INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT: STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION

Stephen F. Austin State University
Department of Government
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Course Description

“Legislative, executive, and judicial functions in American and Texas governments; public policy areas such as finance, social services, and foreign policy; Texas local and county governments. Meets the state requirement for Texas Government.” SFASU General Bulletin

This course is intended to introduce students to the Structure and Function of the United States and Texas Governments – an approach known collectively as “Institutionalism” in the discipline of Political Science. This includes the function of legislative, executive, and judicial political institutions, political representation, policymaking and the translation of actual legislative outputs into public policy, the party system and electoral system of the United States, and, lastly, the institutional politics of the State of Texas. As such, this course will introduce you to the “scientific” side of Political Science and the study of Institutionalism by helping you to understand how political scientists approach and study the development, structure, and role of political institutions in democratic political systems.

I also seek to equip you with the knowledge necessary to be engaged and civically-minded citizens of American democracy. In order to aid this effort, throughout the course you should stay informed of current political events by reading newspapers, watching the news, and viewing digital media outlets such as political websites. As we will routinely discuss current events in class, staying attentive to various media outlets such as these will help in relating those events to the course material and therefore make the course content more substantively relevant. Please feel free to voice your opinions (as long as you do not intentionally insult your fellow classmates) as opinions generate class discussion and class discussion generates knowledge and understanding; further, open discussion makes for a more exciting class than one dominated solely by lecture.

Student Responsibilities

Pertaining to your role as a student of this course, it is your responsibility, and yours alone, regarding whether you pass or fail this course. I provide very generous and frequent opportunities for you to maximize your grade through a multitude of various course policies and supplemental material designed to facilitate your success in the class. However, your grade is ultimately determined by your own actions alone; namely, this involves your ability to comprehend and retain the information provided in class through taking comprehensive lecture notes, studying, and your ability to apply your knowledge of the material on the assignments. To succeed in this regard, your performance is equally dependent on how much effort and commitment YOU put forth in taking advantage of my advice and assistance, attending class, being attentive to what I say in lecture, studying the material before each exam, and abiding by the rules of the course as set forth in the syllabus.

Also, it has become increasingly common for students at the college level to be under the impression that they are entitled to a certain grade regardless of their effort or commitment to the courses they take, that receiving poor grades is somehow the responsibility of someone other than themselves, or that their instructor is to blame for their mediocre academic performance. Such notions are inherently counterproductive to succeeding at the university level. The only individual capable of assuring academic success is you, the student.
Compliance Agreement: Class Policies and Procedures
Enrollment in this course constitutes a binding agreement between the students within the course and their instructor. As such, this agreement stipulates that students will concede to the unequivocal acceptance of all the policies and procedures found herein, and that every student will consent to absolute and indisputable compliance with those policies and procedures; further, this also includes any and all verbal, written, electronic, or otherwise additional instructions, policies, rules, or directives issued to students by the instructor.

Program Learning Outcomes
This course is a general education core curriculum course and no specific program learning outcomes for a political science major are addressed in this course.

General Education Core Curriculum Objectives
In any given semester, one or more of the following Core Curriculum Objectives for the political science/government Foundational Component Area may be assessed.

- Critical Thinking Skills – creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information
- Communication Skills – effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral, and visual communication
- Social Responsibility – intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to effectively engage in regional, national, and global communities
- Personal Responsibility – the ability to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making

Textbooks
We have one required textbooks for this course, which you can purchase at the local bookstores or from a variety of on-line retailers. Although you are free to purchase the texts at the location which is most convenient for you, keep in mind you are not obligated to buy them from any local, university-affiliated bookstore and are more than welcome to purchase them from an online source, which are typically far more inexpensive.

Also, the course material on Texas Government is free online at the below link:


http://texaspolitics.utexas.edu/textbook

Other Readings
I reserve the right to assign additional readings at my discretion if I deem it adequately supplements the current topic of the course material. These may be in the form of journal articles, book chapters from other relevant texts, or sources discussing current events. However, rarely will I assign such reading, if ever, due to the current course material being more than sufficient to educate you as to the dynamics of American Government.

