U.S. Government and Politics

Course Description

This is a lower-division course that introduces students to the fundamentals of American Government. The class will focus on political behavior and institutions, public policy, and provide a complementary overview of U.S. political history when appropriate.

Learning Outcomes

1. Students shall be able to recognize and recall fundamental facts related to the: foundations of the state and local government, state and local political institutions, state and local political behavior, and state and local public policy.

2. Students shall be able to express and interpret information concerning key political concepts related to the: foundations of the state and local government, state and local political institutions, state and local political behavior, and state and local public policy.

3. By having the students engage in critical thinking activities related to the Constitution, the political and philosophical foundations of the nation, governmental institutions, and political behavior.

Major Course Requirements

You will have an exam each week beginning in Week 2 and a final. All will be timed exams to be taken by the scheduled days and will be multiple-choice format. You will have access to each exam beginning the Monday of the week. Notes are not allowed.

1. Exam 1: 20% covering Week 1 and 2

2. Exam 2: 20% covering Week 3 and 4

3. Final Exam: 15% covering week 5. The final exam is non-comprehensive; it only covers the final week of material.

4. Writing assignment 1: 10% - a writing assignment that is scheduled in module 2/week 2

5. Writing assignment 2: 10% - a writing assignment that is scheduled in module 4/week 4
6. Discussion board participation: (5% each week * 5 weeks = 25%) - each week you are required to post a thoughtful response to the question(s) in the discussion boards and respond to your peers.

*You must make your original post in each forum by Wednesday of that week or face a 10 point penalty each day for lateness and respond to each other by Sunday. You are required to post thoughtful responses to at least (2) of your peers or you will not receive credit (i.e. "I agree with your post") is not thoughtful. Discussion responses are graded on the following criteria: 80% content/20% response to peers
*Grammar and spelling errors will result in point deductions

Attendance:
I will not check attendance every day, although I will track log-in and course activity in Blackboard (BB). Students not logging-in weekly may be contacted by the professor to discuss their progress in the course.

Required Readings

*You are not required to purchase a physical textbook for this course.

1. Our main textbook for the course, American Government, is available free online: [http://www.ushistory.org/gov/](http://www.ushistory.org/gov/)
Each week you will be responsible for reading multiple chapters in the book. These chapters are listed in the syllabus. I will provide a hyperlink below for each chapter, but if any go dead during the course, the link above is the chapter index. Alternatively, the site is ushistory.org, where you go to “Free Online Textbooks” and then proceed to “American Government” to find the text.

2. Web-based readings located within the learning modules each week inside of the BB shell

3. Instructor lecture notes and guidance sections for each week that are placed within the learning modules in BB

Format

American political institutions: The Executive, Judicial, and Legislative Branches.
American political structure: The U.S. Constitution and Federalism
Political actors and behavior: Elections, Political Participation, Interest Groups, Political Parties
Public policies: Foreign Policy, Energy, Plea Bargaining, and the courts
Political rights: The U.S. Bill of Rights, civil liberties, and civil rights
Legislative focus: Civil liberties in context: The Patriot and Real ID Acts
** The syllabus provides a calendar of readings and due dates, but the same information is found in each week’s learning module.

** It is best to contact your instructor either via email or in the discussion forums in Blackboard. If you call the above office phone number it will route your call to my voicemail, which I will check regularly and then return your call as soon as possible.

***If any of the links are dead in my lecture notes, do not worry. This material is supplemental and not required exclusively for testing purposes.

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**Class Schedule:**

Below you will find a class calendar, as well as the due dates for your exams, discussion posts, and writing assignments. Each week you are responsible for reading the web-based materials, my lecture notes (in Power Point format, Adobe, or MS Word), and checking the web links in those notes and any additional web content. I have posted the suggested readings on a daily basis that should keep you on track with the course. Good luck!


**Tuesday-5: Introductions/The American Founding and the U.S. Constitution**
1. Familiarize yourself with the class, BB, and note the due dates and assignments for our course
2. Introduce yourself and respond to at least (2) of your peers in the first discussion board
3. Read Chapter 1 in American Government, which covers the basic nature and purpose of government: [http://www.ushistory.org/gov/1.asp](http://www.ushistory.org/gov/1.asp)
5. Take a brief look over the U.S. Constitution minus amendments: [http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution_transcript.html)

**Wednesday-6: Federalism and Public Policy Making**
2. Review instructor guidance document in the Week 1 Learning Module in BB
3. Review lecture slides on Federalism in the Week 1 Learning Module in BB
4. Post responses to the discussion question in the second discussion board

