



POLS 2301 - Introduction to American Government I (Honors)
(Section 11302) Fall 2017

Class Time: T/Th 11:10 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Location: Wayne A Reaud Admin Building 102

Professor: Dr. Bianca Easterly

Department: Political Science

Office: SBS 201M

Office Phone: (409) 880-7801

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays: 1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.; Fridays: By appointment

Contacting me: Feel free to email me at bianca.easterly@lamar.edu. I check email regularly except after business hours.

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 same-sex marriage? In a post-September 11th 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.

Prerequisites

- Sophomore standing
- Basic skills competency in reading and writing
- Acceptance to the Honors College

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. **Personal Responsibility** – Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of how to register to vote and the expectations of citizenship in the United States.
2. **Social Responsibility** – Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of political parties and interest groups to achieve political outcomes.

General Education/Core Curriculum Student Learning Outcomes (THECB)

The following learning outcomes of core curriculum courses are required by the State of Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board:

Critical Thinking Communication Skills Personal Responsibility Social Responsibility

The THECB learning outcomes for POLS 2301 will be assessed by the following criteria:

Critical Thinking and Communication Skills: Effective critical thinking and written and verbal communication skills are essential to successful completion of the course. In addition to participation in classroom discussions and presentations, critical thinking and communication will be assessed based on one writing assignment per semester that will be evaluated and graded by your instructor based on the approved THECB assessment rubric. Critical Thinking: Students will be able to analyze a political problem and synthesize a solution to the problem. The outcome will be assessed on the writing assignment. Communication Skills: Students will be able to effectively develop and express an argument supported by fact regarding a political problem or question. The outcome will be assessed on the writing assignment.

Personal Responsibility and Social Responsibility: The classroom is a learning environment, and all students are expected to observe basic rules of courtesy, personal discipline, and responsibility. Personal responsibility and social responsibility will be *informally* assessed by class attendance; timely arrival to class; non-use of cell phones, i-pods, ear buds, etc.; not using computers inappropriately in class (engaging in facebook, surfing the net, etc.); not eating, sleeping, texting, listening to music, carry on private conversations with others or otherwise disrupt the learning environment of the classroom; reading all assigned materials *prior* to class; and completing the Course Evaluation at the conclusion of the semester. Personal responsibility and social responsibility will be *formally* accessed based on multiple choice questions embedded in your examinations. Personal Responsibility: Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of how to register to vote and the expectations of citizenship in the United States.

This outcome will be assessed on the exams throughout the semester. Social Responsibility: Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of political parties and interest group role in the political process and how an individual can effectively engage in these groups to achieve political outcomes. This outcome will be assessed on the exams throughout the semester.

Reaud Honors College Curriculum

The curriculum offered in the Honors College is designed to meet the requirements of the University Core Curriculum and the needs of our Honor students.

Honors students are expected to develop at least two of the following in each Honors class:

1. A critical understanding of basic principles and theories underlying a given body of knowledge.
2. Ability to link knowledge to life experience and world events.
3. Familiarity with the leading edge of knowledge creation as well as its enduring foundations.
4. Capability of exploring the interface between the given subject matter and other fields of study, questioning traditional boundaries between disciplines.

Required Course Materials

Textbook: Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore J. Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline J. Tobert, Robert J. Spitzer. *We the People: An Introduction to American Politics. 11th Essentials Edition*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. ISBN13: 978-0-393-28364-8 (paperback). Other versions of the text are available via the publisher's website at <http://books.wwnorton.com/books/webad-detail-editions.aspx?id=4294993242>.

Additional readings posted in LU Learn or available online.

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 Disability Resource Center (DRC) stating that this is a necessary accommodation.

I will ensure we maintain this classroom culture by addressing any disruptive behavior immediately. I will address disruptions as follows:

- A first instance of disruptive behavior will be addressed verbally and expectations for appropriation behavior will be clarified.
- If a student continues to be disruptive during a class period, that student will be excused from the classroom for the remainder of the course period.

