeping the Republic*, 4th Ed. Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright
Access to the Americans Governing Website for class assignments (instructions given in class)

COURSE SCHEDULE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>8-25</td>
<td>Introductions</td>
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<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>8-30</td>
<td>Generation Next Video, Writing Response</td>
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<td>R</td>
<td>9-1</td>
<td>In-Class Exercise on Political Ideology</td>
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<td>T</td>
<td>9-6</td>
<td>Chapter 1: Power &amp; Citizenship</td>
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<td>R</td>
<td>9-8</td>
<td>Chapter 2: Politics of American Founding</td>
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<td>T</td>
<td>9-13</td>
<td>Chapter 3: Federalism</td>
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<td>R</td>
<td>9-15</td>
<td>Chapter 5: Struggle for Political Equality</td>
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<td>T</td>
<td>9-20</td>
<td>Chapter 5: Struggle for Political Equality</td>
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<td>R</td>
<td>9-22</td>
<td><em>First Exam</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>9-27</td>
<td>Chapter 10: In-class exercise on Public Opinion</td>
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<td>R</td>
<td>9-29</td>
<td>Chapter 10: Public Opinion</td>
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<td>T</td>
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<td>10-6</td>
<td>Chapter 13: Media</td>
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<td>T</td>
<td>10-11</td>
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<td>R</td>
<td>10-13</td>
<td>Chapter 11: Parties and Interest Groups</td>
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T, 10-18  Chapter 11: Parties and Interest Groups
R, 10-20  Chapter 12: Voting & Elections

T, 10-25  Chapter 12: Voting & Elections
R, 10-27  Second Exam

T, 11-1  Chapter 6: Congress
R, 11-3  Chapter 6: Congress

T, 11-8  Chapter 7: Presidency
R, 11-10  Chapter 7: Presidency

T, 11-15  Chapter 7: Presidency
R, 11-17  Exam Three

T, 11-22  Chapter 9: Law and the American Legal System
R, 11-25  Thanksgiving

T, 11-29  Chapter 9: Law and the American Legal System
R, 12-1  Chapter 4: Fundamental American Liberties

T, 12-6  Chapter 4: Fundamental American Liberties
R, 12-8  Fourth Exam, 8:00