



POLS 2301 - Introduction to American Government I  
(Section 11292) Spring 2014  
Class Time: MWF 9:10 a.m. – 10:05 a.m.  
Location: Social Behavioral Sciences (SBS 110)

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Office Hours: Mondays: 12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.;  
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### **Teaching Philosophy Statement**

Given the complexities in understanding American government processes and politics, it is imperative that students take an active role in learning. To aid in this process, I embrace the following philosophy regarding teaching:

1. I believe students learn best when they are given opportunities to apply their knowledge. As an Active and Collaborative Engagement for Students (ACES) Fellow, I encourage regular class discussions, and devote a fair amount of class time to writing exercises and group activities. I will explain the purpose of the exercises and activities and then let students apply them, asking questions throughout the process.
2. I believe students will get what they put in this course. Simply put, each student must decide how much time he/she is willing to commit to the course in order to earn the grade he/she desires.
3. It is my ultimate goal to ignite students' interest in learning about the political world around them, challenge them to think proactively about their education, and finally, to create a learning environment that will allow students to develop critical thinking skills that will be an asset throughout their academic and professional lives.

### **Course Description**

Despite a national consensus that Americans value liberty, equality, and democracy, conflict is the hallmark of the American constitutional system. Since its inception, Americans have generally supported the principles but struggle to agree how to achieve and instill these principles in American politics. Should the federal government require every state to recognize gay marriage? In a post-September 11<sup>th</sup> America, to what extent should citizens sacrifice their privacy to ensure national security? Should all groups have the right to assemble including groups such as the Kansas-based Westboro Baptist Church that is known for picketing soldiers' funerals? When liberty, equality, and democracy come into conflict with each other, how should we decide which values should take precedence?

This course is the first half of a two-part core requirement for Texas state colleges and universities that introduces students to American political behavior by examining the systems that comprise our

government and how citizens, elected officials, political parties, and interest groups continue to influence our answers to these questions. The design of the U.S. and Texas Constitutions provide a framework to explore a number of concepts including federalism, public opinion, the media, political parties, elections, and interest groups, and their relevance to shaping national and Texas politics. Students are encouraged to use information acquired in this course to become more informed and active participants in the American democratic experience.

### Course Goals

After the course, you should:

1. Continue to develop critical-thinking, reading, written and oral communication through formal and informal assignments, such as group exercises, short essays, and in-class discussions.
2. Develop the ability to connect governmental processes, policies, and institutions to their day-to-day lives.

### Student Learning Outcomes

1. The Constitution – Identify the powers assigned to Congress, the Presidency, and the Courts based on the separation of powers specified in the U.S.
2. Comparing Federal and State Constitutions – Differentiate between the powers and functions of the U.S. Constitution and the Texas State Constitution.
3. Public opinion – Identify the key factors that shape individual opinions and describe the methods researchers employ to measure them.
4. Campaigns and Elections – Demonstrate knowledge of the basic elements of the U.S. system of campaigns and elections.
5. Political Parties and Interest Groups– Explain how organized interests and parties influence policy.

### Required Course Materials

**Textbook:** Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore J. Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline J. Tolbert, Anthony Champagne, and Edward J. Harpham. *We the People: An Introduction to American Politics. 9<sup>th</sup> Texas Edition.* New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.  
ISBN-13: 978-0-393-90452-9 (hardcover) other versions of the text are available at <http://books.wwnorton.com/books/detail.aspx?id=4294975527> or at the bookstore.

**Devices:** i>clicker2: ISBN: **1429280476**. You can purchase i>clicker2 in the bookstore or online at [www.iclicker.com](http://www.iclicker.com). I>clicker2 is a response system to be used for attendance and in-class activities. Each student must have their own i>clicker2 registered to him/her and ready for use in each class to receive credit and the device can be used for other courses. Once you have answered at least one question in class, you can register your device at <http://www1.iclicker.com/register-an-iclicker>. Complete the fields with your first name, last name, student ID, and remote ID. Your student ID for i>clicker your **BANNER STUDENT ID** number (it is a number that begins with “L”). The remote ID is the series of numbers and sometimes letters found on the back of the i>clicker2 remote. A tutorial on how to register is available at <http://support.iclicker.com/categories/20106298-Student-Support>. Students who do not register their i>clicker2 **before class on Wednesday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>** will not receive credit for attendance, participation, or for in-class i>clicker2 activities.

