

American National Government
POLS 206 (Section 509)
Spring 2008

Professor: Dr. Christine Lipsmeyer

TTH 12:45-2:00 in CHEM 100

Office: Allen 2035

Office Hours: Thursdays 10:00-12:00 (Other times by appointment)

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Vista website for the course (I will post grades here, any changes to this syllabus, and announcements):
<http://elearning.tamu.edu/>

Course Description:

This course provides a broad overview of American politics. Its purpose is to acquaint students with the fundamental principles, processes, and institutions that have shaped our government from its founding to today. The focus of this class will be on the *problems* of and *conflicts* in American government.

In the first part of the course we will explore a fundamental tension between two central commitments in American political life: majority rule and individual rights. The United States is not guided by majority rule alone. While responsiveness to “the people” is a cornerstone of our politics, our system also is founded in the belief that certain things—our constitutional “rights”—should be partly beyond popular control. Which is more important, democratic self-rule or the safeguarding of our personal freedoms? Throughout this semester, we will turn to the question of how the conflict between these grounding principles plays out in the pressing issues of our politics. In parts two and three of the course, we will examine the formal and informal institutions of American government. From this I hope that students will acquire an appreciation of the difficulties of governing in the United States.

The aim of this course is to help you begin to think critically about American politics. At a purely preliminary level, this means that you will need to gain a working knowledge of many of the “facts” about our government. But facts are only the first steps on the road to understanding. For this class, you will be expected to move beyond factual memorization to actual analysis. For the exams, you will need to think about the themes of the course and make connections between ideas.

Learning Outcomes:

Each student can expect to learn:

- To comprehend the origins and evolution of the US political system with a focus on the growth of American political institutions.
- To define, understand, and use concepts and terms relevant to the study of American politics.
- To understand how the U.S. constitution, institutions, and civil liberties and rights have evolved since the founding era

Course Requirements:

First exam: 25%

Second exam: 35%

Third exam: 40%

All exams are multiple choice and cover material from both the lectures and the books.

Required Texts:

Edwards III, George C., Martin P. Wattenberg, and Robert L. Lineberry. 2007. *Government in America: People, Politics, and Policy [Brief 9th Edition]*. New York: Pearson Longman. ISBN: 0321442784

Paine, Thomas. 1982 [1776] *Common Sense*. London: Penguin Classics. (Should be bundled with Edwards)

Course Policies:1) Make-up Exams/Excused Absences:

- There will be no extra credit assignments.
- In order to be eligible for a make-up exam, a student must have an excused absence that corresponds with those in the TAMU Academic Rules (see <http://student-rules.tamu.edu/rule7.htm> for a list of excused absences). For any of these absences to be “excused,” you must provide me with acceptable written documentation (see the Academic Rules for details).

Note that the TAMU website states:

“To be excused the student must notify his or her instructor in writing (acknowledged e-mail message is acceptable) prior to the date of absence if such notification is feasible. In cases where advance notification is not feasible (e.g. unanticipated illness, accident, or emergency) the student must provide notification by the end of the second working day after the absence. This notification should include an explanation of why notice could not be sent prior to the class.”

“...the student must provide additional documentation substantiating the reason for the absence, [sic] that is satisfactory to the instructor, within one week of the last date of the absence.”

Also, keep in mind that an exam proctored outside of the normal exam time may be of a different format than the original exam.

2) Attendance Policy:

This is your responsibility. You should attend all classes but I will not police your attendance. If you need to miss a class, make sure you get the class notes from another student. Because the course material revolves around lectures, your attendance is crucial in understanding the material; I will not make my notes or the PowerPoint slides available.

3) Course Materials/Copyright and Plagiarism Statements; Academic Dishonesty:

The handouts used in this course are copyrighted. By “handouts,” I mean all materials generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, quizzes, exams, lab problems, in-class materials review sheets, and additional problem sets. Because these are copyrighted, you do not have the right to copy the handouts, unless I expressly grant permission.

The Aggie Honor Code states: “An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal, or tolerate those who do.”

