

*Midwestern State University - Political Science - Fall 2021*

**American Government** (POLS 1333-107) (TR 2:00-3:20 PM PY 200)

**Instructor:** Kyle Keel e-mail: [kyle.keel@msutexas.edu](mailto:kyle.keel@msutexas.edu) Office: OD 214

**Course Description:** American & Texas Government I concerns the study of the culture of the United States and of Texas. We will study the constitutions guiding US and Texas society and Texas and the US' relationship in the federal system. Also to be explored are political parties and interest groups, the media and public opinion, elections, and local governments. The course is legally called "American Government" by the State of Texas, but half of the course is about Texas, per state law.

**Textbooks (TWO)**

*We the People* (Thirteenth Edition), by Ginsburg, Lowi, Weir, Tolbert, Campbell. W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2021.

*Governing Texas* (Fifth Edition) by Champagne, Harpham, Casellas. W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 2021.

**Expectations:**

Students are expected to attend class and behave in an adult fashion. It is important to attend class in order to understand what is going on with the class itself (regarding grades) and to understand how to approach studying the material appropriately for quizzes and exams. Learn how to take notes over the lectures to help you remember them. If you miss class, it is up to you to make up notes from the day of absence. Make a "note buddy" with another student in class. Show up before the class begins, not after the Lecturer has arrived and begun lecturing/giving a grade. Numerical penalties might be assessed for excessive or noteworthy tardiness. Leaving after class roll is taken (without permission established by the professor prior to class) will result in class roll being taken again and the offender being counted absent altogether for that respective class day.

If a student shows up for class, but leaves for an extended or significant period of time for that class (it's up to the professor to determine excessiveness of absence), then the student shall be counted as absent.

Students get 4 **unexcused** absences before an instructor-initiated absenteeism form (an **attendance notice sent to the Dean of Students**) is sent to inform the student and the school that the student is not appropriately attending (or engaging grade-wise). Afterwards, the student can be dropped from the class by the Professor for failure to attend and/or participate in an appropriate manner.

Please turn off cell phones, or place them on vibrate, as they can distract the class. Also, do not text message in class. Give your thumbs a break! In short, the student is expected to attend, provide relevant participation regarding the taking of grades, and not hinder anyone else from listening, asking questions, taking notes, or participating fully. If a student is being a distraction (talking, watching videos on a computer, etc.) during class, they can be told to leave,

with that day counting as an absence. In addition, points may also be deducted from a grade, at the professor's discretion.

If I (the Professor) have not arrived to class after **15 minutes** have passed since the technical start of class-time, then students are free to leave without repercussion.

In addition, any student in this course who has a disability that may preclude demonstrating fully his or her abilities should contact me as soon as possible. We will then discuss the necessary accommodations to facilitate full and equal participation for the student through Disability Services. Resources are limited and tied to need officially established through the university; otherwise resources cannot be accommodated legally.

IF a student has a health issue/concern regarding attendance long-term for the entire semester, then the student should contact and consult with Disability Support Services to remedy the situation.

**Students must report COVID-related symptoms to the MSU Safety App and fill out the COVID link when applicable. Follow any medical instructions given from a medical professional regarding the issue, including self-quarantining. Then specify the issue with the professor through appropriate email from your MSU student email account.**

It is important to note that this is a class with political discussion, so there may be discussion on difficult and sensitive issues. All students have the ability to present their arguments on an issue before the class, just make sure the premises are sound and keep your opinions **constructive!!!** I will **not** allow derogatory comments just for the sake of hearing one's own voice.

**During class, students are expected to take notes during the lectures. Do not distract your fellow students (some of whom actually care about their grade 😊). Questions, answers, and class discussion are most welcome, of course. The lecture format is modeled on the basic left-brain German-influenced Socratic method.**

I often incorporate current events (elections, Supreme Court cases, issues with foreign countries) into the discussion of a class. **Unless otherwise noted**, current events will not be a part of a quiz or exam. Such discussion is meant to help the students get a feel for what's going on, as they likely dealing with being overwhelmed with university life.

The best way to contact me about an issue is in person, as it puts a face to the name. Emails are a good secondary contact mechanism, but they do not suffice as "legitimate" documentation for an absence. Note that because of security threats, my MSU email account is heavily-secured and therefore will not accept weak, spam, or other unusual emails. **Students need to activate their personal MSU student email to send a legitimate email and have access to the class on D2L\*** (D2L will be used in case of emergency, such as during a public health issue).

