

POLS 1333: AMERICAN & TEXAS GOVERNMENT I

Prothro-Yeager College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Department of Political Science

Spring 2025

Section X22 & Section X66 (Online)

Contact Information

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Course Description

This course will introduce students to the American political system with a brief survey of the political dynamics of the state of Texas. By the conclusion of this course, students will have a basic understanding of the key components of American and Texas politics, such as political culture, the constitution, federalism, election, political parties, interest groups, and the media. To do that, we will study historical evolution of the American political system and see how Texas state politics have developed in conjunction with the federal government. This course also provides students with opportunities to practice various analytical skills in a range of real-world cases. Classes will include lecture, debates, and presentations, which will help students stay up to date on current issues.

Course Objectives

By the completion of this course, students are expected to have achieved the following learning outcomes. They will be able to:

- describe the structure of federalism and the key features of the U.S. Constitution.
- understand the main ideas of the Founding Fathers and the philosophers and how their ideas influenced the creation of the Constitution.
- explain US political parties, their history and formation, and interest groups.
- articulate how campaigns and elections work in the United States and the state of Texas.
- discuss the media and how it influences political outcomes in the United States and the state of Texas.
- Outline how collective action by citizenry impacts policy outcomes and institutional rules in the United States and the state of Texas.

***NOTE:** The syllabus provides a general plan for the course, and changes may be necessary throughout the semester. Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor. Any changes made to this syllabus will be announced in class and posted on D2L.

Course Requirements

Completing ALL the readings and regular attendance (online) will be required of all students. Active participation in discussions is critical for students to succeed in this course.

Assignment	Point	Notes
Final exam	30	Online format (D2L lockdown browser)
Midterm exam	30	Online format (D2L lockdown browser)
Current event essays (2)	10 (5 x 2)	500 words each
Movie reflection papers (2)	10 (5 x 2)	500 words each
Engagement	20	Online attendance & participation

- 1. Exams (Midterm: 30 points / Final: 30 points):** Each exam will consist of multiple-choice questions and some short answer questions. Questions will test your understanding of the key concepts of American and Texas politics that will be covered in class. For both exams, I will utilize the Respondus Lockdown Browser and Respondus Monitor. A study guide will be provided before the exams.
- 2. Current event essays (10 points):** Students will choose 2 topical political issues over the semester and write a short analysis paper on them (500 words each). The topic may be any political/social issues in which you are interested or about which you have a strong opinion. A good paper must be critical and goes beyond a summary of the issue. Originality will be critical for your grade (similarity rate above 5% will be penalized). This assignment should be submitted electronically via D2L.
- 3. Movie reflections papers (10 points):** During the semester, we will watch 2 movies on American politics. You will be expected to respond to each of the movies in a short reflection paper (500 words). Again, your response must be critical and go beyond a summary or a description of those movies. Originality will be critical for your grade (All assistance or similarity rate above 5% will be penalized). All papers should be submitted electronically via D2L.
- 4. Engagement with the course (20 points):** This is a fully online course; however, your attendance and participation are still vital to learning the material presented in this course. Lecture slides and assignments will be posted on D2L based on the course schedule below. Regular logins to D2L to participate online discussions will be required. I will closely monitor your participation and consider your original postings as your attendance and replies to other students' postings as your class participation. In each week, the online discussion boards will become unable to write at 11:00 pm on Sunday. Past discussion boards will not be reopened.

Your final grade will be based on the quality of assignments listed above. It will be determined using the following percentage scale:

- A = 100-90
- B = 89-80
- C = 79-70
- D = 69-60
- F < 60

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

All the material for this course will be located on the MSU D2L platform. Each student is expected to be familiar with this platform as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You should regularly check D2L and the email hosted via D2L for important course information. If you experience any difficulties, please contact the IT technicians immediately and let me know your problems. DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE TO TAKE QUIZZES OR EXAMS.

For your midterm and final examinations, I will utilize the Respondus Lockdown Browser and Respondus Monitor. In order to install these programs, you will need the following:

- **A desktop computer or laptop** other than a Chromebook. Chromebooks are NOT compatible with the Respondus Lockdown Browser and Monitor. Apple iPads may be used for quizzes, but mobile phones and similar devices are not compatible with the required programs.
- **A working webcam on the computing device** used for the exam.
- **Microsoft Office or a compatible program** for written assignments. Access to Microsoft Office 365 is available through the Office 365 for Students on the Microsoft website.

On Academic Honesty

Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work not the individuals to whom credit is given). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the [Office of Student Conduct](#).

