INTRODUCTION TO AMERICAN FEDERAL GOVERNMENT
Political Science 2305.014
Stephen F. Austin State University
Fall 2023

Course Meeting Time: T/TH: 11:00-12:15
Course Location: Vera Dugas 142
Instructor: Michael Tkacik
Office Location: McKibben (EDU) 381 (Honors School)
Office Hours: MWF: 11:00 am – 1:00 pm; T/R: 12:30 pm – 2:30 pm; and by appointment (please make an appointment)
Office Phone: 468-2813
E-mail: mtkacik@sfasu.edu (this is the best way to reach me)

Course Description

This course includes development of the U.S. Constitution, structure and powers of the national government, including the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, federalism, political participation, the national election process, public policy, civil liberties, and civil rights.

General Education Core Curriculum

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has identified six core learning objectives: Critical Thinking Skills, Communication Skills, Empirical and Quantitative Skills, Teamwork, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility. SFA is committed to the improvement of its general education core curriculum by regular assessment of student performance on these six 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, students will:
• better understand how government affects their lives;
• have learned about federal political systems;
• understand the structure and functions of the three branches of the federal government (Legislative, Executive, and Judicial) and the bureaucracy;
• gain greater interest in contemporary political issues;
• become knowledgeable about public policies (domestic and foreign); and,
• develop the ability to critically analyze information.

Course Contact Hours and Study Hours

In compliance with SFA Policy 5.4, you are expected to spend 150 minutes each week attending class. In addition, you should spend 300 minutes each week in preparation for class. This time includes reading and reviewing material from your assigned readings, as well as reviewing notes from class, working on class assignments, and studying for exams.

Text and Materials

The text is: Barbour and Wright, *Keeping the Republic*, 10th Edition (Sage). (I’m not stuck on this edition. You should be ok with any edition you can get, so long as you do the reading.)

I may assign outside readings throughout the class.

Course Requirements

There will be four exams in this class.

I want us to think about “informed citizenship” this semester. There is a great deal of mistrust of the media, other institutions, and our fellow citizens today. While some of the mistrust of the media is justified, political entrepreneurs drive much of it. I want the class to be able to examine and reach defensible conclusions about the quality of information we consume, from both the traditional media and especially the other options available on social media, the internet, and elsewhere.

I also want to give all of you the opportunity to register to vote in Nacogdoches. Given that you will be spending at least 2/3s of the year in Nacogdoches, it makes a great deal of sense to register here. For those of you who have never registered and/or voted, I want to help you to register and vote, based on your values and informed opinions.

You are expected to read the assigned material before class and to participate in class. You will gain more from the course (and earn a better grade) if you read and participate. It is assumed that students regularly read a major current newspaper such as *The New York Times* (www.nytimes.com), *The Wall Street Journal* (https://www.wsj.com/), *The Washington Post* (www.washingtonpost.com), *The Economist* (https://www.economist.com/), or the *Financial Times* (www.ft.com). Many of these can be accessed for free via Steen Library.


You will note a lack the lack of Infowars (Alex Jones), The Grayzone, Palmer Report, Judicial Watch, and similar websites. These websites are either entertainment websites that masquerade as objective news, just like talk radio and TV “talk shows,” or conspiracy-centered websites. These are not reputable sources of information. They are propaganda sites pushing a particular political and economic objective.

I would further encourage you to critically examine the readings, lectures, and class discussions. One of the
primary benefits arising out of a solid liberal arts education is critical thinking. You will never be penalized in this class for asking questions, for seeking clarification, or for disagreeing with my interpretation of some subject. Of course, this does not mean that you are free to invent your own answers on the exams.

Grading Policy

Examinations: Examinations (except makeup exams) will consist of multiple choice and/or true/false questions. Each exam, including the final exam, covers a specific segment of lectures and readings, and each will have equal value in determining the final course grade. You need to bring a Scantron answer sheet (Form #882-ES) and a sharpened #2 pencil for each exam.

Tentative exam dates are noted below. The final exam will be given at the time and date specified in the official University calendar. Students should check the University schedule before planning any end-of-semester trips or activities since it will not be possible to change dates for the final exam. **No early exams will be given under any circumstances.**

Exams will cover both the reading and lecture material. You are responsible for each.

Grading Policy: Grades will be determined by four examinations, each counting 1/4 toward the final grade (100 points per exam). The following scale will be used for this course, based on a total of 400 aggregate points available for the semester.

