

POLS 2305: U.S. Government and Politics

Spring 2020

Sections: 280, 281, 282, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294

Department of Social Sciences
Texas A&M University Corpus Christi

1 Instructor Information

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Office Hours: Mondays: 1:00pm-3:00pm

Tuesdays: 2:15pm-4:15pm

Thursdays: 2:15-4:15

and by appointment

Class Location: Center for Instruction 138

Course Time: 9:30 to 10:45 TR

2 Course Description and Purpose

Why do I have to pay taxes? What will it take to repeal Obamacare? Who should I call if I don't get my tax return? Can a state legalize marijuana? Can you carry a gun on campus? Why do I have to get my dog a license, but not my cat? All of these questions are important to our daily lives; to answer *any* of these questions requires understanding how American government works. This course serves as an introduction to how the American political system works, and how people behave in that system.

This course assumes little knowledge about politics, it is after all an introductory course. It functions almost like a buffet, we'll explore lots of topics, including the structure of American government (the rules of the game) and the way people and groups behave in that system (how the players play the game). If find you're interested in a topic we cover (and I hope you will!), we probably have a course dealing specifically with that topic. Just talk to me and I'll let you know what that course is so you can register for it next semester.

Each week we'll cover a different aspect of American government in the abstract along with concrete examples. So for instance, we might talk about federalism, and then use drug legalization as an example of federalism in practice. In many cases, we will spend a whole day discussing concrete examples. The goal here is that you see the concepts in action and have a concrete example, which you have likely heard about and care about, to help you grasp the material. In order for this to work, you have the readings and participate in class- remember, I am interested in you participating in class; there is no penalty for answering incorrectly in classroom discussion.

Additionally, this course is a part of the First Year Learning Community Program. So, do know that I will be meeting with and coordinating with your professors. Please know, the general theme of our meetings is how we can help you succeed in our classes, in college, and in your eventual career.

Student Learning Outcomes

On completion of this course students will be able to:

1. Recall basic facts related to the foundations of U.S. national government
2. Describe key political concepts related to U.S. institutions such as Congress, the presidency, and the judiciary.
3. Demonstrate their understanding of key concepts relating to U.S. political behavior such as voting, elections, political parties, interest groups and the media.
4. Understanding of definitions, concepts, and theories of U.S. national government

Core Objectives

The Four Core Objectives related to this course are: Critical Thinking Skills, Communication Skills, Personal Responsibility, and Social Responsibility. By the end of the semester the course will have met these objectives:

1. By having the students engage in critical thinking activities related to the Constitution, the political and philosophical foundations of the nation, governmental institutions, and political behavior.
2. By having students engage in written, verbal, or visual activities related to the Constitution, the political and philosophical foundations of the nation, governmental institutions, and political behavior.
3. By having students engage in course related activities that connect personal responsibility and political ideology to encourage ethical decision making.
4. By having students engage in course related activities that connect social responsibility to civil rights, civil liberties, and to voting and voting behavior, and the policy making process.

3 Course Format

This course meets twice times a week. We will have a mix of traditional style lectures which covers the “nuts and bolts” of that week’s topic, along with periodic examples. In the readings, we very often have a contemporary news story that will help illustrate the topic in action. For example, we might talk about how the Supreme Court works on followed by a discussion of the Court’s decision in the case about a baker refusing to make a cake for a same-sex wedding. The purpose of this format is to give you *both* the “how” and a practical example that helps explain the “why do we care?” aspect of American politics.

4 Requirements

Text

There is one required book which the majority of our readings will come from. Other readings are posted on Blackboard and are noted on the course schedule.

The book is available at the campus bookstore, for both purchase and rental. However, you can purchase or rent the book for a substantially lower rate online. To this end, I provide the ISBN for the book in the syllabus and will place all of the first week's readings on Blackboard to allow for shipping time. After the first week I expect you to have the book and bring it with you to class. I will place the seventh edition on reserve at the library (some of the examples may be a little dated).

