

PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
POLITICAL SCIENCE 261 ONLINE
Jim Massey Fall 2007

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Office Hours: MWF 9-1030a

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:

The main objective of this course is 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.

Online v. Traditional:

This class is unique from any other you may take in your college career, in that it is being taught *entirely* online. Needless to say, you must have ready-access to the internet in order to complete this course. Although the method of delivery is different, we will still be covering the same material over the same timeframe as my classes that meet in a traditional classroom environment. There will be times that you will have to collaborate with other students in a group setting, in which you will have to coordinate times to meet online to get certain tasks completed—although all work/efforts will be evaluated individually. This will be explained more at length later in this syllabus.

As I will not have traditional office hours for this course, rest assured I will do my very best to respond to your emails/inquiries as soon as humanly possible—typically within 24 hours. Of course, you are more than welcome to come see me during my office hours for my other course(s), as shown at the top of this syllabus.

Misconceptions:

When students schedule an online course, they frequently are of the opinion that it is something they can complete at their own pace without regard to deadlines. Please understand that this is NOT a correspondence or independent study course. There will be weekly assignments, some of which may take place in the form of online threaded

discussions; topics may include current events, politics, or material from any relevant section of the textbook (specifics are outlined below). Assignment and exam deadlines are firm—exceptions may only be granted under extreme circumstances and will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis only. Be sure to check the assignment calendar and your email frequently.

Online classes take a tremendous degree of discipline and dedication—more so than in a classroom environment. If you have any question about your ability to force yourself to sit down weekly and complete the work, I would strongly suggest you drop this course and schedule something in a normal classroom setting.

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

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.

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days:

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

Obviously, with this being an online class, we won't meet on any religious holy days. IF an assignment/exam due date conflicts with any of your religious holy days, it is your responsibility to make sure the assignment/exam is turned in/completed prior to the holy day to be observed.

Course Requirements and Assessment:

The format for this class will be a combination of lecture, class discussion, and group work. Except for the section on Congress, “lectures” will briefly highlight certain terminology and concepts you are expected to become familiar with. When covering Congress, I will be providing a substantial amount of material from outside the text. It is your responsibility to read the notes I post very carefully, as well as keeping up with the reading from your textbook, as all material is fair game for examinations.

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. 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.

This is the one part of the semester that could pose the greatest stress on you as a student, due to the fact that while you may take an exam early, *you cannot take one late*. You will have two hours with which to complete your exams. In the event of a technical glitch (technology is great, but only when it chooses to cooperate), I will allow one (1) restart of an exam, but that is all. Understand that you cannot simply shut the computer down and claim technical difficulties—you will be graded on what has been received to the point of the shutdown, with all incomplete answers being counted incorrect.

Obviously, being an exam, you are expected to NOT use your texts.

Makeup Exams:

With the exception for extremely mitigating circumstances, there will be no make ups allowed.

Final Exam/Self Assessment:

This is to be a written summary of what you have learned throughout the semester. Be specific. Tell me about your thoughts and feelings of this field of study, and how you think it may or may not apply to life for you in the future. Incorporate something you think is relevant from class discussions, things from the news....whatever you feel is important.

For 100 points, it is in your best interest to put some thought into it and not try to give me some half-page mumbo-jumbo. Be sure your paper is double-spaced, Times-New Roman 12-point font. It should be 2-3 pages in length, and is due by noon on the date of the final exam.

Final Course Grade: You will be able to figure your own grade using the maximum 750-point scale. 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

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/threaded discussion assignments.

Allocation of time for homework: We have 15 weeks (16, if you count Thanksgiving 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. Try to keep an open mind when you begin. Think of ways that you can make the material relevant to your life, either based on your experiences up to this point, or what you anticipate for your future. One thing is for certain—if you cannot succeed in making the material have some kind of meaning, whatever you try and cram into your head will go away following the exam...
2. 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.
3. Keep an eye open for this material when you read.

4. 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.
5. Review the terms and questions again after you have read the material.
6. Study your notes and chapter reviews for your exams.