**Thursday-7: Civil Liberties, the Real ID and Patriot Acts:**

2. Watch the PBS Documentary "Spying on the Home Front" to better understand the consequences of the Patriot Act and domestic government espionage:
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/homefront/

*Optional-if you have time watch the follow-up documentary “United States of Secrets” or read an interesting and related article in The New Yorker

Friday-8: Material Continued
1. Study lecture slides and readings on the Real ID and Patriot Acts in the Week 1 Learning Module in BB
2. Read the discussion board and respond to peers

Saturday-9: Review
1. Watch the PBS Documentary “Top Secret America” to better understand the impact of 9/11 on American civil liberties and the rise of the national security complex:
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/topsecretamerica/
2. Read the discussion board and respond to peers if you have not done so at this point
Take some time to review the material and review sheet for this week located in the lessons module

Sunday-10:
1. Read the discussion board and respond to peers

Week 2 (July 11-17) Political Parties, Interest Groups, and Campaign Finance

Monday 11: History of American Parties
1. Read Chapter 5 in American Government, which covers the topical matter for this week:
http://www.ushistory.org/gov/5.asp

*Exam #1 is now available to you
Exam 1 is a 30 question multiple-choice exam to be taken in 50 minutes over the material from weeks 1 and 2. You may only take the exam once and must complete the exam on your first attempt. You can revisit previous questions until you submit the exam, but the test will automatically submit after the time expires. The exam will be available in the Assessments tab beginning at 8:00 AM (CST) on 7/11 (Monday) and remain available until 11:00 PM (CST) on 7/15 (Friday).
Tuesday 12: Political Parties
1. Review lecture slides on political parties in the Week 2 Learning Module
2. Read the lecture slides on Interest groups and Lobbyists in the Week 2 Learning Module
3. Watch the following short video on lobbying found in the lecture slides:
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lbvv3kMYcME

Wednesday 13: Interest Groups, Lobbyists, and Campaign Finance
1. Read the lecture slides on Campaign Finance in the Week 2 Learning Module
2. Read the following article on the *Citizens United* ruling that had a profound impact on the funding of U.S. elections and political advocacy:
3. Watch the documentary “Big Sky, Big Money” to learn more about how the *Citizens United* ruling has changed political campaigns in the United States:
   http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/big-sky-big-money/
4. Post response to discussion question in the third discussion board

Thursday 14:
1. Review your notes in preparation for Exam #1
2. Look over the review sheet found in the Week 2 Learning Module

Friday 15: Exam 1:
A multiple choice exam to be taken after you finish reading the course content for weeks 1 and 2. You must begin and finish the exam (which is timed) by 11:00PM today (Friday, July 15).

Saturday 16: Writing assignment #1:
1. Follow the instructions in the week 2 learning module, which will direct you to web links for a set of ideology quizzes. The instructions will call for you to take the quizzes and reflect on the results and your personal ideology, while deciding which political parties best represent your viewpoints and beliefs

*Writing Assignment: Political Ideology and Citizenship*

Part 1: Better understanding your political ideology
Follow the web links below and take both of the ideology quizzes. Write an essay describing the results of your quizzes. In your response please state if you agree or disagree with the results of the surveys and if there were inconsistencies in the results why you think this result occurred. Make sure you weave in some of your responses to the survey questions in your answer. Think carefully when reflecting on this one, as you have a (4) page minimum. Please cut and paste the results from the political compass test
in your document (i.e. the grid that marks your political ideology that pops up after the quiz). http://www.politicalcompass.org/test  http://typology.people-press.org/

Part 2: Should they let you into the country?
How much do you actually know about American government? Can you pass a citizenship test? For the second part of your writing assignment you must follow the link below and complete the following test online. When you are finished use the print screen function (either the prt scr key on your keyboard or hold the alt key and hit prt scr) and paste the results into the essay. Please provide your personal observations as to whether this is an adequate measure of the fundamentals of U.S. politics and culture.


Sunday 17: Wrapping up
*Post response to peers in the discussion forum
*Writing assignment #1 is due by 5:00PM on Sunday, June 17. You will receive a 10 point penalty per day for lateness.

