

Political Science 261.15
Principles of American Government – National and State

Instructor: Mike Durham

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Office: AB1, Room 318C

Office hours: T-Th 9:30AM – 11:00 AM

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Course Description and Objectives:

This course is designed to survey topics that are vital for an understanding of American government and politics. Readings and lectures will examine the structural foundations, institutions, citizen-government linkages, and processes that characterize the American and Texan political systems. Because POL261 is an introductory course, it offers broad coverage of American government and consequently more in-depth inquiry can be realized in upper division courses and through your own examination of topics that interest you. Specific objectives include:

- to help you gain a better understanding of why American government looks the way it does today (i.e. the basic characteristics that define our values, expectations and development);
- to help you learn about the essential institutions of American and Texan government – specifically, the Executive, the Legislature, and the Courts;
- to help you appreciate contemporary American politics;
- to help you analyze some basic contemporary public policy issues;
- to help you relate national and Texas government to your own personal experiences;
- to help you develop skills in critical thinking (i.e. thinking logically, utilizing information sources purposefully, discussing thoughtfully, etc.).

Class Format:

This class will be a mixture of lecture, interactive group projects, and student participation. Interaction among participants is important for the healthy exchange of ideas. Students are encouraged to develop and exchange those ideas in a respectful manner. Students are expected to arrive at class prepared, which means that assigned readings must be completed before class.

Required Readings:

Texts: Janda et al, *The Challenge of Democracy with Texas Politics*. Ninth Edition.
ISBN 9780618987

Exams and Grading:

There will be three major exams, each counting as 25% of the semester grade. The major exams may consist of multiple choice, matching, true/false, and/or 1-2 essay questions. There is no comprehensive final. Major exams will require the student to bring a Scantron Form Number 816-E, and a number 2 pencil.

In addition, there will be reading exams on each of the assigned readings. Reading exams consist of 5 – 10 multiple choice, matching, or true/false questions. The average of the reading exams will count as 15% of the semester grade. A Scantron Form Number 815-E and a number two pencil are necessary for the reading tests.

The final 10% of the semester grade will be based on class participation and attendance. Regular attendance is of the utmost importance to the understanding of the material. Attendance will be taken at each class period. Any absences in excess of three will result in a 2 point penalty on the final average for each excessive absence.

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| Three major exams: | 25% | each = | 75% |
| Reading exams: | 15% | = | 15% |
| Participation: | 10% | = | 10% |

Final letter grade will be determined by the standard SHSU scale as follows:

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|-----|---------|
| A = | 90+ |
| B = | 80 – 89 |
| C = | 70 – 79 |
| D = | 60 – 69 |
| F = | 0 – 59 |

Any student that has a question regarding a grade must have available the Scantron or reading exam sheet for the grade in question.

Make Up Exams

Make-up exams will only be granted to students who can provide formal documentation of a medical or family emergency. If a student fails to provide this documentation, he or she will receive a zero on the exam. Please note that visitation slips issued by the University Health Center are not considered formal documentation, unless the slip clearly indicates that the student was too ill to attend class. Make up exams will be short answer and/or essay exams.

Extra Credit:

No extra credit is offered for this course.

Email Etiquette

My Sam email address (stdrmd11@shsu.edu) is the best way to communicate with me. All emails should include the class number and section in the subject line. It must be made absolutely clear who you are and what is the subject of the email, otherwise I will not respond.

University Policies

Americans with Disabilities Act

Please note: 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 Counseling Center 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 Counseling Center.

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days Policy

Likewise, SHSU has a policy on student absences on religious holy days. 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. 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). This request must be made in the first fifteen days of the semester or the first seven days of a summer session in which the absence(s) will occur. 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.

Academic Dishonesty

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experience 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 to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

Tentative Class Schedule

Week 1: Introduction to Political Theory.

Week 2: American Political Culture.

Week 3: Constitutional Democracy.

Week 4: Federalism.

Week 5: Civil Liberties.

Week 6: Equal Rights. Exam Review.

Week 7: First Exam.

Week 7: Political Opinion and Political Socialization.

Week 8: Political participation and Voting.

Week 9: Political Parties, Candidates, and Campaigns.

Week 10: Interest Groups. Exam Review

Week 11: Exam 2.

Week 11: The News Media.

Week 12: The Congress.

Week 13: The Executive.

Week 14: The Judiciary.

Week 15: The Federal Bureaucracy.

Week 16: Bureaucracy cont'd, Review

Final Exam

Consult University final exam schedule for date and time of final exam.