

## POL 261 PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

(3 credit hours)

Semester: Spring 2008  
Time: 2:00-3:20 TuTh  
Location: AB1 317  
Professor: Dr. John C. Domino  
Office: AB1, Room 315 E  
Office Hours: TuTh: 9-9:30; 12:30-2; and by appointment.  
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### **Course Objectives:**

The objectives of the course are to examine, understand factual information about, and think critically concerning 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 three midterm 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. The Final Exam is an in-class only exam.

**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, notebook computers, 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.

### **Students With Disabilities Policy**

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired. 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 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**

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. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: "a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20...." 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). 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.

### **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