1. Barbour, Christine and Gerald C. Wright. 2019. *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics*. 8th Brief Edition. Congressional Quarterly Press: Thousand Oaks, CA. **ISBN: 9781544316215**

Students often ask if they can purchase an older version of the textbook. In this case, the answer is a qualified yes. The chapter numbers are the same for the **brief** seventh edition, although the examples will be older (e.g. the 2016 election instead of the 2018 election). Do not buy the "full" version of the book and I wouldn't go before the brief sixth edition.

Assessment

This course is worth 100 points which are broken up over several different items. It is your responsibility to keep track of your grade over the course of the semester

- Participation and Attendance: 5 points
 - Research Project: 20 points
 - Quizzes: 15 points
 - Exams: 60 points
1. **Participation and Attendance (5 points)**– Attending class is important since we will go over difficult concepts in class and you'll have the opportunity to ask questions about parts of the readings and lectures which are not clear. However, coming to class is only half the battle. You also have to participate in class. Of course, asking informed questions or joining the classroom discussion is a part of participation, but so too is actively listening (ie: Are you taking notes and paying attention or are you sleeping and texting?). Please be aware, this score is assessed in collaboration with the seminar professors. So, the extent to which you participate in seminar and the extent to which the seminar professors see you participating in large lecture can impact your participation grade.
 2. **Research Project (20 points)**– A key component of learning communities is an integrated assignment across the classes in the learning community. Moreover, writing is a skill that translates across majors and careers. To that end, you will use writing to explore a topic the president touches on in his State of the Union address. This project is unique to this class, but it will be *very* similar to the assignment you produce for the other classes in the triad. The assignment is broken up into an outline (due: March 3) and a final draft (due: April 14). More details on this assignment are provided in the Research Project section on Blackboard.

3. **Quizzes (15 points)**— Over the course of the semester there will be periodic quizzes. All quizzes are due on Thursdays at the start of class. They will open late Saturday night/early Sunday morning. Most weeks, except those with exams or Spring Break will have a quiz; they are all listed on the Quiz Schedule handout on Blackboard. Quizzes consist of a mix of material from the previous week’s lectures/readings and the current week’s readings. The quizzes consist of five multiple choice questions. They are open note, but are timed at ten minutes with just one attempt, so I recommend taking the time to review your notes before taking the quiz. If you do the readings, you should have no problem with the quizzes. There will be a total of ten quizzes, each is ultimately worth 1.5 points toward your final grade.

4. **Exams (60 points)**—There are three exams, each is worth 20 points, or two letter grades. Exams consist of 40 multiple choice questions and twenty fill in the blank questions (in sets of five questions with an eight word bank per set). None of the exams are cumulative. Before each exam I will provide a study guide. Attending exams is imperative, if you miss an exam and do not have a valid documented excuse (ie: a doctor’s note) the make up exam will be a separate research paper. Should you miss the exam, the onus is on you to schedule a make-up with me. I will not seek you out to remind you that you missed the exam.

Assessment Scale

A: 90-100	B: 80-89.9	C: 70-79.9	D: 60-69.9	F: <59.9
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Disclaimer

Since politics is a reflection of the society in which we live, we will cover several topics which touch on topics which might be sensitive. Some examples include same-sex marriage, gun control, protest movements, and transgender rights. These topics are included because we cannot adequately study American government without covering them. My personal policy is to remain neutral (I’m a political scientist, emphasis on the second word). I encourage disagreement, but it must be done in a respectful way. You have my assurance that I will do everything reasonably related to keeping these discussions civil and academic.

5 Course Policies

Contacting the Instructor

I am happy to help you either via e-mail, office telephone, or in-person during office hours. Of course, if office hours do not fit your schedule let me know and we can schedule a meeting at a time that is more convenient. If you come to office hours you should come prepared; bring your book, notes, and read the material in advance. If you contact me via e-mail, I will respond within 48 hours, though in most cases it will be less than six hours. Should you not hear from me after 48 hours, feel free to send a follow-up. However, in any e-mail you must identify yourself and use proper format which consists of an opening (As simple as the recipient’s name), a closing (as simple as your name), and a descriptive subject line. If you do not follow that convention or if you use Internet shorthand (ie: “u” instead of “you,”) I will not reply to the message. Telephone calls will be returned as soon as possible, though e-mail is usually quicker. Please note, the phone number

listed is my office phone; it cannot receive text messages.

