U.S. GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

How democratic are we?

We live in an increasingly densely populated, technologically sophisticated urban nation. All of these developing conditions unavoidably involve us with one another and make us increasingly interdependent. As we have come to live closer to one another, to work in ever more mutually dependent markets, and to depend increasingly on technologies understood and controlled by others, our need for government has grown. Because we call on government to do much more in modern urban society, it is ever more important that we as citizens have a basic understanding of its structure and function. If the people are to be able to control their more complicated and interdependent society, they will need to control their government. The first and most fundamental step toward controlling government is understanding it.

Learning Objectives

The Facts: The basic objective of this course is to provide factual information about the fundamental principles and practices of the U.S. political system. To this end, we will be examining the country's basic political structure, the role of the people in politics, the processes through which policy choices are shaped and institutions through which political decisions are made. Specifically, the course will achieve the following student learning outcomes:

- Ability to recall basic facts related to the foundations of U.S. national government.
- Ability to describe key political concepts related to U.S. institutions (Congress, the Presidency, the Judiciary, and the Bureaucracy).
- Ability to demonstrate an understanding of key concepts relating to U.S. political behavior (culture, voting, elections, political parties, interest groups, and the media).

Intellectual Skills: A second important objective of the course stems from its role as a required element in the University Core Curriculum Program. The underlying objective of the University Core Curriculum is to help the student develop intellectual skills that will contribute to personal growth as both student and citizen. This course in U.S. Government and Politics is designed to help you develop several intellectual skills vital to your success in the professional world, including listening, reading, writing, and critical thinking. Like nearly all courses we will depend heavily on reading to convey basic facts and provide a common information base for discussion, so reading comprehension will be basic to success in the course. Class lecture will supplement rather than merely review and repeat what is in the readings, so listening and taking quality notes will be vital as well. Assignments in the course will stress exercising your writing skills as you think critically about what you read.

Understanding: A final basic objective is to get students to think critically about the question of how democratic we really are as a polity. It is generally assumed that the United States is a democracy, and if so, the people are ostensibly in control of government. One of the essential elements of critical thinking is to challenge such comfortable assumptions, asking questions about fundamental values and beliefs and thinking anew about the answers. Throughout the course we will take a close and critical look at what it means to have democratic government, and the extent to which the United States measures up to that ideal. This exercise takes us well beyond
just learning the basic facts and offers the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of the political system, including our own beliefs and values regarding it and our role in it as individuals.

**Study Aids**

The tools described below play a vital role in your success in the course. Be sure to obtain access to each and use them fully to enhance your learning experience and your grade.

**Text:** The basic text for the course is Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright, *Keeping the Republic*. The required readings should be read in the sequence listed in the Schedule of Reading below prior to when the associated material will be discussed in class. The text provides the basic information you need about the political system to think about and draw conclusions about how it measures up to democracy.

**Topic Review Guides:** Topic Review Guides will be provided on Blackboard Learn for each major topic covered in the course. The Guides list the “Key Terms to Know About,” and the “In-class Discussion Questions” that may appear on the exams. Intended as a guide to help you prepare for exams, the Topic Review Guides should not be relied upon exclusively in studying for exams.

**Course Guide:** In the Course Guide you will find suggestions on how to make the most of the texts, Topic Review Guides, lectures, and other aspects of the course while preparing for exams. It also suggests some study strategies for the exams that may be useful to you. It is posted with the Introduction materials on Blackboard.

**CASA:** The Center for Academic Student Achievement is available to provide help with general academic, writing, and study skills and is a valuable resource which you should use to your advantage.

**Supplemental Instruction:** We will have a Supplemental Instructor that is familiar with course content to help with understanding course material, and you are encouraged to take advantage of this service.

**Course Requirements** (tentative - subject to revision)

Please read the course elements listed below with care. It is important that there is no misunderstanding concerning them, so if you have any questions be sure to ask. I will operate under the assumption that you are aware of and understand them.