Grading Criteria
Your grade will be determined by the total number of points you accrue on the three in-class exams and the five quizzes administered throughout the semester. There are a total of 100 possible points drawn from these assignments. Grades for all of the tests and quizzes – along with test reviews, course announcements, and any other course-relevant material – will be posted on the course’s Desire2Learn (D2L) website.

Points are only earned on quizzes and exams. I DO NOT offer extra credit opportunities as it tends to distract from the formal coursework assigned for the class, and also rewards those students who habitually miss class

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1 Simply follow the link on the right side of the web-page to access the online textbook.
while simultaneously being unfair to those who make the commitment to attend regularly. Further, your time is best spent paying attention to lecture, taking comprehensive lecture notes, reading the text, and reviewing both your notes and the text rather than pursuing extra credit. This policy is firm – **NO EXCEPTIONS** will be made under any circumstances.

Lastly, mid-term grades will either be posted online (likely both on D2L and MySFA) or otherwise made available prior to last day to drop the course: **March 23rd**.

The grading scale for the course is as follows (please note the unique grading criteria):

- **A**: 88 – 100%
- **B**: 78 – 87%
- **C**: 68 – 77%
- **D**: 58 – 68%
- **F**: Below 58%

**Performance Evaluation: Graded Assignments**

**Exams (75 points)**
There will be three in-class exams: an initial exam of the introductory material, a mid-term examination and a final examination. Each is worth 25 points and will be multiple choice tests, with the occasional True/False question, consisting of 50 questions. Exam dates are listed in the syllabus. Test sheets will be provided by the instructor, but you will require scantrons for each test – the rectangular, green scantrons. Be sure to mark your answers clearly. Any ambiguous answers will be counted as incorrect. Exams will draw upon material from both texts, as well as from lecture material that may not necessarily be included in either textbook. Anyone showing up after the first test has been submitted will not be allowed to take the test and receive a grade of ZERO for the assignment; further, once the first test is handed out, no more talking will occur – violation of this policy will earn everyone a ZERO on the exam. Each test will be comprised of material as allocated in the course schedule (again, including both readings and lecture material) from, for the first exam, the start of the semester to the test day, and for each subsequent test all of the material covered from the previous exam to test day. This means that all assigned reading and anything said in lecture during those spans of time is free game for use on that particular exam. Lastly, **no exam taken in this class is cumulative**.

**Test Reviews**
There will be a test review issued to the class seven to ten days prior to each exam which will be posted on D2L. This review will consist of an itemized list of topics – some broad, some specific – from which the test itself will be composed. In fact, everything listed on the review will be on the actual test itself. This means that a comprehensive, detailed, and thorough knowledge of the topics listed on the test review will correspond to an increased likelihood of attaining a much higher grade on the actual exam.

**Make-Up Exams**
Such exams are given at the discretion of the instructor and require a valid, documented excuse as per university policy; however, these are very limited criteria and I only allow make-up exams in **very rare** circumstances. If a make-up is granted, the scheduling of the make-up exams will also be at my discretion. For your benefit, a good way to think about my policy on make-up exams is just to assume that I do not give make-ups **unless I am forced to do so** by the policies of the university and/or the State of Texas.

