



POLS 4233-201: American and Texas Government I

Prothro-Yeager College of Humanities and Social Sciences
Monday/Wednesday/Friday 12-12:50 PM
PY 209
Spring 2026

Contact Information

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Office Hours: Tuesday 10:230 AM – 12:30 PM, Wednesday 1:30 – 2:30 PM, Thursday, 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM, and by appointment

Course Description and Learning Objectives

Political Science 4233 focuses on the power and authority of the federal and state governments derived from the US Constitution. It explores the scope of the powers of the major institutions of the federal government, as well as the interplay between federal and state governments in cases coming before the US Supreme Court. Students in this course will be able to:

- Understand the US Constitution
- Understand the federal court system and the US Supreme Court
- Think critically about the law and the social and political forces surrounding court decisions
- Analyze Supreme Court cases and political science research
- Apply knowledge of constitutional law to current court cases
- Apply political science methodologies and frameworks to research
- Conduct college-level research
- Present research findings

The syllabus provides a general plan for the course; changes may be necessary.

Required Text:

Available as an ebook in D2L:

Lee Epstein, Kevin T. McGuire, and Thomas J. Walker. 2023. Constitutional Law for a Changing America: A Short Course. 9th Edition. CQ Press.

Grades:

Breakdown of Grades:

Grade Category	Grade Percentage
Exam 1	15%
Exam 2	15%
Assignments and Activities	15%
Research Paper	15%
Research Presentation	10%
Course Participation	15%
Final Exam	15%
Total	100%

Grading:

On each exam and for the final grade, points will be assigned according to the following scale:

Letter Grade	Numerical Grade
A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
F	0-59

Course Engagement Grading:

Engagement Grade	Unexcused Absences/Non-Engagement Days
95	1
90	2
85	3
80	4

Engagement Grade	Unexcused Absences/Non-Engagement Days
75	5
70	6
60	7
50	8
40	9
0	10+

Class Policies:

Attendance and Engagement:

Absences:

Class attendance is important. Students who do not attend class often have difficulty with the course and receive lower grades. Attendance will be taken at each class meeting and will be noted in Attendance and Engagement. **Students missing more than 9 course periods may be dropped from the course without notice.** Excused absences will be those as follows: illness, death in the family, legal proceedings occurring during class period, university-approved absence such as travel as member of a MSU sports team, or emergency situation as determined by me. Excused absences require documentation, such as a doctor's note. To have absences excused, I must receive all documentation for the absences within ***2 weeks** of your return to class. Any documentation received after more than 2 weeks will not be accepted and absences will remain unexcused. No documentation will be accepted after the final class period of the semester.

Engagement:

Engagement during class is as important as attendance. Students are expected to engage in the class and be fully present with their engagement. Students observed using mobile phones, reading non-class materials, or otherwise not fully engaged in class, will not receive engagement credit for that class period. Distracting behavior will also constitute non-engagement for the class period. This syllabus serves as the notice of the above policies; students will receive no further alert if engagement points are not earned during a class meeting.

Lateness:

I will take attendance at each class meeting. Students arriving after the role has been called will not be counted as on-time and will be marked as tardy; this means approximately more than 5 minutes late. **Two tardies will be the equivalent to one absence.** Students arriving more than 15 minutes late to class either in-person or online will be counted as absent for that class meeting. Students who leave early without an

excuse that meets the excused absence criteria for this course may be marked tardy or absent, depending upon how much time remains in the course meeting.

Leaving Class/Disruptions:

Students are expected to be present for the entire class period. Excessively leaving the classroom during the class period is defined in this syllabus as more than 2 times during one class period or leaving 1 time for more than 10 minutes in one class period. **Excessive trips outside of the classroom during a class period will be equivalent to 1 absence.** This is a form of disruptive behavior. If a student requires accommodation to this rule (e.g. due to illness or medical condition), please let me know in advance.

Disruptive Behavior:

Furthermore, disruptive behavior, including but not limited to raising one's voice to the instructor or classmates, threatening the instructor or classmates, recording the instructor or classmates without permission, sharing screenshots or videos of course material or student work on other platforms, slurs and insults directed at the instructor or classmates, or other behavior that disrupts the course will not be tolerated. **This syllabus serves as the warning** that disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students committing disruptive behavior will be removed from the course.

The Class Environment:

This classroom is a place where all students will be treated with respect. We will work together to create an environment respectful to everyone in the class. Everyone is expected to engage with course material and with the ideas shared by me and the other students from the perspective of academic inquiry and discussion. When we agree or disagree, we will do so with civility and respect. It is the expectation that ALL students consider the classroom a safe environment. Harassment, sexual misconduct, violence, bullying, and disruptive behavior will not be tolerated will result in removal from the classroom and reporting to the appropriate university authority. This syllabus is your warning.