Make-up Exams and Assignments

To qualify for a make-up test a student must notify me of the absence in advance via e-mail and provide documentation. Make-up exams will be a written research paper. The onus is on the student for a make-up exam. I will not seek you out to let you know you missed an exam.

Papers are due in hard copy at the beginning of the class on the date indicated in the schedule. I will not accept e-mail copies or papers placed under my door. Please do not be afraid to print multiple rough drafts and revise them before turning them in. I am happy to look at drafts and help you with crafting your final paper. I do not accept excuses about dogs, computers, or traffic. Be responsible.

Academic Honor Code

Students are expected to uphold the Academic Honor Code published in the University Student Handbook. The Academic Honor Code is based on the premise that each student has the responsibility (1) to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity in the student's own work, (2) to refuse to tolerate violations of academic integrity in the university community, and (3) to foster a high sense of integrity and social responsibility on the part of the university community. Violations of the Academic Honor Code will not be tolerated.

Academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism of any kind are unacceptable. There are no exceptions. Consequences for academic dishonesty, cheating, and plagiarism include, but are not limited to, a failing grade for an assignment or exam, a failing grade for the course, noncredit for an assignment or exam, additional work, and/or direct referral to university officials.

If academic dishonesty, cheating, or plagiarism is suspected on any assessment, the instructor reserves the right to impose restrictions and make changes on future assessments for an individual and/or the entire class as needed.

Please also note that the university requires that faculty members formally report all instances of academic misconduct. Here are the official procedures: http://judicialaffairs.tamucc.edu/assets/procedure_academicmisconductcases.pdf

Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the use of unauthorized information during a quiz or exam, plagiarism, submitting the same paper for multiple courses without permission, or depriving another student of the ability to perform his or her work. The term cheating includes, but is not limited to: (1) use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; (2) dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments, plagiarism; or (3) the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a member of the university faculty or staff. The term plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the use by paraphrase or direct quotation, of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment. Plagiarism also includes the unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling or distribution of term papers or other academic

materials. If you have questions about the university's policy on academic dishonesty, please see the Student Code of Conduct at <http://judicialaffairs.tamucc.edu/StudentCofC.html>.

Please note "plagiarism" includes intentionally, knowingly, or carelessly presenting the work of another as one's own. Additionally, the procedure has been updated to reflect the Academic Integrity Committee as the body to consider grade appeals and academic misconduct cases, as well as identifies the selection process of committee members. Detailed information can be found on the University Handbook of Rules and Procedures website. Contact for interpretation or clarification is the Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Students with Disabilities

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please call or visit Disability Services at (361) 825-5816 in Corpus Christi Hall 116.

If you are a returning veteran and are experiencing cognitive and/or physical access issues in the classroom or on campus, please contact the Disability Services office for assistance at (361) 825-5816.

Student Caregivers: If you have caregiving responsibilities (e.g., parent of a child or care for elderly parents) and you anticipate scheduling difficulties, please discuss this with me the beginning of the semester to work out an appropriate strategy in advance.

Academic Advising (for students with a majors in the College of Liberal Arts)

The College of Liberal Arts requires that students meet with an Academic Advisor as soon as they are ready to declare a major. Degree plans are prepared in the CLA Academic Advising Center. The University uses an online Degree Audit system. Any amendment must be approved by the Department Chair and the Office of the Dean. All courses and requirements specified in the final degree plan audit must be completed before a degree will be granted. The CLA Academic Advising Office is located in Driftwood #203. For more information please call 361-825-3466.

