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.

Course 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 Timothy O. Lenz and Mirya Holman, *American Government*. 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. Lenz and Holman, *American Government* is a traditional U.S. government textbook that is available without cost to the student as a pdf. The advantage of the text is that it is free, the disadvantage is that it does not have ancillary study aids. It does have some imbedded study aids that you should make the most of at the conclusion of each chapter including a summary, list of key terms, study questions and a listing of additional resources. 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. The text can be found at: [http://florida.theorangegrove.org/og/file/2e74506d-6095-0531-a2fb-b04504b885bd/1/9781616101633_LenzHolman.pdf](http://florida.theorangegrove.org/og/file/2e74506d-6095-0531-a2fb-b04504b885bd/1/9781616101633_LenzHolman.pdf)

**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.

**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. **Though you will have just 45 minutes to do the quiz, the good news is 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 three exams during the course of the semester. Each exam will consist of “identification” questions focusing on terms, as well as short “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 3 will take place during the regularly scheduled final exam period. The Exams collectively will constitute 60% of your overall course grade.

**Learning Community Paper Assignment** -- As part of the Triad F Learning Community, you will be required to write a 3-5 page paper which integrates the content of your History and Political Science classes, the themes that evolve from your freshman seminar classes, and the skills that you develop in your freshman composition classes. Your first-year seminar leader will grade this paper. It will contribute to your grade in your Political science, Composition and First-Year Seminar classes. For the particulars of this assignment, see your freshman seminar leader. The Tetrad Paper Assignment will constitute 15% of your overall grade.

**Reading Response Papers:** Are brief reaction papers responding to articles assigned from time to time. Your reactions should be clear, thoughtful and supported, where appropriate, by facts and logic. Reading Response Papers should be brief, (approximately one page) and follow the format of the assignment sheet provided. The Reading Response Papers collectively will constitute 30% of your overall grade.

**Extra Credit:** There will be several optional readings on the Blackboard Blog Area for interested students, and students will have the opportunity to contribute to the class content in a number of ways that will be discussed in class. It will be possible to earn up to an additional 20% on your final grade through these extra credit efforts.

**Course Evaluation Summary:** Course grades will be based on the following:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Percent of Final Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance Quizzes</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text Quizzes</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Community Paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam 2</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam 3</td>
<td>20%</td>
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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, will be allowed to take a make-up exam for partial credit (85%).

**Extra Credit:** No individual extra credit opportunities will be available, but circumstances may arise during the semester for which extra-credit opportunities for the entire class would enhance the learning experience.

**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. Events can conspire in such a way to make dropping a course necessary or wise, however. In the case of this class, I hope you will consult with me before you decide to drop to be sure it is necessary or wise. Current university policy designates November 15th as the last day to drop a class with an automatic grade of “W.” This means that if you have not dropped by this date, you will receive a grade for the course even if you don’t complete the course. Any outstanding assignments will, therefore, “count” and have a very damaging effect on your grade.
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.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures, a student who believes that she 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.C2.01, Student Grade Appeal Procedures (available at: http://academicaffairs.tamu.edu/rules_procedures/assets/13.02.99.C0.03_student_grade_appeals.pdf). For complete details on the process of submitting a formal grade appeal, please visit the College of Liberal Arts website, http://cla.tamu.edu/about/student-resources.html. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Associate Dean’s Office.

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, 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: About the Course
Reading: None

Topic 1: What’s Power Got to Do With It?
Reading: Lenz and Holman: Chapter 1

Topic 2: Political Culture and Ideology: Consensus and Conflict
Reading: Lenz and Holman: Chapter 9

Topic 3: The Constitution: Republicanism and Democracy
Reading: Lenz and Holman: Chapter 2

Topic 4: The Constitution: Federalism and Democracy
Reading: Lenz and Holman: Chapter 6

Topic 5: The Constitution: Liberties, Rights and Democracy
Reading: Lenz and Holman: Chapter 18

Exam One: ?*

Part II: Participating in Politics

Topic 5: Public Opinion and Democracy
Reading: Lenz and Holman: Chapter 8

Topic 6: The News Media: Framing Politics and Democracy
Reading: Lenz and Holman: Chapter 7

Reading: Lenz and Holman: Chapter 10

Topic 8: Political Parties and Interest Groups: Mobilizing Majorities and Minorities for Power
Reading: Lenz and Holman: Chapter 11 & Chapter 12
Exam Two: ??

Part III: Policy Making: Institutions and Outcomes

Topic 9: Congress v. President: Who Governs Domestic Policy?
Reading: Lenz and Holman: Chapter 3 & Chapter 14

Topic 10: Congress v. President: Who Governs Foreign and Defense Policy
Reading: Lenz and Holman: Chapter 4 & Chapter 17

Topic 11: The Judiciary and Public Policy
Reading: Lenz and Holman: Chapter 5

Topic 12: Bureaucracy, Implementation, Regulation and Democracy
Reading: Lenz and Holman: Chapter 13

Final Exam: December ?, 4:30 PM

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