

POLS 2305: American Government

CRN: 20433

Spring 2018

Weekly Meeting: Tue & Thu 12:30 -1:50 pm

Classroom: CHSS C070

Professor: Dennis L.C. Weng

Email: dennis.weng@shsu.edu

Office Hours: MW 9:30-11:30, or by appointment

Office/Mailbox: CHSS, Room 482

QR Codes:



Catalog Description:

Syllabus

This course offers an overview of American government at the national level. Topics include the origin and evolution of the U.S. Constitution, political behavior and attitudes, political parties, interest groups, the media, and the three branches of government - Congress, the Executive Branch, and the Judiciary. A goal of the course is to equip students with the knowledge to engage in political and civic life.

Course Description:

“Politics is just not my thing!”

An alarmingly high number of young adults in the United States are of the belief that engaging in some manner of meaningful political discourse is boring, complicated or simply a waste of time. Are you one of them? If so, this course may change your mind! This course provides a basic introduction to American politics and government. We will examine the institutions and processes of American government and the political factors that influence them through the use of concepts and frameworks provided by the text. Given that 2016 was a historical presidential election year and we’re now in the beginning of the “Unprecedented Trump Administration”, our class provides an opportunity to discuss two interesting questions, “Where are you in this story, and how does it factor into your decision to begin participating (or further participate) in the political process?”

Students in this class should begin to understand both the structures and functions of key concepts in American political life. More importantly, the student should acquire a greater understanding of the sources of political conflict in contemporary American society and it would help you cope with the polarized society in today’s political environment. In addition I encourage students to explore the normative questions underlying much of the political dialogue here in America with the goal of developing your own informed and articulated opinions. Among the topics included are the historical overview of American politics, the fundamental foundation of today’s American politics, political culture and socialization, political participation, the media, social movements

and minority politics, and interest groups and political parties. I do not try to cover everything in detail during this semester. However, this semester should give you a much better idea about politics. If something confuses you and requires clarification, you must ask questions. Please remember that I facilitate the process of learning, but the ultimate responsibility for learning – and demonstrating what you've learned - lies with you.

Course Objectives:

At the end of the course, students should be able to

- Contemporary debates on the bounds of power of the federal government: U.S. Constitution, federalism and separation of powers, civil rights, civil liberties.
- The formation, over time alteration, and impact of national political institutions: Congress, President, Bureaucracy, Supreme Court
- The role of players outside of the formal walls of the federal government in the political process : Voters, political parties, interest groups, media

Required Materials:

We will be reading a big portion of this following book. As a result, you may wish to purchase this book. In addition to this text, students are responsible for all the materials that I may provide to you during the semester. All the other course related materials, if any, will be accessible via Blackboard for students to download.

Required Textbook:

Lowi, Ginsberg, Shepsle, and Ansolabehere. American Government: Power & Purpose, Full 14th edition

Other Materials:

Other materials assigned to the class will be found on Blackboard. These may include published articles, materials prepared by the instructor, research reports by political scientists, etc. You are also expected to read the political news to keep up-to-date on the most notable headline stories. Reading on-line CNN, the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, or the Washington Post will work fine.

Contact The Professor:

I strongly encourage you to discuss anything related to the class during my office hours. My office hours are 9:30 am to 11:30 am on Mondays and Wednesdays. I am also

happy to meet you in outside of my posted office hours. If you cannot meet me during my office hours, please e-mail me. If you do email me, follow these standards:

1. Include the class title (e.g. POLS 2305-02) and a substantive heading (e.g. question about political culture). Emails without a subject title or which do not follow this format (e.g. a title of "Hey") will not be answered.
2. Make sure you put your name in the email if you are not using your SHSU email account. I will not spend time trying to guess which student is partyanimal99@gmail.com nor am I likely to respond if no signature is included. I generally respond within 24-48 hours, if you email me regarding with an assignment, test, etc. due the next day, I strongly recommend that you plan ahead accordingly.

Course Requirements and Evaluation:

First thing first: Read this syllabus carefully!!!

The syllabus is your instruction for this the class; it informs you about required readings, grading expectations, course policies, how to contact me, required assignments (if any), and any other general information pertaining to this class. Let me make it clear, the most important thing to the course is keeping up with the reading material.

Your class performance will be based on the following:

- **Participation - 10%**
- **Random Written Exercises – 10 %**
- **First Midterm - 25%**
- **Second Midterm– 25%**
- **Final – 30%**

Grade Scale:

All the course evaluations will be graded on a 100-point scale. The following grading scale will be used for the final semester grade:

A	90 – 100
B	80 – 89
C	70 – 79
D	60 – 69
F	59 and lower

Attendance

You are required to attend all lectures and read the materials according to the schedule (see below). I will introduce and explain some issues and concepts that are not in the readings, so attendance is crucial. That is to say, you may have a significant amount of material on your exams come from class lectures. All absences require a written explanation in order to be considered to be an excused absence. Attendance is recorded and each unexcused absence will cost you a small fraction of your final grade.

You may miss up to Three class sessions without penalty to your grade. You are responsible for all material discussed in class and all assigned readings missed.

This class will be primarily lecture with some discussion sections. I expect you to have done the readings by the date on the syllabus. There is a moderate amount of reading, but none of it is particularly dense. Students can earn bonus participation points by responding to questions incorporated into the course lecture and by taking part in class discussions.