## Course Policies

To ensure that everyone has the opportunity to learn without undue distraction, the following are guidelines for appropriate behavior in our classroom:

- Civility and topicality are essential for in-class discussion. You may comment on recent and relevant news events; however, name-calling, taunting, harassment, or otherwise non-productive talk is not allowed. I reserve the right to penalize your grades for inappropriate behavior, up to and including permanent removal from the class.
- Turn off all cell phones (or put them on silent mode) and remove ear buds during class.
- You are permitted to use laptops/tablets during class for the purpose of taking notes only. If they are used for any other purpose including doing work for another course during class, I will terminate your computer privileges immediately.
- The use of recording devices, including camera phones and tape recorders, and the reproduction, distribution, or publication (on-line or otherwise) of abbreviated, transcribed, or taped versions of my lectures is **not permitted** without my consent. Typically, consent will only be given to students who have documentation from the Lamar University Office of Services for Students with Disabilities that this is a necessary accommodation.

## Evaluation

### *Participation and Attendance*

Regular participation and attendance are recommended for all students. As a way to keep this course both informative and useful, you should read required materials *before* coming to class and be prepared to discuss the readings. You are encouraged to read newspapers, websites or listen to television or radio news to keep up with current political news. Almost every lecture contains a series of polling questions that you will answer using your i>clicker2. The questions are designed to both ensure student engagement to the learning process and to facilitate discussion. You must respond to 75 percent of the questions to earn points each session.

Students who are unable to attend a class do not need to notify the professor. Instead, you should contact a classmate for lecture notes as **I do not post or distribute lecture notes/slides**. It is necessary to note that students who frequently miss class rarely perform as well as those who regularly attend. Also, some students receiving assistance will have participation reported to Student Financial Aid which, depending on their final grade, may be a factor in loss or retention of financial aid in future semesters. You earn 1 point for *productive* participation in each class (25 points total).

### *In-Class Writing Assignments and Group Exercises*

You will be required to complete short in-class writing assignments and group exercises during the semester. **If you are absent from class during a session that includes either an in-class assignment or group exercise, you will receive a zero.** The objective of both activities is to help you think more deeply about the course material and how it relates to your own experiences and ideas. Grades for the writing assignments are based on content, organization, and grammar and spelling. A writing assignment rubric is available in Blackboard Learn in the “Content” folder. I will collect and grade only eight (8) of the in-class writing assignments worth 10 points each (80 points total).

### *Blackboard Learn Quizzes*

Prior to and after the completion of each chapter, you will complete timed pre and post-chapter quizzes in Blackboard Learn. The quizzes ensure that you have some familiarity with the chapter prior to coming to class while enabling me to assess your understanding of the main concepts well before exams. Questions will be multiple choice and will cover lecture material, reading assignments, or any in-class activities for that particular week only. **The pre-chapter quizzes will remain visible until 11:00 p.m. the night before we begin the chapter. You can take post-chapter quizzes until 11:00 p.m. the day we complete the chapter.** I do not offer makeup quizzes if you miss deadlines. Blackboard Learn quizzes are worth 5 points each (140 points total).

### *Exams*

There will be 4 exams, but only the 3 highest grades will count. You have the option to take the cumulative final exam to replace your lowest exam grade (if the final exam score is higher than the lowest exam score) or to provide a grade for a missed exam. Students who miss more than one exam will receive a 0 for each exam missed. Exams will include approximately 50 multiple choice questions that will come from course lectures, class discussions, and course readings. Each question is worth two points. You will have 50 minutes to complete each of the regular exams and 2 and a half hours to complete the final examination. Exams are worth 100 points (300 points total).

### *Exam Day Reminders*

1. Students may not leave the room after the first exam is handed out.
2. Students who arrive after the submission of the first exam will not be allowed to take the exam so please arrive on time.

### **Grading and Evaluation\***

Grades will be posted on Blackboard Learn and will be based on the following:

Participation and Attendance	25 points
In-class writing assignments and group exercises	80 points
Blackboard Learn pre-chapter and post-chapter quizzes	140 points
Three (3) exams	300 points
<b>Total</b>	<b>525 points</b>

\*I do not offer extra credit on an individual basis.

### **Grading Scale**

**A**= 525 – 472 points  
**B**= 471 – 420 points  
**C**= 419 – 367 points  
**D**= 366 – 315 points  
**F**= <314 points

### **Help & Resources**

W.W. Norton provides a free online resource called "StudySpace" to help you organize a study plan, review readings, and evaluate your knowledge through quizzes, flashcards, and video exercises. You can access StudySpace at <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/polisci/we-the->

[people9/texas/welcome.aspx](http://people9.texas/welcome.aspx). Integrating these tools as part of your preparation for class is likely to improve quiz and exam performance.

In addition to the textbook resources, you will find 3-4 study questions for each chapter in Blackboard Learn (in the “Course Materials” folders). The purpose of the questions is to help you assess their comprehension of the major themes presented in each chapter. While I **do not** assign the questions for a grade, it is very likely that I will use one of the questions from each chapter for the in-class writing assignment exercise.