- A student who continues to be disruptive in subsequent class periods will be reported to the department chair and/or the Dean of Students.
- Any student who exhibits extreme behavior or makes threats against members of the classroom community will immediately be reported to LUPD.

Course Evaluation

Instruction as well as student performance is subject to evaluation. Procedures may be instituted for this purpose near the end of this course.

Participation and Attendance

While I will not grade attendance, you will be required to complete in-class, online, 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 (and you are NOT representing Lamar University at a university-sponsored event), you will receive a zero.** The objective of the activities is to help you think more deeply about the course material and how it relates to your own experiences and ideas. Grades for in-class writing assignments are based on content, organization, and grammar and spelling. I will collect and grade ten (10) of assignments which are worth 10 points each (100 points total).

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, listen to television, or radio news to keep up with current political news.

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.

Local Government Observation Analysis and Presentation

Media focus on national politics often causes many of us to overlook the political events that occur locally. The goal of this assignment is to acquaint you to the political landscape and the issues that currently dominate local city government in Southeast Texas. To that end, in groups of two, students will observe two different city council meetings and each student will submit a 5-7 page (excluding Works Cited) paper (double spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font, one-inch margins, consistent citation style) that describes and, more importantly, analyzes your observations from the visits. Analyses are due via **SafeAssign** in LU Learn by **10 a.m. on Tuesday, December 4th, 2017.** In addition to the paper, the groups will present an 8-10 PowerPoint (or Prezi) slide presentation that summarizes the analysis on either the paper due date or the last day of class (if necessary). More detailed instructions can be found in LU Learn via the “Writing Assignment Materials” link. The paper and presentation are worth a combined 100 points.

Exams

Each of the three exams will include approximately 50 multiple choice questions, worth two points each, will come from lectures, discussions, exercises, and readings. **You cannot skip any of the exams.** Only one excused missed exam may be made-up. Students must have a valid, documented excuse for missing an exam. Valid excuses include:

- Representing Lamar University at a university-sponsored event
- Sickness or hospitalization – Requiring the care of a doctor
- Death of an immediate family member (parent, sibling, or child)
- Traffic accident on the way to the exam (police report will be required)

Maintenance issues with your automobile, having overslept, work schedule conflicts will not be counted as an excused absence. If you are prone to making these kinds of excuses, you should not take this class. 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 LU Learn and will be based on the following:

Participation and Attendance	100 points
Local Government Paper and Presentation	100 points
Three (3) exams	300 points
Total	500 points

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

Grading Scale

A= 500 – 450 points **B**= 449 – 400 points **C**= 399 – 350 points **D**= 349 – 300 points **F**= <299 points

Privacy Notice

Federal privacy laws (FERPA) apply to universities and colleges. University employees, including instructors, cannot discuss student information with third parties including parents and legal guardians of students. Anyone requesting information about a student should be referred to the Registrar. Instructors will be officially notified in writing by the Registrar's Office about the specific information to be released and the persons authorized to receive the information.

Help & Resources

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.

The Writing Center is centrally located on the first floor of the Mary and John Gray Library. The Center's individualized tutoring sessions aspire to more than just the short-term goal of improving a particular essay or paper. Writing Center tutors seek to improve the student writer's composing skills so that he or she can approach any writing assignment in a progressively more skilled and thus more confident manner. **Overall, their goal is to provide authentic learning of the writing process, not**

quick-fixes for papers. Walk-ins are welcome, but students are strongly encouraged to make appointments by calling 880-8571, emailing UWC@lamar.edu, or dropping by the center.

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

Lamar University is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Resource Center (DRC) is located in the Communications building room 105. Office staff collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations.

For students:

- If you have, or think you may have, a disability (e.g., mental health, attentional, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical), please contact the DRC at 409-880-8347 or drc@lamar.edu to arrange a confidential appointment with the Director of the DRC to explore possible options regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.
- If you are registered with DRC and have a current letter requesting reasonable accommodations, we encourage you to contact your instructor early in the semester to review how the accommodations will be applied in the course.

myLamar Portal

Students are asked to obtain a Lamar Electronic Account username and password so they can log into the myLamar website and LU Learn. Students may get information on how to get into the myLamar Web site from the University’s homepage (<http://www.lamar.edu>) by clicking on the myLamar link on the left top corner of the screen. Follow the steps to secure your myLamar username and password.

