United States and Texas Government: Institutions and Policies  
[PSCI 2302 US/TX Gov; INSTS & POLS]  
Spring 2015  
Tuesdays/Thursdays (11:00-12:15pm)  
BA 221

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Office Hours: T/Th 1:45pm-3:30pm; W 5:00pm-6:00pm and 8:45pm-9:15pm; or by appointment

Course Description:

Welcome to United States and Texas Government! The purpose of this course is to study the political systems in the United States and Texas. This course will introduce you to the formal and informal institutions of national and state governments and the roles they play in the creation and implementation of public policy. Please note that you will not be taught what to think about political issues in this course. Rather, you will be provided with the knowledge base to determine how to think about political issues for yourself.

First, we will examine the legislative, executive and judicial branches of the United States government and Texas, in addition to federal and state bureaucracies. Then, we will spend a significant amount of time analyzing the formulation and implementation of public policies at the national and state levels. We will also discuss institutions and policies in the context of the 2015 sessions in Congress and the Texas Legislature, as well as the upcoming 2016 presidential election.

Format:

Each class session will involve lectures and discussions about the assigned readings. You will regularly be asked to contribute your opinions about the assigned readings and answer questions about the readings. In addition to the assigned readings listed in the syllabus, we will regularly discuss current political events, since developments in American politics occur on a daily basis. This syllabus is subject to change at any time at the professor’s discretion.

NO PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES ARE ALLOWED IN CLASS AT ANY TIME. THIS INCLUDES (BUT IS NOT LIMITED TO):
CELL PHONES,
LAPTOPS,
iPADS,
iPODS,
MP3 Players/Recorders,
Translation Devices
VIDEO CAMERAS
OR ANY OTHER AUDIO AND/OR VIDEO RECORDERS OF ANY KIND

IF ANY OF THESE DEVICES ARE PRESENT IN CLASS THE ENTIRE CLASS WILL HAVE A POP QUIZ AND THE INDIVIDUAL(S) RESPONSIBLE MAY BE DIRECTED TO LEAVE THE CLASSROOM IMMEDIATELY.
Requirements/Assignments:

Examinations: In this course, all students are required to take three exams, each of which will consist of 50 questions in a multiple choice format. Together, these exams will comprise 93% of your grade (each exam is worth 31%). The exams are NOT comprehensive. There is NOT a final exam in this course.

If you miss an exam, you will receive 0% for that exam.

If you have a legitimate reason for missing an exam (e.g. severe illness or injury requiring professional medical care, emergencies in your immediate family, participation in official university activities, legal obligations) AND you have supporting documentation for your absence, then you may request taking the make-up exam, which will only be given during finals week.

Requests for taking the make-up exam must be submitted in writing and include documentation explaining and substantiating why the absence was legitimate. An approval to take the make-up exam will be based solely upon the professor’s evaluation of your request and any supporting documentation. Your grade on the make-up exam may only be used to substitute one missed exam. Any other missed exams will receive 0% scores, irrespective of the circumstances.

Attendance: Attendance is critical, discussions are irreplaceable, and course sessions cannot be “made up.” It will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for you to succeed in this course if you do not attend all—or nearly all-class sessions. Attendance will be taken during each class session using a sign-in sheet for financial aid and other documentation purposes, however it will not directly affect your grade. Signing in a student who is not present or asking a student to sign you in when you are absent constitutes academic dishonesty (see p.3). Since your attendance will not be used to calculate your grade, it is not necessary to provide me with any excuses for absences (unless you are absent during an examination – read the previous section).

Attendance Note 1: If a pop quiz or any other assignment is given when you are absent, you CANNOT make it up, regardless of the reason for your absence (excused or unexcused).
Attendance Note 2: I will NOT reply to any emails asking what we did in class during your absence- We will follow the syllabus. If you miss class, get notes from a classmate and ask him/her if there were any announcements.

Participation: Your participation in this class is highly desirable and will make class sessions more interesting. Positive participation includes responding to my questions, asking your own questions, and contributing to class discussions. Your participation will not directly affect your grade, however, if you use personal electronic devices in class that will result in a pop quiz for the entire class and your removal from the classroom. Also, if you misbehave in class or disrupt class in any way you may be directed to leave the classroom.

Pop Quizzes: These will be assigned only if anyone is found to be using an electronic device in class, and will count for a total of 3% of your grade. If you are absent when a pop quiz is given, you cannot make it up, irrespective of the circumstances, and will earn 0% for any quiz you miss. Pop quizzes will be graded on the basis of the content and clarity of your answers.

