

American Government
POLS 2305.13
3 undergraduate credit hours
Fall 2017
Professor. Waggener
Department of Political Science at
Sam Houston State University

Class Location/Time: CHSS #242B 12:00 – 12:50
Office Location: CHSS #490B
Office Phone/Email: (936) 294-1466, tamarawaggener@shsu.edu
Office Hours: Office hours are by appointment.

Students are strongly encouraged to make use of office hours.

Course Description

This course addresses the structure of national and state governments; key features of federalism; the roles of the executive, legislative and judicial branches in national government; voter registration and voting; elections; and civil liberties and civil rights.

Course Learning Objectives

The course has three primary objectives.

1. Students will gain factual and analytical knowledge of governmental institutions, political behavior, civic engagement, and their political and philosophical foundations
2. Students will gain knowledge of civic responsibility and the ability to engage in American democracy
3. Students will learn how to find and use resources for answering questions or solving problems.

Required Texts

American Government

American Government, Timothy O. Lenz and Mirya Holman. University Press of Florida (Copyright 2013). This is an online textbook. Students are not required to pay a fee to access the textbook. Students may download the textbook to an electronic device or print hard copies of the textbook.

https://florida.theorange grove.org/og/file/2e74506d-6095-0531-a2fb-b04504b885bd/1/9781616101633_LenzHolman.pdf

Students will use the following government websites

The Whitehouse website <http://www.whitehouse.gov/>
US Senate website <http://www.senate.gov/>
US House website <http://www.house.gov/>
Federal Courts website <http://www.uscourts.gov/FederalCourts.aspx>

Class Format

The class format will be a mixture of lecture and discussion. Current political issues/events will be referenced during discussion. During discussion we will not assume there is a single correct opinion on a given political issue. All opinions will be given careful consideration. Students are strongly encouraged develop and express their own political opinions. However, students must arrive at their opinions through active debate and informed reasoning. “Off the cuff” political opinions are not credible or productive to class learning.

Class Attendance

Regular and punctual class attendance is expected of each student enrolled in this course.

Classroom Policies

Class Policies

Extra Credit

Extra credit will not be offered in this course.

Make Up and Late Assignments

Students may request a make-up exam if they can provide formal documentation of a medical, family or other type of emergency that prevented them from taking an exam. Make-up exams are not be granted if students fail to provide such documentation. Please note that slips from the University Health Center are not considered acceptable documentation, unless the slip clearly indicates that the student was too ill to attend class.

Other Policies

For other class policies addressing absences on religious holy days, academic dishonesty, students with disabilities, and visitors in the classroom see the following link:

www.shsu.edu/syllabus

Grades and assignments

Exams (100 points each)

Students will complete three multiple-choice exams (25 questions per exam). Students will receive a review sheet one week before each exam. Students must bring a scantron sheet to class on the day of exams. Students who believe their grades are entered wrong must be able to provide me with their scantrons. Thus, students must keep all their scantrons until final grades are assigned.

Calculation of Final Course Grades

Final course grades will be the average of the three exam grades. Final grades are based on the following grading scale: 100 – 90=A, 89-80=B, 79-70=C, 69-60=D, 59-0=F.

Optional Assignment (Report worth 100 points) and Calculation of Final Course Grades

Students who are not satisfied with their first two exam grades will have the opportunity to submit a report addressing an issue relevant to the course. Please note that the third exam is scheduled during finals week and thus students should make their decision about the optional assignment immediately after receiving their second exam score. The report will be a minimum of three pages, single spaced, font no larger than 12, and 1 inch margins. The report will be worth 100 points. The report will be due December 7 no later than 5:00 PM via email as a Word attachment. Information about the content requirements of the report and a grading rubric will be distributed in class after the second exam.

Final Course Grades with Optional Assignment

Final course grades will be the average of the three exam grades and the report grade. Final grades will be based on the following grading scale: 100 – 90=A, 89-80=B, 79-70=C, 69-60=D, 59-0=F.

Class Schedule

The class schedule is tentative and thus subject to change.

Constitutions and Government

Date: September 6 - 8

Topics: Key features of the US Constitution

Readings: Chapter 2 – The U.S. System of Constitutional Government

Federalism

Date: September 11 - 22

Topics: Structure of federalism, key constitutional clauses addressing power relationships between the national government and state governments, etc.

Readings: Chapter 6 Federalism

The Presidency (executive branch)

Date: September 25 - 29

Topics: Structure of the presidency, role of the presidency in national government, presidential powers, etc.

Readings: Chapter 4 The Presidency and readings from The Whitehouse website

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/>

October 2 Exam 1

US Congress (legislative branch)

Date: October 4 - 13

Topics: Structure of Congress, role of Congress in national government, congressional legislative process, representative role of senators and representatives, etc.

Readings: Chapter 3 Congress and readings from US Senate website <http://www.senate.gov/>

US House website <http://www.house.gov/>

US Courts (judicial branch)

Date: October 16 - 20

Topics: Structure of the court system, role of the courts in national government, court cases, court decision making, etc.

Readings: Chapter 5 The Judiciary and readings from Federal Courts website

<http://www.uscourts.gov/FederalCourts.aspx>

Elections and Voting

Date: October 23 – November 3

Topics: Types of elections, schedule of elections, voter registration, Texas voter registration requirements, three ways of casting a ballot, etc.

Readings: Chapter 10 Political Participation and Texas Secretary of State web site:

<http://www.sos.state.tx.us/>

[Election related issues: immigration, US economy and trade, etc.](#)

Exam 2 November 6

Courts, the Constitution, and Civil Liberties

Date: November 8 - 20

Readings: Chapter 18 Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Thanksgiving Break November 22 – 24

Courts, Government, and Civil Rights

Date: November 27 - December 1

Readings: Chapter 18 Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Tentative Date: Exam 3 December 4 1:00 – 3:00 PM