Dropping a Class

I hope that you never find it necessary to drop this or any other class. However, events can sometimes occur that make dropping a course necessary or wise. Please consult with your academic advisor, the Financial Aid Office, and me, before you decide to drop this course. Should dropping the course be the best course of action, you must initiate the process to drop the course by going to the Student Services Center and filling out a course drop form. Just stopping attendance and participation **WILL NOT** automatically result in your being dropped from the class. **April 10, 2020** is the last day to drop a class with an automatic grade of "W" this term.

Grade Appeals

As stated in University Procedure 13.02.99.C0.03, Student Grade Appeal Procedures, a student who believes that he or she has not been held to appropriate academic standards as outlined in the class syllabus, equitable evaluation procedures, or appropriate grading, may appeal the final grade given in the course. The burden of proof is upon the student to demonstrate the appropriateness of the appeal. A student with a complaint about a grade is encouraged to first discuss the matter with the instructor. For complete details, including the responsibilities of the parties involved in the process and the number of days allowed for completing the steps in the process, see University Procedure 13.02.99.C0.03, Student Grade Appeal Procedures. For assistance and/or guidance in the grade appeal process, students may contact the Deans office in the college in which the course is taught or the Office of the Provost. These documents are accessible through the University Rules Web site at: http://academicaffairs.tamucc.edu/rules_procedures/assets/13.02.99.c0.03_student_grade_appeals.pdf.

Statement of Academic Continuity

In the event of an unforeseen adverse event, such as a major hurricane and classes could not be held on the campus of Texas A&M University Corpus Christi; this course would continue through the use of Blackboard and/or email. In addition, the syllabus and class activities may be modified to allow continuation of the course. Ideally, University facilities (i.e., emails, web sites, and Blackboard) will be operational within two days of the closing of the physical campus. However, students need to make certain that the course instructor has a primary and a secondary means of contacting each student.

Classroom Courtesy

Classroom courtesy is an essential component of creating an effective learning environment. All students have the right to learn without unnecessary distractions. These distractions include: cell phones, talking during lectures (unless recognized by the instructor), reading newspapers, falling asleep, etc. If you need a cell phone for emergency purposes, leave it on vibrate. Entering and leaving are also significant sources of distraction. It is your responsibility to be on time and to stay for the entire period. In circumstances where you need to leave early, tell the instructor beforehand. Repeated disruptions of class will lead to a reduction in your final grade.

Most importantly, the syllabus includes many sensitive topics which can lead to strong feelings and heated debate. Because this is a college classroom, all discussion must be respectful and scholarly. This is to say you must be respectful, in both content and tone, of diverse opinions and not make personal or partisan attacks.

Acceptable Comments

- are respectful of diverse opinions and open to follow up questions and/or disagreement
- are related to class and/or the course material
- focus on advancing the discussion about issues related to the course and/or course material rather than personal beliefs, and
- are delivered in normal tones and a non-aggressive manner.

Unacceptable Comments

- are personal in nature. This includes attacks on a person's appearance, demeanor, or political beliefs.
- include interrupting the instructor or other students. Raise your hand and wait to be recognized.
- often use the discussion to argue for political positions and/or beliefs. If political discussions arise, they must be discussed in a scholarly way (see above).
- may include using raised tones, yelling, engaging in arguments with other students and being threatening in any manner.
- include ignoring the instructor's authority to maintain the integrity of the classroom environment.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice. These changes may come via e-mail. Make sure to check your university supplied email regularly. You are accountable for all such communications.

6 *Tentative* Course Schedule

A few notes about reading the course schedule:

- “*Barbour*” refers to the required Barbour & Wright book
- “(B)” means that reading can be found on Blackboard.

