INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN GOVERNMENT: STRUCTURE & FUNCTIONS
Political Science 142.010
(MWF 11:00 – 11:50 AM, Ferguson 179)
Stephen F. Austin State University
Spring 2020 (01.15.2020 – 05.08.2019)

Instructor: Mrs. Katie C. McClain
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Phone: 936.468.1494
Department: Government
Office: Ferguson 478

Student Hours:
Mon, Wed, & Fri: 9:00-10:00 AM, 1:00-2:00 PM
Tues: 5:30-6:30 PM
and by appointment

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, 2019-2020.

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 readings and materials, many 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.

**Email Communications with Instructor**
Email ([kmclain@sfasu.edu](mailto:kmclain@sfasu.edu)) 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.

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 Brightspace by D2L dropbox for instructor approval. 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, 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 Brightspace by 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 Brightspace by 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.

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 for 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 Brightspace by D2L course page and will review content from assigned readings/materials and lectures. Quizzes will open Mondays at 8:00 a.m. and will close Sundays at 11:59 p.m. on the weeks indicated on the syllabus. 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. 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 Brightspace by 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**
*Brightspace by D2L:* http://sfaonline.sfasu.edu/; d2l@sfasu.edu; 936.468.1919
*Technical Support Center:* https://help.sfasu.edu/TDClient/Home/; helpdesk@sfasu.edu; 936.468.4357
## Tentative Course Calendar

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic &amp; Readings</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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| **Week 1** 1/15 – 1/19  | Introduction to Government and Politics  
AG Ch. 1 | --- |
| **Week 2** 1/20 – 1/26  | U.S. & Texas Constitutions  
AG Ch. 3; D2L | Quiz #1 and Quiz #2 due by 1/26 |
| **Week 3** 1/27 – 2/2  | U.S. Congress  
AG Ch. 11 | Quiz #3 due by 2/2 |
| **Week 4** 2/3 – 2/9  | Texas Legislature  
AG Ch. 14.3, 14.4; D2L | Presentation #1 topic approval by 2/5  
Quiz #4 due by 2/9 |
| **Week 5** 2/10 – 2/16  | End of Unit 1 | Presentation #1 on 2/12 (research due)  
Exam #1 on 2/14 |
| **Week 6** 2/17 – 2/23  | U.S. President  
AG Ch. 12 | Writing Assignment topic approval by 2/23  
Quiz #5 due by 2/23 |
| **Week 7** 2/24 – 3/1  | U.S. Bureaucracy; Texas Plural Executive  
AG Ch. 15; D2L | Presentation #2 topic approval by 2/26  
Quiz #6 and Quiz #7 due by 3/1 |
| **Week 8** 3/2 – 3/8  | End of Unit 2 | Presentation #2 on 3/4 (research due)  
Exam #2 on 3/6 |
| **Week 9** 3/9 – 3/15  | **SPRING BREAK** | |
| **Week 10** 3/16 – 3/22  | U.S. Courts  
AG Ch. 13; D2L | Quiz #8 due by 3/22 |
| **Week 11** 3/23 – 3/29  | Texas Judiciary  
D2L | Quiz #9 due by 3/29 |
| **Week 12** 3/30 – 4/5  | Local Government  
AG Ch. 14.1, 14.5; D2L | Presentation #3 topic approval by 3/30  
Quiz #10 due by 4/5 |
| **Week 13** 4/6 – 4/12  | End of Unit 3 | Presentation #3 on 4/6 (research due)  
Exam #3 on 4/8 |
| **Week 14** 4/13 – 4/19  | Introduction to Public Policy;  
U.S. Domestic Policy  
AG Ch. 16 | Quiz #11 due by 4/19 |
| **Week 15** 4/20 – 4/26  | U.S. Domestic & Foreign Policy  
AG Ch. 16, 17 | Writing Assignment due 4/26  
Quiz #12 due by 4/26 |
| **Week 16** 4/27 – 5/3  | Texas Public Policy  
D2L | Quiz #13 due by 5/3 |

**FINAL EXAM: Wednesday, May 6, 2020, 10:45 a.m. – 1:15 p.m.**