

# PSCI 2305: American Government, Fall 2008

Section 101: MWF 8:00–8:50 a.m., 101 Bullock Hall (BH)

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Hours: MWF 9:00–10:00 a.m., MW 2:30–3:15 p.m., Tu 6:00–7:30 p.m., or by appointment

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This course has two primary objectives: to acquaint you with the study of political science, and to improve your understanding of the institutions and processes that govern the United States (and, to a lesser extent, other democratic societies).

Students will generally be expected to think logically and rationally about American politics, and will be expected to demonstrate these abilities in their assignments. Although we will cover many of the same topics you may have encountered in a high school civics course, we will explore these topics here in greater detail and complexity.

**Student Learning Objectives:** Ideally, at the conclusion of this course, you will have a greater understanding of

- ▷ the interaction between politics and government.
- ▷ the structure and institutions of American government.
- ▷ the political process in the United States and other democratic societies.
- ▷ the role of individuals and civil society groups (such as political parties and interest groups) in influencing government behavior.
- ▷ key events that shaped the rights and liberties of all American citizens.
- ▷ how social scientists study politics and government.

**Required Materials:** There are **two** books required for this course:

- ▷ Kenneth Janda, Jeffrey M. Berry, and Jerry Goldman. *The Challenge of Democracy: Government in America*, 9th ed. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin. ISBN 978-0-618-81017-8. (JBG)
- ▷ Raymond A. Smith. *The American Anomaly: U.S. Politics and Government in Comparative Perspective*. New York: Routledge. ISBN 978-0-415-95746-5. (Smith)

Both of these textbooks should be available, new and used, at the TAMIU Bookstore in the Student Center; you may also be able to order them on-line at a discount.

Additional readings may be assigned at the discretion of the professor and will be provided for you at the library reserve desk, on the course Angel site, or as handouts in class.

A study guide for the Janda et al. textbook is available (ISBN 978-0-618-87449-1); study guides for other American government books or AP U.S. Government and Politics may also be helpful.

You are required to provide your own standard green, blank Scantron form (“Form 882-ES”) for each examination, including the final exam, and should bring a #2 pencil to complete the exam.

**Assignments and Grading:** Your grade in this course will be based on the following elements, weighted as specified below:

Exams (3)	55%
Final Exam	15%
Attendance, In-Class Quizzes, and Participation	10%
Angel Reading Quizzes	20%
University-Mandated Assessments (2)	(See below)

Your final grade in the course will be assigned based on this scale:

Final Average	≥ 90.0	≥ 80.0	≥ 70.0	≥ 60.0	< 60.0
Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Grade Points	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	0.0

**Exams:** There will be four closed-book, in-class examinations, including the final examination, on the dates that are indicated on the syllabus, covering the assigned materials. The exams will be drawn from the material covered in the most recent section of the course: Exam 2 will mostly cover material studied after Exam 1, and Exam 3 will mostly cover material after Exam 2. Per college policy, the final examination is *comprehensive* and will cover all of the course materials.

The lowest exam grade of Exams 1–3 will count for 15% of your final grade; the other two exams will account for 20% of your final grade each. The final examination will account for 15% of your final grade in the course, regardless of your score.

During exams, no discussion among students is permitted of any kind, and all electronic devices (cell phones, calculators, pagers, computers, etc.) must be **switched off**.

**University-Mandated Assessments:** All sections of this course are required to participate in an assessment process by TAMIU administrators, which will be administered in a “pre-test, post-test” format. All students enrolled in the course must complete the assessments. These assessments will be closed-book and will be administered as if they were ordinary examinations. The pre-test will be given during the second week of class, on the date designated below; the post-test will be administered as part of the final exam period. You do not need to bring a Scantron sheet, but you should bring a #2 pencil.

Your score on the assessment will not affect your final grade in the course, provided you make a genuine effort to complete the assessment; however, students who do not complete the assessments due to unexcused absences, or those who demonstrate they did not take the assessment seriously, will have their final grades in the course reduced by 1/2 letter grade (5%) per missed assessment. Students who were not enrolled in the course as of 8:00 a.m. the day of the assessment, and those with a valid, **excused** absence, will not be penalized and will not need to “make up” the assessment.

**Online Quizzes:** For each module of the course, there will be a quiz posted in Angel. The quiz will be available online at least 48 hours prior to the first class scheduled for that module, marked (Q) on the schedule below. *No quizzes will be accepted after the quiz deadline, which is 15 minutes prior to the start of class.*

The online quizzes are open-book. You may work with other students in the class on the online quizzes, although it is probably *not* in your best interest to simply copy someone else’s answers without understanding *why* they chose those answers.

Your lowest two quiz grades will be dropped from your quiz average. Together, the quizzes will count as 20% of your final grade.

**Attendance, Participation, and In-Class Quizzes:** The remaining 10% of your final grade will be based on your level of participation and attendance in class. Unannounced, in-class quizzes will also make up a portion of this grade.

