

Sam Houston State University
Department of Political Science
Spring 2018
American Government
POLS 2305 - 07
Unique #: 20536

Instructor: Eric Svensen
Office: CHSS 485
Office Hours: TTH 11:00 – 12:00
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Course Information:
Meeting Place: CHSS 252
Meeting Time: TTH 9:30 – 10:50

Course Overview and Objectives

This course is an introduction to American government and politics. Subjects we will cover are U.S. political history, political institutions, political parties, elections, public opinion, civil rights and freedoms, and public policy. By the end of the course, students should have a working understanding of the functions and structure of U.S. Constitution, including negative checks on government power, a working understanding of each branch of government, a working understanding of elections, voter behavior, parties and interest groups, and a working understanding of how public policy works. To navigate this material, the class will be divided into four thematic sections. The first section begins with the creation of the nation and its fundamental features, including the development of democracy, the adoption of the Constitution, federalism, and civil liberties and civil rights. The second section of the course focuses on institutional features of the national government – Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy, and the courts. The third section explores mass democratic behavior including American political parties, elections, public opinion, individual level and interest group participation, and the media. The final section of class focuses on economic, social, and foreign policy.

Course Evaluation

For this course, there will be three exams and a final. The percentage toward your overall grade total is as follows:

20% - Exam #1 – Tuesday, February 13th
25% - Exam #2 – Tuesday, March 20th
25% - Exam #3 – Tuesday, April 17th
30% - Final (Cumulative) – Thursday, May 10th (9:30 – 11:30)
100%

Exams: Exams will comprise multiple-choice questions. The final is cumulative.

Grading: The grading scale for the course is as follows:

90-100%	A
80-89%	B
70-79%	C
60-69%	D
< 60%	F

Attendance Policy

There is no attendance policy for this course. However, history has shown that students who miss significant amount of lecture often perform poorly on class exams. In addition to missing valuable course information for exams, engaging discussions that will undoubtedly enhance your civic knowledge, and important class announcements, I also provide extra credit opportunities for students who participate regularly in class.

Texts and Required Materials

Theodore J. Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere. 2017. *American Government: Power and Purpose* (14th Edition). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co. ISBN: 978-0-393-28375-4

Make-up Exams

Make-up exams will be permitted for illness certified by a doctor, family emergencies certified by the Dean, or official university events with a letter from the appropriate university authority. Athletes and other students who must miss exams should notify me in advance.

Accommodations for Religious Holidays

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.

Special Needs

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.

Academic Integrity

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: <http://www.shsu.edu/dept/dean-of-students/index.html>

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.

Additional Resources

The following are additional sources for both the political hungry and students seeking additional political knowledge

General

<http://www.realclearpolitics.com/>
<http://www.politico.com/>
<http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/>

Polling

<http://www.pollingreport.com/>
<http://www.gallup.com/>

Election Data

<http://uselectionatlas.org/>
<http://www.princeton.edu/~rvdb/JAVA/election2004/>

Institutions

<http://www.house.gov/>
<http://www.senate.gov/>
<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>
<http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php>

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Please note: The syllabus should be used as a guideline for course objectives and student responsibilities. The instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus, including the course schedule, shown below. Any modification to the schedule will be announced. Students are responsible for announcements and other information presented in class, posted on Blackboard, and/or sent via email.

Part One: The American Founding and U.S. Constitution – (January 18th – February 8th)

Chapter 1 – Introduction/Basic Terms
Chapter 2 – The American Founding, The Constitution (Appendix)
Chapter 3 – The American Founding cont., Separation of Powers
Chapter 3 – Federalism
Chapter 4 – Civil Liberties
Chapter 5 – Civil Rights

****Exam—Tuesday, February 13th****

Part Two: American Political Institutions – (February 15th – March 8th)

Chapter 6 – Congress
Chapter 7 – The Presidency
Chapter 8 – The Bureaucracy
Chapter 9 – The Federal Courts

Spring Break – March 12th to March 16th

****Exam—Tuesday, March 20th****

Part Three: Mass Electoral Politics – (March 22nd – April 12th)

Chapter 10 – Public Opinion
Chapter 11 – Campaigns and Elections
Chapter 12 – Political Parties
Chapter 13 – Interest Groups
Chapter 14 – The Media

****Exam—Tuesday, April 17th****

Part Four: Public Policy – (April 19th – May 3rd)

Chapter 15 – Economic Policy
Chapter 16 – Social Policy
Chapter 17 – Foreign Policy

FINAL EXAM – May 10th: 9:30 AM – 11:30 PM – Location = CHSS 252