

Midwestern State University
Department of Political Science

POLS 1333: AMERICAN GOVERNMENT I

Spring 2023

Section X21 & Section X66 (Online Courses)

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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
Midterm exam	30	Online format
Current event essays (2)	10 (5 x 2)	500 words each
Movie reflection papers (2)	10 (5 x 2)	500 words each
Engagement (attendance + participation)	20	Online 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 (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 first posting as your attendance and additional postings and replies as your class participation. In each week, the online discussion boards will become unable to write at 11:00 pm on Sunday. Over the course of the semester, 2 absences will be allowed for all students. More than 2 absences will significantly 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 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 and exams, but these are not advised for any assignment with a written component. 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*. 13th 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*. 5th Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. ["*Governing Texas*"]

Course Schedule

Week 1 – Introduction and American Political Culture

Discussion questions: 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 17 – January 22

- Introduction to the course
- *We the People*, Chapter 1 (pp. 2-33)
- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 1 (pp. 3-40)
- **Online discussion due: January 22 (Sunday 11:00 pm)**

Week 2 – The Founding and the Constitution

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

January 23 – January 29

- *We the People*, Chapter 2 (pp. 34-67)
- **Online discussion due: January 29 (11:00 pm)**

Week 3 – Federalism

Discussion questions: 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?

January 30 – February 5

- *We the People*, Chapter 3 (pp. 68-97)
- **Online discussion due: February 5 (11:00 pm)**

Week 4 – The Texas Constitution

Discussion questions: 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 6 – February 12

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 2 (pp. 44-85)
- **Online discussion due February 12 (11:00 pm)**
- **Movie Watching: "Loving" (Netflix)**
- **A reflection paper should be submitted by February 12 (11:00 pm)**

Week 5 – Texas in the Federal System

Discussion Questions: 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 13 – February 19

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 3 (pp. 81-114)
- **Online discussion due February 19 (11:00 pm)**

Week 6 – Political Participation and Voting

Discussion Questions: Why did the US government denied 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?

Monday, February 20 – February 26

- *We the People*, Chapter 8 (pp. 264-303)
- **Online discussion due February 26 (11:00 pm)**

Week 7 – Political Parties

Discussion Questions: 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?

February 27 – March 5

- *We the People*, Chapter 9 (pp. 304-343)
- **Online discussion due March 5 (11:00 pm)**
- **Current event paper #1 March 5 (11:00 pm)**

Week 8 – Midterm Exam (March 8)

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

Week 9 – Spring Break (March 13 – March 18)

Week 10 – Campaigns and Elections

Discussion Questions: 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 20 – March 26

- *We the People*, Chapter 10 (pp. 344-393)
- **Online discussion due March 26 (11:00 pm)**

Week 11 – Campaigns and Elections in Texas

Discussion Questions: 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 27 – April 2

- *Governing Texas*, Chapter 5 (pp. 151-184)
- **Online discussion due April 2 (11:00 pm)**

Week 12 – Holiday Break (April 3 – April 9)

Week 13 – Groups and Interests

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 10 – April 16

- *We the People*, Chapter 11 (pp. 394-427)
- **Online discussion due April 16 (11:00 pm)**

Week 14 – Interest Groups and Lobbying in Texas

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 17 – April 23

- Governing Texas, Chapter 6 (pp. 185-214)
- *Movie Watching: "13th" (Netflix)*
- **A reflection paper should be submitted by April 23 (11:00 pm)**

Week 15 – Public Opinion

Discussion Questions: 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?

April 24 – April 30

- *We the People*, Chapter 6 (pp. 204-253)
- **Online discussion due April 30 (11:00 pm)**

Day 16 – The Media

Discussion Questions: 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?

May 1 – May 5

- *We the People*, Chapter 7 (pp. 254-261)
- **Current event paper #2 due May 5 (11:00 pm)**

Week 17 – Final Exam (May 8)