

COURSE SYLLABUS
POL 261H.01
POL 261.08
PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT – NATIONAL AND STATE
CREDIT HOURS: 3
SPRING, 2008

LOCATION OF CLASS MEETING: H - AB1 310; .08 – AB1 317

CLASS MEETING TIME: H – 6M; .08 – 7M

INSTRUCTOR: DR. WILLIAM E CARROLL

OFFICE LOCATION: AB315D

INSTRUCTOR CONTACT INFORMATION: PHONE – 41469; pol_wec@shsu.edu

OFFICE HOURS: 10-11 MWF

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This is the required survey course in US and Texas government. All sections are using the same text, though each professor brings different emphases and styles to the course. I will emphasize Americans' political ideals, our fragmented governmental system, the power of organized groups, individual rights and the effects of individualism generally, and our chiseled-in-stone reliance on the marketplace; each of these affects politics and public policy in so many ways, obvious and not-so obvious. While the different values and beliefs people as voters hold about government certainly affect their evaluations of parties, candidates and government performance, these values and beliefs are in turn shaped by the media and other influences. At the same time the personal beliefs and party ideologies, no less than the pressure to attend to powerful interests, also combine to determine the decisions made by those we elect to make those decisions.

With so many topics that we must attempt to cover – the US and Texas Constitutions, federalism and local government, civil liberties and civil rights, public opinion, the media, parties and elections, the three branches of government – it is impossible to give all of them the time they deserve; but in one form or another we will get to them.

Approach/Method of Instruction: Classes are devoted to lectures and discussion. Lectures will be used to elaborate on or amplify material in the text, highlight topics or themes that may or may not be covered in the text – and provide optimum time and opportunity for discussion of any and all relevant topics and issues. Study guides will be provided that will list both text and lecture topics for the exams.

Prerequisite: None

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- Factual Knowledge: the “nuts and bolts” of the US and Texas political and governmental systems, but in more precise terms, who exercises power, how, and on whose behalf
- Critical Thinking: learning to understand and evaluate our political system in a more informed and “critical” manner: eschewing platitudes, hype, and knee-jerk opinions masquerading as “common sense”

REQUIRED TEXT:

Janda The Challenge of Democracy, 9th edition

Brown Practicing Texas Politics, 13th edition

These are packaged together in one text.

Other readings may be assigned (or suggested); there will also be handouts throughout the semester; and students are expected to keep up with current events in appropriate news sources.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Class attendance is required, following general university regulations. Repeated absences result in a grade penalty. Makeup exams are given, only for verified and excused absences, and at the convenience of the instructor.

ASSIGNMENTS:

In addition to the exams, there will be one out-of-class assignment, the details of which will be explained in class and a separate handout will be provided.

EXAMS:

There will be four exams, objective in format (honors section exams will include a written component). Each of the exams counts equally toward the final grade. Dates of exams will be announced in class.

GRADING PLAN:

Exams will count 80% toward the final grade, the out-of-class assignment 10%, and class attendance/participation 10%. For the Honors section exams will count 70%, out-of-class assignment 20%, and participation 10%. The normal grading scale is used: 90 and above, A; 80-89, B; 70-79, C; 60-69, D; and 59 and below, F.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY: Per University policy: Cheating, collusion, plagiarism, if discovered, will result in disciplinary action. These three do not exhaust the possibilities of academic dishonesty.

CLASSROOM RULES OF CONDUCT: Per University policy: Disruptive behavior – intentionally disrupting class, persistent talking at inappropriate times, disrespectful words or actions toward classmates or instructor, etc shall result in a directive to leave class and possible referral to the Dean of Students.

VISITORS IN THE CLASSROOM: If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom.

COURSE OUTLINE:

I. Dilemmas of Democracy and Foundations of American Government

1. Freedom, Order, or Equality
Janda, chapter 1
2. Majority or Pluralist Democracy
Janda, chapter 2
3. Constitutional Democracy
Janda, chapter 3; Brown, chapters 1 ; 2, pages 63-83
4. Federalism and Local Government
Janda, chapter 4; Brown, chapters 2, pages 57-63 ; 3

FIRST EXAM

II. Linking People with Government: Mass Politics

5. Public Opinion and Political Socialization
Janda, chapter 5
6. Media
Janda, chapter 6
7. Political Participation and Voting
Janda, chapter 7
8. Political Parties, Candidates, and Campaigns
Janda, chapters 8-9; Brown, chapters 4-5
9. Interest Groups
Janda, chapter 10; Brown, chapter 6

SECOND EXAM

III. Governing Institutions

11. Congress and Texas Legislature
Janda, chapter 11; Brown, chapter 7
12. President and Texas Governor
Janda, chapter 12; Brown, chapter 8
13. Federal and State Bureaucracy
Janda, chapter 13; Brown, chapter 9
14. Federal Courts and Texas Judicial System
Janda, chapter 14; Brown, chapter 10

THIRD EXAM

IV. Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

15. Civil Liberties
Janda, chapter 15

16. Civil Rights
Janda, chapter 16

FINAL EXAM

STUDY TIPS: Students are strongly advised to take thorough class notes. It also helps to keep up with the reading as we cover each topic in class, rather than leave it until the night before the exam. Keeping up with the reading also allows questions about the material to be addressed in class. There is a “Study Corner” at the end of each chapter: key terms, self-test questions, critical thinking questions, web sites. Another tip is to find classmates to study with, comparing notes, etc.

INSTRUCTOR EVALUATIONS: Students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation toward the end of the semester

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES will be accommodated in any way possible. Please let me know early in the semester.

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS: Any student who needs to miss a class due to observance of a religious holiday will be accommodated in any way possible. Please let me know early in the semester.

Syllabus is subject to change if circumstances dictate. This would happen only if, for example, it made sense to shift material between exams for student ease. Additional topics may be added if there is time and if they are timely.