Week 3 (July 18-24): The Judicial and Legislative Branches

Monday 18: The Judiciary
1. Read Chapter 9 on the Judicial Branch in American Government:
2. Review lecture slides on the Judiciary in the Week 3 Learning Module in BB

Tuesday 19: The Plea Bargaining Process
1. Read lecture notes on Plea bargaining in the Week 3 Learning Module in BB
2. Watch the PBS Frontline episode “The Plea”. A link to the documentary can be found in the lecture slides for this section, but a link can also be found below:
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/plea/
*If the above link does not work, please use the following:
http://video.pbs.org/video/2216784391/

Wednesday 20: Congress Bargaining Continued
1. Read Chapter 6 on Congress in American Government:
http://www.ushistory.org/gov/6.asp
2. Post in the fourth discussion board

Thursday 21: Congress
1. Read the lecture notes on Congress/Legislative Branch in the Week 3 Learning Module in BB

**Friday 22: Prep**
1. Take this day to read the discussion board and begin preparing for Week 4 and the second exam

**Saturday 23:**
1. Read the discussion board and post a response to your peers

**Sunday 24:**
1. Read the discussion board and post a response to your peers

**Week 4 (July 25-31): Executive Branch, Political Participation, and Elections**

**Monday 25: The Executive Branch**
*Exam II is now available to you*
A multiple-choice exam consisting of 35 questions over the material from weeks 3 and 4. You will have 60 minutes to complete the exam. Once you take the exam you must complete it, as you only get one opportunity to take the exam. Once you answer a question you may go back and revisit it until you submit your exam, but the exam will automatically submit after the time limit expires. The exam will be available between 8:00 AM (CST) on 7/25 (Monday) until 11:00 PM (CST) on 7/29 (Friday). Good luck!

**Tuesday 26: Writing assignment #2:**
1. *The Best of the Modern Presidents*
You will be required to watch at least (2) documentaries online concerning the modern Presidents and to write a paper contrasting their major achievements/weaknesses in office. Please set aside time to do this as the documentaries themselves can be 3 hours long each. In your paper (minimum of (5) pages) you must discuss the major domestic and foreign policy achievements of each President, discuss their major weaknesses, and discuss which person you feel was a more successful President. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/presidents/

**Wednesday 27: Political Participation**
1. Review documentaries and continue with Writing Assignment #2
3. Post your response to the discussion question in the fifth discussion board
Thursday 28: Continue readings on political participation
1. Review materials for Exam 2
2. Look over the review sheet for Exam 2

Friday 29: Exam 2
1. Multiple choice exam over weeks 3&4.
The exam must be taken and completed by 11:00 PM on Friday, August 29

Saturday 30: wrapping up
1. Read the discussion board and respond to peers

Sunday 31: Writing assignment #2 due
1. Writing assignment #2 is due by 5:00PM on Sunday, July 31. You will receive a 10 point penalty per day for lateness.
2. Make your final post to peers in the discussion board

Week 5 (August 1–4) American Foreign Policy, Civil liberties, and Civil Rights

Monday 1: American Foreign Policy
1. Reach Chapter 11 on “Policymaking” in American Government:
http://www.ushistory.org/gov/11.asp
2. Read the lecture slides on Foreign Policy located in the Week 5 Learning Module in BB

*The final exam is now available to you.
A multiple-choice exam consisting of 20 questions over the material from week 5. You will have 40 minutes to complete the exam. The exam will be available from 8/1 at 8:00 AM (CST) until 11:00 PM (CST) on 8/4. Once you begin the exam you cannot retake it and it must be taken within this time frame. You may go back and revisit your questions until you submit the exam, but the exam will automatically submit after the time limit expires. Good luck!

Tuesday 2: Civil Liberties
1. Read Chapter 10 on “Civil Liberties and Civil Rights” in American Government:
2. Read notes on Civil Liberties and Rights in the Week 5 Learning Module in BB

Wednesday 3: Civil Rights
Thursday 4: Final Exam
Multiple choice exam over week 5. The exam must be taken and completed by 11:00PM on Thursday, August 4
Post your final response to peers in the last discussion board before the class closes at midnight

You are done! Congratulations on finishing the course.

ACADEMIC ADVISING

The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood #203. For more information please call (361) 825-3466.

DISABILITY SERVICES

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 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 call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall, Room #116.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

GRADE APPEALS PROCESS

Students who feel that they have not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in this class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, cla.tamucc.edu/students/studentinfo.html For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s Office.

Student Responsibilities:
TURN OFF CELL PHONES!!!
Pay attention during class. Private conversations, sleeping, and reading non-class related material will not be tolerated. Learn something! Participate in class discussions.

Academic Honesty University students are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the highest standards of academic honesty. Academic misconduct for which a student is subject to penalty includes all forms of cheating, such as illicit possession of examinations or examination materials, forgery, or plagiarism. (Plagiarism is the presentation of the work of another as one’s own work.) If unsure of what honesty entails or if for more information regarding the penalties for academic dishonesty, please refer to the University Catalog. Instances of plagiarism or cheating may result in either a zero on the assignment and/or failing the class, decided at the instructor’s discretion.

*The instructor reserves the right to make changes to the course schedule or material due to instructional needs throughout the semester.