**Quizzes (25 Points)**
I will administer a series of 5 quizzes throughout the session at random, with each being worth five points. If you miss a quiz, you will receive a zero. There are no make-up quizzes and no quiz grades will be dropped for any reason. Quizzes will not be administered on any formal sheet of paper, but on notebook paper provided by the student and will be given verbally by the instructor or will presented via PowerPoint.
Class Decorum: Classroom Code of Conduct

You are to maintain a professional manner at all times. This is an environment of higher education, and you are to conduct yourselves as such. This class is intended to not only educate you as to the aspects of the United States and Texas governments, but to also acclimate you to conditions similar to those you will encounter in the American workforce and/or other institutions of higher education (such as in graduate school). This means abiding by the instructions and code of conduct found within the syllabus, listening to and following verbal instructions, paying attention to detail, being punctual, and taking responsibility for your actions and ultimate performance in class. In sum, you will behave in a manner befitting that of an adult university student, and also that becoming of an engaged citizen of our political system. Any and all instances of disrespect, lack of courtesy, or anything that is said, implied, or directed at either myself or your fellow students which I deem to be inappropriate will be dealt with swiftly, harshly, and through punitive measures of my choosing.

Also, when I speak, that means you DO NOT. When I arrive in class, you have until I greet you to end whatever conversation you may be engaged in; additionally, once class starts any conversations will be limited to material relevant to the class and the student will raise their hand to ask a question or begin discourse. However, if an open debate is in progress, you of course do not have to raise your hand every single time you need to make a point; but, that is not to say that bedlam will ensue upon the initiation of open class discussion – you will respect your fellow classmates by waiting for them to finish their point before you begin yours.

Further, please, do not leave early or repeatedly show up late for class. You’re paying for this course, and it is also mandated by the State of Texas. If you’re going to show up, stay…it is that simple. If you have a legitimate reason for leaving class early, please tell me beforehand. I am very lenient in this regard. Further, it benefits you to get to class on time. I often, and will, give quizzes, immediately upon the start of class, and they do not take long to complete. So, if one were to show up five minutes late, they would likely miss the quiz, especially since once the quiz has started, anyone showing up afterwards is not allowed to take it. So, I advise you to show up. Those showing up late are permitted to stay in class, but habitual offenders that are 15, 20, and 30 minutes late will be noted and not only will your tardiness be reflected in your grade due to you missing so much class material, but it will also go a long way in establishing a negative rapport with me, which you do not want.

⇒ The “Freedom of Speech, not Freedom from Offense” Clause

Although I will guard closely against any violations of the policies governing class decorum found herein, my classroom is a FREE SPEECH ZONE. The exercise of your individual entitlement to Freedom of Expression is a legal privilege protected explicitly by the Constitution, and is a natural right to which every citizen of the United States is endowed; as such, under absolutely no circumstances will that freedom be hindered within my course. It is not my job, nor am I in any way enabled on ethical grounds, to attempt to stifle, manipulate, or biasedly influence your thoughts, speech, or creativity in any way whatsoever – such efforts are the death of intellectual development.

Therefore, be aware that because of the policies of the class as established in this syllabus, and the protection of individual rights as set forth in the Constitution, there are NO rules, NO statutes, and absolutely NO Constitutional protections preventing you from being offended by anything that may occur during your experience in this course. In fact, it is almost inevitable that at some point during this class that either I or your colleagues will say or do something that will offend you, and that is perfectly fine: maintaining professionalism and courtesy does not rule out the possibility of offense. Freedom of Speech necessarily involves competition between differences of opinion, and those differences inherently lead to the likely probability that one or more individuals or parties included in any free and open debate will become offended. This is simply a natural consequence of Freedom of Expression.

However, although there are no formal protections against being offended, this does not give students a license to freely insult others – offending someone and insulting someone is not the same thing. Any deliberate verbal abuses by students which blatantly targets their fellow colleagues will not be tolerated under any circumstances. The most severe violation of this policy is engaging in personal attacks oriented
toward demeaning others on the basis of race, cultural identity, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or gender. Thereby, anyone uttering racial or ethnic slurs, homophobic remarks, deriding an individual’s religion, ridiculing a student’s cultural identity, or voicing sexist comments of any form – no matter how seemingly benign or unintentionally insulting such comments may be – will be subject to exceptionally strict disciplinary reprisals which will be left to my discretion (and I have a very creative imagination for such things). In short, any infringement of this policy will be handled with the harshest punitive measures I have at my disposal, and I will be relentless in pursuing such punishment to the fullest possible extent.