Lamar University’s Student Advising and Retention Services (STARS) offers tutoring in many courses, including American government, and can also help you with general study, note-taking, or textbook reading strategies. The STARS Tutoring Center is located on the first floor of the Mary and John Gray Library. If you have any questions, you can reach STARS at (409) 880-PLAN.

### **Academic Honesty**

Students are specifically warned against all forms of cheating and plagiarism. The *Lamar University Student Handbook* clearly reads: “Any student found guilty of academic dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subjected to disciplinary action. Punishable offenses include, but are not limited to, cheating on an examination or academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion, and the abuse of source materials.” One aspect of the *Handbook*’s definition of cheating includes “purchasing or otherwise acquiring and submitting as one’s own work any research paper or other writing assignment prepared by an individual or firm.” Plagiarism is defined as “the appropriation and the unacknowledged incorporation of another’s work or ideas into one’s own and submitted for credit.” Faculty members in the College of arts and Sciences investigate all cases of suspected plagiarism. Any student who is found guilty of academic dishonesty in this course will fail the exercise in question and perhaps the course itself.

### **Disability Accommodation**

It is the policy of Lamar University to accommodate students with disabilities, pursuant to federal and state law and to the University’s commitment to equal educational opportunities. Students with a documented disability should contact the Director of the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SFSWD) which is located in 105 Communication Building. Students may write to P.O. Box 10087, Beaumont, Texas 77710, call 409.880.8347, fax 409.880.2225 or e-mail [SFSWD@lamar.edu](mailto:SFSWD@lamar.edu). The Director will arrange to meet with the student to determine reasonable academic adjustments and/or accommodations. Additional information is available at [dept.lamar.edu/sfswd](http://dept.lamar.edu/sfswd).

### **Emergency Procedures**

Many types of emergencies can occur on campus; instructions for severe weather or violence/active shooter, fire, or chemical release can be found at:

<http://www.lamar.edu/about-lu/administration/risk-management/index.html>. Following are procedures for the first two:

### **Severe Weather**

- Follow the directions of the instructor or emergency personnel.
- Seek shelter in an interior room or hallway on the lowest floor, putting as many walls as possible between you and the outside.
- If you are in a multi-story building, and you cannot get to the lowest floor, pick a hallway in the center of the building.

- Stay in the center of the room, away from exterior walls, windows, and doors.

**Violence/Active Shooter (CADD)**

- **CALL** - 8-3-1-1 from a campus phone (880-8311 from a cell phone). Note: Calling 9-1-1 from either a campus phone or cell phone will contact Beaumont City Police Dispatch rather than University Police.
- **AVOID**- If possible, self-evacuate to a safe area outside the building. Follow directions of police officers.
- **DENY**- Barricade the door with desks, chairs, bookcases or any other items. Move to a place inside the room where you are not visible. Turn off the lights and remain quiet. Remain there until told by police it is safe.
- **DEFEND**- Use chairs, desks, cell phones or whatever is immediately available to distract and/or defend yourself and others from attack.

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The information contained in this class syllabus is subject to change with advanced notice.  
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<b>TOPICAL OUTLINE AND CLASS SCHEDULE</b>					
<b>Week</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Dates to Remember</b>	<b>Scheduled Topic</b>	<b>Reading Schedule</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
<b>Introduction – Political Culture</b>					
1	Mon, 1/13			Introductions and course overview	
	Wed, 1/15	Last day to register for Spring 2014 with late fee	American Political Culture	Chapter 1	Chapter 1 Pre- chapter quiz
	Fri, 1/17				Chapter 1 Post-chapter quiz
2	Mon, 1/20		<b>***Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday***</b>		
	Wed, 1/22		The Political Culture, People, and Economy of Texas	Chapter 19	Chapter 19 Pre-chapter quiz
	Fri, 1/24				Chapter 19 Post-chapter quiz
<b>Foundations</b>					
3	Mon, 1/27		The Founding and the Constitution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Chapter 2</li> <li>❖ Declaration of Independence (Appendix A1)</li> <li>❖ Room for Debate. 2012. “Another Stab at the Constitution.” <i>The New York Times</i>.  <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/07/08/another-stab-at-the-us-constitution">http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/07/08/another-stab-at-the-us-constitution</a> (November 11, 2013).</li> </ul>	Chapter 2 Pre-chapter quiz
	Wed, 1/29	Last day for full refund on dropped (not withdrawn) courses			
	Fri, 1/31				Chapter 2 Post-chapter quiz
4	Mon, 2/3		The Texas Constitution	Chapter 20	Chapter 20 Pre-chapter quiz
	Wed, 2/5				
	Fri, 2/7				Chapter 20 Post-chapter quiz
5	Mon, 2/10		Federalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Chapter 3</li> <li>❖ Room for Debate. 2013. “Is Obamacare Working?”  <i>The New York Times</i>.  <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/09/26/is-obamacare-working">http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/09/26/is-obamacare-working</a> (November 12, 2013)</li> </ul>	Chapter 3 Pre-chapter quiz
	Wed, 2/12				
	Fri, 2/14	Last day to drop or withdrawn without academic penalty			Chapter 3 Post-chapter quiz
6	Mon, 2/17		Local Government in Texas	Chapter 26	Chapter 26 Pre-chapter quiz
	Wed, 2/19				Chapter 26 Post-chapter quiz
	Fri, 2/21		<b>Exam I</b>		<b>Chapters 2-3, 20, and 26</b>