Student Disability Services

Any student having an education disability plan on file with the university needs to inform me within the first week of the class, so I make the appropriate arrangements to accommodate your situation. In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Clark Student Center, Room 168, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to Disability Support Services.

Textbooks

1. Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline Tolbert, and Andrea Campbell. 2021. *We the People*. 14th Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. ["*We the People*"]
2. Anthony Champagne, Edward Harpham, and Jason Casellas. 2021. *Governing Texas: An Introduction to Texas Politics*. 6th Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. ["*Governing Texas*"]

Course Schedule

Module 1 – Americans and Their Political Values

Discussion Topics: Why is government needed? What do Americans think about government? How has the social composition of the American population changed over time? Why does Texas' political culture matter? Is the American Constitution a model for the world?

January 21 – January 26

- Introduction to the course
- *We the People*, Chapter 1
- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 1
- *Online discussion due: January 26 (Sunday 11:00 pm)

Module 2 – The Founding and the Constitution

Discussion Topics: What does government do and why does it matter? Why are taxes always controversial? Why has the Constitution changed over time?

January 27 – February 2

- *We the People*, Chapter 2
- *Online discussion due: February 2 (11:00 pm)

Module 3 – Federalism

Discussion Topics: Which level of government has had the most influence over citizens' lives? How have Supreme Court decisions affected the balance of power between the federal government and the states? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of a unitary system?

February 3 – February 9

- *We the People*, Chapter 3
- *Online discussion due: February 9 (11:00 pm)

Module 4 – The Texas Constitution

Discussion Topics: Why does the Texas Constitution matter? What are the main functions of state constitutions? What are the major provisions of the Texas Constitution? (Why) do we need to change it?

February 10 – February 16

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 2
- *Online discussion due: February 16 (11:00 pm)
- *Movie Watching (Choose 1): "Loving," "Hillbilly Elegy," or "The Long Game"*
- *A reflection paper should be submitted by February 16 (11:00 pm)

Module 5 – Texas in the Federal System

Discussion Topics: Why and how does federalism matter to Texas? Why do certain states receive more funding than others at different time periods? How do federal funds flow to Texas? Should the federal government be allowed to impose unfunded mandates on the states?

February 17 – February 23

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 3
- *Online discussion due: February 23 (11:00 pm)

Module 6 – Political Participation and Voting

Discussion Topics: Why did the US government deny participation to so many for so long? What forces influenced the expansion of voting rights? Why are upper-income Americans more likely to be voters than lower-income Americans?

February 24 – March 2

- *We the People*, Chapter 8
- *Online discussion due March 2 (11:00 pm)
- *Current event paper #1 March 2 (11:00 pm)

Module 7 – Midterm Exam (October 11)

- *Midterm should be completed within the 24-hour window (March 7, 9:00 AM – March 8, 9:00 AM)

Week 8 – Spring Break

- March 8 – March 16 (No Assignment)

Module 9 – Political Parties

Discussion Topics: What rules governing the American electoral process promote a two-party system? How do parties attract the popular support they need to win elections? Should Texas make it easier for minor parties to gain political power? Would people be more or less inclined to participate in politics if politicians did not identify with particular parties?

March 17 – March 23

- *We the People*, Chapter 9
- *Online discussion due: March 23 (11:00 pm)

Module 10 – Campaigns and Elections

Discussion Topics: How do district boundaries affect elections for the U.S. House and state legislatures? Is it fair that relatively small states, such as Iowa and New Hampshire have outsized influence in picking presidents? Do American political campaigns help voters make a decision?

March 24 – March 30

- *We the People*, Chapter 10
- *Online discussion due: March 30 (11:00 pm)

Module 11 – Campaigns and Elections in Texas

Discussion Topics: How do the rules for voting affect turnout among different groups of Texans? Why voter participation in Texas is the lowest in the nation? What can we do to increase voter participation in the short term? In the long term?

March 31 – April 6

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 5
- *Online discussion due: April 6 (11:00 pm)

Module 12 – Groups and Interests

Discussion Topics: What are the major types of interest groups and whom do they represent? How do interest groups and social groups organize? Why do the number of interest and advocacy groups have grown in recent decades?

April 7 – April 13

- *We the People*, Chapter 11
- *Online discussion due April 13 (11:00 pm)
- *Movie Watching (Choose 1): "13th," "Passing," "On the Basis of Sex"*
- *A reflection paper should be submitted by April 13 (11:00 pm)

Module 13 – Holiday Break (No assignment)

Module 14 - Interest Groups and Lobbying in Texas

Discussion Topics: What are the major types of interest groups in Texas and how do they influence Texas government? How do ordinary individuals influence Texas government?