⇒ !Disclaimer! – !Adult Language in Class!
Additionally, please note that the policies governing class decorum as outlined above – known as the “Freedom of Speech, not Freedom from Offense” Clause – also includes the potential use of “adult-oriented” expressions. Such vocabulary entails certain aspects of the English language considered by some to be coarse, vulgar, profane, and, by extension, offensive. Again, due to my class being a Free Speech Zone, this type of language is also totally acceptable as it too is legally protected according to the individual right to Freedom of Expression as specified in the Bill of Rights within the Constitution. So, be aware that such adult-oriented language will be used in class by your instructor, and likely also by your colleagues. If this is a problem for you, the solution is simple: drop the course. It is not the responsibility of either I nor your fellow students to guard against you taking offense to such trivial uses of everyday words commonly used in the English language simply because you deem them to be inappropriate or offensive.

Additional Course Policies

Online Learning:
A substantial amount of material for the class – including grades, course announcements, dates class may not be held, the syllabus, and any other instructions, advice pertaining to assignments, or additional supplemental material I may provide – will be available on the Desire to Learn (D2L) website. As such, please make sure you check this site regularly, and preferably on a daily basis.

Attendance
I do not take attendance. The means by which I assure students attend class is achieved in two ways:
1. I do not give lecture notes, or PowerPoint slides, to students – if you want to have access to the material, you have to come to class.
2. The quizzes are assigned at random and solely at my discretion. Therefore, if you miss class, it is a possibility you will miss a quiz. Due to there being a limited number of quizzes, my policy on not dropping any of the grades, and the quizzes comprising a significant portion of your grade, missing class makes it increasingly likely that your grade will suffer.

That said, there is a VERY high correlation between higher grades and class attendance, thereby attending class can only help your grade so I strongly suggest you show up to class on a regular basis. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to determine what you missed that day, and absences are never a valid excuse for missing deadlines, etc. Students who attend my class often typically find it very easy…those that are frequently absent do not. Due to both my relatively lax nature and the type of material covered, there is absolutely no excuse to fail my class. This is easy! Just come to class!

Texting
If you text, or otherwise use a telephone in class in any way whatsoever, I reserve the right to implement a punishment of my choosing: such as having a student sing in front of class, reciting your ABCs to your colleagues, dismissing you from class entirely, or initiating a random quiz to the class at your expense due to your transgression – I have no issues with embarrassing you in front of your peers, so please don’t give me an excuse. In short, DON’T TEXT! It benefits you in no way and can possibly seriously inhibit your grade.
Computers, Tablets, and other Technology
You are permitted to bring computers, tablets, or any other similar device to use for class-relevant purposes only. I have a bad habit of walking around class, so if I catch you doing anything but taking notes in Microsoft Word, Notepad, or some similar word processor I’ll be forced to embarrass you in front of your peers (again, a skill I am exceptionally adept at), and I also reserve the right to ask you to leave class just as in instances of cell-phone use. I will be particularly severe upon students I find perusing the internet – I’m the instructor of this class, and I will not be subjected to in-class disputes to my teaching, or in-class debate prompted by “Google-Challenges” or inaccurate information drawn from Wikipedia. Further, I strongly encourage my students to take notes by hand using paper and pen due to a simple, almost infallible truth: nothing puts a concept in your mind in a more permanent fashion than putting pen to paper.

Office Hours and Visitation Policy
I have an open-door policy regarding interaction with my students as it pertains to course material, including providing help or feedback in any area in which you may require assistance. As such, DO NOT HESITATE to come by my office any time during my office hours, and, if it is very urgent or pertinent, you can also try to see if I am available outside of office hours – I’ll be glad to help you even then. I am also willing to counsel students on their Major/Minor and their plans after graduation. If there is something you need and I am not in the office, please email me.