Writing Assignments: You will have two required writing assignments that are worth a total of 4% of your grade (2% per writing assignment). The first writing assignment will be a 1-page essay about President Obama’s State of the Union Speech that will be held on the evening of January 20, 2015. The essay will be due on January 27. The second required writing assignment will take place during class on May 5, 2015 and requires you to write about at least three things you learned in this course that demonstrate your awareness of societal and/or civic issues.
Grades:
Your grade in this course will be determined by the criteria listed below. The following scale will be used to determine your grade:

- Exam #1 (February 19): 31%
- Exam #2 (April 2): 31%
- Exam #3 (May 7): 31%
- Pop Quizzes: 3%
- Writing Assignments (January 27, May 5): 4%

A 90-100%; B 80-89.9%; C 70-79.9%; D 60-69.9%; F Below 60%

Notes on Academic Dishonesty of ANY kind: Any student who is caught committing any kind of academic dishonesty will receive an “F” in this course and will be reported to the University administration. “Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, plagiarism (the appropriation or stealing of the ideas or words of another and passing them off as one’s own), cheating on exams or other course assignments, collusion (the unauthorized collaboration with others in preparing course assignments), signing the attendance sheet for a student who is absent (or asking another student to sign you in when you are absent), and abuse (destruction, defacing, or removal) of resource material” (Texas A&M University-Commerce Procedures A13.12). If you have any doubt as to what may constitute academic dishonesty, please consult with me prior to submitting any assignments.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Critical Thinking: Students will be able to differentiate between fact and opinion.

2. Communication: Student communication will be clear, purposeful, and make appropriate use of evidence, data and technology as applicable.

3. Personal Responsibility: Students will be able to understand their role in their own education.

4. Social Responsibility: Students will demonstrate awareness of societal and/or civic issues.

In order to maximize your performance in this course, you must:

- TURN OFF ALL PERSONAL ELECTRONIC DEVICES BEFORE CLASS BEGINS. THIS INCLUDES (BUT IS NOT LIMITED TO): CELL PHONES, LAPTOPS, iPADS, iPODS, MP3 PLAYERS/RECORDERS, TRANSLATION DEVICES, VIDEO CAMERAS, OR ANY OTHER AUDIO AND/OR VIDEO RECORDERS OF ANY KIND

- IF ANYONE IS FOUND TO BE TEXTING OR ANSWERS A PHONE CALL DURING CLASS, THE ENTIRE CLASS WILL TAKE A POP QUIZ ON THE SPOT.
- Attend each class session AND arrive ON TIME (the classroom door will not be opened for late arrivals 15 minutes after class starts; Notify the professor in advance if you need to arrive late or leave early;

- Read the assigned material before class;

- Be prepared to discuss the topics presented in class;

- Refrain from reading materials or working on other homework during class;

- Do NOT get up in the middle of class to go to the bathroom unless absolutely necessary;

- Be courteous to -and respectful of- your fellow students and professor.

Email Policy: Before you ask me a question in an email, check to see if the syllabus answers your question FIRST. I generally reply to emails within 24 hours, Monday-Friday. Emails sent to me over weekends will be replied to on Mondays. I do not reply to emails that ask questions about items covered in the syllabus, such as what chapters are covered on an exam or what the assigned readings are for a given week.

Code of Student Conduct: Faculty have the authority to request students who exhibit inappropriate behavior to leave the class and may refer serious offenses to the University Police Department and/or the Dean of Students for disciplinary action. Failure to comply with the Code of Student Conduct and commonsensical directions listed above may result in a verbal request to cease inappropriate behavior, your immediate removal from the class, being immediately dropped from the class, and/or a review by an appropriate university disciplinary agency. For more information on this subject, please see the Student Guidebook.

Texas A&M University-Commerce will comply in the classroom, and in online courses, with all federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination and related retaliation on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, age, genetic information or veteran status. Further, an environment free from discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression will be maintained.

Note to Students with Disabilities: The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services
Texas A&M University-Commerce
Gee Library, Room 132
Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835
Fax (903) 468-8148
studentdisabilityservices@tamuc.edu
Required Readings:
There are two required texts for this course. You will not be able to succeed in this course without these two books. MAKE SURE TO PURCHASE THE CORRECT EDITIONS:

- We the People: An Introduction to American Politics (NINTH ESSENTIALS Edition, 2013, W.W. Norton and Co.)
  by Ginsberg, Lowi, Weir, Tolbert, Spitzer
  ISBN: 978-0-393-92110-6

  by Ken Collier, Steven Galatas, Julie Harrelson-Stephens
  ISBN: 978-1-4522-1769-7

