

PS 2305 22187 Federal Government
Spring 2026
Monday and Wednesday, 11:45 AM – 1:00 AM

Instructor: Dr. David Watson

Office: Amy 101

Phone: 432-294-4849

Email: dwatson@sulross.edu (Please give me 24 hours to respond)

Office hours:

- Tuesday & Thursday: 2:00 PM- 4:00 PM

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

2025-2026 Core Assessment

- Personal Responsibility
Students will develop principles of personal responsibility for living in a diverse world; to include intercultural competency, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.
- Social Responsibility
Students will develop principles of social responsibility for living in a diverse world, to include the ability to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making.

<p>Program Learning Outcomes (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. 	<p>Marketable skills for Political Science:</p> <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

Topic Quiz (30% of your course grade)

This course covers 20 topics. After my lecture on each topic, students must complete five quizzes on that topic. In other words, since there are 20 topics and five quizzes per topic, there are 100 topic quizzes in total.

Please be aware of the due dates for each topic and its corresponding quizzes.

Exams (70% of your grade):

There will be TWO exams for the course. Exams will include multiple-choice questions and short essays on topics covered in the course. The midterm exam is worth 30% of your final grade, and the final exam is worth 40% of your final grade.

The midterm exam will be held in class on **February 25th**, and the final exam will be held 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: Topic quiz scores \times 0.3 + Midterm Exam \times 0.3 + Final Exam \times 0.4 + your total extra points earned. 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. 2025. *Keeping the Republic: Power and Citizenship in American Politics, 12th Edition*. ISBN: 9781071929902

Students are expected to have read the assigned chapters before coming to class. Should the class be canceled due to illness or other unforeseen circumstances, the material scheduled for the missed class will be covered in the next class. 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 consistently in class, it will affect my evaluation of your performance. In addition, 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 administer pop quizzes for extra credit, so attending class regularly will improve your chances of success in this course.

Classroom Rules

All students must treat the instructor, their peers, and the classroom environment with respect. Please arrive on time, stay for the entire class, turn off cell phones during class, and refrain from 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 using insulting language and gestures, no matter how vehemently you disagree with your classmates. Please note that I reserve the right to stop the discussion at any time.

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.

Before the midterm exam, we will discuss 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 (1/14): Course Guidelines and Expectations

- Welcome to this class. Please read the syllabus and complete the syllabus quiz by January 18.

Week 2 (1/21): American Political Culture

- Chapter 2
- Topic 1-1 Politics and Political Science
- Topic 1-2 Politics and Economics

Week 3 (1/26): The Principles of American Politics

- Chapter 3
- Topic 1-3 Our Democracy
- Topic 1-4 Who Is an American

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

- Chapter 3
- Topic 1-5 Political Ideas Part I
- Topic 1-6 Political Ideas Part II

Week 5 (2/9): Federalism in the United States

- Chapter 4
- Topic 1-7 The Founding of The United States
- Topic 1-8 The U.S. Constitution

Week 6 (2/16): Federalism in the United States

- Chapter 4
- Topic 1-9 Our Federalism
- Topic 1-10 Different Levels of Government

Week 7 (2/23): Midterm Exam Week

- Midterm Exam on 2/25

After the midterm Exam, we will discuss political participation, civil rights and civil liberties, and the fundamental institutions of the U.S. Government. We will examine the extent to which Americans participate in politics and how they do so; the structure and functions of the U.S. government's legislative, executive, and judicial branches; and the components of civil liberties in the United States.

Week 8 (3/2): Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

- Chapter 5 and Chapter 6
- Topic 2-1 Civil Liberties and Civil Rights I
- Topic 2-2 Civil Liberties and Civil Rights II

Week 9 (3/9): Spring Break

- No Class Meetings

Week 10 (3/16): Political Socialization, Participation, and Public Opinion

- Chapter 11
- Topic 2-3 Civil Liberties and Civil Rights III
- Topic 2-4 Public Opinion

Week 11 (3/23): Public Opinion and Political Parties

- Chapter 11 and Chapter 12
- Topic 2-5 Measuring Public Opinion
- Topic 2-6 Political Parties

Week 12 (3/30): Research week

- This week is for catching up on previously missed topics/class meetings.

Week 13 (4/6): Interest Groups, Voting, and Elections in the United States

- Chapters 13 and 14
- Topic 2-7 Interest Group
- Topic 2-8 Voting and Elections in the United States

Week 14 (4/13): The U.S Congress and The Presidency

- Chapter 7, Chapter 8, and Chapter 9
- Topic 2-9 Congress
- Topic 2-10 Presidency and Our Legal System

Week 15 (4/20): The Judiciary

- Chapter 10
- Topic 2-10 Presidency and Our Legal System

Week 16 (4/27): 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

Supportive Statement

I aim to create a learning environment for my students that supports various perspectives and experiences. I understand that the recent pandemic, economic disparity, and health concerns, or even unexpected life events may 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 a supportive 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 LobolD 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 mschwartze@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.