**In an email, you should provide a title message, your name and applicable class, and state business in complete sentences.** This makes it easier to determine the validity of the email and figure out what applies to you, the student. If an email looks questionable regarding security issues, I will ignore and delete the email to protect relevant data. I will not discuss grades through the usage of non-MSU email addresses.

**I check and respond to emails at least once per day (not counting virtual office hours), sometime between lunch and before I leave the office, usually around 3-4 PM. If a student emails me after this time period, I will not see the email until the next day and therefore will not respond until I see the email. If a student emails me after this time period on a Friday, I will not see the message (and therefore respond) until the following Monday. Please allow for the appropriate amount of time to pass (as aforementioned) before sending multiple emails about the same issue.**

Communication is the key to success. If I don't know you or what's going on with you, then it just seems like you are handling everything okay or just do not care. It is your grade and your degree; own it! Emails from the Dean of Students do not suffice as appropriate documentation themselves but rather serve as helpful reminders for faculty.

**Grades:** There will be **3** exams and quizzes given at announced times (no pop quizzes!). Each exam is worth 25% of the student's final grade; the quizzes serve as 25%.

**ALL GRADES FOR THIS SEMESTER SHALL TAKE PLACE IN CLASS. AS PREVIOUSLY MENTIONED, D2L WILL BE USED IN CASE OF AN EMERGENCY THAT AFFECTS THE ENTIRE UNIVERSITY.**

**THE PROFESSOR HAS THE RIGHT TO INCREASE, REDUCE, CHANGE, OR OTHERWISE ALTER ASSIGNMENTS, THE GRADING SCALE, AND THE LECTURING FORMAT TO ACCOMMODATE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUES AND EMERGENCIES. THE PROFESSOR HAS THE RIGHT TO FORMULATE QUIZZES, EXAMS, AND OTHER ASSIGNMENTS ONLINE ON MSU'S D2L TESTING SYSTEM IF GRADES CANNOT TAKE PLACE SAFELY IN THE CLASSROOM FORMAT.**

**STUDENTS WOULD NEED TO ACTIVATE AND UTILIZE THEIR MSU STUDENT EMAIL ADDRESS TO ACCESS ANY QUIZZES OR EXAMS THAT WOULD TAKE PLACE ON D2L IN SUCH AN EMERGENCY SCENARIO. IF A STUDENT IS HAVING DIFFICULTY ACCESSING D2L ITSELF, THE STUDENT NEEDS TO CONTACT DISTANCE EDUCATION'S "D2L Help" at [d2lhelp@msutexas.edu](mailto:d2lhelp@msutexas.edu) for access issues.**

**If students do not follow ORAL OR WRITTEN instructions (regarding questions, name, title, etc.) regarding quizzes and exams, then points will be deducted from the overall score.**

**To have the opportunity to receive full credit on a quiz, students MUST appropriately write their name, classroom code, date, title, and answers.** Students may write the individual questions as well, if the student so desires. **Any other writing will be construed as cheating by the professor.** Unnecessarily cramming answers (when there are still available lines on the sheet) will not be accepted and will result in penalty. Finally, leaving the classroom early and without documentation (whether or not a grade has been taken) will result in the student losing points on an individual grade to be determined by the professor.

Unauthorized talking during a quiz or exam will be considered cheating. If there is a question, then raise your hand and I will initiate appropriate contact with you so as not to disturb others.

**If a student leaves after a quiz is taken, and has not beforehand provided legitimate documentation to explain the necessity of leaving, then the quiz shall be voided and shall count as a “0” towards the overall grade.**

Quizzes are **usually**, but not always, taken weekly and at the beginning of class. Some quizzes are directly taken from charts on the textbooks, while others come from different sources like lectures. The format of a quiz will be outlined in class a week prior to the taking of the quiz.

Before each exam, I give a review of the course material. For the two midterms, I give an oral review. For the final exam, I give a written review mentioning the topics to be covered on the final. Exam questions are derived from the lectures and the associated chapters in the book(s).

Students will need to bring appropriate supplies to complete class grades, including (but not completely exhaustive) long scantrons, pencils, notebook paper for quizzes, among other items.

**During an exam, students are not allowed to look at phones, other electronic devices, loose papers, notebooks, etc. Any violation of this rule will result in a ZERO=0 for the grade and possible expulsion from the class via a conduct referral. I will keep you aware of the time. Also, if a student wishes to leave the room once exams have been passed out, the student must turn in the exam immediately as it will be deemed by me to be complete. Go the bathroom before the exam.**

**1<sup>st</sup> exam- around the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of October;**

**2<sup>nd</sup> exam- around the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of November;**

**Final Exam: Thursday, December 9<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 PM.**

Note: No grade will ever be determined by a student’s individual political beliefs on any given issue. It matters not what you believe, but rather that you are willing to engage appropriately in class activities.

