INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT: STRUCTURE & FUNCTIONS
Political Science 142.013
(T/Th 2:00 – 3:15 PM., Ferguson 377)
Stephen F. Austin State University

Instructor: Mrs. Katie C. McClain  
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Office: Ferguson 478
Office Hours:
- Mon: 1:00-6:00 PM
- Wed: 1:00-2:00 PM
- Tues/Thurs: 10:00 AM-12:00 PM, 1:00–2:00 PM
  and by appointment

SI Leader: Ms. Dakota Rankin
SI Meeting Time & Place: Mondays & Wednesdays, 4:00 – 5:00 PM  
  Lumberjack Landing, Room 139H

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.” General Bulletin,  

This three-credit hour face-to-face course requires approximately 150 minutes of  
classroom time/direct instruction as well as at least six hours of out-of-class reading and  
studying each week in preparation for exams and completion of writing assignments.

There are no prerequisites for this course.

Course Objectives

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

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.
Student Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, you should be able to:

▪ Critically evaluate political science theories and approaches to institutional arrangements of the U.S. and Texas political systems, to national public policy, and to state public policy
▪ Communicate your understanding and interpretation of institutional arrangements of the U.S. and Texas political systems, and well as key domestic and foreign policy issues
▪ Understand social responsibility by examining national and / or state policy choices as they effect various regional, national, and global communities
▪ Understand, connect, and evaluate individual choices associated with national or state public policy options and / or theories and approaches to institutional design of political systems

Students are expected to go beyond rhetoric and ideology to develop critical thinking about the American political system. As a result, students are encouraged to ask questions and to challenge assumptions of class discussions while respecting the logical and reasoned positions of others.

Required Books/Readings

I believe in the use of open educational resources (OER). In other words, all required readings for this course are available for free online.

Your book (which is available in web view and PDF for free and can be purchased on iBooks or Amazon) is:
American Government from OpenStax
https://openstax.org/details/books/american-government-2e

Additional reading materials, most of which pertain to Texas government, will be provided through Brightspace by D2L by the instructor.

Course Requirements

Class Preparation
You are expected to review the assigned material before coming to class; doing so will help you understand the material. To fully understand the concepts covered in this course, you will likely need to review the assigned material more than once. Keeping up with the course requirements throughout the semester helps you better comprehend the content being covered and improves your likelihood of success in a course.

I also strongly encourage you to stay informed of current political events, as relating current events to the class material will help you understand the information and concepts covered in this course. Keep in mind that not all news outlets are equal when it comes to reputability. Recommended news sources include: PBS; BBC; CSPAN; Associated Press; NPR; and Reuters.
Attendance
Attendance is not mandatory for this class. Having said that, I encourage you to attend regularly, as a correlation exists between your attendance and your performance in the course. For documentation purposes, I will take attendance each class. It is your responsibility to sign the attendance sheet.

Participation
You are expected to arrive on time and be prepared to engage in critical evaluation of the topic of the day, actively contribute to class discussions, participate in any in-class activities, and make meaningful contributions to the learning experience. Please feel free to voice your opinions (as long as you do not intentionally insult your fellow classmates). Opinions generate class discussions, which in turn generate knowledge and understanding.

Use of Mobile Electronic Communications/Entertainment Devices in Class
There will be times that we will utilize technology in our classroom as part of in-class activities or exam reviews. Unless otherwise indicated by the instructor, the use of mobile electronic communications/entertainment devices is prohibited and will be considered disruptive behavior. Laptops are permitted for taking notes; however, the instructor reserves the right to prohibit their use in the event that misuse occurs during class time.

Email Communications with Instructor
Email is the best way to reach me. I will do my best to respond to your emails in a timely manner (within 24 hours, with the exception of emails received on the weekend or during university holidays). With that being said, please do not wait until the last minute to send me time-sensitive questions.

