

POLS 206-100: American National Government and Politics

Summer 2016 | MTWRF 2:00 PM—3:35 PM | BLOC 102

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SPECIAL NOTE FOR SUMMER CLASSES

This is at the beginning of the syllabus for a reason! Please read me! Summer classes are an extraordinary demand on your time. We will meet every day, for a long time every day. You have to pay attention in lecture, and you have to study every day. There is a lot of reading. Read the book and look at your notes at least 20 minutes every day to avoid falling behind. We average a test a week. Get in touch with me as soon as you feel like you're falling behind. If at all possible, *do not miss an exam.*

Overview, Objectives, and Outcomes

This course is designed to provide you with a broad understanding of the development and mechanics of the American political system. This understanding, however, is as much theoretical as it is factual. The American political system is but one example of a government serving the public goods typically demanded by citizens. As such, we will discuss what those public goods are, potential solutions, the particular solution of the American government, and the implications of that solution for Americans.

This course aims to teach both the theoretical foundations behind the American political system as well as the historical development of that system. Specifically, we will cover the institutions of the American federal government—from their founding to present—and how they function, extra-governmental actors and their influence in the political process (lobbying firms, interest groups, and active citizens, among others), the importance of elections in affecting the political process, and recent trends in public opinion and political behavior of the average American.

Learning outcomes: by the end of the course, you should sufficiently understand American political system so that you feel qualified to participate in politics as an active and informed citizen. In addition, you should be able to articulate the theoretical motivations behind the institutions and processes of that system. Through all, you should think critically and skeptically, as a scientist.

Official catalog description: American National Government. (3-0). Credit 3. Survey of American national government, politics, and constitutional development.

Prerequisites

None.

Expectations

College is an environment in which you learn how to manage your time and set your priorities. I do not take attendance. There is, however, a strong correlation between course attendance and performance (not to mention that a substantial portion exam material is drawn from lectures). If you choose to come to class, you should do so responsibly. I fully expect that you will have done any assigned readings before coming to class. Class is much more interesting when you engage with both your instructor and the material. I also expect that you make a reasonable effort to maintain classroom decorum by refraining from reading newspapers, doing crossword puzzles, sleeping, texting, or playing on Facebook (or whatever social network/game/trend that I'm oblivious to). Please silence all cell phones.

Text

Geer, John G., Wendy J. Schiller, Jeffrey A. Segal, Richard Herrera, and Dana K. Glencross. 2015. *Gateways to Democracy (The Essentials) [3rd Edition]*. Cengage. ISBN: 978-1-285-85291-1.

The textbook is available at the MSC Bookstore, as well as the internet. There are older editions of this textbook. It is important to get the current edition, especially because of the 2014 election coverage. If you get an older edition, I can't promise that chapters and material will be identical. Roll the dice at your own discretion. Any other supplementary readings will be accessible to all Texas A&M University students through the University Libraries. Your textbook should come with access to Cengage's supplementary service, bizarrely named *MindTap*. There are optional quizzes (to prepare for tests), videos, and flashcards at this site. Only new copies come with *MindTap*.

Exams

The only assignments are three examinations. The exams are drawn from a mixture of lecture material and textbook material. The exam dates are:

Exam 1, June 10 (Friday):	25%
Exam 2, June 22 (Wednesday):	35%
Exam 3, July 1 (Friday):	40%

There is no final exam. On exam days, you are required to bring two things: a large, gray scantron and a photo identification (Texas A&M University student identification, driver's license, passport). You will not be permitted to take an examination without these two items. Grades will be posted at <http://ecampus.tamu.edu> as soon as possible. Make every effort to arrive to examinations on time. No examinations will be given out after the first examination is returned.

Makeup examinations will only be offered to those with a University excused absence, which can be found at <http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule07>. It is your responsibility to ensure that your absence is covered by the University, and it is your responsibility to comply with Student Rule 7.3, which requires that you notify me of your absence prior to the date of absence if such notification is feasible. If that is not feasible, you must notify me by the end of the second working day after the absence. If I need additional information on your absence (doctor's notes, for instance),

you must provide this additional documentation within one week of the last date of the absence. Note that Student Rule 7 also allows for makeup examinations for reasons deemed appropriate by the instructor. If you do not have a University excused absence, and you are going to miss an examination, it is much easier for me to work with you if you notify me promptly, especially if you can provide some sort of documentation. You can view your exams in my office the day after the relevant makeup period. **YOUR 4TH OF JULY PLANS ARE NOT AN EXCUSED ABSENCE.**

Makeup examinations will be offered the Monday after the regularly scheduled exam in 2029 Allen at 11:00 AM. These examinations may differ in content from the regular exams, but not in difficulty.