**Class Attendance** -- Class lectures, presentations, and discussions usually add to (rather than merely review) the reading material, thus regular attendance is necessary for keeping up with what is going on in class and for properly preparing for exams. Of course, effective attendance involves more than just showing up. It is important to practice the fine art of listening (and taking good notes) in order to get and retain the information presented. Paying close attention and taking notes useful to you later are essential to your success in the course. Despite the help of PowerPoint screens to guide you, this is not always easy in a large lecture setting. Remember, what is on the screen is available to you on Blackboard, so what you need to focus on in class is what is said about it. The screens are just an aid, and relying on reviewing what is on them will not be enough. Assessment of attendance will be through occasional and unscheduled attendance quizzes that will ask a simple question about the day’s topic. **Attendance Quizzes collectively will constitute 10% of your overall grade.**
**On-line Text Quizzes:** The text book for the class plays a central role in achieving several of the class objectives and reading and comprehending the material in it is basic to achieving a good grade. Keeping up with and understanding the reading is vital to success in the course. Reading before or as the topics are discussed is so important that we will be doing a series of quizzes to help you keep up as we go along. There will be twelve on-line quizzes consisting of multiple-choice questions over the text material associated with the topic. You will be able to retake the quizzes on-line as many times as you may need to in order to get a high grade. The bad news is you will not be able to make up a text quiz if you don’t do it before the due date for the quiz. The Text Quizzes will collectively constitute 15% of your overall grade.

**Examinations:** We will have four exams during the course of the semester. Each exam will consist of “identification” questions focusing on terms, as well as “in-class discussion” questions based on class material. The “identification” items will be based on the “Key Terms to Know About” listed in your Topic Review Guides associated with the topics covered on the exam and be worth 30% of the exam grade. The In-class Discussion questions will be provided on the Topic Review Guides. You will answer seven in-class discussion questions from those appearing on each exam and these will constitute 70% of the exam grade. Exam 4 will take place during the regularly scheduled final exam period. The Exams collectively will constitute 60% of your overall course grade.

**Learning Community Integrated Assignment** – As part of being in a learning community, all students will participate in an integrated assignment. This assignment will count as a portion of your grade in Seminar, Composition, and Political Science. For English 1302 this assignment will count as one of your situation / genre intersection projects.

For your integrated assignment, students will use what they learn in each of the classes of the Learning Community to advocate, organize, and/or promote some kind of political change through writing. The issue you choose to explore should either come from a national political issue with local implications, or a local issue with national political implications (perhaps a national issue that is implemented locally, or a local issue that is part of a national problem). This project will require you to perform policy research and analysis.

Your writing will take the form of a real political genre of writing such as a position statement, press release, advocacy report, or strategic plan of action. (this is not an exhaustive list, as which genre you choose to use will depend on your research and rhetorical situation).

This project should demonstrate your ability to analyze rhetorical situations in order to identify options and make appropriate choices that will enable you to use writing to achieve specific purposes; demonstrate their ability to locate, read, evaluate, select, use, and effectively integrate information from appropriate sources with your own ideas. Finally, you should be able to demonstrate control of situation-appropriate conventions of writing.

**Learning Community Points:** It will be possible to earn Learning Community Points that can be added to your overall grade. Each point is worth 1% of your overall grade for U.S. Government and Politics up to 10 points or 10% (one letter grade). Points can be earned by responding to articles posted on Blackboard from time to time with structured written responses, using CASA, attending specific SI sessions, attending approved campus events, etc.
**Course Evaluation Summary:** Course grades will be based on the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Percent of Final Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation Quizzes</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Quizzes</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Community Integrated Assignment</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 1: Power, Culture and Ideology</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 2: Constitution</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 3: Non-Governmental Institutions</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam 4: Government Institutions</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Final letter grades will be assigned based on the percentage of points accumulated on the following basis:

- 90% - or more = A
- 80% - 89.9% = B
- 70% - 79.9% = C
- 60% - 69.9% = D
- 59.9% - or less = F

**Course Policies**

*Make-up Exams* – If you have a valid reason for missing an exam (verified illness, accident, unavoidable or university excused absence) you should arrange to take a make-up exam prior to or within two weeks after the exam date. If you miss an exam without a valid reason, you will be allowed to take a make-up exam for partial credit (85%).

*Extra Credit:* No individual extra credit opportunities will be available other than the Learning Community Points.

*Grading:* The primary concern in grading your work is to maintain fair standards. If you feel that you have received a grade on an assignment or exam that does not reflect the quality of your work, or if you do not understand why an answer you gave was graded in the manner it was. Please bring the matter to my attention and schedule a time to come see me.

*Assistance:* You are strongly encouraged to take full advantage of the outside-of-class help available to you. I will always be available during office hours, and will gladly schedule appointments at other times that may be more convenient for you. Feel free to drop by, call, or contact me by e-mail if you have any questions about the course content, exams, or just want to talk politics. The Center for Academic Student Achievement (CASA) is available to provide help with the course material.

