

PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
POLITICAL SCIENCE 261 All Sections (Except Online)
Jim Massey Fall 2007

Office: AB-1, 318-C
Office Phone: 936-294-1470
Email: texasjarhead001@shsu.edu

Office Hours: MWF 730-8a; 9-1030a; 1-145p

Texts: Janda, et al. *The Challenge of Democracy with Practicing Texas Politics*. 9th Ed.
Oleszek, Walter J. *Congressional Procedures and the Policy Process*, 7th Ed.

NOTE: (As I have not yet obtained my copy of the 7th Edition of this book to determine the degree of changes between the Editions, please feel free to use the 6th Edition.)

Main Course Objective:

To provide students with basic knowledge of the structural and philosophical foundations of American and Texas governments, in addition to a more detailed understanding of the legislative process.

Focal Points:

1. History of the American system of government and the US Constitution
2. Components
 - a. The President
 - b. Congress
 - c. The Supreme Court
3. Federal-State relations
4. The Texas Constitution
5. Current Events and Issues

Attendance Policy: You are all adults, and I cannot force you to be here. However, attendance is mandatory, especially if you intend to do well in this course. If you find yourself unable to attend class on a regular basis, you need to drop the course and take it at a later date. I will not drop you—this is your responsibility.

I allow a maximum of six (6) Monday, Wednesday or Friday “just because” absences with no penalty. For each absence beyond six, I will deduct 5 points from your final grade. For those of you who make the extra effort to attend class *every day*, you will have 5 points added to your final average, no questions asked. All you have to do is show up for class.

Life happens, and things come up that will prevent you from making it to class. I will consider as “excused” any absences in which a legitimate medical situation arises, attending a sports- or

other school-related function for which you are a participant, military reserve “drill” or ROTC function, or any other similar situation for which I give prior approval. However, I reserve the right to limit such excused absences with suitable notification from a doctor or other official within one week (7 calendar days) of your return to class. Put simply, do not miss class and try to bring me a doctor’s note 2 months later—I will not accept it and your absence(s) will be unexcused.

Be warned—do not attempt to sign in for someone else. At minimum, you will fail the class (see “Academic Dishonesty” below).

Tardiness: This is an early class, and I understand that many of you may not be “morning” people. However, my policy on this is simple. Class starts promptly as scheduled. If you are late, do not bother trying to walk in and disrupt the lecture (or class discussion)—you will not be allowed in the classroom and counted absent. If you cannot handle getting here on time, it is your responsibility to find another section more suited to your sleep/commuting requirements.

You are more than welcome to bring coffee or whatever form of caffeine (or other beverages) you choose. However, if you make a mess, please clean it up.

Academic Dishonesty:

<http://www.shsu.edu/administrative/faculty/sectionb.html#dishonesty>.

Bottom line: do not get caught cheating. You will fail this course in addition to other possible punitive action, to be determined by the University.

Students with Disabilities:

http://www.shsu.edu/~vaf_www/aps/811006.html

If you are a student with a qualifying disability, please see me after class, and contact the Counseling Center (call 936-294-1720).

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days:

<http://www.shsu.edu/catalog/scholasticrequirements.html#holyday> .

See me if this applies to you.

Course Requirements and Assessment:

Interactive Political Journal Assignments:

There will be seventeen (17) weekly assignments (including a survey) worth 25 points each, totaling 425 points, all of which will be posted via threaded discussions on

Blackboard. Assignments 2 through 11 will deal strictly with the Oleszek text, one chapter per week. Additional possible discussion topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Current events—must be political in nature, and can cover local, state, national or international government or politics.
- Politics—United States, preferably; we are coming up on another major election season, and there will be more than ample material for us to discuss here.
- Terminology/concepts relevant to where we are in the textbook.
- Material from any handouts.

All assignments will have a midnight Sunday deadline. Once closed, an assignment will not be reopened, so be sure to:

1. Read the instructions for each week's posting(s) carefully
2. Make your post before midnight on Sunday
 - a. Your post should be at least 100-150 words, plus any relevant hyperlink(s).
 - b. You must respond to at least two class members' posts each week starting with week 2 until otherwise instructed.

Exams:

There will be three (3) exams throughout the semester. Each exam will consist of 75 multiple-choice questions and will cover materials from your assigned reading, as well as from topics addressed in our threaded discussions, and will count for a possible 75 points each. At no point will an exam cover material from a previous exam.

All exams will use the 100-question scantron form (#882-E).

Makeup Exams: As I said earlier, life happens. It is entirely possible that you, for whatever reason, may miss an exam. No problem. You will be afforded the opportunity to take a makeup exam, should you provide sufficient justification for having missed a scheduled exam (see paragraph 3 of the Attendance Policy, above). Do not count on receiving the same exam as your classmates...

Final Exam: The final exam will NOT be comprehensive, and will only cover the material after the second exam. For those of you who do well all semester and earn an "A" going into the final—you will be considered exempt and will not have to take it. It will consist of 100 questions, all of which will be multiple-choice; 90 questions will deal with lecture/reading with the last ten dealing with current events.

Group Project: This will be covered in detail in a separate handout, and will be worth 250 points.

Final Course Grade: You will be able to figure your own grade using either the 900 or 1000-point scale (depending on if you exempt the final or not). Remember, attendance points are awarded or deducted as outlined above. Normal rounding applies, and there will be no curve.

90-100%	A
80-89%	B
70-79%	C
60-69%	D
59 or below	F

Now that we are through the administrative details, we can move to the more fun aspects of this course. Yes, I said fun. This is not a class on politics, but on political origins and processes. Part of our discussions will likely head in the direction of personal political beliefs (ideology). Debate within reason is not a problem, as long as it remains relevant to the topic being discussed and does not demean or attack your fellow classmates. While free speech reigns supreme, I reserve the right to limit or terminate discussion at any time.

The course material to be covered may not follow chapter-by-chapter in your textbook, so it is important to keep up with your weekly reading assignments, and pay attention to the schedule outlined below. I reserve the right to modify content or material covered for each exam period, but you can rest assured that all tested material will be covered in lecture or your reading/current events assignments.

Allocation of time for homework: We have 16 weeks counting the partial week of the Thanksgiving holiday to cover all of the needed material, including your group project. This should be more than enough time, especially if you manage your time properly—even if you are taking more than 12 hours.

How to read your text: This may seem like a pointless section, but you would be surprised how many people really do not know how to cover a large amount of material effectively. So...

1. Review the terms and questions at the end of the chapter. This gives you a general idea of what material is going to be covered in that chapter—and what could be tested.
2. Keep an eye open for this material when you read.
3. Highlight key terms and subjects, especially if you are not familiar with the material. This is your textbook. Mark in it and make notes—make it yours and put it to work for you.
4. Review the terms and questions again after you have read the material.
5. Study your notes and chapter reviews for your exams.

Schedule: Remember, I reserve the right to adjust the calendar as needed. You will receive sufficient notification of any changes.

All grades will be posted with the Registrar no later than December 14th

A tentative class schedule will be posted either attached to a modified copy of this syllabus or independently before the beginning of the semester.