D2L:

This course will use D2L through MSU Texas as the online platform. All course material, including assigned textbooks, will be available in D2L.

Web Browser for D2L and D2L Help:

- D2L is the learning management system for MSU. It can be accessed through the [MSU Homepage](#).
- The preferred web browser for D2L is Google Chrome.
- Problems using D2L should be directed to the D2L Help Desk. It is open 7 days a week from 8 AM-10 PM.

Assignments and Late Work:

No late work is accepted, except in unforeseen, limited circumstances such as a medical emergency requiring hospitalization for which documentation is provided. All

other assignments not submitted by the due date will receive the mark of zero. Even with a documented excuse, no work is accepted after the final class period of the semester.

Grades and Communication:

Grading Policy:

Grades will be determined in accordance with the information on grading in this syllabus. Although grades will be posted in the D2L gradebook, the weight of assignments may not always be reflected in the D2L gradebook. I will calculate the final course grade using the grade breakdown provided in this syllabus. Students are welcome to calculate their grades at any time and to use D2L to see their progress. However, I will not calculate individual grades for students during the course term, nor will I calculate hypothetical grading scenarios for individual students. In other words, please do not ask me what grade you will need to receive on a particular exam or assignment to earn a particular final grade. With the information provided in D2L and the syllabus, you are welcome to calculate different scenarios on your own.

Communication:

The best way to contact me is to visit me in my office during my office hours or via email (not via D2L email). My email address is listed on the first page of the syllabus. Most of the time, On weekends, I may not be checking email as often, so please be aware that I may not respond until Monday.

When emailing me, please include the following:

- Your name (first and last): Students' names do not always appear with your email address. So, without your name in the email, I may not be able to tell from whom the email was sent.
- Your course number: I have more than one class, so it helps to know to which class you are referring.
- A specific question: If you have a question or are having difficulty with a particular concept, I am happy to help. However, please have a specific request. For example, "I don't understand federalism" or "what should I take away from chapter 2" are really too general. Try to come up with a specific request when you are having difficulty.

Quizzes and Exams:

Quizzes:

We will have quizzes and written assignments throughout the semester. These will be announced in class and in D2L. Quizzes will be taken during class.

Exams:

Exams will be given in person during class time. No materials including notes, books, websites, slides, text messages, apps, etc., may be used during the exam. Any use of outside materials or collaboration with another during the exam will result in a 0 on the exam. The academic dishonesty policy will apply.

Make-Up Exams

A make-up exam will only be given if the following criteria are met: If a student has a course-approved excuse and the instructor is notified ***in writing, prior** to the examination, and the instructor approves the excuse and make up exam, arrangements for a make-up exam will be made. If a student fails to notify the instructor, the student will receive a zero for the exam. ***Unless arrangements have already been made in accordance with this policy, no exam may be administered after the graded exam is returned to the class.**

Missing the Final Exam:

If the final exam is missed and arrangements for a make-up exam have not been made in advance, the final exam cannot be made up.

Taking Exams Early:

Only under ***extraordinary circumstances*** can a student take an exam early. Only university-approved excuses, death in the family, or illness with a doctor's note be considered for taking an exam early. Scheduled vacations are not reasons for exam to be given early. The request for an early exam must be made **in writing**. For any reason, no request will be approved to schedule the final exam earlier than one week before its scheduled date.

Extra Credit:

From time to time, extra credit opportunities will be given to the class. Usually, bonus points are available on quizzes or exams. However, **no individualized extra-credit/bonus assignments will be created for individual students**. No extra credit or bonus points are available after the last day of classes or the final exam.

Academic Dishonesty:

The MSU Honor Creed applies in this course, and students are expected to abide by it. As a reminder, here is the MSU Honor Creed:

As an MSU Student, I pledge not to lie, cheat, steal, or help anyone else do so."

As students at MSU, we recognize that any great society must be composed of empowered, responsible citizens. We also recognize universities play an important role in helping mold these responsible citizens. We believe students themselves play an important part in developing responsible citizenship by maintaining a community where integrity and honorable character are the norm, not the exception.

Thus, We, the Students of Midwestern State University, resolve to uphold the honor of the University by affirming our commitment to complete academic honesty. We resolve not only to be honest but also to hold our peers accountable for complete honesty in all university matters.

We consider it dishonest to ask for, give, or receive help in examinations or quizzes, to use any unauthorized material in examinations, or to present, as one's own, work or ideas which are not entirely one's own. We recognize that any instructor has the right to expect that all student work is honest, original work. We accept and acknowledge that responsibility for lying, cheating, stealing, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty fundamentally rests within each individual student.