- A = 360-400 points
- B = 320-359 points
- C = 280-319 points
- D = 240-279 points
- F = Less than 240 points

Class Participation: Meaningful class participation is encouraged. This means participation about the topic at hand, illuminated by the readings. For students who regularly thus participate, I reserve the right to add up to ten (10) points to their aggregate point total (above). This may help the borderline student on occasion. These additional points, whether zero or ten or somewhere in between, are based entirely on my discretion and depend upon exceptional participation.

Disinformation Across Media: Some have said we now live in a “post-truth society.” Their point is not simply that different policy options exist, but rather that the underlying truths (related to science but also related to what actually occurs in day-to-day life) no longer exist. For example, a notable segment of the American population claims climate change does not exist, despite widespread scientific agreement otherwise. Similarly, for a significant part of the American population, conspiracy theories abound. I want us to learn to spot disinformation in the media (broadly defined to include social media).

It is important for us to agree on basic facts as Americans. We can differ as to policy choices, but if we cannot agree on basic facts, we can’t even hold a conversation about the policy choices that may follow. These assignments associated with the disinformation are included in the Media section of this syllabus and may be worth up to 40 extra credit points, to be added to your final point total above.

These assignments falling under the Media section of the syllabus are as follows:

The following assignments are linked. You must do them in order. You CANNOT get
credit for a later assignment unless you completed the earlier assignment first. If you don’t complete the first assignment on time, you can’t do the second.

A. Got Bad News Game Assignment (due date: TBD) (Communication Skills/Personal Responsibility): https://www.getbadnews.com

   Print out your final score when finished with the game. (20 points extra credit)


   Review the webpage and write a three-page paper (typed) that shows how they are using the tools introduced in the game (due date: TBD). (20 points extra credit)

The total points earned for these two assignments will be added to your aggregate point total for the class.

Attendance Policy

I have no attendance policy. You’re an adult. Make adult decisions.

However, if you’re not in class, you won’t have the opportunity to participate. Moreover, a significant portion of the test material comes from lecture. If you skip class, you’ll miss that lecture and may struggle with the related test questions. I will not provide my lecture notes to you. There are no “Power Point” notes. You’ll have to ask someone who was in class for their notes.

Please show up on time for class. I will shut and lock the door once class begins. You will not be permitted to enter once the door is shut.

Academic Integrity

The Code of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity outlines the prohibited conduct by any student enrolled in a course at SFA. It is the responsibility of all members of all faculty, staff, and students to adhere to and uphold this policy.

Articles IV, VI, and VII of the new Code of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity outline the violations and procedures concerning academic conduct, including cheating, plagiarism, collusion, and misrepresentation. Cheating includes, but is not limited to: (1) Copying from the test paper (or other assignment) of another student, (2) Possession and/or use during a test of materials that are not authorized by the person giving the test, (3) Using, obtaining, or attempting to obtain by any means the whole or any part of a non-administered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program, or using a test that has been administered in prior classes or semesters without permission of the Faculty member, (4) Substituting for another person, or permitting another person to substitute for one’s self, to take a test, (5) Falsifying research data, laboratory reports, and/or other records or academic work offered for credit, (6) Using any sort of unauthorized resources or technology in completion of educational activities.
Plagiarism is the appropriation of material that is attributable in whole or in part to another source or the use of one’s own previous work in another context without citing that it was used previously, without any indication of the original source, including words, ideas, illustrations, structure, computer code, and other expression or media, and presenting that material as one’s own academic work being offered for credit or in conjunction with a program course or degree requirements.

Collusion is the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic assignments offered for credit or collaboration with another person to commit a violation of any provision of the rules on academic dishonesty, including disclosing and/or distributing the contents of an exam.

Misrepresentation is providing false grades or résumés; providing false or misleading information in an effort to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment for the purpose of obtaining an academic or financial benefit for oneself or another individual or to injure another student academically or financially.

**Withheld Grades Semester Grades 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 coursework 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 to compute the grade point average. For additional information, go to [https://www.sfasu.edu/policies/course-grades-5.5.pdf](https://www.sfasu.edu/policies/course-grades-5.5.pdf).

**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/](http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/).

**Student Wellness and Well Being**

SFA values students’ overall well-being, mental health and the role it plays in academic and overall student success. Students may experience stressors that can impact both their academic experience and their personal well-being. These may include academic pressure and challenges associated with relationships, emotional well-being, alcohol and other drugs, identities, finances, etc.