April 21—April 27

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 6
- *Online discussion due: April 27 (11:00 pm)

Module 15 – The Media and Political Information

Discussion Topics: In recent years, a number of major media corporations have acquired numerous newspapers, television stations, and radio properties. Is media concentration a serious problem? Are there differences between how younger adults and older adults get their news?

April 28 – May 4

- *We the People*, Chapter 7
- *Online discussion due: May 4 (11:00 pm)
- *Current event paper #2 due: May 4 (11:00 pm)

Module 16 – Final Exam (May 9)

- *Online exam should be completed within the 24-hour window (May 9, 9:00 AM – May 10, 9:00 AM)

Social Studies Certification Standards/Competencies List

Objectives or Student Learning Outcomes	Standard or Competency	Assignment/Module/Course Activities/Assessment
Understand the key structural features of the US federal government, including the legislative branch, executive branch, and judiciary.	Grades 4-8 Competency 001 (A, B) Grades 4-8 Competency 001 (Q) 4-8 Competency 004 (C, H, L,M) Grades 7-12, Domain II (Standard IV), Competency 009 (D) Grades 7-12, Domain III (Standard IV) Competency 012 (B, C) Grades 7-12, Domain V: Government and Citizenship (Standard VII-VIII), Standard VII, Competency 017 (B, C, D,E, G) Grades 7-12, Domain V: Government and Citizenship, Standard VII, Competency 018 (A, B,C, E, G)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unit 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assessment: Exam 1 • Unit 3 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assessment: Exam 2 • Unit 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Assessment: Exam 3
Understand the key structural features of the Texas state government, including the Texas legislature, executive branch, and judiciary.	Grades 4-8: Competency 004 (C, D, I, K, M) Grades 7-12, Domain III (Standard IV), Competency 012 (C) Grades 7-12 Domain V (Standard VII-VIII) Competency 017 (I) Grades 7-12, Domain V (Standard VIII) Competency 018 (A, B, C, G)	Unit 2 Assessment: Exam 1 Unit 4 Assessment: Exam 2 Unit 6 Assessment: Exam 3 Unit 12 Assessment: Final Exam
Understand the civil liberties and describe the origin of the Bill of Rights and how those rights came to apply to the states.	Grades 4-8, Domain 1 (Standards IV-X), Competency 004 (N) Grades 7-12 Domain V (Standard VII-VIII), Standard VII, Competency 017 (A, H) Grades 7-12, Domain V (Standard VIII) Competency 018 (G)	Unit 7 Assessment: Exam 3

Objectives or Student Learning Outcomes	Standard or Competency	Assignment/Module/Course Activities/Assessment
Understand civil rights and describe how different groups have fought for and won protections for their rights.	<p>Grades 4-8, Domain 1 (Standards IV-X), Competency 001 (P, Q)</p> <p>Grades 4-9, Domain 1 (Standards IV-X), Competency 004 (G, J)</p> <p>Grades 7-12, Domain II (Standard IV), Competency 009 (A, D, E, F)</p> <p>Grades 7-12, Domain III (Standard IV), Competency 012 (A)</p> <p>Grades 7-12, Domain IV (Standard V and IX) Competency 016 (B)</p> <p>Grades 7-12, Domain V (Standard VII-VIII), Standard VII, 017 (E, G, H)</p> <p>Grades 7-12, Domain V (Standards VII-VIII), Standard VIII, Competency 018 (E, F)</p>	Unit 8 Assessment: Final Exam
Understand the steps and concepts to engage in political participation policy-making at the local, state and national level.	<p>Grades 4-8, Domain I (Standards IV-X), Competency 004 (B, C, G, H, K)000</p> <p>Grades 7-12, Domain II (Standard IV), Competency 009 (A, E)</p> <p>Grades 7-12, Domain V (Standard VII and VIII), Standard VII, Competency 017 (I)</p> <p>Grades 7-12, Domain V (Standards VII-VIII), Standard, VIII, Competency 018 (C)</p> <p>Grades 7-12, Domain VI (Standards VI, X), Standard VI, Competency 021 (B, E, F)</p>	Unit 9 Unit 10 Unit 11 Unit 12 Unit 13 Assessment: Final Exam