Sexual Harassment

In accordance with administrative policy, sexual harassment is reprehensible and will not be tolerated by the university. Behavior in the course must conform to the university policy.

Gender Identity

This course affirms people of all gender expressions and identities. If you prefer to be called a different name than is what on the class roster, please let me know. Please advise me of this preference early in the semester so that I may make appropriate changes to my records, and so I may call you by your preferred name and pronouns.

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.

CAMPUS CLOSURE – In the event of an announced campus closure in excess of four days due to a hurricane or other disaster, students are expected to login to Lamar University’s website’s homepage (www.Lamar.edu) for instructions about continuing courses remotely.

 The information contained in this class syllabus is subject to change with advanced notice.

TOPICAL OUTLINE AND CLASS SCHEDULE

	Tues	Thurs
Part I: Foundations		
Week 1 (Aug 28 – Sept 1)	First Day of the Semester Introductions and course overview	Chapter 1: The Citizen and Government • Watch “American Political Culture” and “The Changing State of US Ethnicity” (click on ‘Course Materials, and ‘Chapter 1’ in LU Learn)
		Wed, Aug 30th Last day to register for Fall 2017 with late fee
Week 2 (Sept 4– Sept 8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Political Culture, People, and Economy of Texas-Link to chapter in folder • Read “Texas Politics—Texas Political Culture (located in chapter folder) 	
Week 3 (Sept 11– Sept 15)	• Chapter 2: The Founding and the Constitution and Declaration of Independence (Appendix A8-13)	
	Wed, Sept 13th Last day for full refund on dropped (not withdrawn) courses	
Week 4 (Sept 18– Sept 22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Texas Constitution • Read “Constitutions and Political Culture” (located in chapter folder) 	
Week 5 (Sept 25– Sept 29)	Chapter 3: Federalism	
	Fri, Sept 29th Last day to drop or withdraw without academic penalty	

Week 6 (Oct 2– Oct 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Government in Texas • Click on links in chapter folder 	Exam I Weeks 1-6
Part II: Politics		
Week 7 (Oct 9 – Oct 13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 5: Public Opinion • Roper Center. 2014. “Fundamentals of Polling –Total Survey Error.” https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/support/polling-fundamentals-total-survey-error/ (August 24, 2017). 	
Week 8 (Oct 16 – Oct 20)	Chapter 6: The Media	
Week 9 (Oct 23– Oct 27)	Chapter 7: Political Parties	Exam II Weeks 7-9
Week 10 (Oct 30 – Nov 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Texas Politics”—Link to chapter in ‘Parties and Elections in Texas’ folder • Review other content in folder • Chapter 7 Participation and Elections (continue) • Read materials and click on links in chapter folder LU Learn 	
		Fri, Nov. 3rd Last day to drop or withdraw with academic penalty
Week 11 (Nov 6– Nov 10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 7 (continue) • Room for Debate. 2014. “Should Voting in an Election Be a Constitution right?” <i>The New York Times</i>. http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/11/03/should-voting-in-an-election-be-a-constitutional-right (June 20, 2017). 	
Week 12 (Nov 13 – Nov 17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parties and Elections in Texas • Link to chapter, “Texas Politics—Political Parties” posted in folder 	
Week 13 (Nov 20 – Nov 24)	Chapter 8 Groups and Interests	

<p>Week 14 (Nov 27– Dec 1)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest Groups and Lobbying in Texas • Link to chapter, “Introduction: Interest Groups and Representation in Texas” posted in folder 	<p>Exam III Weeks 10-14</p>
<p>Week 15 (Dec 4 – Dec 8)</p>	<p>Local Government Observation Project Due (Analysis and Presentations)</p> <hr/> <p>Analyses are due via SafeAssign in LU Learn by 10 a.m</p>	