A 2.0 GPA, or a “C” average, is required to graduate with a college/university degree. The grading scale is standard for assignments:

90-100 A    80-89 B    70-79 C    60-69 D    0-59 F    60-100 is a passing score

**Note: ANYONE SEEKING TO MAKE-UP A MISSED GRADE MUST HAVE LEGITIMATE DOCUMENTATION PROVIDED EXPLAINING THE NATURE OF THE ABSENCE. I determine what is deemed “legitimate”: this could include military deployment, job training, court or legal issues, medical emergencies, etc. Regarding exams, the documentation must be turned in to me before the exam (unless not physically possible). Without such documentation, the individual grade will be a ZERO = 0. Documentation for absences must be turned in to me in person, unless submitted as an appropriate email attachment (see the aforementioned rules regarding emails).**

**All makeup grades (quizzes and exams) and forms of class credit (excepting the Final itself) must be completed prior to the beginning of Finals Week. If not completed before the start of Finals Week, the grade(s) shall become a “0”.**

**Usage of any electronic device during the taking of a grade (quiz or exam) shall be construed as cheating by the student and shall result in a ‘0’ for the grade.**

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Advice from a student and professor:

College is the time when one transitions from childhood to adulthood. You will be given vast amounts of freedom like never before and you will have access to many different things, some good and some bad. There are no more truancy issues and parents cannot even legally get information from your professors about your grades, as non-felon civilian adults have a significant “right of privacy” over their person and their property. Grades are between the student and the parent, even if parents are paying tuition. **(As a professor, I am bound by federal and state law to oblige the right of privacy (through the Federal law FERPA, even if the college student is still technically a minor. Sorry, I don’t deal with parents, whether the student wants me to or not ☹. I am a State of Texas employee and must protect both myself and my employer.)**

With all that newly-found freedom, **however**, is the sobering realization that society expects each individual member of that society to do something, and fast. If one does not continue education, that process is immediate, with societal safety nets limited by design and necessity. College provides a phenomenal opportunity to get guidance for the adult stage of life by indoctrinating a skillset, from a respective field of study, on how to survive and thrive. American higher education, in its basic intention, is to make the student more well-rounded and somewhat competent in different modes of thought. That’s why students take “basics”, or non-major and non-minor classes. Get the basics done first, as (1) they will usually transfer anywhere if at least a “C” and (2) you don’t want to be a senior stuck in a freshman-level course. Even students who love college will likely have to fight some degree of being “burnt out” after a period of years. It is natural, but it is easier to conquer if you’re not stuck in a class with the mode of thought being so introductory (and dull by the standards of a senior brain). College offers many resources to help students navigate both college itself and life (academic organizations, counseling, disability services, training seminars, job fairs, job placement, study abroad, and wellness services like weightlifting). Learn to understand what “studying” actually means and develop ways of studying different types of academic material. The more one studies, the easier it becomes to study. The more one reads, the more one picks up through reading, and the more worthwhile and enjoyable reading becomes.

**Ultimately it is up to the student to obtain his/her degree and do something. When you lose your childhood, you go from being the future to being the present. With all that freedom of adulthood comes ALL that RESPONSIBILITY of adulthood. You might not be famous or ever be rich, but neither of those traits guarantees happiness anyway. Find what you are good at and**



## Chapter Outline

First Exam: US Chapters 1-3

Chapter 1- American Political Culture

Chapter 2- The Founding and the Constitution

Chapter 3- Federalism

Second Exam: Texas Chapters 1-3, 10

Chapter 1- The Political Culture, People, and Economy of Texas

Chapter 2- The Texas Constitution

Chapter 3- Texas in the Federal System

Chapter 10- Local Government

Final Exam: US Chapters 6-11, Texas Chapters 4-6

US Ch. 9- Political Parties

TX Ch. 4- Political Parties

US Ch. 10- Campaigns and Elections

TX Ch. 5- Campaigns and Elections

US Ch. 8- Political Participation and Voting

US Ch. 11- Groups and Interests

TX Ch. 6- Interest Groups and Lobbying

US Ch. 6- Public Opinion

US Ch. 7- The Media

**For the Final exam, similar chapters will be combined, not studied individually.  
Pay attention to the Exam Review Guide.**