Welcome! Take a look below for answers to some frequently asked questions about the course. Please read this syllabus carefully.

Frequently Asked Questions

* What will we cover in PSC 142 – Intro to American Government: Structure and Function?

PSC 142 is the second of a two course series on United States Constitution and the Texas Constitution. Keep in mind that covering these two documents in detail requires much more than a couple semesters. As such, this course offers a broad overview of how politics works at the state and national level. Beyond identifying the rules and branches of government, we will evaluate how the U.S. government evolved from the Founding to today. We will explore how politics and institutions shape policy outcomes. I hope my students leave the course with a better understanding of the political institutions impacting our lives and, however fanciful this seems, I hope we help each other become better citizens.

* Who is my professor?

Name: Peyton Wofford Gooch (Mrs. G)
E-mail: woffordpe@d2l.sfasu.edu and woffordgooch@sfasu.edu Email is the best way to reach me.
Phone: 936-468-4408
Office: Vera Dugas Liberal Arts North 112
Office Hours: MW 9-11am, TR 12:30-3pm

* What is the best way to get in contact with you, Mrs. G?

Email or office hours. I will respond to email as soon as possible. Typically, I respond within one business day, but it may take as many as two business days depending on the content of your email.

* What are the registration specifics for this course?

Name: Introduction to American Government: Structure and Function
Prefix, #, Section: PSC 142.014
SFA Prerequisites: None
Unofficial prereqs: Common sense, time management skills, stick-to-itiveness and a sense of humor
Semester Credit Hrs: 3
* What about books?

In my experience, the following two texts are essential to understanding the course material. In short, the texts will help you earn a passing grade in this course. As such, both texts are required. The SFA Campus Bookstore has ISBN information for both texts. If you choose to use an older or newer edition of either, you are responsible for reading the correct chapters when chapter numbers differ from those listed on the syllabus.

1) *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics* by Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright  
   a. ISBN: 9781483381138

2) *Texas Politics 142 Workbook* edited by Alan Baily (also called the *PSC 142 Workbook*)  
   a. ISBN: 2818440027543

* How much are we going to use D2L in this course? Are we going to use any other programs?

All course communication will be posted to the course’s D2L newsfeed or sent via D2L email. Check D2L and your D2L email at least every other day for course updates.

* Where do I go for technical help with D2L?

To learn more about using D2L, visit SFA ONLINE at [http://sfaonline.sfasu.edu](http://sfaonline.sfasu.edu). For technical support, contact the Office of Instructional Technology at d2l@sfasu.edu or 936-468-1919. For general computer support (not D2L related), contact the Technical Support Center at 936-468-4357 or helpdesk@sfasu.edu.

* How do I know what I am supposed to read/write for each class? Will all readings come from the two books?

Review the course schedule at the end of this syllabus and check D2L for updates. Not all readings will come from your two textbooks. Other required readings, videos, podcasts, etc. will be posted under the *Content* tab on D2L. If you cannot find the reading in one of the textbooks, look under the *Content* tab.

* Should I bring my books to class?

Yes and no. Bring a hard copy of the assigned reading for the particular class day. For example, if you were supposed to read “Ugly Things” and the first chapter of *Keeping the Republic*, bring your printed copy of the article and *Keeping the Republic* to class. You are welcome to read on an iPad, Kindle, or laptop, but that will only suffice for a first glance. Those devices cannot be used in class. Careful reading requires note taking and underlining, both of which are more beneficial to your retention if they are done the old fashioned way, meaning with pen and paper.

* Can I use my phone, laptop, iPad, or the like to take notes?

No. Take notes the old fashioned way. Do not forget to silence your phone.
* Do you use PowerPoint, Mrs. G?

Sometimes. Slides are meant as guideposts or bullet points. The information presented on them is not exhaustive. Too often I see students trying to copy every word on the PowerPoint slide. This will not serve you well. Use the slides to give you a framework for the lecture or class discussion. Listen to and take notes on what we talk about in class, drawing connections between the material presented in class, the information on the slides, and your reading assignment. In most cases, I will post slides on D2L after class.

* How do grades work in this course?

Grades are earned through class participation, quizzes, think-pieces, and examinations. Each course component is a percentage (or weight) of your final course grade. See below. Late assignments are not accepted. Make-up exams will only be allowed under the exceptional circumstances described below. Grades are non-negotiable. I expect you to have read and understood SFA’s academic dishonesty policies (see below).

