

Political Science 2305-16: American Government

Spring 2021

Online

CRN: 20373

Credit Hours: 3

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Course Description

Can President Trump really just use a tweet to announce a military attack? Why does Congress seem like a high school drama full of old people? Does voting even matter? This is an introductory course in which we consider the basic ideas, structures, and political processes of the United States government, and explore how the scientific study of politics helps us understand government.

By the end of the semester, students should be able to recognize the major players in American politics, the basic structure of the U.S. Government, and the roles ideas, individuals, and institutions play. In addition, we will apply these ideas in our discussion about the development of civil liberties and rights and the defining/protecting of these rights. Students will also be introduced to patterns in voter turnout and civic participation, as well as the role of public opinion and the media.

Throughout the course, students are encouraged to bring up current events or issues that apply to our academic discussions in class. I will attempt to set aside time each week to discuss these issues and relate them to both our lecture and assigned readings. However, you do not need to have a deep knowledge of current political events or be involved in politics already. This class is designed for the complete beginner, and I hope that you find something that triggers your interest and desire to participate in politics as the class goes on!

Learning Objectives

1. Gaining a basic understanding of the subject (factual knowledge, principles, theories)
2. Gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of intellectual activity
3. Learning to apply course material to improve thinking and problem solving

Course Textbook

There is one textbook required for this course:

Textbook: Krutz, Glen and Sylvie Waskiewicz, et. al. 2019. *American Government 2e*.

To keep costs to students to a minimum, we will be using the above book, provided by [OpenStax](#). This is available freely as a:

1. [PDF file that can be viewed online](#) or downloaded to your computer
2. As a smartphone app ([iPhone/Apple Users](#) or [Android](#)).
3. Ordered from Amazon as a print copy for \$48.50 (**not recommended**).

A PDF copy of the textbook is also available on the course Blackboard page, as are the links.

Blackboard and Online Communication

All communication for this course will be conducted via the course's Blackboard site and University email. Any supplementary material, assignments, or changes to the course structure will be made available on this site. Each student should ensure that they have access to these materials and are able to receive emails through their student account. Please note that I cannot accept or respond to student emails that come from a non-university address.

I usually respond to emails within 24 hours of receipt, earlier if they are sent during typical business hours (9am-5/6pm). Please do not send a second email until the 24 hour waiting period is up. If there is an emergency, please take care of that first. I am always happy to work around personal emergencies when it comes to the completion of coursework.

Discord

In addition to email and Blackboard, I am using Discord to provide a place where students and I can meet, exchange instant messages, talk over voice/video, and stream. It is entirely free and provides a less formal environment where students can talk to each other or to me. I am also hoping to use this to help with class communication since we will not be meeting in person as frequently.

To set up an account on the Discord server:

1. Visit <https://discordapp.com/>
2. If you don't already have an account, click the "Register" button.
3. Once your account is created (please keep your username class/work appropriate), click on this link: <https://discord.gg/Q3W6FJD> and you should automatically be sent to the server.
4. The service will run fine on a web browser, so there is no need to download any software. If you would like to download the app to use on your phone or home computers, the site has apps available for most platforms.

Once you are on the server, you will see that there are text and voice “channels” for each of my classes this semester. You are free to look in, chat with, and generally interact with the students in classes that are not your own—this is an informal and open space. There are also several text and voice chat rooms available as “Student Study Spaces” where groups of you can work together.

Virtual Office

Because we do not get to meet in person, I have set up a “Virtual Office” on Blackboard. During my scheduled office hours, I will also be in this “room” on Blackboard where we can chat (by text) remotely. This way, students can talk with me personally even if they are away from campus. Please see the directions under the “Virtual Office” section on Blackboard for how to access this resource.

Students are also completely free to use this space to chat with each other about the course as well.

Grading

Exam 1: 100 points

Exam 2: 100 points

Discussion Board: 10 points each

Each week, a folder will appear in the “Weekly Assignments” section of the course Blackboard. It will have a checklist of the reading assignments and discussion questions for the week. It will also be where I post the outlines/recordings/lecture slides for that week. Hopefully this will make it easier for students to keep track of what is going on that week.

Each exam will consist of 50 multiple choice or true false questions, worth two points each. On the Monday of the scheduled exam week, the exam will be available on Blackboard. Students will have until 11:59pm on the following Friday to finish the exam. We will not have class on those Fridays so that there is at least one class period where everyone has time to finish the exam.