If you are experiencing concerns, seeking help, SFA provides a variety of resources to support students’ mental health and wellness. Many of these resources are free, and all of them are confidential.
On-campus Resources:

The Dean of Students Office (Rusk Building, 3rd floor lobby)
www.sfasu.edu/deanofstudents
936.468.7249
dos@sfasu.edu

SFA Human Services Counseling Clinic Human Services, Room 202
www.sfasu.edu/humanservices/139.asp
936.468.1041

The Health and Wellness Hub “The Hub”
Location: corner of E. College and Raguet St.

To support the health and well-being of every Lumberjack, the Health and Wellness Hub offers comprehensive services that treat the whole person – mind, body and spirit. Services include:

- Health Services
- Counseling Services
- Student Outreach and Support
- Food Pantry
- Wellness Coaching
- Alcohol and Other Drug Education

www.sfasu.edu/thehub
936.468.4008
thehub@sfasu.edu

Crisis Resources:

- Burke 24-hour crisis line: 1.800.392.8343
- National Suicide Crisis Prevention: 9-8-8
- Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1.800.273.TALK (8255)
- johCrisis Text Line: Text HELLO to 741-741

Acceptable Student Behavior

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. 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 Early Alert Program (also known as iCare). This program provides students with recommendations for resources or other assistance that is available to help SFA students succeed.

Some examples of inappropriate behavior include, but are not limited to:

1. arriving late for class;
2. talking while your classmates are talking or I am talking;
3. distracting your classmates or me; and/or,
4. using a cell phone (texting, talking, ringing, or otherwise), tablet, or other electronic device (you
may, of course, use a notebook or tablet for note-taking purposes).

Course Complaints

Any college course complaints or problems should first be discussed with the course instructor for the
particular course. Difficulties can usually be resolved there. If the complaint cannot be resolved, the next
person to see is the appropriate department chairperson.

Communication

Each student must use their: @jacks.sfasu.edu email account. This is SFA policy. You are deemed to have
received any message sent to your sfasu.edu account. If you use another account, have your SFA email
forwarded to that account. Make sure your sfasu.edu email does not go to a quarantine folder and/or is not
interpreted as spam. All official communication in this class will occur through your sfasu.edu account.

PLEASE NOTE: I will not respond to communication via D2L. Please email me at: mtkacik@sfasu.edu.
I do not use D2L beyond a few “housekeeping” issues for class (such as posting the syllabus and grades).

Additional Points

Dates to Remember: 18-26 November 2023 - Thanksgiving Break; 11-15 December 2023 - Finals Week;
13 January 2024 – Residence Halls Open; 18 January 2024 – Spring Classes Begin.

Other Useful Dates: 31 August 2023 – last day to register online (5:00 pm); 8 November 2023 – last day
to drop/withdraw;

Absolutely no early exams will be given. No make-up exams will be given unless documentary evidence
is provided to show a medical emergency or other University accepted excuse. If given, the make-up exam
may be more difficult and different in kind from the regularly scheduled exam. Thus, a make-up exam may
(or may not) include essay questions. A make-up exam may also be cumulative in nature (as opposed to
regularly scheduled exams, which will not be cumulative). It is in your interest to take the regularly
scheduled exams.

All make-up exams must be taken Friday, December 8, 2023 at noon. A room will be reserved so that
all students can take the make-up exam at the same time; the place for exams will be announced in class.

You are strongly encouraged to take extensive class notes. One of your objectives should be the
development of writing and note-taking skills. Therefore, please do not use any recording devices in this
class. My lectures are my legally protected work product.

Grades will be available on D2L.
Do not arrive late for class.

Treat everyone in the class with respect and courtesy. While our political leaders may have lost all sense of decorum, I think civility and courtesy still have places in society.

All students are expected to demonstrate professional behavior and use language appropriate for the classroom learning experience.

Cell phones and electronic devices (except computers for note taking) should be turned off and put away during class time.

During tests, no electronic devices will be permitted at your desk except a watch (not a cell phone that tells time, but a watch).

During tests, please turn your baseball caps so they are facing backward.

Unless otherwise explicitly noted, all assignments are due at the beginning of class on the date specified.


**I reserve the right to eject any student who violates these or other rules.**

Changes to Syllabus/Class

I RESERVE THE RIGHT TO MODIFY ANY PORTION OF THE CLASS AND/OR SYLLABUS. SHOULD THE NEED ARISE, I WILL NOTIFY YOU BY EMAIL AT YOUR SFASU.EDU ACCOUNT.

