

American Government (Honors Section)
POLS 2305.10, CRN 21845
3 undergraduate credit hours (honors)
Spring 2018
Dr. Waggener
Department of Political Science at
Sam Houston State University

Class Location/Time: CHSS #495, T-days, 2 – 3:20
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 gain the ability to engage effectively in American democracy
3. Students will learn how to find and use resources for answering questions or solving problems.

Required Readings and Texts

Textbook

American Government, Timothy O. Lenz and Mirya Holman. University Press of Florida (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.

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

Students will use the following government websites

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>

Current Event Readings

To be announced at the beginning of each section of the course.

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

Extra Credit

Extra credit is not 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 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

2 Exams (25 points each for a total of 50 points)

Students will complete two 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.

5 Quizzes (5 points each for a total of 25 points)

Quizzes will be based on readings and will be administered on the first Thursday in each topic section.

Creative Assignment (25 points)

Students will propose a project that is appropriate to the class material and students’ political interests. All student project proposal must receive instructor approval.

Final Course Grades

Final course grades will be the average of the three exam grades and the research project. Final grades are 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.

Introduction

Date: January 18

Topic: Class introduction

Section 1: Constitutions and Government

Date: January 23 - 25

Topics: Key features of the US Constitution

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

Section 2: US Courts (judicial branch)

Date: January 30 – February 8

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

Readings: Chapter 5 The Judiciary

Current Events Referenced: Cases from the US Supreme Court's 2017-2018 term

Section 3: Civil Liberties

Date: February 13 - 20

Readings: Chapter 18 Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Current Events: The First Amendment and Hate Speech

Section 4: Civil Rights

Date: February 22 – March 6

Readings: Chapter 18 Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

Current Events: Current social protests

Exam 1 March 8

Spring break March 12 – 16

Section 5: Federalism

Date: March 20 - 27

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

Readings: Chapter 6 Federalism

Current Events Referenced: State governments and the legalization of marijuana; national government and state government gun laws; etc.

Section 6: The Presidency (executive branch)

Date: March 29 – April 5

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

Readings: Chapter 4 The Presidency

Current Events Referenced: Immigration, US military involvement outside the US, Presidential powers and foreign affairs, etc.

Section 7: US Congress (legislative branch)

Date: April 10 - 19

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

Readings: Chapter 3 Congress

Current Events Referenced: Gerrymandering

Section 8: Elections and Voting

Date: April 24 – May 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/>

Current Events Referenced: 2018 midterm elections, voting rights, etc.

Exam 2 May 8 3:30 – 5:30