Objectives or Student Learning Outcomes	Standard or Competency	Assignment/Module/Course Activities/Assessment
Think critically about policy-making in American and Texas politics and engage in meaningful civic participation.	Grades 4-8 Competency 004 (B, K) Grades 7-12, Domain V (Standard VIII) Competency 018 (C, G)	Civic Engagement Project Project Presentation

Grades 4-8 Social Studies Certification:

Domain 1: Social Studies Content (Standards IV-X)

Competency 001 (History)- The teacher understands and applies knowledge of significant historical events and developments, multiple historical interpretations and ideas and relationships between the past, the present and the future, as defined by the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

- A. Understands traditional historical points of reference in the history of Texas, the United States and the world.
- B. Analyzes how individuals, events, and issues shaped the history of Texas, the United States and the world.
- P. Demonstrates knowledge of major U.S. and Texas reform movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (e.g., abolition movement, women suffrage movement, temperance movement, Civil Rights movement, agrarian groups, labor unions, James L. Farmer, Jr., Jane Addams, Hector Pérez García, Oveta Culp Hobby, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the evangelical movement).
- Q. Understands important issues, events and individuals of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that shaped the role of Texas in the United States and the world (e.g., Great Depression, First and Second World Wars, Civil Rights movement, Lyndon B. Johnson, emergence of a two-party system, political and economic controversies, immigration, migration).

Competency 004 (Government and Citizenship)- The teacher understands and applies knowledge of government, democracy and citizenship, including ways in which individuals and groups achieve their goals through political systems, as defined by the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

- B. Understands the purpose of rules and laws; the relationship between rules, rights and responsibilities; and the individual's role in making and enforcing rules and ensuring the welfare of society.
- C. Knows the basic structure and functions of the U.S. government, the Texas government and local governments (including the roles of public officials) and relationships among national, state and local governments.
- G. Demonstrates knowledge of how state and local governments use sources of revenue such as property tax and sales tax, and the funding of Texas public education.
- H. Demonstrates knowledge of types of government (e.g., constitutional, totalitarian), and their effectiveness in meeting citizens' needs and the reasons for limiting the power of government.

- I. Knows the formal and informal process of changing the U.S. and Texas constitutions and the impact of changes on society.
- J. Understands the impact of landmark Supreme Court cases (e.g., *Marbury v. Madison*, *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, *Gibbons v. Ogden*).
- K. Understands components of the democratic process (e.g., voting, contacting local and state representatives, voluntary individual participation, effective leadership, expression of different points of view) and their significance in a democratic society.
- M. Demonstrates knowledge of the importance, accomplishments and leadership qualities of United States and Texas leaders (e.g., Presidents Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Lincoln; U.S. senators Calhoun, Webster, Clay; Texas governors and local Texas representatives).
- N. Analyzes the relationship among individual rights, responsibilities and freedoms in democratic societies.

Grades 7-12 Social Studies Certification

Domain II: US History (Standard IV)

Competency 009-(Political, Economic and Social Developments from 1877 to the Present): The teacher understands significant political, economic and social developments in the United States from 1877 to the present.

- A. Understands political, economic and social changes in the United States from 1877 to the present (e.g., in relation to political parties, transportation, labor unions, agriculture, business, race, gender).
- D. Demonstrates knowledge of significant individuals who shaped political, economic and social developments in the United States from 1877 to the present (e.g., Jane Addams, Henry Ford, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, Jr., Cesar Chavez, Betty Friedan, Malcolm X).
- E. Demonstrates knowledge of events and issues that shaped political, economic and social developments in the United States from 1877 to the present (e.g., ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, Great Depression, passage of the GI Bill, passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, urbanization, anti-trust legislation, immigration restriction, globalization, terrorism).
- F. Analyzes the impact of civil rights movements in the United States, including the African American, Hispanic, American Indian and women's rights movements.

Domain III: Texas History (Standard IV)

Competency 012- (Texas in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries): The teacher understands significant historical developments and events in Texas from 1900 to the present.

- A. Understands the impact of individuals and reform movements such as the Progressive movement and the Civil Rights movement on Texas in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries (e.g., Jane McCallum, Lulu Belle Madison White, Manuel C. Gonzales, Oveta Culp Hobby, James Hogg, Hector Garcia).
- B. Understands the political, economic, cultural and social impacts of major events in the twentieth century, including World War I, the Great Depression, World War II and the Cold War on the history of Texas.

