

POLITICAL SCIENCE 261
PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
3 Credits
Jim Massey Spring 2008

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Class Hours: MWF—**8a (rm 310); 11a (rm 317); 2p (rm 302)**

Office Hours: MW—730a-8a; 9-945a; 3-5p
Tu/Th—3-5p
Friday—By Appointment

Course Description:

This course deals with the origin, development, and Constitution of the American governmental system, citizenship and civil rights, suffrage, the national party system, the national executive, organization of congress, national judiciary, federal-state relations, and the Constitution of the State of Texas. This course meets the legislative requirement for a course on the Constitutions of the United States and Texas.

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

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: 6th Ed. is acceptable, if you can find it)

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 the allowed maximum, 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.

Tardiness: Class starts promptly as scheduled. However, given the near-terminal state of construction and lack of parking on campus, I provide a 10-minute window in which you may still enter the classroom—as long as you can do so in a quiet, non-disruptive manner. If you are late beyond that 10 minutes, 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. Understand that any assignments that are turned in in class (as opposed to posting to Blackboard) fall under the same restrictions—if your absence is unexcused, your assignments will not be accepted.

Food and Drinks: You are more than welcome to bring coffee or whatever form of caffeine (or other beverages) you choose. However, your mother does not work here—if you make a mess, please clean it up. Should this become a problem, I reserve the right to restrict bringing anything to eat or drink into the classroom.

Course Requirements and Assessment:

There will be eighteen (18) weekly assignments worth 25 points each, totaling 450 points. All homework, with only a couple exceptions, will be turned in in class in accordance with the dates on the schedule (attached to this syllabus); your first two assignments are to be posted/completed on Blackboard. Assignments 5 through 15 will deal strictly with the Oleszek text, one chapter per week. Specific topics for each assignment can be found on Blackboard under either the “Assignments” or “Discussion Board” folders.

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.

Once closed, assignments will not be reopened. Be sure that you complete the proper assignment(s) for each week, as you will not be afforded the opportunity to resubmit them. Exceptions include allowances for technical problems relating to Blackboard or the University computer network, and will be announced on a case-by-case basis.

Required Format for all Homework Assignments:

WITHOUT EXCEPTION, all work must be completed in the following MLA format—

- Times New Roman font
- 12-point font
- 1-inch margins
- Double-spaced
- Heading on the upper left side of the first page only (use of a cover sheet is acceptable), to include
 - your name
 - the course number and time of the class
 - instructor's name
 - date the assignment is being turned in

Should your assignments need more than a single page (as will happen with more than a few of your papers), you are responsible to make sure they are either stapled or paperclipped together before you come to class. Do not come to class and ask me for a stapler...

Exams:

There will be three (3) exams throughout the semester. Each exam will consist of 50 multiple-choice questions and will cover materials from your assigned reading, as well as from topics addressed in our class discussions, and will count for a possible 100 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. 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 the 1000-point scale. Remember, attendance points are awarded or deducted as outlined above. Normal rounding applies, and there will be no curve.

895-1000 points	A
795-894 points	B
695-794 points	C
595-694 points	D
594 or below	F

Academic Dishonesty:

<http://www.shsu.edu/administrative/faculty/sectionb.html#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 experiences 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 which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

Students with Disabilities:

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

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 a student has a

disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center.

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> .

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.

"Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.

See me if this applies to you.

Visitors in the Classroom:

Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. 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.

Classroom Rules of Conduct:

<https://www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html>

While you are responsible to adhere to the Rules of Conduct listed at the link above, I want to identify a couple of additional items that relate to our class:

1. Cell phones. When you enter the room, silence them or turn them off. Also, don't bother trying to text message people during class. If you are unable to refrain from this activity, you will be asked to leave and will be counted absent.
 2. Side talk. Don't. It's disruptive, rude, and disrespectful to the entire class. You may be granted one warning after which you will be asked to leave and will be counted absent.
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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 18 weeks counting Spring Break 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 May 15th