To ensure emails do not get lost or mistakenly deleted, please include the course code and general description of the email in the subject line for all emails sent to the instructor. [Example: PSC 142 – Writing Assignment Question] Email communications that do not follow this format may not be responded to timely or at all. Additionally, the body of each email should be written coherently with the question or issue described in a clear and thoughtful manner. If the answer to your question can be found in the syllabus, catalog, or course schedule, I will refer you to the appropriate resource. I will not respond to emails requesting a summary of material covered during a class meeting that the student missed. If you are absent and would like to discuss the material we covered in class, please plan to meet with a classmate or stop by my office.

Grading Policy
Grades will be determined using the following weights:

- Examinations: 70%
- Writing Assignment: 10%
- Group Presentations: 10%
- Quizzes: 10%
Grade Point Average (GPA) for this course is assessed using the following scale:

- A = 90 – 100%
- B = 80 – 89%
- C = 70 – 79%
- D = 60 – 69%
- F = Less than 60%

Examinations (70 percent): There will be three (3) unit examinations and one final examination. Unit exams will not be cumulative; the final exam will be cumulative. Exams (except make-up exams) will consist of multiple-choice, matching, true/false, fill-in-the-blank, and/or short answer questions. Material for the exams comes from classroom discussions as well as assigned readings. You are responsible for each of these. Class sessions do not cover all material from the assigned readings, but all assigned readings, regardless of whether the material is discussed in class, may be incorporated into the exams.

I will drop the lowest of your four exam grades when calculating your final grade for this course. Therefore, if you are content with your grades on the unit exams, you are not required to take the cumulative final exam.

Make-up exams will be given only in the case of documented illness, documented emergencies, death in the family, university related absences, or similar unavoidable circumstances. Make-up exams may differ in format from scheduled exams. In the event of a missed exam, the student is responsible for informing the instructor as to the nature of the absence and providing the necessary documentation. Failure to do so will result in a score of zero (0) points on the exam.

Writing Assignment (10 percent): There will be one writing assignment in which you will thoroughly discuss a public policy area of your choice. Topics should be submitted electronically to the corresponding D2L dropbox for instructor approval by the date indicated in the tentative course schedule. Failure to do so will result in a ten (10) point deduction from the student’s final writing assignment grade. Completed writing assignments must be submitted to the appropriate course dropbox by the due date indicated in the tentative course schedule.

Late writing assignments will be accepted with a deduction of 20 points per day for each day following the assignment due date. Plagiarism will result in a score of zero (0) points for the assignment.

Writing assignments will be evaluated using a rubric, with the main emphasis on the content, mechanics, conventions, and organization. The writing assignment prompt is included on the last page of this syllabus. Additional guidelines (including length and formatting requirements and information concerning what to include in the content of your paper), resources, and an evaluation rubric are available on Brightspace by D2L.

Group Presentations (10 percent): There will be three group presentations during the semester. Each group will discuss a contemporary political issue and prepare a five (5) to six (6) minute presentation. Groups must submit their topics electronically to the corresponding D2L dropbox for instructor approval one week prior to the day of the
presentation. This helps to ensure your topic is appropriate and reduce the likelihood of topic duplication amongst groups. Each student’s individual research (formatted as MLA citations) must be submitted electronically to the corresponding D2L dropbox prior to the start of class on the day of the presentation. Failure to do so will result in a ten (10) point deduction from the student’s overall presentation grade.

Presentations should remain on topic. Having said that, creativity is encouraged; you may use a variety of techniques including debates, role-playing, game shows, editorial commentary, and explaining the topic from different perspectives or opposing viewpoints. Avoid descriptive presentations that involve reading your research and avoid using the same format for each presentation.

In the event a student misses a group presentation, he or she will be responsible for contacting the instructor to schedule a make-up presentation. Failure to do so will result in a score of zero (0) points on the presentation.