The Basic Structures of Government

Tuesday January 21– Introduction to the Course

- *No readings*

Thursday January 23– American Politics Basics

- Barbour Chapter 1

Tuesday January 28– American Politics Basics (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 1

Thursday January 30– The Constitution: The Rulebook

- Barbour Chapter 2

- Constitutional. 2017. “Framed.” *The Washington Post*. (B)

Basic Structures of Government

Tuesday February 4– The Constitution: The Rulebook (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 2
- Constitutional. 2017. “Framed.” *The Washington Post*. (B)

Thursday February 6– *Two Governments?!*: Federalism

- Barbour Chapter 3
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “The Electoral College.” *Civics 101* (B)

Tuesday February 11– *Two Governments?!*: Federalism (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 3
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “The Electoral College.” *Civics 101* (B)

Thursday February 13– The Bill of Rights

- Barbour Chapter 4
- *Justices Scalia & Marshall on how to read the Constitution* (B)

Rights & Liberties

Tuesday February 18– The Bill of Rights (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 4
- *Justices Scalia & Marshall on how to read the Constitution* (B)

Thursday February 20– The Struggle for Rights

- Barbour Chapter 5
- Perry, David M. 2015. “A New Right Grounded in the Long History of Marriage.” *The Atlantic*. (B)

Tuesday February 25– The Struggle for Rights (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 5
- Perry, David M. 2015. “A New Right Grounded in the Long History of Marriage.” *The Atlantic*. (B)

Thursday February 27– **EXAM ONE**

- *No readings*

Political Institutions: The Rules of the Game

Tuesday March 3– Congress

- Barbour Chapter 6
- National Public Radio. 2018. “REDMAP.” *Planet Money*. (B)

Thursday March 5– Congress (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 6
- National Public Radio. 2018. “REDMAP.” *Planet Money*. (B)

Tuesday March 10– **SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS**

- *No readings*

Thursday March 12 – **SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS**

- *Enjoy your day!*

Tuesday March 17– The Presidency

- Barbour Chapter 7
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “Impeachment.” *Civics 101*. (B)

Thursday March 19– The Presidency (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 7
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “Impeachment.” *Civics 101*. (B)

Tuesday March 24– The Courts

- Barbour Chapter 9
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “Federal Courts.” *Civics 101*. (B)

Thursday March 26– The Courts (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 9
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “Federal Courts.” *Civics 101*. (B)

Tuesday March 31– The Bureaucracy

- Barbour Chapter 8
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2019. “Becoming a U.S. Citizen” *Civics 101*. (B)

Thursday April 2– The Bureaucracy (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 8
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2019. “Becoming a U.S. Citizen” *Civics 101*. (B)

Tuesday April 7– **EXAM TWO**

- *No readings*

Political Behavior: How the Actors Behave

Thursday April 9– Public Opinion

- Barbour Chapter 10
- National Science Foundation. 2012. “Science of Public Opinion Polls.” *Youtube* **(B)**
- Pew Research Center. 2016. “Why 2016 Election Polls Missed Their Mark.” (*Youtube* **B)**)

Tuesday April 14– Public Opinion (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 10
- National Science Foundation. 2012. “Science of Public Opinion Polls.” *Youtube* **(B)**
- Pew Research Center. 2016. “Why 2016 Election Polls Missed Their Mark.” (*Youtube* **B)**)

Thursday April 16– Parties and Interest Groups

- Barbour Chapter 11
- National Public Radio. 2018. “The New Socialists.” *Planet Money*. **(B)**

Tuesday April 21– Parties and Interest Groups (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 11
- National Public Radio. 2018. “The New Socialists.” *Planet Money*. **(B)**

Thursday April 23– First Year Conference

- *No class: But be sure to attend the conference!*

Tuesday April 28– Voting, Campaigns, and Elections

- Barbour Chapter 12
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “Gerrymandering.” *Civics 101*. **(B)**

Thursday April 30– Voting, Campaigns, and Elections (cont.)

- Barbour Chapter 12
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “Gerrymandering.” *Civics 101*. **(B)**

Tuesday May 5– Media & Politics

- Barbour Chapter 13
- New Hampshire Public Radio. 2017. “The First Amendment- The Freedom of the Press.” *Civics 101*. **(B)**

Thursday May 7– **READING DAY: NO CLASS**

- *Good luck studying!*

FINAL EXAM: Thursday May 14 from 8:00am to 10:30am in our usual classroom