- C. Understands the political, economic and social impact of major events and individuals in the latter half of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries on the history of Texas (e.g., Kay Bailey Hutchison, Barbara Jordan, Eddie Bernice Johnson, Henry B. Gonzalez, Lyndon B. Johnson, James Farmer, George Walker Bush, Craig Anthony Washington, immigration, Rust Belt to Sun Belt migration).

Domain IV: Geography, Culture, and the Behavioral and Social Sciences (Standard V and IX)

Competency 016- (Sociological, Anthropological and Psychological Concepts and Processes): The teacher applies sociological, anthropological and psychological concepts and processes to understand cultural formation and change, intergroup relations and individual development.

- B. Understands the evolving nature of race and gender relations in the United States and knows how people from various racial, ethnic and religious groups have adapted to and modified life in the United States and contributed to a national identity.

Domain V: Government and Citizenship (Standard VII-VIII)

Standard VII Competency 017- (Democratic Principles and Government in the United States): The teacher understands the principles of democratic government and the structure and functioning of government in the United States.

- A. Analyzes the beliefs and principles reflected in the U.S. Constitution (e.g., republicanism, checks and balances, federalism, separation of powers, separation of church and state, popular sovereignty, individual rights) and other important historical documents (e.g., Declaration of Independence, Federalist Papers, English Bill of Rights).
- B. Demonstrates knowledge of the structure and functions of the government created by the U.S. Constitution (e.g., bicameral structure of Congress, role of congressional committees, constitutional powers of the president, role of the Cabinet and independent executive agencies, functions of the federal court system).
- C. Understands the processes by which the U.S. Constitution can be changed.
- D. Knows procedures for enacting laws in the United States.
- E. Analyzes changes in the role of the U.S. government over time (e.g., civil rights, New Deal legislation, wartime policies).
- F. Understands changing relationships among the three branches of the federal government (e.g., Franklin D. Roosevelt's attempt to increase the number of U.S. Supreme Court justices, War Powers Act, judicial review).
- G. Demonstrates knowledge of the impact of Constitutional amendments on U.S. society (e.g., Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, Seventeenth, Nineteenth, Twenty-fourth and Twenty-sixth amendments).
- H. Analyzes the interpretations and impact of landmark Supreme Court decisions on U.S. society (e.g., *Marbury v. Madison*, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, *Cherokee Nation v. Georgia*, *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, *Schenck v. U.S.*, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, *Engel v. Vitale*, *Miranda v. Arizona*, *Roe v. Wade*, *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*).
- I. Demonstrates knowledge of the structure and functions of Texas state government and local governments.

Standard VIII Competency 018- (Citizenship and Political Processes in the United States): The teacher understands political processes in the United States and the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizens.

- A. Understands the historical and contemporary roles played by political parties, interest groups and the media in the U.S. political system.
- B. Demonstrates knowledge of processes for filling elective and appointive public offices (e.g., primary system, electoral college).
- C. Demonstrates knowledge of processes for making policy in the United States, the impact of technology on the political process and ways in which different points of view influence decision making and the development of public policy at the local, state and national levels.
- D. Understands rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, including each amendment in the Bill of Rights, (e.g., due process, equal protection) and their role in protecting individual liberties.
- E. Demonstrates knowledge of efforts to expand the democratic process in the United States and understands the contributions of significant political and social leaders (e.g., George Washington, John Marshall, Frederick Douglass, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Martin Luther King, Jr.).
- F. Demonstrates knowledge of the causes and effects of major reform movements in U.S. history (e.g., abolitionist movement, public education, temperance, women’s rights, prison reform, civil rights movement).
- G. Understands civic responsibilities (e.g., jury duty), the difference between personal and civic responsibilities and the importance of voluntary individual participation in the U.S. political process.

Domain VI: Economics and Science, Technology, and Society (Standard VI, X)

Standard VI Competency 021- (Structure and Operation of the U.S. Free Enterprise System): The teacher understands the structure and operation of the U.S. free enterprise system; the role of government, business, consumers and labor in the system; and basic concepts of consumer economics.

- B. Analyzes issues and developments related to U.S. economic growth from the 1870s to the present (e.g., anti-trust acts; tariff policies; The New Deal; economic effects of World War I, World War II and the Cold War; increased globalization of the economy).
- E. Analyzes the role of government in the U.S. free enterprise system (e.g., significance of government rules and regulations, impact of fiscal and monetary policy decisions, role and function of the Federal Reserve System, relationship between government policies and international trade)
- F. Demonstrates knowledge of the goals of economic growth, stability, full employment, freedom, security, equity and efficiency as they apply to U.S. economic policy.