On the Friday before the scheduled exam week, we will have a review session over Zoom. We will also have in class activities where students pose their own questions and/or answer practice questions as a group.

Because I am not sure what resources people will have available at home or in their dorms, and to reduce stresses because of COVID, exams **will be open book/note**. You will not need to use any special software such as Respondus. You can work together to figure out the answers to questions and to ask me for help.

Keep in mind that this means exam questions will be a little more difficult than you may be used to. Rather than asking basic definitions or checking to see whether you've memorized a fact, these questions will ask you to look at an event or idea that we've studied and determine which term, theory, or process best fits that example. I am more interested in teaching you how to apply the knowledge you'll gain in this class, so questions on exams will ask you to do that.

Because this course is held entirely online, it is especially important to keep up with assigned reading. To help with this, I will post a brief outline every week outlining the learning objectives for the week, structure your own note-taking, and providing extra context where necessary.

Deadlines and Late Work

I'm sure many of you are stressed and uncertain about the semester. Nobody is sure how events will unfold, or what other changes may be needed later in the semester. Schedules are totally different from what you're used to, and you all have other classes in addition to mine.

Please do not be afraid or worried if you forget to turn in an assignment or get mixed up on an in-person meeting date. I will not lower grades for late work, nor will I shame or otherwise punish students who turn in late work or miss a class.

I will be doing my best to check in with everyone in the class each time we meet in person, and will check in regularly through email, Blackboard, and the course Discord. You all are welcome and encouraged to reach out to me if you need any support, advice, or other help in keeping up with this class. I am perfectly happy to work with students to keep them on track to pass this course and will be happy to talk with anyone who asks for that.

As always, you are free to get in touch with me however you feel comfortable to talk about what is happening in class, or for other kinds of support. At the very least I can help get you in touch with other resources at SHSU that will be able to provide any support you might need.

All assignments will be due by 11:59pm on the Sunday of the week they are assigned.

Grading Scale

A: 90-100

B: 80-89

C: 70-79

D: 60-69

F: Below 60

Information and University Policies

Academic Dishonesty:

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain 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. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

http://www.shsu.edu/~slo_www/

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days Policy:

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. Section 51.911 (a) (2) defines a religious holy day as: "a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20...." 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.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/861001.pdf>

Students with Disabilities Policy:

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 should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936-294-3786, and e-mail disability@shsu.edu). 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 you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For a complete listing of the university policy, see: <http://www.shsu.edu/dotAsset/7ff819c3-39f3-491d-b688-db5a330ced92.pdf>

Copyright on Course Materials

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Emergencies, Crises, and Mental Health

Sometimes the study of Political Science involves dealing with difficult material. In some cases these may reflect or reference your own personal, family, or group experiences. Other times, life events may interfere with your ability to succeed in class. We do not want neglect our own health or well-being. If you need support, the Counseling Center can be reached at 936-294-1720. The [website](#) also contains self-help resources, and those services available in the Huntsville community.

As with all other parts of the course, students are welcome and encouraged to come talk to me to voice their concerns, seek support, or discuss accommodation for coursework after a crisis. If you can, please let me know if you are falling behind or need additional help. I'm always happy to work with students to find ways to help them through the course as the rest of life goes on around them.

Class Outline

I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus at any time. Changes will be announced in class and on the course Blackboard site. It is the responsibility of the student to take note of any changes.

You will also notice that particularly important political events (such as elections) are posted here. These are for your information, and we will discuss them as the events themselves get closer.

Week 1: January 13-15

Course Welcome

Week 2: January 18-22

Social Science and American Government

Week 3: January 25-29

The Constitution

Week 4: February 1-5

Federalism

Week 5: February 8-12

Civil Liberties

Week 6: February 15-19

Civil Rights from the Founding to the Civil War

Week 7: February 22-26

Civil Rights from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement

Week 8: March 1-5

Post-Civil Rights Act America

Week 9: March 8-12

Civil Rights Beyond Race

Week 10: March 15-19

No Class, Spring Break

Week 11: March 22-26

Public Opinion in Politics

Week 12: March 29-April 2

Voting and Elections

Week 13: April 5-9
Media and Politics

Week 14: April 12-16
Role of Political Parties

Week 15: April 19-23
Interest Groups

Week 16: April 26-30
Political Institutions

Week 17/18: May 3-12
Review and Finals Week

Exam 2 Due at 11:59pm on Wednesday May 12.