Note:

10% of Total Grade, with deductions for more than three absences

-2% for 4-5 absences

-4% for 6-7 absences

-6% for 8-9 absences

-8% for 10-11 absences

-10% for 12 or more absences

Random Written Exercises

Throughout the course, the instructor will give seven take-home written exercises. Written exercises ask students to express your opinion about a question relevant to a specific class. The exercises are designed to provide a quick evaluation of how well students understand lectures and/or keep up with readings. A thoughtful response or a correct answer will earn the student full credit (2 points), a messy, incomplete response will earn half credit (1 point), and no response will earn no credit (See Rubric Below). Students will earn a maximum of 10 points this way, for 10% of their total grade. Note that the dates for these exercises and quizzes will NOT be announced in advance. Also, the take-home written exercises will only be distributed at the end of the class on the randomly selected meeting dates, and it is your responsibility to make sure you receive the exercises. While NO “make-ups” are available for this portion of the course, the instructor will offer at least seven opportunities to earn these 10 points. Students who have already earned 10 points will receive extra credits on the final grade for each additional assignment (range from 1 to maximum 4).

Rubric for your writing assignment:

Category		
Minus (0)	Check (1)	Plus (2)
A messy incomplete response or no response at all will earn no credit.	An incomplete/incorrect response or answer will earn half credit. Indicates the piece meets the basic expectation for length (on time on task) and for engagement.	A thoughtful response or a correct answer. Indicates a strongly engaged, especially high-quality exploration.

Note: Your first exercise is a quiz that tests your knowledge of the contents of the syllabus. This syllabus is a contract between each of you and me. Completing the first written exercise indicates that you have read and understood the requirements of this course. Please do not work on the first exercise until you fully understand the syllabus. Simply put, when you complete your first exercise, you agree that you will be held to the requirements of this course.

Exams

There will be three exams: two midterms and a final. All three exams will be multiple-choice questions. The two midterms and the final are closed book exams. The two midterm exams are not cumulative; the final exam is cumulative. Before each exam, I will distribute a review sheet that will contain the key concepts/questions that may appear on the exam. A review session will also be held before the exams.

Please note that there will be ***no make-up exams!*** If you have a conflict over the exam, see the professor in advance. I understand that emergencies happen. In a genuine emergency, I am very willing to work with you. I will, however, require documentation of emergencies - notes from doctors, emergency room personnel, etc.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

Dean of Student's Office

STUDENT ABSENCES ON RELIGIOUS HOLY DAYS POLICY:

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: "a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20...." A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

<http://shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/861001.pdf>

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY:

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936-294-3786, and e-mail disability@shsu.edu). They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dotAsset/7ff819c3-39f3-491d-b688-db5a330ced92.pdf>

VISITORS IN THE CLASSROOM:

Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar's Office.

Course Schedule

Date	Topics	Readings	Notes
I. The Foundations			
Week 1:			
01/18 Thu	Introduction to the Course and Syllabus	Syllabus	Read the Syllabus!
Week 2:			
01/23 Tue	The Five Principles of Politics?	Chapter 1	
01/25 Thu	Why Politics? Who are you? We are all rational animals, or not?	Finish Chapter 1	Game Theory and Simulation!
Week 3:			
01/30 Tue	Constructing a Government: The Founding and the Constitution	Chapter 2	
02/01 Thu	Federalism and the US Constitution	Chapter 3	
Week 4:			
02/06 Tue	Civil Liberties	Chapter 4	
02/08 Thu	Civil Rights	Chapter 5	
Week 5:			
02/13 Tue	Political Ideology	Chapter 13	
02/15 Thu	Groups and Interests	Chapter 13	
Week 6:			
02/20 Tue	Catch up/Review		Don't miss the review session!
02/22 Thu	First In-Class Exam		
II. Political Institutions and Decision Making			
Week 7:			
02/27 Tue	Congress: The First Branch;	Chapter 6	
03/01 Thu	Congress (Continued)	Chapter 6	
Week 8: The President and Media			
03/06 Tue	In-Class Video and Discussion: <i>Wag the Dog</i>	Chapter 7 & 14	
03/08 Thu	In-Class Video and Discussion: <i>Wag the Dog</i>	Chapter 7 & 14	
Week 9: Spring Break			
03/13 – 03/15	Spring Break		
Week 10:			
03/20 Tue	The Presidency as an Institution;	Chapter 7	

03/22 Thu	The Presidency as an Institution;	Chapter 7	
Week 11:			
03/27 Tue	The Executive Branch: Bureaucracy in a Democracy	Chapter 8	
03/29 Thu	The Federal Courts	Chapter 9	
Week 12:			
04/03 Tue	Catch up/Review		Don't miss the review session!
04/05 Thu	Second In-Class Exam		Prof. Weng will be attending the MPSA meeting in Chicago
III. Political Behavior – Party, Interests, and Media			
Week 13:			
04/10 Tue	Public Opinion	Chapter 10	
04/12 Thu	Public Opinion	Chapter 10	
Week 14:			
04/17 Tue	Elections	Chapter 11	
04/19 Thu	Political Parties	Chapter 12	
Week 15:			
04/24 Tue	The Media	Chapter 14	
04/26 Thu	Policy Issues	Chapter 15-17	
Week 16			
05/01 Tue	Final Recap and Review		Don't miss the review session!
05/03 Thu	Final Exam		
Final Exam Week (05/07 – 05/10)			
05/04 – 05/07 Final Exam Week	Meet with the Professor, if needed.		