

# POL 261 PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

(3 credit hours)

Semester: Fall 2007  
Time: 12:30-1:50 TuTh  
Location: AB1 317  
Professor: Dr. John C. Domino  
Office: AB1, Room 315 E  
Office Hours: TuTh: 9-9:30; 11-12:30; and by appointment.  
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## Course Objectives:

The objectives of the course are to examine, think critically about, and understand the following:

1. origins and development of the U.S. and Texas Constitutions.
2. the structure and function of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the U.S. and Texas government.
3. the nature of democracy, ideology, and citizenship and civil rights
4. the political process: that is, how we elect/select public officials at the national and state levels; and how such actors as interest groups, parties, and the media impact this process.
5. our rights and liberties as set forth in the U.S. and Texas Constitutions.

In sum, the course is a comprehensive introduction to the political systems of the United States and Texas.

## Required Book:

Janda, et al., *The Challenge of Democracy w/ Brown, et al., Practicing Texas Politics*, 9<sup>th</sup> edition

Note: It is the student's responsibility to obtain the course book at the beginning of the semester.

## Course Requirements and Policies:

**Exams:** There will be *four major examinations* - three "midterms" and a final. **The exams consist of two components: 1. in-class and 2. take home component.** The in-class component will consist of multiple choice questions; and the take home part (which you will have at least two days to complete) will be all essay and typed. The two components will be combined for your exam grade. **Make up exams** are given at the professor's discretion. If you miss an exam and have a documented legitimate excuse (illness, family emergency, university-related travel.) you may be able to take a make up exam (all essay); if you don't have a legitimate excuse, then a 0 will be averaged in with your other grades. "Work-related" excuses are **usually not** considered as legitimate.

***Grades:***

The final grade in the course will be based on the average of four exams. No extra credit or additional assignments or grading curves are used. No re-grading or dropping of grades for extenuating circumstances or hardships. The following scale will be applied:

A=90-100    B=80-89    C=70-79    D=60-69    F=0-59

For status of your grade during the semester please check Blackboard or email me at [pol\\_jcd@shsu.edu](mailto:pol_jcd@shsu.edu)

***How to do well on exams in this course:***

**Keep up with reading assignments:** Everything you need to know about the reading assignments is on the syllabus. I will rarely make day-to-day reading assignments, so simply use the syllabus to keep up with me in class. Unlike some of your past experiences, I will not cover every bit of information contained in the texts in class. A major requirement of this course is “reading.” So, it is not uncommon for me to take 60% of the exam items on a test from lectures and 40% from a particular chapter of a book. *This strategy is to encourage students to read and think about their reading independently.* Students who adjust to this fact will do very well on the exams. Use your study guides!

**Taking Notes:** Write down (or record) everything -- not just what I write on the board.

**How to study:** Reading is not studying. You would not sit through a class and not take notes on what the professor has said. Similarly, reading without taking notes is largely a waste of time. Critically interact with your book: Ask, “what is the author trying to say?” “What are the main points?” “If I were the professor, what kinds of exam questions would I ask?” use the quizzes in each chapter and the book's website. Of course, study guides will be crucial. Prepare detailed answers for each item on the study guide and then study those answers.

Note to Freshman or first-time college students: With all due respect, unlike high school and your experiences with TAKS, I do not “teach to the test.” While all readings, lectures, study guides outlines, etc. are carefully crafted to be relevant to the exams and to guide you in studying, my goal is education -- and not to “train” you for the exams.

***Attendance:***

In accordance with University Policy regular attendance is required.

***Academic Dishonesty :***

All students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences in and out of the classroom. Copying answers from another student’s exam, collaborating on projects, or using unauthorized notes, “cheat sheets,” or electronic devices during an exam constitutes academic dishonesty and will result in swift disciplinary action by the professor. The professor may give a failing grade to the student for that assignment or exam or

the course and report such action to the University and its official representatives who may initiate further disciplinary proceedings against a student who is accused of academic dishonesty.

***Disruptive Conduct:***

Any rude behavior in the classroom that intentionally or unintentionally disrupts the learning process (including ringing cell phones, IPODs, etc thus, impedes the mission of the university, will be reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action in accordance with written university policy. If someone is disturbing you please tell me rather than being cool and suffering in silence. Students will often wait to the last day of class or on the evaluations to proclaim that others were bothering them. Tell them to be quiet, put the phone away, etc. After all you are paying for your education.

**Americans with Disabilities Act**

Student requests for accommodations must be initiated by the student. A student seeking accommodations should go to the Counseling Center and Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) in a timely manner.

**Religious Holidays**

University policy states that a student who is absent from class for the observance of a religious holy day shall be permitted to take an examination or complete an assignment scheduled for that day within a reasonable time after the absence. Not later than the 15th calendar day after the first day of the semester, or the 7th calendar day after the first day of a summer session, the student must notify the instructor of each scheduled class that he/she would be absent for a religious holy day.

**Visitors in the Classroom**

Unannounced visitors to class must present a valid SHSU ID to be permitted in the classroom and should not disrupt the educational process.

**Instructor Evaluations**

All students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form toward the end of the semester.

## Course Outline

**I. Democracy and Politics/ Political Culture/ Public Opinion/Ideologies:**  
Janda , chps. 1, 2; Brown (author of Texas section), chp. 1

**II. The U.S. Constitution: Janda, chp. 3.**

**III. The Texas Constitution: Brown, chp. 2.**

**FIRST EXAM: date to be announced no later than one week prior to exam**

**IV. The Legislative Branch**

**A. U.S. Congress: Janda, chap. 11.**

**B. The Texas Legislature, Brown, chap. 7.**

**V. The Executive Branch**

**A. The Presidency: Janda, chap. 12.**

**B. The Texas Governor: Brown, chap. 8.**

**SECOND EXAM: date to be announced no later than one week prior to exam**

**VI. The Judicial Branch**

**A. The Federal Judiciary: Janda, chap. 14.**

**B. The Texas Judiciary: Brown, chap. 10.**

**VII. Civil Rights & Liberties**

**A. Janda, chaps. 15 and 16.**

**THIRD EXAM: date to be announced no later than one week prior to exam**

**VIII. The Political Process: The Presidential Election: A Case study**

**A. Political Parties, Candidates, and Elections: Janda, chaps. 8 and 9;  
Brown, chaps. 4 and 5.**

**B. Political Participation: Janda, chap. 7.**

**C. Interest Groups: Janda, chap. 10; Brown, chap. 6.**

**D. The Media's Impact on Politics: Janda, chap. 6.**

**FINAL EXAM**