Class Participation – 5%

Active, professional engagement during class time requires a few things: regular attendance, punctuality, and preparedness. I expect you be ready to take notes and participate when class begins. I will make every effort to begin and end class promptly. I expect you to participate in the class from start to finish. I realize life can sometimes make this difficult, but late arrivals, early departures, and/or multiple absences are unprofessional. They will negatively impact your performance in the course. Complete the required reading and assignments before class begins. Be professional in class. In short, engage in civil discourse, stay off your phone, remove your headphones, avoid distracting chatter with your neighbor, be respectful of your classmates and me, and the like.

Let’s take a moment to address civil discourse. The respectful exchange of ideas is a course requirement. Make it a goal to develop critical thinking about the American political system. As such, I encourage you to ask questions and to respectfully challenge assumptions of class discussions. You are allowed to express your opinion. Please do so in a reasoned, professional manner. Please also remember that your fellow students are allowed to express their opinions, which may differ from yours.

According to SFA’s Student Conduct Code (D-34.1), your behavior in class should not interfere with my ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program. Students who disrupt the learning environment will be subject to penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums. The instructor has full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the class.
Quizzes – 20%
Expect unannounced (i.e., pop) quizzes throughout the semester. These are designed to encourage students to complete the required reading, review D2L materials, review notes from the previous class, and otherwise retain information. Quizzes will be administered during class time and may be multiple choice or short answer. Make up quizzes will only be administered in cases of documented illness, family emergency or University-related absences.

Think-Pieces – 25%
You will submit one practice think-piece and a series of graded think-pieces. I will provide feedback on your practice think-piece, but it will not be graded. Your lowest think-piece grade will be dropped.

Think-pieces should be approached as opportunities to practice expressing yourself in English prose. Use proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Proofread your work. Avoid violating the rules of usage and principles of composition. Take a look at common style manuals (e.g., APA, MLA, and Chicago). Pick one style and stick with it. Bring a typed copy of your work to class on the day outlined in the course schedule below. Do not submit think-pieces via email or Dropbox. There is no need to do outside research or include a works cited, bibliography, or foot/endnotes. If you include quotations, however, I expect you to cite your source. Please a look at the sample think-piece in the Writing Matters lesson under the Content tab for information about formatting, acceptable length, and such. Specific instructions and the prompt for each think-piece are available under the Dropbox on D2L. Late think-pieces will only be accepted in cases of documented illness, family emergency, or University-related absences.

Exams – 50%
For the most part, an exam will be administered after each course section (see the schedule below for section content). Each exam will include multiple choice and short answer questions. Take a look at the course schedule to for exam dates. Exams will include questions drawn from required reading, lesson material, and class discussion. You are responsible for all of these components.

Make-up exams will be given only in the case of documented illness, documented emergencies or University-related absences. Make-up exams may be more difficult than scheduled exams. If you miss an exam and would like to take a make-up exam, it is your responsibility to inform me why you were absent and to provide documentation. If the absence meets the above criteria, we will schedule a make-up exam. No exams will be given early.
### Weighting (or Percentage) Scale

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<tr>
<th>Course Component</th>
<th>Percentage of Student’s Final Course Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Think-Pieces</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Exams</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
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### Final Grade Scale

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<th>Final Course Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>90% and up</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>80% - 89%</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>70% - 79%</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60% - 69%</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59% and lower</td>
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Tentative Course Schedule

“The justification for a university is that it preserves the connection between knowledge and the zest of life, by uniting the young and the old in the imaginative consideration of learning.”

This calendar is subject to change. Complete reading and writing assignments before class time.

KTR = Keeping the Republic
WB = Texas Politics 142 Workbook (also called PSC 142 Workbook)
D2L = Print and read the article from D2L’s Content tab.

Section I: During the first weeks of the course, we will cover basics about the American system. But that is not all we will do. This course has an explicitly normative focus. What do I mean by normative? We will explore the ideas (or at least a selection of the ideas) that animate us whether we recognize them or not. Expect to read and talk about competing definitions of justice, the value of civil discourse, government’s utility (or lack thereof), and the purpose of a constitution. Although our treatment of American history will be woefully inadequate, we will cover a few pertinent details about the Founding. Expect to reread the Declaration of Independence and US Constitution. You will also get a glimpse into the Founders’ understanding of human nature, government, and citizenship by reading excerpts from various Founding era documents. This understanding will serve as a springboard for our discussion of America’s political institutions – that is, the “how” of our government. To put it another way, I hope the first section of this course provides a glimpse into why our government is structured the way it is. Without some knowledge of the “why,” the “how” makes precious little sense.

