

Midwestern State University
Department of Political Science

POLS 1433: AMERICAN GOVERNMENT II

SPRING 2021

Section 201 MWF 8:00 - 8:50 am (PY 200)

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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 structural features of American politics—such as Congress, the presidency, the federal courts, civil liberties and rights, foreign policy, and public policy—and Texas politics—such as Texas legislature, the governor and the executive branch, Texas courts, public finance and public policy. To do that, we will look at 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:

- identify the key structural features of the federal government including the legislative branch, the executive branch, and the Judicial branch.
- identify the key structural features of the three main branches of government in Texas
- explain the origins and evolution of the civil liberties in the Bill of Rights as they apply to the federal government and the states.
- describe how different groups have fought for and won protection of their civil rights.
- explain the important roles and structure of county government in Texas.
- Describe the key steps and concepts in the policy-making process and the major issues that have shaped major policies in 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 will be required of all students. Active participation in discussions is critical for students to succeed in this course.

Assignment	Point	Notes
Final exam	40	Online format
Midterm exam	30	Online format
Current event essays (2)	10 (5 x 2)	500 words (due Feb 28 and Apr 18)
Movie reflection papers (2)	10 (5 x 2)	500 words each (due Feb 7 and Apr 11)
Engagement (attendance + participation)	10	Online participation
* Extra credit opportunity	Up to 3	Current event essay presentation (10 mins)

- 1. Exams (Midterm: 30 points / Final: 40 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 (similarity rate above 5% will be penalized). All papers should be submitted electronically via D2L.
- 4. Engagement with the course (10 points):** Your attendance and participation are vital to learning the material presented in this course. Without any change of university-wide COVID-19 policy, you will be expected to come to class prepared to engage thoughtfully, listen attentively, and interact with your peers respectfully. However, please do not come to class if you are feeling sick or you think you might have been exposed to COVID-19. Contact me (via email) and provide details about your situation at your earliest convenience for your absence to be excused. Over the course of the semester, 6 excused absences will be allowed for all students. More than 6 absences and unexcused absences may lower your final grade.

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 of the material for this course is located on the MSU D2L platform. Since all of the material for this course will be located on the MSU D2L platform, each student is expected to be familiar with this platform. 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 and mobile phones are NOT compatible with the Respondus Lockdown Browser and Monitor.
- **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.

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. The 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. For more details, please go to Disability Support Services.

On Electronics and Courtesy

All electronic messaging devices must be turned off and stowed away by the time class begins: no e-mail/Facebook/text message checking, net surfing, etc. during class time. The use of laptops and tablets is prohibited in class except when explicitly permitted by the instructor. Out of courtesy to your classmates and your instructor, please come to class on time and do not leave until the class ends, unless you obtained prior permission, and do not engage in private conversations in class.

Textbooks

1. Benjamin Ginsberg, Benjamin, Margaret Weir, Theodore Lowi and Caroline Tolbert. 2019. *We the People*. 12th Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. ["*We the People*"]
2. Champagne, Anthony, and Edward Harpham. 2019. *Governing Texas: An Introduction to Texas Politics*. 4th Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. ["*Governing Texas*"]

Course Schedule

Week 1 – Introduction and Overview

Questions: Why is government needed? What do Americans think about government? How has the social composition of the American population changed over time? What recent events have affected Americans' trust in government? What are the defining characteristics of political culture in Texas? Why does Texas' political culture matter in American politics?

Monday, January 11

- Introduction to the course

Wednesday, January 13

- *We the People*, Chapter 1 (2-39)
- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 1 (pp. 2-43)

Friday, January 15

- Online discussion due January 17 (11:30 pm)

Week 2 – Congress

Questions: (Why) is sociological representation important? Does it matter if the backgrounds of members of Congress reflect the population as a whole? Can members still represent their constituents effectively if they do not come from similar backgrounds? Would Congress work more effectively if it brought back earmarks? Why are earmarks so difficult to eliminate?

Monday, January 18

- Martin Luther King's Birthday (No Class)

Wednesday, January 20

- *We the People*, Chapter 12 (466-489)

Friday, January 22

- *We the People*, Chapter 12 (489-511)
- Online discussion due January 24 (11:30 pm)

Week 3 – Texas Legislature

Questions: What are the basic rules of the legislature in Texas? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a part-time or a full-time legislature? Are there issues in Texas that you think the legislature should address? How would you go about getting attention for those issues?

Monday, January 25

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 7 (212-234)

Wednesday, January 27

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 7 (234-249)

Friday, January 29

- Online discussion due January 31 (11:30 pm)

Week 4 – The Presidency

Questions: What is the president’s role in the legislative process? How might the anticipation of a veto affect the behavior of Congress? Why do you think all presidents have been men and all but one have been white? Why do you think so many presidents have come from the South and the East?

Monday, February 1

- *We the People*, Chapter 13 (512-533)

Wednesday, February 3

- *We the People*, Chapter 13 (533-549)

Friday, February 5

- **Movie Watching: “Loving” (Netflix)**
- **A reflection paper should be submitted by February 7 (11:30 pm)**

Week 5 – The Presidency and the Executive Branch of Texas

Questions: Compared with other large-population states, are the institutional powers of the Texas governor high or low? Would Texas government be more efficient and more responsive to public needs if it had a stronger governor? What enhancements in the powers of Texas governors would be most beneficial to the management of state government?

