



Course Syllabus: American & Texas Government I

College of Humanities and Social Sciences
POLS 1333 Section X10, X13, and X50
Fall 2026, Online Course

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 governments, such as political culture, the constitution, federalism, election, political parties, interest groups, and the media. To do that, we will discuss historical evolution of the American government 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. The course will include lecture, debates, and presentations, which will help students stay up to date on current issues.

Textbook & Instructional Materials

- Benjamin Ginsberg, Caroline Tolbert, Andrea Campbell, and Megan Francis. 2024. *We the People*. 15th Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Anthony Champagne, Edward Harpham, and Jason Casellas. 2024. *Governing Texas: An Introduction to Texas Politics*. 7th Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Student Handbook

Refer to: [Student Handbook](#)

Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

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Dishonesty: Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work not the individual's to whom credit is given).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

[Office of Student Conduct](#)

Moffett Library

Moffett Library provides resources and services to support student's studies and assignments, including books, peer-reviewed journals, databases, and multimedia materials accessible both on campus and remotely. The library offers media equipment checkout, reservable study rooms, and research assistance from librarians to help students effectively find, evaluate, and use information. Get started on this [Moffett Library webpage](#) to explore these resources and learn how to best utilize the library.

Grading

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

Table 1: Points allocated to each assignment

Assignments	Points
Engagement (Online attendance & participation)	20
Current Event Essays (5 points x 2)	10
Movie Reflection Papers (5 points x 2)	10
Midterm Exam	30
Final Exam	30
Total Points	100

Table 2: Total points for final grade.

Grade	Total Points
A	90 and above
B	80 to 89
C	70 to 79
D	60 to 69
F	Less than 60

Course Engagement (20%)

This is a fully online course, but your attendance and participation are still vital to learning the material presented in this course. 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 11:59 pm on Sunday will not be reopened.**

Current Event Essays (10%)

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 (***AI assistance or similarity rate above 5% will be penalized**). This assignment should be submitted electronically via D2L.

Movie Reflection Papers (10%)

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). Your response must be critical and go beyond a summary or a description of those movies. Originality will be critical for your grade (***AI assistance or similarity rate above 5% will be penalized**). All papers should be submitted electronically via D2L.

Mid-Term Exam (30%)

The 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 governments covered in class. We will utilize the Respondus Lockdown Browser and Respondus Monitor. A study guide will be provided a week before the exam.

Final Exam (30%)

The exam will cover the chapters discussed AFTER the midterm exam. We will utilize the Respondus Lockdown Browser and Respondus Monitor.

Extra Credit

There will be no assignment or activity for extra credit. However, at the end of the semester, I may raise grades for students who have great records of participation and attendance throughout the semester.

Late Work

Late assignments will be accepted with a grade reduction.

Important Dates

- Last day for term schedule changes: Check date on [Academic Calendar](#).
- Deadline to file for graduation: Check date on [Academic Calendar](#).
- Last Day to drop with a grade of "W:" Check date on [Academic Calendar](#).
- Refer to: [Drops, Withdrawals & Void](#)

Desire-to-Learn (D2L)

Extensive use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. Each student is expected to be familiar with this program as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You can log into [D2L](#) through the MSU Homepage. If you experience difficulties, please contact the technicians listed for the program or contact your instructor.

Online Computer Requirements

Taking an online class requires you to have access to a computer (with Internet access) to complete and upload your assignments. It is your responsibility to have (or have access to) a working computer in this class. ****Assignments and tests are due by the due date, and personal computer technical difficulties will not be considered reason for the instructor to allow students extra time to submit assignments, tests, or discussion postings.*** Computers are available on campus in various areas of the buildings as well as the Academic Success Center. ****Your computer being down is not an excuse for missing a deadline!!*** There are many places to access your class! Our online classes can be accessed from any computer in the world which is connected to the internet. Contact your instructor immediately upon having computer trouble. If you have technical difficulties in the course, there is also a student helpdesk available to you. The college cannot work directly on student computers due to both liability and resource limitations however they are able to help you get connected to our online services. For help, log into [D2L](#).

MSU Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend all meetings of the classes in which they are enrolled. Although in general students are graded on intellectual effort and performance rather than attendance, absences may lower the student's grade where class attendance and class participation are deemed essential by the faculty member. In those classes where attendance is considered as part of the grade, the instructor should so inform students of the specifics in writing at the beginning of the semester in a syllabus or separate attendance policy statement.

An instructor who has an attendance policy must keep records on a daily basis. The instructor must give the student a verbal or written warning prior to being dropped from the class. Instructor's records will stand as evidence of absences. A student with excessive absences may be dropped from a course by the instructor. Any individual faculty member or college has the authority to establish an attendance policy, providing the policy is in accordance with the General University Policies.