Thursday, January 21 – The Questions of Politics

“For all we may resist such ultimate questions as the meaning of justice and the nature of the good life, what we cannot escape is that we live some answer to those questions – we live some theory – all the time.”

Read: “Ugly Things” by Janie Cheaney (D2L)
KTR 1
OPTIONAL: Skim “The Coddling of the American Mind” by Lukianhoff and Haidt (D2L)
Write: “Ugly Things” Practice Think-Piece

Tuesday, January 26 – The Questions of Politics

Read: “Who Deserves What?” by Michael Sandel (D2L)
Reread KTR 1

Thursday, January 28 – The Founding

“All that has happened to you is also connected with the detail of...a rising people.”

Read: Skim KTR 2
“Who Deserves What?” by Michael Sandel (D2L)
Write: Justice Think-Piece
Tuesday, February 2 – The Founding

Read: KTR Chapter 2
Common Sense (D2L)
Declaration of Independence (D2L)

Thursday, February 4 – The Founding

"A republic, if you can keep it."iv

Read: Reread KTR Chapter 2
Read the review/summary at the end of KTR Chapter 3
Skim the US Constitution (D2L)
“Perspectives on the Constitution” by Richard R. Beeman (D2L)

Write: Constitution Think-Piece

Tuesday, February 9 – The Founding

Read: George Washington’s Farewell Address
“Letters from an American Farmer” by Hector St. Jean de Crèvecoeur
“On Citizenship” and “The Natural Aristocracy” by Thomas Jefferson

Thursday, February 11 – Loose Ends

Read: Review all Section I materials

Write: Founding Think-Piece

Tuesday, February 16 – Exam I

Section II: We now turn to the US Congress and Texas State Legislature. From this point forward, the course will move at a quicker pace. We will also begin to shift our focus to institutional design. The legislative branch is the largest and most powerful part of our system. Expect to read about the differences between the national and state versions of this branch. During these weeks, we will discuss theories of representation, the committee system, veto overrides, redistricting, and the behavior of elected officials (to name a few topics). Be prepared to focus on structural details and pay close attention to key terms (e.g., cloture).

Thursday, February 18 – The US Congress

“...such an institution may be sometimes necessary as a defence to the people against their own temporary errors and delusions.”v

Read: KTR Chapter 6
“On Congress” by Alexander Hamilton and James Madison (D2L)
Tuesday, February 23 – The US Congress

Read:  
Reread KTR Chapter 6  
Reread “On Congress” by Alexander Hamilton and James Madison (D2L)  
US Congress (D2L)

Thursday, February 25 – The Texas State Legislature

Read:  
WB Chapter 1  
Reread KTR Chapter 6

Write:  
Congress Think-Piece

Tuesday, March 1 – Texas State Legislature

Read:  
Review all Section II materials

Write:  
WB Exercises (optional)

Thursday, March 3 – Exam II

Section III: We now turn to the executive branches of the United States and of Texas. The US President and the Texas Governor are the most visible pieces of these two respective executive branches; as such, we will dedicate the majority of our time to them. Please keep in mind, however, that both executive branches include extensive bureaucracies. Get ready for a journey through the land of the red tape. As we move through the material, consider the following questions. How is the presidency (as an institution) different today than it was when George Washington took office in 1789? Why is it different? What is the most/least satisfactory justification for its evolution? Now, what is the purpose of bureaucracy? Are there some things the bureaucracy does best? In short, despite our inveterate criticisms of the bureaucracy, why do we keep it around?

Tuesday, March 8 – The Presidency

Read:  
KTR Chapter 7  
pages 53-55 of Locke (D2L)  
NOTE: You are only required to print and read pages 53-55. Reading on will increase your understanding, but it is optional.