We expect of ourselves academic integrity, personal professionalism, and ethical character. We appreciate steps taken by University officials to protect the honor of the University against any who would disgrace the MSU student body by violating the spirit of this creed.

Written and adopted by the 2002-2003 MSU Student Senate.

Student work in this course is expected to be original to the student and produced only for this course. Here is the reason: the purpose of this class is to help students learn to think critically about government and to be an active and engaged citizens. This means being able to demonstrate understanding of concepts and applying them to current and future political events. Doing that requires students to put in individual work in the course and for me to evaluate student work individually.

To maintain academic honesty in this class, here are the expectations:

- Students may not use the textbook, chapter summaries, notes, PowerPoints, lectures, or any online material during quizzes and exams.
- Students may not use electronic devices, such as cell phones, or listen to electronic devices (ie wearing headphones) during a quiz or exam; use of electronic devices during an exam will result in the quiz/exam paper being taken up and receiving a 0.
- Students may not collaborate with each other during quizzes or exams. Students looking at another's quiz or exam will have their quiz/exam paper taken up and receive a 0.
- Students may not collaborate to create substantially similar responses to writing assignments.
- In addition, students may not copy the textbook or websites, such as Wikipedia pages, for written response questions.
- Students may not memorize and write in-class response questions material copied or substantially copied from textbook materials or webpages.
- Each written assignment or written response is expected to be in your own words. Submitted work that replicates the textbook or a webpage will be considered academic dishonesty.
- In addition, students may not submit work from previous courses.
- AI tools, such as Chat GDP, may not be used to create assignments.
- AI Detection Detectors, such as Turnitin, will be used in this course and the results used in determining academic honesty.

In other words, all submitted work is expected to be fully your own thoughts and words and created for this course during this semester.

University Policies

Services for Students with Disabilities:

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 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 to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services](#).

MSU Campus Carry Statement:

Senate Bill 11 passed by the 84th Texas Legislature allows licensed handgun holders to carry concealed handguns on campus, effective August 1, 2016. Areas excluded from concealed carry are appropriately marked, in accordance with state law. The 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 regarding campus carry, please refer to the [MSU Campus Carry Policy](#).

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.

Active Shooter Policy

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.”](#)

Inclement Weather Policy

If inclement weather closes the university during our class meeting time, there will be no class (in-person or online) that day. If a quiz or exam is scheduled for that class meeting, we will move it to the next class meeting.

Class Schedule:

The following is a tentative outline of the semester. Students will be notified of any changes.

Class Schedule

Week	Unit	Assignment/Topic	Date
Week 1	Unit 0	Introduction to Course	Wed, Jan 21
Week 1	Unit 1: The Constitution and the Court	Part 1: Chapter 1: The Living Constitution	Fri, Jan 23
Week 2	Unit 1	Part 1: Chapter 2: Understanding the Supreme Court	Mon, Jan 26
Week 2	Unit 1	No in-person class Assignment: Choose a method of constitutional interpretation	Wed, Jan 28
Week 2	Unit 2: The Judiciary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 3: The Judiciary • <i>Marbury v. Madison</i> • <i>Martin v. Hunter's Lessee</i> • <i>Eakin v. Raub</i> 	Fri, Jan 30
Week 3	Unit 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ex parte McCordle</i> • <i>Baker v. Carr</i> • <i>Nixon v. United States</i> • <i>Lujan v. Defenders of Wildlife</i> 	Mon, Feb 2
Week 3	Unit 3: The Legislature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 4: The Legislature • <i>Powell v. McCormack</i> • <i>US Term Limits, Inc. V. Thornton</i> • <i>Gravel v. United States</i> 	Wed, Feb 4
Week 3	Unit 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>McCullough v. Maryland</i> • <i>McGrain v. Daugherty</i> • <i>US v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corp.</i> • Research Paper Proposal Due 	Fri, Feb 6
Week 4	Unit 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Watkins v. United States</i> • <i>Barenblatt v. United States</i> 	Mon, Feb 9