**Exam and Quiz Content:** Questions on examinations and quizzes may be drawn from the Janda et al. book, the Smith book, materials presented in lecture, and/or additional materials provided by the instructor as announced in class. Just reading the books, or just attending class, will likely be insufficient to earn a good grade in the course.

**Class Policies:** I make it a general policy to treat all students as adults. While this affords you, the student, greater freedom than you may have had in high school, it also means that you must take a greater personal responsibility for your performance in the course. I am always happy to meet with students to discuss their concerns about the course, but I will not necessarily assume that you are in difficulty simply because you perform poorly on a quiz or disappear from class for a few days.

Please provide a respectful learning environment for your fellow students. Repeated tardiness, cell phone disruptions, reading materials unrelated to the course (such as the student newspaper), and abuse of communication technologies (e.g., web browsing/IMing/texting during class) during class will adversely affect your participation grade; per university policy, repeated disruptive behavior may result in your involuntary withdrawal from the course.

Please arrive at class *on time* and mute (or switch off) all pagers, cell phones, and alarms during class.

Make-up examinations must be scheduled two weeks in advance in the case of an **unavoidable** planned or reasonably-foreseeable absence; otherwise, make-ups will be given only in the case of an illness or emergency that is properly **documented**. Please refer to the [student absence policy](#) posted on the TAMIU website for examples of absences that will ordinarily be excused by the professor and specific documentation that is acceptable. Should you have three final exams scheduled for one day, please consult with me to arrange an alternative time to take your final. Quizzes may not be made up under any circumstances.

I do not provide lecture notes for students under any circumstances. You will have to rely on the generosity of a classmate or make use of the materials provided on the textbook website or the textbook's study guide. Students with disabilities who require notes or other learning environment accommodations should consult with the Student Disability Services office for assistance.

This syllabus is subject to revision by the professor.

**Grade Appeals:** If you wish to dispute a grade on a particular assignment for any reason other than an obvious arithmetic error on my part or a scoring error caused by the Scantron equipment, you will need to type a one-page explanation of your position and turn it in, along with the original graded assignment, *at least one week after* the assignment is returned to you. I will then consider your appeal and make a determination. Appeals must be submitted in hard copy format; no appeals submitted via email will be considered.

For appeals regarding your final grade in the course, please consult the Student Handbook and Catalog for procedures.

**University and College Policies:** The following policies of the TAMIU College of Arts and Sciences and Texas A&M International University are reproduced here for your information; you may already be familiar with them from other courses, but please review them.

**STUDENT EMAIL ADDRESS:** All students must obtain a TAMIU email address and have access to the Angel E-Learning system. Students should check their TAMIU email on a regular basis.

**STUDENT RESPONSIBILITY FOR DROPPING A COURSE:** It is the student's responsibility to drop the course before the designated drop date. Faculty are not responsible for dropping students who stop attending class.

**OFFICE HOURS:** Your professor will keep regular office hours, as posted above, and appointments can be made to accommodate students' schedules. The door will be open for all students on a "first-come, first-served" basis when no appointment has been previously scheduled.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** Texas A&M International University seeks to promote reasonable accommodations for all qualified persons with disabilities. This University will adhere to all applicable federal, state, and local level laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations as required to afford equal education opportunity. It is the student's responsibility to register with the Student Disability Services office and to contact the faculty member in a timely fashion to arrange for suitable accommodations.

**CLASSROOM BEHAVIOR:** The College of Arts and Sciences encourages classroom discussion and academic debate as an essential intellectual activity. It is essential that students learn to express and defend their beliefs, but it is also essential that they learn to listen and respond respectfully to others whose beliefs they may not share. The College will always tolerate diverse, unorthodox, and unpopular points of view, but it will not tolerate condescending or insulting remarks. When students verbally abuse or ridicule and intimidate others whose views they do not agree with, they subvert the free exchange of ideas that should characterize a university classroom. If their actions are deemed by the professor to be disruptive, they will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, which may include being involuntarily withdrawn from the class.

**COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS:** The Copyright Act of 1976, as amended by the Digital Millennium Copyright Act, grants to copyright owners the exclusive right to reproduce their works and distribute copies of their work. Works that receive copyright protection include published works such as a textbook. Copying a textbook without permission from the owner of the copyright may constitute a copyright infringement. Civil and criminal penalties may be assessed for copyright infringement. Civil penalties include damages up to \$100,000; criminal penalties include a fine up to \$250,000 and imprisonment.

**PLAGIARISM AND CHEATING:** Plagiarism is the presentation of someone else's work as one's own work. Recently the internet has complicated the issue. Taking from the internet and presenting it as one's own work is still plagiarism. Copying another student's paper or a portion of the paper is called "copying." Neither plagiarism nor copying will be tolerated. Should a faculty member discover that a student committed plagiarism, the student will receive a grade of "F" in that course and the matter will be referred to the Executive Director of Student Life for possible disciplinary action.