*ELECTRONIC BOOKS (e-books) ARE NOT ACCEPTABLE FOR THIS COURSE*

Course Schedule:

Week 1  Introduction to Course; Discuss State of the Union Address; U.S. Congress
January 20, 22
Read:
- Buy your books
- Watch President Obama's State of the Union Address on TUESDAY, JANUARY 20 on any Network TV Station (ABC, NBC, CBS, FOX), Cable News (CNN, MSNBC, or FOX NEWS), or livestream on the Internet (www.whitehouse.gov) and write a REQUIRED 1-page essay reflecting on what he said. (1 page only, typed, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, 1-inch margins all around. Write only your name and class time at the top.)
- We the People, Chapter 9

Week 2  U.S. Congress; Obama Essay DUE; Statement of Personal Responsibility DUE
January 27, 29
Read:
- We the People, Chapter 9
- Writing Assignment #1 (Obama State of the Union Essay) DUE ON TUESDAY, JANUARY 27
- Statement of Personal Responsibility DUE ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

Week 3  Texas Legislature; Texas Legislative Process
February 3, 5
Read:
- Lone Star Politics, Chapter 3
- Lone Star Politics, Chapter 4

Week 4  U.S. Bureaucracy
February 10, 12
Read:
- We the People, Chapter 11
Week 5  U.S. Bureaucracy; *Exam 1*
February 17, 19
Read:
- We The People, Chapter 11
- *Exam #1 will take place at the beginning of class on THURSDAY, the 19th of February. You will have the entire class period to complete it. The exam will cover:*
  - We The People, Chapter 9 and 11
  - Lone Star Politics, Chapter 3 and 4

Week 6  U.S. Presidency
February 24, 26
Read:
- We The People, Chapter 10

Week 7  U.S. Presidency; Texas Governor
March 3, 5
Read:
- We The People, Chapter 10
- Lone Star Politics, Chapter 5

Week 8  Texas Bureaucracy
March 10, 12
Read:
- Lone Star Politics, Chapter 6

Week 9  SPRING BREAK (No Classes)
March 17, 19
Read:
- Nothing.

Week 10  U.S. Federal Courts
March 24, 26
Read:
- We The People, Chapter 12

Week 11  U.S. Federal Courts; Exam 2
March 31, April 2
Read:
- We The People, Chapter 12
- *Exam #2 will take place at the beginning of class on THURSDAY, the 2nd of April. You will have the entire class period to complete it. The exam will cover:*
  - We The People, Chapters 10 and 12
  - Lone Star Politics, Chapters 5 and 6
Week 12  Texas Courts
April 7, 9
Read:
  • Lone Star Politics, Chapter 7

Week 13  Texas Justice; Texas Fiscal Policy
April 14, 16
Read:
  • Lone Star Politics, Chapter 8
  • Lone Star Politics, Chapter 13

Week 14  Texas Social Policy (Education, Healthcare, Welfare)
April 21, 23
Read:
  • Lone Star Politics, Chapter 14

Week 15  U.S. Domestic Policy
April 28, 30
Read:
  • We The People, Chapter 13.

Week 16  U.S. Domestic Policy; In-Class Writing Assignment; Exam #3
May 5, 7
Read:
  • We The People, Chapter 13.
  • Your second Writing Assignment will take place in class on TUESDAY, May 5.
  • Exam #3 will take place at the beginning of class on THURSDAY, the 7th of May. You will have the entire class period to complete it. The exam will cover:
    o We The People, Chapter 13
    o Lone Star Politics, Chapters 7, 8, 13, and 14

Finals Week  Make-Up Examinations
May 12 (10:30am-11:45am)

  • There is NOT a Final Exam in this course.
  • If you have been approved to take the Make-up Exam, it will take place on TUESDAY, MAY 12th at 10:30am in our regular classroom. The make-up exam covers material on the exam that you missed. You will have one hour and fifteen minutes to complete it.
STUDENT STATEMENT OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

I, ________________________________________________, have read the syllabus in its entirety, and understand the guidelines and agree to the policies detailed therein as a condition of being enrolled in this course. I understand my obligation to adhere to these guidelines and policies in this course, and that failure to do so may result in serious consequences, including (but not limited to) being dropped from the course, and/or receiving a grade of “F” in the course.

Student Signature:_____________________________________________________

Student PRINTED Name:_________________________________________________

Date of Signature:_____________________________________________________

FAILURE TO RETURN THIS SIGNED STATEMENT BY THE FOURTH CLASS SESSION (January 29, 2015) WILL RESULT IN YOUR BEING DROPPED FROM THIS COURSE.