Thursday, March 10 – The Presidency

Read:  
Reread KTR Chapter 7  
Reread pages 53-55 of Locke (D2L)

Write:  
Prerogative Think-Piece

Tuesday, March 22 – The Presidency

Read:  
Finalize your notes on KTR Chapter 7  
“The Power to Persuade” by Richard Neustadt (D2L)  
Skim KTR Chapter 8 (we’ll cover this later)
Tuesday, March 29 – The TX Governor

Read: WB Chapter 2
Skim WB Chapter 3

Thursday, March 31 – The TX Governor

Read: Reread WB Chapters 2 and 3
Write: Presidency Think-Piece

Tuesday, April 5 – The Federal and State Bureaucracies

“Some third person decides your fate: this is the whole essence of bureaucracy.”

Read: KTR Chapter 8
WB Chapter 3

Tuesday, April 12 – The Federal and State Bureaucracies

Read: KTR Chapter 8
WB Chapter 3
Write: WB Exercises (optional)

Thursday, April 14 – Exam III

Section IV: During the next few course meetings, we are going to combine institutional details with normative questions. We will give the most basic of outlines for the US and Texas court systems. We will also discuss the purpose of law, the function of courts (particularly the US Supreme Court), and different understandings of justice. Our system is designed to prioritize procedural justice. As a society, however, we tend to also care about substantive justice. We’ll explore this tension over the next few class meetings.

Tuesday, April 19 – The Courts

Read: Skim KTR Chapter 9
“SCOTUS as Counter-Majoritarian” (D2L)
pages 1-7 of “SCOTUS Year in Review” by Ilya Shapiro (D2L)

Thursday, April 21 – The Courts

Read: KTR Chapter 9
Skim WB Chapter 4
Reread “SCOTUS as Counter-Majoritarian” (D2L)
Reread pages 1-7 of “SCOTUS Year in Review” by Ilya Shapiro (D2L)
Tuesday, April 26 – The Courts

Read: Review all Section IV materials
Write: Courts Think-Piece

Section V: You have probably noticed there is no exam between Section IV and Section V. Both sections will be covered on the last exam. Now that we’ve talked a little bit about our political institutions, let’s take a look at what these institutions create, public policy. Remember what we covered in Section I? Determining who deserves what is the first question of public policy. The next questions deal with when and how recipients get their desert. We will have a normative bent to our discussion of domestic policy – that is, we will spend a good bit of time talking about the philosophy underlying public policy alternatives, specifically two competing theories about how the government and economy should interact.

Thursday, April 28 – Public Policy

Read: Skim KTR Chapter 14
“The Mystery of Government” by PJ O’Rourke (D2L)
“Why We Need More, Not Less, Government” by Douglas J. Amy (D2L)

Tuesday, May 3 – Public Policy

Read: KTR Chapter 14
Reread “The Mystery of Government” by PJ O’Rourke (D2L)
Reread “Why We Need More, Not Less, Government” by Douglas J. Amy (D2L)

Thursday, May 5 – Public Policy

Read: WB Chapters 6 and 7
Review all Section IV and V materials
Write: Policy Think-Piece

Tuesday, May 10 from 8am to 10am – Exam IV

NOTE: Exam IV is not comprehensive. Questions will only be drawn from Sections IV and V.

That’s all folks! Enjoy your summer!
More Helpful Information

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: 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/.

SFA COURSE DESCRIPTION: SFA’s official course description reads, “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” (SFA General Bulletin 2015-2016, p. 324).

ACADEMIC HONESTY: “Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism.” - SFASU’s Policy Manual (2011), section on “Academic Integrity” (A-9)

Definition of Academic Dishonesty: 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. All cases of academic dishonesty will be handled according to University policies and procedures (A-9.1). The consequences for academic dishonesty may range from a score of zero (0) on the assignment to an “F” for the course. For details, students should refer to the SFA Policy Manual (2015) or the University’s General Bulletin, 2014 – 2015 section entitled “Academic Integrity” and other sources of University policy.

WITHHELD GRADES: The following is taken from SFASU’s Policy Manual (2011), “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 semesters, 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 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES:

General Education Core Curriculum Objectives

In any given semester, one or more of the following Core Curriculum Objectives for the political science Foundational Component Area may be assessed. See the Texas-Mandated Assessment Rubric below for more information.

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.

4 Ibid.
5 Alexander Hamilton and James Madison, On Congress (1788), 171.
6 Alexandra Kollontai, The Workers’ Opposition (1921).