Change of Schedule

A student dropping a course (but not withdrawing from the University) within the first 12 class days of a regular semester or the first four class days of a summer semester is eligible for a 100% refund of applicable tuition and fees. Dates are published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

Refund and Repayment Policy

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Midwestern State University (MSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees and room/board charges that were paid to MSU for the semester. HOWEVER, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. As described below, two formulas (federal and state) exists in determining the amount of the refund. (Examples of each refund calculation will be made available upon request).

Services for Students with Disabilities

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 Student Wellness Center, (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](#).

College Policies

Campus Carry Rules/Policies

Refer to: [Campus Carry Rules and Policies](#)

Smoking/Tobacco Policy

College policy strictly prohibits the use of tobacco products in any building owned or operated by WATC. Adult students may smoke only in the outside designated-smoking areas at each location.

Alcohol and Drug Policy

To comply with the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibits the unlawful possession, use or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

Campus Carry

Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes has prohibited. The new Constitutional Carry law does not change this process. Concealed carry still requires a License to Carry permit, and openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit [Campus Carry](#).

Active Shooter

The safety and security of our campus is the responsibility of everyone in our community. Each of us has an obligation to be prepared to appropriately respond to threats to our campus, such as an active aggressor. Please review the information provided by MSU Police Department regarding the options and strategies we can all use to stay safe during difficult situations. For more information, visit [MSUReady – Active Shooter](#). Students are encouraged to watch the video entitled “Run. Hide. Fight.” which may be electronically accessed via the University police department’s webpage: ["Run. Hide. Fight."](#)

Grade Appeal Process

Update as needed. Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [MSU Catalog](#)

***Notice:** Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor.

Course Schedule

Week 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? Is the American Constitution a model for the world?

August 24 – August 30

- Introduction to the course
- *We the People*, Chapter 1
- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 1
- *Online discussion due: August 30 (Sunday 11:59pm)

Week 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?

August 31 – September 6

- *We the People*, Chapter 2
- *Online discussion due: September 6 (Sunday 11:59pm)

Week 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?

September 7 – September 13

- *We the People*, Chapter 3
- *Online discussion due: September 13 (Sunday 11:59pm)
- *Movie Watching (Choose 1): "Loving," "Hillbilly Elegy," or "The Long Game"*
- *A reflection paper due by September 13 (Sunday 11:59pm)

Week 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?

September 14 – September 20

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 2
- *Online discussion due: September 20 (Sunday 11:59pm)

Week 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? Should the federal government be allowed to impose unfunded mandates on the states?

September 21 – September 27

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 3
- *Online discussion due: September 27 (Sunday 11:59pm)

Week 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?

September 28 – October 4

- *We the People*, Chapter 8
- *Online discussion due: October 4 (Sunday 11:59pm)
- *Current event paper #1 due: October 4 (Sunday 11:59pm)

Week 7: Midterm Exam

October 7 (Wednesday)

- *Online exam should be completed within the 24-hour window (October 7, 12:01am–11:59pm)

Week 8: 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? Would people be more or less inclined to participate in politics if politicians did not identify with particular parties?

October 12 – October 18

- *We the People*, Chapter 9
- *Online discussion due: October 18 (Sunday 11:59pm)

Week 9: 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?

October 19 – October 25

- *We the People*, Chapter 10
- *Online discussion due: October 25 (Sunday 11:59pm)

Week 10: Campaigns and Elections in Texas

Discussion topics: How do the rules for voting affect turnout among different group 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?

October 26 – November 1

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 6
- *Online discussion due: November 1 (Sunday 11:59pm)
- Movie watching (Choose 1): "Passing," "On the Basis of Sex," "13th"
- *A reflection paper due by November 1 (Sunday 11:59pm)

Week 11: 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?

November 2 – November 8

- *We the People*, Chapter 11
- *Online discussion due: November 8 (Sunday 11:59pm)

Week 12: 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?

November 9 – November 15

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 7
- *Online discussion due: November 15 (Sunday 11:59pm)

Week 13: Public Opinion

Discussion topics: Why does the media focus on issues on which public opinion is sharply divided while there are in fact many issues on which Americans largely agree? Do liberals live in areas with other liberals and conservatives live in areas with other conservatives? What are the political consequences of geographic sorting?

November 16 – November 22

- *We the People*, Chapter 6
- *Online discussion due: November 22 (Sunday 11:59pm)
- *Current event paper #2 due: November 22 (Sunday 11:59pm)

Week 14: Thanksgiving Break (No assignments)

November 23 – November 29

Week 15: The Media and Political Information

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

November 30 – December 4 (MSU Last class day)

- *We the People*, Chapter 7
- *Online discussion due: December 4 (Friday 11:59pm)

Week 16: Final Exam

December 7 (Monday)

- *Online exam should be completed within the 24-hour window (12:01am–11:59pm)