I also encourage students having trouble with the course material or any other aspect of the class to come see me in my office hours as soon as possible. I cannot help you with a test, quiz, or anything else you may be struggling with after the fact, so please come by and speak with me before it is too late. I’m glad to help anyone who needs it, and I have seen too many students wait too late to ask for assistance. So, by all means, come to office hours whenever you encounter a problem before it is reflected in your grade – those waiting until the last minute, after a test or quiz has already been graded, or those who procrastinate until the final 1/3 of the semester are beyond my aid at that point, and will not be taken seriously.

Email Policy
You are free to email me anytime about anything which is salient or relevant to the class. In fact, it is the best way to contact me as I am far more likely to respond to a received email than a missed phone call or office visit. However, if you choose to do so, I have a very specific policy regarding the content of student emails. I regard email as official correspondence between students and their instructor, and it should be treated as such. Students who use informal or colloquial language, do not address me professionally, do not close the email with their full name, or make repeated grammatical and/or punctuation errors will likely not get a response. I do this primarily because this is a very simple skill that you need to become habituated to – if you plan on entering the workforce, or possibly pursuing a graduate degree, this is a necessary skill and poorly composed or informal emails will not be tolerated in real-world settings.

Finally, if you find the policies governing this course to be too arduous, offensive, or otherwise not to your liking, I SUGGEST YOU DROP THE CLASS!!!

Official University Policies

Disability Statement
Any student who, because of a disability may require some special arrangements in order to meet course requirements should contact the instructor during office hours as soon as possible to request the necessary accommodations. Students should present the appropriate verification from Student Disability Services. No requirement exists that accommodations be made prior to completion of this university approved process.

To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and
outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/.

Course Withdrawals
In accordance with university policy, students may officially drop a course up to and including March 23rd.

Academic Misconduct
Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit.

Please read the complete policy at http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp

Beyond the official policies of the university, I have a zero-tolerance policy regarding academic misconduct and dishonesty. Students who engage in cheating or plagiarism will receive a 0 on the assignment that they were caught engaging in academic misconduct. While the student will receive a 0 on that particular assignment, it does not rule out the possibility of further sanctions – including receiving a 0 for the course itself.

Observance of a Religious Holy Day
Texas House Bill 256 requires institutions of higher education to excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day. The student shall also be excused for time necessary to travel. An institution may not penalize the student for the absence and allows for the student to take an exam or complete an assignment from which the student is excused. No prior notification of the instructor is required.

Withheld Grades (Semester Grades Policy – A-54)
At the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.

Course Schedule

Week One: Class Introduction & Introduction to the US Congress
Keeping the Republic

Week Two: US Congress – The House of Representatives
Keeping the Republic

Week Three: US Congress – The Senate
Keeping the Republic

2 I reserve the right to alter the schedule as I deem necessary. You will be notified of these in class and it is your responsibility to keep track of such changes.
Week Four: Congress Wrap-Up and The Texas State Legislature
Keeping the Republic

*** Exam I: February 16th ***

Week Five: The Presidency
Online Reader

Week Six: The Presidency (Continued)
Keeping the Republic

Week Seven: The Bureaucracy
Keeping the Republic

Week Eight: The Bureaucracy (continued) and The Texas State Executive
Online Reader

Week Nine: Spring Break – NO CLASS

*** SPRING BREAK: March 12th through March 20th ***

Week Ten: Texas State Courts
Keeping the Republic
Online Reader

*** Exam II: March 22nd ***

*** LAST DAY TO DROP CLASSES! – March 23rd ***

Week Eleven: Public Policy: Domestic Policy
Keeping the Republic

Week Twelve: Public Policy: Foreign Policy
Online Reader

Week Thirteen: Public Opinion
Keeping the Republic

Week Fourteen: The United States Party System and Electoral System
Keeping the Republic

Week Fifteen: The United States Party System and Electoral System

Week Sixteen: Course Wrap-Up and Exam Review

Week Seventeen: Final Examination Week

!!! Final Exam (Exam III) !!!
Tuesday, May 10th – 8:00am to 10:00am