“As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one’s own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of the person. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues without which research cannot be safely communicated. If you have any questions regarding plagiarism, please consult the Aggie Honor System Office website (<http://www.tamu.edu/aggiehonor>) or the latest version of the Texas A&M University Student Rules, under the section “Scholastic Dishonesty.”

4) 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 contact the Department of Student Life, Disabilities Services in Room B118 of Cain Hall, or call 845-1637.

5) Grading Scale and Exams:

The grading scale is the standard point scale:

90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
59 ↓	F

Note: All exams begin on-time in the lecture hall. Students are allowed to enter the exam up to the time when the first student turns-in his exam and leaves the classroom. Thereafter, the exam is closed to students not already present in the room, and students who arrive later will not be allowed to take the exam.

Lecture Schedule:

Part I. *The Founding Principles of American Government*

Week 1:	Jan. 15	<i>Course Introduction</i>
	Readings:	Syllabus
	Jan. 17	<i>Foundations of Government and the Protection of Individual Rights I</i>
	Readings	Edwards, et.al., Ch. 1
Week 2:	Jan. 22	<i>Foundations of Government and the Protection of Individual Rights II</i>
	Readings:	Edwards, et.al., Ch. 1 (reread)
	Jan. 24	<i>Common Sense & the American Founding</i>
	Readings:	Paine, Sections I & II
Week 3:	Jan. 29	<i>The Confederation and the Constitution</i>
	Readings:	Edwards, et.al., Ch. 2; Appendix (the Declaration) Appendix (the Constitution)
	Jan. 31	<i>Federalist/Anti-Federalist Debates</i>
	Readings:	Edwards, et.al., Ch. 3; Appendix (Federalist #10 and Federalist #51)
Week 4:	Feb. 5	<i>Federal Differences</i>
	Readings:	Edwards, et.al., Ch. 3 (reread)
	Feb. 7	<i>Civil Liberties and the Bill of Rights</i>
	Readings:	Edwards, et.al., Ch. 4; Appendix (the Amendments)

Week 5: Feb. 12 *Civil Rights and the Growth of Equality*
Readings: Edwards, et.al., Ch. 5

Feb. 14 *Exam Review*

Week 6: Feb. 19 **First Exam**

Part II. *The Voices of the People*

Week 6: Feb. 21 *Public Opinion*
Readings: Edwards, et.al., Ch. 6

Week 7: Feb. 26 *Mass Media and Politics*
Readings: Edwards, et.al., Ch. 7

Feb. 28 *Representative Government and Political Parties*
Readings: Edwards, et.al., Ch. 8

Week 8: Mar. 4 *Elections/Voting Behavior/Campaigns*
Readings: Edwards, et.al., Ch. 9

Mar. 6 *Re-alignments and Divided Government*
Readings: Edwards, et.al., Ch. 9 (reread)

Spring Break Week: Mar. 10-14

Week 9: Mar. 18 *Interest Groups*
Readings: Edwards, et.al., Ch. 10

Mar. 20 *Exam Review*

Week 10: Mar. 25 **Second Exam**

Part III. *Government Institutions*

Week 10: Mar. 27 *Congress and Representation*
Readings: Edwards, et.al., Ch. 11

Week 11: Apr. 1 *Congressional Leadership and Structure*
Readings: Edwards, et.al., Ch. 11 (reread)

April 1 – the last day for students to Q-drop

Apr. 3 **No Class**
Midwest Political Science Association Conference

Week 12: Apr. 8 *Presidential Power*
Readings: Edwards, et.al., Ch. 12

Apr. 10 *American Presidency—Divided Government*
Readings: TBA

Week 13: Apr. 15 *Modern Presidency*
Readings: Edwards, et.al., Ch. 12 (reread)

Apr. 17 *Democracy and the Courts I*
Readings: Edwards, et.al., Ch. 14

Week 14: Apr. 22 *Democracy and the Courts II*
Readings: Edwards, et.al., Ch. 14 (reread)

Apr. 24 **Third Exam**

There is no final exam for this course.