Week 4	Unit 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Trump v. Mazars USA, LLP</i> • <i>Grundy v. United States</i> • <i>INS v. Chadha</i> 	Wed, Feb 11
Week 4	Exam	Exam 1	Fri, Feb 13
Week 5	Research Meetings	No Class: Research Paper Meetings	Mon, Feb 16 Tue, Feb 17
	Unit 4: The Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 5: The Executive • <i>Bush v. Gore</i> 	Wed, Feb 18
Week 5	Unit 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>In re Neagle</i> • <i>United States v. Winsor</i> 	Fri, Feb 20
Week 6	Unit 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Clinton v. City of New York</i> • <i>NLRB v. Noel Canning</i> 	Mon, Feb 23
Week 6	Unit 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>United States v. Nixon</i> • <i>Clinton v. Jones</i> 	Wed, Feb 25
Week 6	Unit 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Trump v. Vance</i> • <i>Trump v. United States</i> 	Fri, Feb 27
Week 7	Unit 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Prize Cases</i> • <i>Ex parte Milligan</i> • <i>Korematsu v. United States</i> 	Mon, Mar 2
Week 7	Unit 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hamdi v. Rumsfeld</i> • <i>Hamdan v. Rumsfeld</i> • <i>Boumediene v. Bush</i> 	Wed, Mar 4 Fri, Mar 6
	Spring Break	No Class	Mon, Mar 9 Wed, Mar 11 Fri, Mar 13
Week 8	Unit 5: Federalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 6: Federalism • <i>McCullough v. Maryland</i> • <i>Dred Scott v. Sandford</i> 	Mon, Mar 16
	Unit 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Coyle v. Smith</i> • <i>Garcia v. San Antonio Metropolitan Transit Authority</i> • <i>Printz v. United States</i> 	Wed, Mar 18
Week 9	Unit 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Seminole Tribe of Florida v. Florida</i> • <i>Nevada Department of Human Resources v. Hibbs</i> 	Fri, Mar 20
Week 10	No Class	No Class	Mon, Mar 23
Week 10	Exam	Exam 2	Wed, Mar 25

Week 10	Unit 6: The Commerce Clause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 7: The Commerce Power • <i>Gibbons v. Ogden</i> • <i>Hammer v. Dagenhart</i> • <i>National Labor Relations Board v. Jones and Laughlin Steel Corporation</i> 	Fri, Mar 27
Week 11	Unit 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>United States v. Darby</i> • <i>Wickard v. Filburn</i> • <i>Heart of Atlanta Motel, Inc v. United States</i> 	Mon, Mar 30
Week 11	Unit 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>United States v. Lopez</i> • <i>Gonzales v. Raich</i> • <i>National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius</i> 	Wed, Apr 1
Week 11	Easter Break	No Class	Fri, Apr 3
Week 12	Unit 6: Taxing and Spending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 8: The Power to Tax and Spend • <i>Hylton v. United States</i> • <i>Pollock v. Farmers' Loan and Trust Co.</i> 	Mon, Apr 6
Week 12	Unit 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Graves v. New York ex rel. O'Keefe</i> • <i>South Carolina v. Baker</i> • <i>Sonzinsky v. United States</i> 	Wed, Apr 8
Week 12	Unit 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>South Dakota v. Dole</i> • <i>National Federation of Independent Business v. Sebelius</i> 	Fri, Apr 10
Week 13	Unit 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>South Dakota v. Wayfair</i> • <i>Oregon Waste Systems, Inc v. Department of Environmental Quality of Oregon</i> 	Mon, Apr 13
Week 13	Unit 7: Economic Powers: The Contracts Clause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part IV Introduction • Chapter 9: The Contracts Clause 	Wed, Apr 15
Week 13	Extra Credit	MSU Celebration of Scholarship and Undergraduate Research Day	Wed, Apr 15 Thu, Apr 16

Week 13	Unit 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Proprietors of Charles River Bridge v. Proprietors of Warren Bridge</i> • <i>Home Building and Loan Association v. Blaisdell</i> 	Fri, Apr 17
Week 14	Research Meetings	Term Paper Meetings	Mon, Apr 20 Tues, Apr 22
Week14	Unit 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 10 • <i>Lochner v. New York</i> • <i>Adkins v. Children's Hospital</i> 	Wed, Apr 22
Week 14	Unit 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>West Coast Hotel v. Parrish</i> • <i>Pennell v. City of San Jose</i> 	Fri, Apr 24
Week 15	Unit 9: The Takings Clause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 11: The Takings Clause • <i>Penn Central Transportation Co. v. City of New York</i> • <i>Lucas v. South Carolina Coastal Council</i> 	Mon, Apr 27
Week 15	Unit 9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Kelo v. City of New London</i> • <i>United States v. 564.54 Acres of Land</i> 	Wed, Apr 29
Week 15	W Date	Last Day to drop a class with a W	Wed, Apr 29
Week 15	Research Meetings	Presentation and Paper Meetings	Thu, Apr 30 Fri, May 1
Week 15	Presentations	Research Paper Presentations	Mon, May 4 Wed, May 6 Fri, May 8
Exam Week	Final Exam	Final Exam	Wed, May 13, 3:30 PM – 5:30 PM