

PS 2305-21148 Federal Government
Spring 2025

Monday and Wednesday, 11:45 AM – 1:00 PM on Blackboard

Instructor: Dr. David Watson
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Office hours:
• Monday & Wednesday: 1:00-5:00

Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to the basic concepts of the U.S. federal government. This involves understanding the fundamental principles of the American government, the basic institutions that comprise the American government, and the political participation of the American people. In addition, we will examine the quantity and quality of American civil involvement and how our political system and public opinion have changed.

Course Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Describe some of the most well-known political philosophers and their teachings
- Summarize what is included in the Constitution
- List and articulate your views on the big questions and great issues of government
- Explain and critically assess the formal and informal political institutions and their respective roles in American politics
- Summarize and explain several key Supreme Court rulings in our nation’s history
- Assess the causes and consequences of different forms of political participation and outline how individuals and groups can affect political outcomes in the United States
- Critically analyze information to discern its meaning and validity
- Explain how the government impacts your daily life

2024-2025 Core Assessment

- **Critical Thinking**
Students will develop critical thinking skills to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information.
- **Communication**
Students will develop communication skills to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral, and visual communication.

Program Learning Outcomes	Marketable skills for Political Science:
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<p>(Political Science): Students will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate knowledge of significant theoretical approaches of political science through written work and oral communication. • Demonstrate the ability to analyze domestic and international political processes in written work and oral communication. • Demonstrate the ability to develop arguments about global equity and equality issues in politics through written work and oral communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can effectively communicate ideas and information verbally, visually, and in writing. • Students can distinguish between credible/relevant information and information lacking credibility/relevance • Students can identify critical and common institutions of political decision-making and policy-making across different nation-state settings. • Students can engage with social and political problems and use critical thinking to develop logical solutions.
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Texas Domain III Competency 003 (Geography & Culture)

The teacher understands and applies knowledge of geographic relationships involving people, place, and environments in Texas, the United States, and the world: the teacher also understands and applies knowledge of cultural development, adaptation, diversity, and interactions among science, technology, and society.

Texas Domain III Competency 004 (Economics)

The teacher understands and applies knowledge of economic systems and how people organize economic systems to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services.

Texas Domain III Competency 005 (Government & Citizenship)

The teacher understands and applies knowledge of concepts of government, democracy, and citizenship, including ways that individuals and groups achieve their goals through political systems.

Assignments and Grading

Homework Assignments (30% of your course grade, 10% for each of the three assignments):

Students are required to complete THREE homework assignments. Assignments may include short essays on topics learned in the course, concept clarification, and your response to a particular issue. A student who does not turn in an assignment on time will receive a zero for the assignment. Also, students cannot use any AI generators to generate answers to the exam questions.

Exams (70% of your grade):

There will be THREE exams for the course. The exams will include multiple-choice questions on topics covered in the course. The first exam is worth 20% of your final grade, the second is 20%, and the final is 30%. The first exam will be held on **February 17th**, the second on **March 31st**, and the final during the final exam week.

Extra Credit Assignment and Pop Quiz (Extra credit):

A number (to be determined by the instructor) of unannounced quizzes and extra assignments will be given occasionally. The score will be added to your course grade as extra points.

Grade Scale

- Your points= $\text{HW1} \times 0.1 + \text{HW2} \times 0.1 + \text{HW3} \times 0.1 + \text{First Test} \times 0.2 + \text{Second Test} \times 0.2 + \text{Final Exam} \times 0.3 + \text{your total earned extra points}$.
- Your grade will be determined based on the following grading scale:

Points	Letter Grade
100- 90.0	A
89.9-80.0	B
79.9-70.0	C
69.9-60.0	D
59.9 or less	F

Assigned Reading

The required text for this course is:

Christine Barbour and Gerald C. Wright. 2016. *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics, 8th Edition*. ISBN: 9781506362182

Students are expected to have read the assigned chapters before coming to class. Should class need to be canceled due to illness or other unforeseen circumstances, the material scheduled for the missed class will be covered the next time the class meets. All additional readings will be posted.

Attendance and Participation

Students decide to attend college and are responsible for their college education. As this is a college-level course, I do not take attendance. However, if you are not in class consistently, it will affect my evaluation of your performance. Also, since much of the exam material is based on class lectures, it would be in your best interest to attend class meetings regularly. I will occasionally give pop quizzes as extra points, so attending class regularly will improve your chances of success in this course.

Classroom Rules

All students must treat the instructor, the other students, and the classroom setting with respect. Please come to class on time, stay for the entire class, turn off cell phones during class, and refrain from potentially disruptive activities such as talking with friends or passing notes. These policies facilitate a classroom learning environment that allows all students to focus on the lecture and class discussion. It is also essential to respect alternative opinions and points of view during class discussions. Thus, you should listen when the instructor or a fellow student is speaking to the class and refrain from insulting language and gestures, no matter how vehemently you disagree with your classmates. Please note that I reserve the right to stop the discussion anytime.

Tentative Course Schedule

Below is a tentative schedule of topics and reading assignments for the course. Thus, items on this syllabus are subject to change at the instructor's discretion. If I deem it necessary to make changes and modifications to the schedule, I will announce them in class.