Presentations will be evaluated using a rubric, with the main emphasis on delivery, organization, and content. To assist in the accuracy of grading, the instructor has the right to record the presentations. Additional resources pertaining to group presentations, including an evaluation rubric, are available on Brightspace by D2L.

**Quizzes (10 percent):** Timed quizzes will be administered on the D2L course page and will review content from the assigned readings for the upcoming class and/or previous lectures. Quizzes will open at 8:00 a.m. on Monday and will close the following Sunday at 11:59 p.m. You will have ten (10) minutes to complete and submit a quiz, which may consist of multiple choice, true/false, matching, and/or fill in the blank questions. Of the administered quizzes, the ten (10) quizzes with the highest grades will be used for determining the final grade for this course.

Once quizzes are graded, you will be able to review your responses along with the correct answers. I highly encourage you to review each quiz and take note of any questions you may have answered incorrectly, as this will help guide your study efforts.

There will be no opportunity to make-up or retake quizzes.

**Extra Credit Opportunities:** Extra credit opportunities may be available at the instructor’s discretion. Any extra credit opportunities will be announced on D2L and in class.

**University Policies and Additional Information**

**Academic Integrity (University Policy 4.1)**
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.

**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

Withheld Grades (University Policy 5.5)
Ordinarily, 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.

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/.

Student Conduct (University Policy 10.4)
Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (see the full Student Conduct Code at http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/student-code-of-conduct-10.4.pdf). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students who disrupt the learning environment may be asked to leave class and may be subject to judicial, academic or other penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the classroom. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the iCare Early Alert Program. This program provides students with recommendations for resources or other assistance that is available to help SFA students succeed.

Technical Support
Brightness by D2L: http://sfaonline.sfasu.edu/; d2l@sfasu.edu; 936.468.1919
Technical Support Center: https://help.sfasu.edu/TCClient/Home/
helpdesk@sfasu.edu; 936.468.4357
**General Education Core Curriculum Assessment**

**General Education Core Curriculum**

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has identified six core learning objectives listed at the front of this syllabus. SFA is committed to the improvement of its general education core curriculum by regular assessment of student performance on these six objectives. PSC 142: American Government: Structure and Functions is a general education core curriculum course and fulfills the Critical Thinking Skills general education core curriculum requirement.

During the semester, you will receive an assignment associated with general education core curriculum assessment. When you complete the assignment you will upload the assignment to the “Core Curriculum – Critical Thinking Skills” dropbox that you will find on your account in Brightspace by D2L. This dropbox is for core curriculum assessment only. Your course instructor may provide another set of instructions for submitting this assignment for your course grade.

If you have any questions, please see your instructor or contact the Office of Institutional Effectiveness at (936) 468-1038 or assessment@sfasu.edu.

The chart below indicates the core objectives addressed by this course, the assignment(s) that will be used to assess the objectives in this course and uploaded to the Critical Thinking Skills dropbox this semester.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Objective</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Course Assignment</th>
<th>Date Due in D2L</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking Skills</td>
<td>To include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information.</td>
<td>Public Policy Writing Assignment</td>
<td>November 24, 2019</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>To include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas though written, oral, and visual communication.</td>
<td>Not Assessed in Fall 2019</td>
<td>Not Assessed in Fall 2019</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Public Policy Writing Assignment
For this assignment, each student will select a specific area of public policy, for example the issue of the national debt and budget deficit. You will develop a well-written essay on that public policy issue. Your assignment must include one or more graphic representations of some aspect of the material that you are discussing. A chart or a graph of data showing trends in the size of the national debt, spending priorities of the national government, etc. are examples. This assignment will directly assess your mastery of the Core Curriculum Objective(s) assigned to this course. For this semester, we will assess the Core Curriculum Objective of critical thinking skills.