Tentative Assignments and Core Curriculum Objective

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Core Curriculum Objective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>General Introduction</td>
<td>(Critical Thinking, Social Responsibility)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is Politics? (No Reading)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>U.S. Political Culture (Text, Chapter 4)</td>
<td>(Personal Responsibility and Social Responsibility)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 2 &amp; 3</td>
<td>U.S. Constitution (Text, Chapter 1)</td>
<td>(Critical Thinking)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>Federalism (Text, Chapter 2)</td>
<td>(Critical Thinking)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>TEST 1</strong> (Critical Thinking)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 5-6</td>
<td>Civil Liberties (Text, Chapter 3)</td>
<td>(Personal Responsibility)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 6-7</td>
<td>Civil Rights (Text, Chapter 3)</td>
<td>(Social Responsibility)</td>
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<td><strong>TEST 2</strong> (Personal Responsibility and Social Responsibility)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Week 8  Public Opinion, Participation and Voting (Text, Chapters 5) (Personal Responsibility)

Writing Assignment (10 October) (Communication Skills)

Week 9  Political Parties and Interest Groups (Text, Chapters 7) (Personal Responsibility)

Week 10  Media (Text, Chapter 6) (Personal Responsibility and Communication Skills)

The following assignments are linked. You must do them in order. You CANNOT get credit for a later assignment unless you completed the earlier assignment first. If you don’t complete the first assignment on time, you can’t do the second.

A.  Got Bad News Game Assignment (due date: TBD) (Communication Skills/Personal Responsibility): https://www.getbadnews.com

   Print out your final score when finished with the game. (10 points extra credit)


   Review the webpage and write a three-page paper (typed) that shows how they are using the tools introduced in the game (due date: TBD). (20 points extra credit)

The total points earned for these two assignments will be added to your aggregate point total for the class.

Week 11  Congress (Text, Chapter 9) (Critical Thinking)

Week 12  President (Text, Chapter 10) (Critical Thinking)

TEST 3 (Critical Thinking and Personal Responsibility)

Week 13  Bureaucracy (Text, Chapter 11) (Critical Thinking)

Week 14  Federal Courts, (Text, Chapter 12) (Critical Thinking)

Week 15  Domestic Policy and Foreign Policy (Text, Chapters 15 & 16) (Social Responsibility)

Week 16  FINAL EXAM (December 12, 2023) (10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.) (Critical Thinking and Social Responsibility)

Voting Information

Voter Registration:  http://www.votetexas.gov/ or http://votetexas.gov/register-to-vote/
Assessment Addendum

General Education Core Curriculum

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has identified six core learning objectives: Critical Thinking Skills, Communication Skills, Empirical and Quantitative Skills, Teamwork, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility. SFA is committed to the improvement of its general education core curriculum by regular assessment of student performance on these six objectives.

By enrolling in GOVT 2305: Federal Government you are also enrolling in a Core Curriculum Course that fulfills the Core Curriculum / General Education Objectives of Communication Skills (Visual and Written), Critical Thinking, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility.

The chart below indicates: (a) The core objectives that are required to be taught in this course per the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB), (b) How the required core objectives will be addressed.

During the semester, you will receive assignments that 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. If you have any questions, please see your instructor or the Office of Student Learning and Institutional Assessment at (936) 468-1130.

The chart below indicates the core objectives addressed by this course and the assignment(s) that will be used to assess the objectives associated with this course:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Objective</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Course Assignment Titles</th>
<th>Date Due</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>To include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas though written, oral, and visual communication.</td>
<td>1) Homework Assignment</td>
<td>TBD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td>To include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information</td>
<td>1) Exam 1 and 4</td>
<td>Exam 1: TBD</td>
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<td>Exam 4: 12 December 2023, 10:30-12:30</td>
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<td>Social Responsibility</td>
<td>To include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to effectively engage in regional, national, and global communities</td>
<td>1) Exam 1, 2, and 4</td>
<td>Exam 1: TBD</td>
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<td>Exam 2: TBD</td>
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<td>Personal Responsibility</td>
<td>To include the ability to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making</td>
<td>1) Exam 1, 2, and 3</td>
<td>Exam 1: TBD</td>
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<td>Exam 2: TBD</td>
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<td>Exam 3: TBD</td>
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