Political Opinion, the Media, and Political Participation					
7	Mon, 2/24		Public Opinion	Chapter 6	Chapter 6 Pre-chapter quiz
	Wed, 2/26				Chapter 6 Post-chapter quiz
	Fri, 2/28				
8	Mon, 3/3		The Media	Chapter 7	Chapter 7 Pre-chapter quiz
	Wed, 3/5				
	Fri, 3/7				Chapter 7 Post-chapter quiz
9	Mon, 3/10	<b>***Spring Break***</b>			
	Wed, 3/12				
	Fri, 3/14				
10	Mon, 3/17		Political Participation and Voting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Chapter 8</li> <li>❖ Room for Debate. 2013. "Is the Voting Rights Act Still Needed?" <i>The New York Times</i>.  <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/02/24/is-the-voting-rights-act-still-needed">http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/02/24/is-the-voting-rights-act-still-needed</a> (November 2, 2013).</li> </ul>	Chapter 8 Pre-chapter quiz
	Wed, 3/19				Chapter 8 Post-chapter quiz
	Fri, 3/21				
11	Mon, 3/24	<b>Exam II</b>			<b>Chapters 6-8</b>
	<b>Political Parties and Elections</b>				
	Wed, 3/26	3/27 Last day to drop or withdraw with academic penalty	Political Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Chapter 9</li> <li>❖ Room for Debate. "Is the G.O.P. Giving Independents an Opening?" <i>The New York Times</i>.  <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/10/13/is-the-gop-giving-independents-an-opening?gwh=0FCB158F7B273ED4FD44BEF01C080BB1">http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/10/13/is-the-gop-giving-independents-an-opening?gwh=0FCB158F7B273ED4FD44BEF01C080BB1</a> (November 2, 2013).</li> </ul>	Chapter 9 Pre-chapter quiz
Fri, 3/28					
12	Mon, 3/31		Political Parties	Chapter 9	Chapter 9 Post-chapter quiz
	Wed, 4/2		Campaign and Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Chapter 10</li> <li>❖ Room for Debate. 2012. "Foreign Money swaying U.S. Voters?" <i>The New York Times</i>.  <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/01/05/should-foreign-money-be-allowed-to-finance-us-elections/thanks-to-citizens-united-non-us-citizens-can-contribute-to-campaigns">http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/01/05/should-foreign-money-be-allowed-to-finance-us-elections/thanks-to-citizens-united-non-us-citizens-can-contribute-to-campaigns</a> (November 2, 2013).</li> </ul>	Chapter 10 Pre-chapter quiz
	Fri, 4/4				
13	Mon, 4/7		Campaign and Elections	Chapter 10	Chapter 10 Post-chapter quiz
	Wed, 4/9		Parties and Elections in Texas	Chapter 21	Chapter 21 Pre-chapter quiz
	Fri, 4/11				
					Chapter 21 Post-chapter quiz


14	Mon, 4/14		Parties and Elections in Texas	Chapter 21	
	Wed, 4/16	<b>Exam III</b>			<b>Chapter 9,10, and 21</b>
	Fri, 4/18	***Good Friday***			
<b>Interest Groups</b>					
15	Mon, 4/21		Groups and Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Chapter 11</li> <li>❖ Room for Debate. “Is the Gun Lobby Invincible?” <i>The New York Times</i>. <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/12/17/is-the-gun-lobby-invincible?gwh=F9EE91E776D1E515C88D9348B2B952D3">http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/12/17/is-the-gun-lobby-invincible?gwh=F9EE91E776D1E515C88D9348B2B952D3</a> (November 2, 2013).</li> </ul>	Chapter 11 Pre-chapter quiz
	Wed, 4/23				Chapter 11 Post-chapter quiz
	Fri, 4/25				
16	Mon, 4/28		Interest Groups and Lobbying	Chapter 22	Chapter 22 Pre-chapter quiz
	Wed, 4/30				
	Fri, 5/2				Chapter 22 Post-chapter quiz
17	Mon, 5/5	Last Day of Class/Final Exam Declaration/Review			
Final Exam	Mon, 5/12		<b>Optional Cumulative Final Exam 8 a.m. – 10: 30 a.m.</b>		