As you address the points raised above, you must show Mastery of critical thinking by:

- Clear and concise definitions of key terms in the public policy selected, for example defining the national debt and budget deficit
- Correctly identifying and evaluating explanations for the public policy issue, for example identifying reasons for the national debt and budget deficit and evaluating explanations for the existence of the national debt and deficit.
- Recognition of context and assumptions, for example the context of causes of the national debt and budget deficit evaluated from multiple perspectives
- Evaluation of the advantages and disadvantages of the explanation(s) related to the public policy and the construction of a logical conclusion that demonstrate synthesis of multiple points of view. For example, a discussion of the advantages of solving the national debt through spending cuts, or by raising taxes, or by reforming entitlement programs with clear reference to the complexity of the proposed solution. A similar discussion of the disadvantages associated with the selected solution must occur.
- Conclusions and related outcomes reflect informed evaluation of the topic.

This assignment fulfills both the requirements of this course and the needs of Stephen F. Austin State University’s Core Curriculum Assessment Plan with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board. This assignment should be submitted to the both the PSC 142 course Brightspace by D2L website and the Core Curriculum Brightspace by D2L website by November 24, 2019 at 11:59 p.m. Your assignment must be uploaded to both Brightspace by D2L locations in order to be graded.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week / Dates</th>
<th>Topic &amp; Readings</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1 8/26 – 9/1</td>
<td>Introduction to Government and Politics Ch. 1</td>
<td>Quiz #1 due by 9/1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2 9/2 – 9/8</td>
<td>Federalism; U.S. &amp; Texas Constitutions Ch. 2, 3</td>
<td>Quiz #2 due by 9/8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3 9/9 – 9/15</td>
<td>U.S. &amp; Texas Legislatures Ch. 11, 14.3, 14.4</td>
<td>Presentation #1 topic approval by 9/12 Quiz #3 due by 9/15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 4 9/16 – 9/22</td>
<td>U.S. &amp; Texas Legislatures Ch. 11, 14.3, 14.4</td>
<td>Presentation #1 on 9/19 (research due) Quiz #4 due by 9/22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 5 9/23 – 9/29</td>
<td>End of Unit 1 / U.S. President Ch. 12</td>
<td>Exam #1 on 9/24 Quiz #5 due by 9/29</td>
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<td>Week 6 9/30 – 10/6</td>
<td>U.S. President; Texas Plural Executive Ch. 12, 14.3</td>
<td>Writing Assignment topic approval by 10/6 Quiz #6 due by 10/6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 7 10/7 – 10/13</td>
<td>U.S. &amp; Texas Bureaucracy Ch. 15</td>
<td>Presentation #2 topic approval by 10/10 Quiz #7 due by 10/13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 8 10/14 – 10/20</td>
<td>Local Government Ch. 14.1, 14.5</td>
<td>Presentation #2 on 10/17 (research due) Quiz #8 due by 10/20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 9 10/21 – 10/27</td>
<td>End of Unit 2 / Judicial Systems Ch. 13</td>
<td>Exam #2 on 10/22 Quiz #9 due by 10/27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 10 10/28 – 11/3</td>
<td>U.S. Courts Ch. 13</td>
<td>Quiz #10 due by 11/3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 11 11/4 – 11/10</td>
<td>Texas Judiciary</td>
<td>Presentation #3 topic approval by 11/5 Quiz #11 due by 11/10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 12 11/11 – 11/17</td>
<td>End of Unit 3</td>
<td>Presentation #3 on 11/12 (research due) Exam #3 on 11/14 Quiz #12 due by 11/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 13 11/18 – 11/24</td>
<td>Introduction to Public Policy; U.S. Public Policy Ch. 16, 17</td>
<td>Completed Writing Assignment due by 11/24 Quiz #13 due by 11/24</td>
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<td>Week 14 11/25 – 12/1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 15 12/2 – 12/8</td>
<td>Texas Public Policy</td>
<td>Quiz #14 due by 12/8</td>
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**THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY**

**FINAL EXAM:** Thursday, December 12, 2019, 1:30 – 4:00 p.m.