Monday, February 8

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 8 (250-291)

Thursday, February 10

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 8 (250-291)

Friday, February 12

- Online discussion due February 14 (11:30 pm)

Week 6 – Classes cancelled due to the snowstorm

Week 7 – The Federal Courts

Question: Does racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of federal judges matter? What are the key components of democracy? What similarities and differences are there in the judicial appointments of the presidents? What is selective incorporation? What is its significance in American constitutional history?

Monday, February 22

- *We the People*, Chapter 15 (590-610)

Wednesday, February 24

- *We the People*, Chapter 15 (610-629)

Friday, February 26

- Online discussion due February 28 (11:30 pm)
- **Current event paper #1 due February 28 (11:30 pm)**

Week 8 – The Judiciary of Texas

What are the advantages of nonpartisan elections to select judges? Which method of selection do you think is the best and why? Are there regional patterns in how judges are selected? Are there more or fewer minority judges in Texas than in the state population overall? What are some of the factors that might lead to an increase in the representation of minorities in the state's courts?

Monday, March 1

- *We the People*, Chapter 14 (573-589)

Wednesday, March 3

- Midterm Review

Friday, March 5

- **Midterm**

Week 9 – Bureaucracy in a Democracy

Questions: With 2 million people working for the executive branch, how can Congress and the president be sure that they are serving the public's interests? What is the impact of iron triangles on government services in the United States? Do the ties among agencies, congressional committees, and organized groups promote the efficient provision of government services?

Monday, March 8

- *We the People*, Chapter 14 (550-572)

Thursday, March 10

- *We the People*, Chapter 14 (573-589)

Friday, March 12

- Online discussion due October 3 (11:30 pm)

Week 10 – Civil Liberties

Questions: The United States still uses the motto “In God We Trust” and calls itself “one nation, under God.” Do you think its reference to God is a violation of the separation of church and state? How do we determine what speech should be protected because it contributes to this exchange and what speech does not? Studies have shown that African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to be jailed than whites. Is this a violation of civil liberties?

Monday, March 15

- *We the People*, Chapter 4 (114-136)

Wednesday, March 17

- *We the People*, Chapter 4 (136-157)

Friday, March 19

- Online discussion due March 21 (11:30 pm)

Week 11 – Civil Rights

Questions: What were the consequences of “separate but equal” policy for southern society and for blacks’ civil rights? Should there be public efforts to encourage more female students to enter well-paid fields such as science and technology, or is that mainly a matter of individual choice? How much does each of these factors—education, political office, and income—say about gender equality in the United States?

Monday, March 22

- *We the People*, Chapter 5 (158-179)

Wednesday, March 24

- *We the People*, Chapter 5 (179-203)

Friday, March 26

- Online discussion due March 28 (11:30 pm)

Week 12 – Government and the Economy

Questions: Why does the unemployment rate matter for the economic health of the country? What other policies could the government implement? What does the American government do to ensure that the products American buy are safe? How does government spending hurt/help the economy? Why is the Federal Reserve so important to economic policy? What are some of the policies that can be used to address climate change?

Monday, March 29

- *We the People*, Chapter 16 (630-673)

Wednesday, March 31

- Online Discussion due April 4 (11:30pm)

Friday, April

- Holiday Break

Week 13 – Foreign Policy

Questions: Should the United States pay more attention to the human rights records of its trading partners, like China, or allies, like Saudi Arabia? What factors might help to determine the effectiveness of economic sanctions on North Korea? In what ways do US ideals affect the nation's foreign policies? Should foreign policies be guided by ideals or determined by national interests?

Monday, April 5

- *We the People*, Chapter 18 (714-733)

Wednesday, April 7

- *We the People*, Chapter 18 (733-751)

Thursday, April 9

- **Movie on American Politics: "American Factory" (Netflix)**
- **A reflection paper should be submitted by April 11 (11:30 pm)**

Week 14 – Local Government

Questions: Of these major Texas cities, which city council, which city council best reflects the racial/ethnic composition of its population? What are some of the characteristics of states with large numbers of local governments? Does the picture change when we factor in population? Which states have larger numbers of local governments per capita?

Monday, April 12

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 10 (326-365)

Wednesday, April 14

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 10 (326-365)

Thursday, April 16

- **Current event paper #2 on April 18 (11:30 pm)**

Week 15 – Public Finance and Public Policy in Texas

Questions: Which states have the highest income tax rates? What are the advantages and disadvantages to having no state income tax in Texas? Which group pays the highest percentage of its income in taxes in Texas? Are public schools in Texas still segregated? What should policy makers do? What are the stereotypes about people on welfare? Are these stereotypes accurate? What appears to be the relationship between state taxes and insurance rates in a state?

Monday, April 19

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 11 (366-401)

Wednesday, April 21

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 12 (403-439)
- Final exam review

Friday, April 23

- Online discussion due April 25(11:30 pm)



Week 16 – Final Exam (online) – April 26