Grades

89.5-100:	A
79.5-89.49:	B
69.5-79.49:	C
59.5-69.49:	D
59.49↓:	F

I use the standard Texas A&M University grading scale. To maintain fairness, I do not change grades under any circumstances except when I make a mathematical error in computing your grade. There is a grade calculator at tinyurl.com/206gradecalc. Do not email me about when test grades will be posted or to calculate your grade.

Extra Credit

Extra credit may be offered at the discretion of the instructor throughout this class. There is absolutely no guarantee of extra credit. You should plan on there being no extra credit.

Et Cetera

Look around! There are a bunch of people in the class with you! As such, I ask that follow three guidelines when attempting to contact me. First: include the course number and section number [206-100] in the subject of your email. Your email will almost certainly get lost in the abyss if it missing this information. Second: wait at least 48 hours, not including weekends, to send a second email. I promise I will get to it, but it may not be immediate. Third: email me only from your Texas A&M University official email address. In the event that I need to contact you, it will almost certainly be at your @tamu.edu email address. You should check this email often!

Aggie Honor Code

An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do.

Texas A&M University is a institution committed to integrity and honor. It is your job as a University citizen to uphold those values. I will not tolerate any cheating or plagiarism, broadly defined as using unauthorized aids during examinations or attempting to represent someone else's

work as your own. You are not as sly as you think you are. With 250 heads facing forward, it is extremely easy to tell who is working alone and who is not. Be aware that violating the Aggie Honor Code can lead directly to failing the course and being referred to the Aggie Honor System Office. For additional information visit <http://aggiehonor.tamu.edu>.

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 believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, currently located in the Disability Services building at Student Services at White Creek complex on West Campus, or call 979.845.1637. For additional information visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>.

Any requests or arrangements made with the instructor in person must be followed up with an official email request for documentation. If you believe you may need an accommodation, it is your responsibility to contact Disability Services before the first exam.

Copyrighted Materials

The lectures, presentations (including slides), readings, and exams for this course are copyrighted, so you do not have the right to copy and distribute them. This includes recording class lectures.

Course Outline

PART I: WHAT THE GOVERNMENT MEANS TO YOU

Day 1 (May 31): What is “Politics” or “Science”? How is Political Science “Scientific”?

Gateways to Democracy, Chapter 1

Days 2 and 3 (June 1 - 2): The Constitution

Gateways to Democracy, Chapter 2

The Constitution. <http://constitutionus.com/>

June 2 (Thursday): Required Exam 1 practice quiz due by midnight.

Days 4 - 6 (June 3, 6 - 7): The Constitution, Civil Liberties, and Civil Rights

Gateways to Democracy, Chapters 4 and 5

The Constitutional Amendments. <http://constitutionus.com/#rbillofrights>

June 3 (Friday): Add/drop deadline.

Days 6 - 7 (June 7 - 8): Federalism

Gateways to Democracy, Chapter 3

Day 8 (June 9): Political Parties

Gateways to Democracy, Chapter 8

Day 9 (June 10): FRIDAY: Exam 1

PART II: THE INSTITUTIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT

Day 10 (June 13): Presidency

Gateways to Democracy, Chapter 11

Day 11 (June 14): Bureaucracy

Gateways to Democracy, Chapter 12

Day 12 (June 15): Judiciary

Gateways to Democracy, Chapter 13

Day 13 (June 16): Interest Groups

Gateways to Democracy, Chapter 7

Day 14 (June 17): Congress

Gateways to Democracy, Chapter 10

Day 15 (June 20): Lawmaking and Policymaking

Gateways to Democracy, Chapter 14

June 20 (Monday): Last day to Q-drop. Last day to withdraw for the first term.

Day 16 (June 21): Policies: Economic, Domestic, and Foreign

Gateways to Democracy, Chapter 14

Day 17 (June 22): WEDNESDAY: Exam 2

PART III: HOW YOU TYPICALLY THINK AND PARTICIPATE

Day 18 (June 23): Campaigns, Elections, and Voting

Gateways to Democracy, Chapter 9

Day 19 (June 24): Polling, Public Opinion, and Partisanship

Gateways to Democracy, Chapter 6

Day 20 (June 27): Mass Media

Gateways to Democracy, Chapter 6 (again)

Day 21 (June 28): Public Opinion

No reading.

Day 22 (June 29): Public Opinion and Political Psychology

Lau and Redlawsk, *Voting Correctly*. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2952076>

Pro tip: you must be logged in to `library.tamu.edu` to access this reading.

Day 23 (June 30): Polarization and Representation

Abramowitz and Saunders, *Is Polarization a Myth?*

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1017/s0022381608080493>

Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope. *Polarization in the American Public: Misconceptions and Misreadings*.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1017/S002238160808050X>

Day 24 (July 1): FRIDAY: Exam 3

Day 25 (July 5): Makeup for Exam 3 during regular class hours in Allen 2029.