*Freedom of Speech:* Feel free to raise your hand with a question or comment. Reducing confusion, providing clarification, or responding to student curiosity is an important part of the classroom process. Chances are that if you didn’t understand something, I just didn’t explain it clearly. Asking for clarification will help me do my job better, and most likely clear things up for your fellow students as well. We will also be discussing subjects and ideas that may be controversial. Students should feel free to express themselves on such matters, but also respect the opinions of those with whom one may disagree. Class discussion animated by questions and thoughtful opinions makes for a better class.
**Freedom to Learn:** Universities must maintain standards of etiquette in order to effect an atmosphere conducive to learning. Students are expected to help maintain such an atmosphere by demonstrating courtesy to one another both in and out of the classroom. In the classroom all students should consider the right of others to have the opportunity to learn, and behave in a manner that best preserves that right. Talking to one's neighbor(s) during class lectures or general discussions, chronic lateness, leaving class before it has been dismissed, inappropriate use of cell phones or computers, etc., is inherently disruptive and thus injurious to others' opportunity to learn. Students who are unable to respect the right of others to learn may be asked to leave and are potentially subject to disciplinary sanction under the Student Code of Conduct.

**Academic Integrity:** Cheating or plagiarism on an assignment or test, or failure to complete any of the course requirements will result in a zero grade for the assignment in question. If you are in doubt about what practices might constitute plagiarism, consult with me or your academic advisor.

**Dropping a Class:** I hope that you never find it necessary to drop this or any other class. However, events can sometimes occur that make dropping a course necessary or wise. Please consult with your academic advisor, the Financial Aid Office, and me, before you decide to drop this course. Should dropping the course be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop the course by going to the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation WILL NOT automatically result in your being dropped from the class. (April 6) is the last day to drop a class with an automatic grade of “W” this term.

**Notifications**

**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.

**Grade Appeals Process** – As stated in University Procedure 13.02.99.C2.03, *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 appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. 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 Procedure 13.02.99.C2.03, *Student Grade Appeals*. These documents are accessible online at: [http://academicaffairs.tamucc.edu/rules_procedures/assets/13.02.99.C0.03_student_grade_appeals.pdf](http://academicaffairs.tamucc.edu/rules_procedures/assets/13.02.99.C0.03_student_grade_appeals.pdf). For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s office in the college in which the course is taught. For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal in CLA, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, [http://cla.tamucc.edu/about/student-resources.html](http://cla.tamucc.edu/about/student-resources.html).

**Disability Accommodations** -- 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, or 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.
SCHEDULE OF READINGS

Part I: The Foundations of American Politics

Introduction: What’s Power Got to Do With It?
Reading: Syllabus

Topic 1: Political Culture and Consensus
Reading: Barbour and Wright: Chapter 1

Topic 2: Political Ideology and Conflict
Reading: Barbour and Wright: Chapter 1

Power, Culture, and Ideology Exam:

Part II: The Foundations of American Government

Topic 3: The Constitution: Republicanism and Democracy
Reading: Barbour and Wright: Chapter 2

Topic 4: The Constitution: Federalism and Democracy
Reading: Barbour and Wright: Chapter 3

Topic 5: The Constitution: Civil Liberties and Democracy
Reading: Barbour and Wright: Chapter 4

Constitution Exam:

Part III: Participating in Politics

Topic 6: Public Opinion, Media and Democracy
Reading: Barbour and Wright: Chapter 10 & 13

Topic 7: Political Parties and Interest Groups: Mobilizing Majorities and Minorities for Power
Reading: Barbour and Wright: Chapter 11

Topic 8: Elections and Democracy: Structure, Process and Political Equality
Reading: Barbour and Wright: Chapter 12

Non-Governmental Institutions Exam:
Part IV: Policy Making: Institutions and Outcomes

Topic 9: Congress v. President: Who Governs Domestic Policy?
Reading: Barbour and Wright: Chapter 6
Chapter 14 pp. 453 - 486

Topic 10: Congress v. President: Who Governs Foreign and Defense Policy
Reading: Barbour and Wright: Chapter 7
Chapter 14 pp. 486 – 596

Topic 11: The Judiciary: Civil Rights and Public Policy
Reading: Barbour and Wright: Chapters 9 and 5

Topic 12: Bureaucracy, Implementation, Regulation and Democracy
Reading: Barbour and Wright: Chapter 8

Government Institutions Exam:

*Dates may be subject to change due to circumstances as announced in class.