- A. The Fundamental Principles of the U.S. Government:** Our objective is to review the agreements, principles, and primary institutions that comprise the American Government.

Week 1 (1/15): Course Guidelines and Expectations

- Chapter 1

Week 2 (1/20): American Political Culture

1/20 is MLK day and there is no class

- Chapter 2

Week 3 (1/27): The Principles of American Politics

- Chapter 3

Week 4 (2/3): The Principles of American Politics

- Chapter 3

Week 5 (2/10): Federalism in the United States

- Chapter 4

Week 6 (2/17): First Exam Week

- **First Test on 2/17**

- B. To Participate or Not to Participate:** Our objective will be to examine the degree to which Americans participate in politics and how they do it.

Week 7 (2/24): Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

- Chapter 5 and Chapter 6

Week 8 (3/3): Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

- Chapter 6

Week 9 (3/10): Political Socialization, Participation, and Public Opinion

- Chapter 11

Week 10 (3/17): Spring Break

- Enjoy your Spring Break

Week 11 (3/24): Political Parties

- Chapter 12

Week 12 (3/31): Second Exam Week

- **Second Test on 3/31**

C. The Fundamental Institutions of U.S. Government: Our objective will be to examine the structure and functions of the U.S. government's legislative, executive, and judicial branches. In addition, we will review what comprises civil liberties in the United States.

Week 13 (4/7): Interest Groups, Voting and Elections in the United States

- Chapters 13 and 14

Week 14 (4/14): The U.S Congress and The Presidency

- Chapter 7, Chapter 8, and Chapter 9

Week 15 (4/21): The Judiciary

- Chapter 10

Week 16 (4/28): Final Exam Week

- **Final Exam during the final exam week**

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Other Course Policies & Resources

Academic Integrity

Intellectual development requires hard work. Students in this class are expected to demonstrate scholarly behavior and academic honesty in the use of intellectual property. A scholar is expected to be punctual, prepared, and focused; meaningful and pertinent participation is appreciated. Examples of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to: Turning in work as original that was used in whole or part for another course and/or professor; turning in another person’s work as one’s own; copying from professional works or internet sites without citation; collaborating on a course assignment, examination, or quiz when collaboration is forbidden. The policy can be found at: <https://www.sulross.edu/about/administration/university-policies/> In addition, please note that plagiarism detection software will be used in this class for written assignments.

Classroom Climate of Respect

This class will foster free expression, critical investigation, and the open discussion of ideas. This means that all of us must help create and sustain an atmosphere of tolerance, civility, and respect for the viewpoints of others. Similarly, we must all learn how to probe, oppose, and disagree without resorting to tactics of intimidation, harassment, or personal attack. No one is entitled to harass, belittle, or discriminate against another based on race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender, national origin, or sexual preference. Still, we will not be silenced by the difficulty of discussing politically sensitive issues fruitfully.

Course Blackboard Resources

There are several resources on the course Blackboard page. You are expected to review and familiarize yourself with the items in Blackboard in the first week of class.

Blackboard Technical Support

SRSU 24/7 Blackboard Technical Support Online Support Desk Contact Info: Toll Free: 888.837.6055. Email: blackboardsupport@sulross.edu

Commitment to Diversity

I aim to create a learning environment for my students that supports a diversity of thoughts, perspectives, and experiences and honors your identities (including race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, ability, socioeconomic class, age, nationality, etc.). I also understand that the crisis of COVID-19, economic disparity, health concerns, or even unexpected life events could impact the conditions necessary for you to succeed. My commitment is to be there for you and help you meet the learning objectives of this course. I do this to demonstrate my commitment to you and to the mission of Sul Ross State University to create an inclusive environment and care for the whole student as part of the Sul Ross Familia. If you feel like your performance in the class is being impacted by your experiences outside of class, please don't hesitate to come and talk with me. I want to be a resource for you.

SUSR Library Services

The Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library in Alpine offers FREE resources and services to the entire SRSU community. Access and borrow books, articles, and more by visiting the library's website, library.sulross.edu. Off-campus access requires logging in with your LoboID and password. Librarians are a tremendous resource for your coursework and can be reached in person, by email (srsulibrary@sulross.edu), or phone (432-837-8123).

The Southwest Texas Junior College (SWTJC) Libraries at Uvalde, Del Rio, and Eagle Pass offer additional access to library spaces and resources. Del Rio, Eagle Pass, and Uvalde students may also use online resources available through SWTJC website, library.swtjc.edu. The SWTJC Libraries serve as pick-up locations for Inter Library Loan (ILL) and Document Delivery from the Alpine campus.

ADA Statement

SRSU Disability Services. Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request each semester for each class. Alpine students seeking accessibility/accommodations services must contact Mary Schwartze Grisham, M.Ed., LPC, SRSU's Accessibility Services Coordinator at 432-837-8203, or email mschwartz@sulross.edu. Our office is located on the first floor of Ferguson Hall – room 112, and our mailing address is P.O. Box C-122, Sul Ross State University, Alpine. Texas, 79832.