**INCOMPLETES:** Incompletes are discouraged and are assigned only under extenuating circumstances. College policy mandates 70% of course requirements must be met before an "I" can be considered. In fairness to those students who complete the course as scheduled, under no circumstances will an incomplete ("I") be changed to an "A" unless the student has experienced a death in the immediate family or has a written medical excuse from a physician.

**Course Outline:** Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class and will be posted to the course calendar and in Angel. We will not necessarily read books in the order they appear on the syllabus; please be sure you read the correct chapters *in advance of* the designated class dates.

While the professor may periodically remind students of upcoming scheduled events, it is **your responsibility** to be familiar with this schedule and any changes to it.

**Aug 25: Introduction** Introduction to the course; what is politics?

**Aug 27, 29: Principles of Government** Political institutions and the collective action problem; republican democracy; pluralism versus majoritarianism.  
Readings: JBG, chapters 1–2; Smith, chapter 1.

**Sep 1 Labor Day Holiday: No Class**

**Sep 3 Assessment Pre-Test** — *5% final grade penalty if enrolled and absent without excuse.*

**Sep 5 (Q), 8, 10: The Constitution** The struggle for independence; the Articles of Confederation; weaknesses of the Articles; the Constitutional Convention—influences, key debates, and compromises; ratification; the theory of the Constitution.  
Readings: JBG, chapter 3; Smith, chapters 2, 4; Madison, *Federalists* 10 and 51 (online).

**Sep 12 (Q), 15, 17: Federalism** Dual versus shared (marble-cake) federalism; the evolution of state-federal relations; why policy becomes nationalized.  
Readings: JBG, chapter 4; Smith, chapter 3.

**Sep 19 (Q), 22, 24: Public Opinion** What is public opinion?; where public opinion comes from; content and meaning of opinion; group/demographic effects on opinion formation.  
Readings: JBG, chapter 5; Smith, chapter 11.

**Sep 26 Exam 1**

**Sep 29 (Q); Oct 1: The Media** The mass media as a business; the politics of news-making; relationships between the media and politicians; the role of the media in public opinion.  
Readings: JBG, chapter 6.

**Oct 3 (Q), 6, 8: Political Participation** Forms of political participation; expansion of the right to vote; why voter turnout is low.  
Readings: JBG, chapter 7; Smith, chapter 10.

**Oct 10 (Q), 13, 15: Political Parties** Why parties?; features of the party system; party systems and realignments; dealignment?  
Readings: JBG, chapter 8.

**Oct 17 (Q), 20: Campaigns and Elections** The party nomination process; general election campaigns; campaign finance; the Electoral College; how voters decide.  
Readings: JBG, chapter 9; Smith, chapter 8.

**Oct 22 (Q), 24: Interest Groups** The evolution of interest groups; the modern proliferation of interest groups; what interest groups do (lobbying, litigation, and campaign finance); commonalities and differences with parties.  
Readings: JBG, chapter 10; Smith, chapter 9.

**Oct 27 Exam 2**

**Oct 29 (Q), 31; Nov 3: Congress** Key provisions of Article I; Congress and electoral politics; legislative organization: committees and parties; the legislative process.  
Readings: JBG, chapter 11; Smith, chapter 6.

**Nov 4 Election Day** — go vote!

**Nov 5 (Q), 7\*, 10: The Executive Branch** Key provisions of Article II; the historical and modern presidencies; the evolution of the bureaucracy; bureaucratic policy-making; bureaucratic oversight and reform.

Readings: JBG, chapters 12–13; Smith, chapter 5.

\* **November 7 is the drop date.**

**Nov 12 (Q), 14, 17: The Judiciary** Judicial review and the emergence of the Supreme Court; the “three eras” of the Court; structuring the judiciary; judicial decision-making; the Supreme Court and the separation of powers.

Readings: JBG, chapter 14; Smith, chapter 7.

**Nov 19 (Q), 21, 24: Civil Liberties** Distinguishing civil rights and civil liberties; nationalization and incorporation of civil liberties; freedom of speech; freedom of the press; religious liberties (free exercise and establishment); rights of the criminally-accused; privacy; firearms; property.

Reading: JBG, chapter 15.

**Nov 26 (Q): Civil Rights** What are civil rights?; the politics of civil rights for African-Americans.

Readings: JBG, chapter 16; Lawrence, “The Civil Rights Movement” (online).

**Nov 28 Thanksgiving Holiday: No Class**

**Dec 1, 3: Civil Rights (continued)** The Hispanic civil rights movement; women’s rights; civil rights for other historically marginalized groups.

Readings: as above.

**Dec 5 Exam 3**

**Friday, December 12, 8:00–11:00 a.m. Assessment Post-Test and Final Exam**