



PS 2305-002
Federal Government
Fall 2026
LH 309, 9:30-10:45 a.m.

Professor: Jessica Velasco, DPA
Office Hours: M (12-1, 2-3), T (2-5), W (12-1) and by appointment
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Course description

Welcome to what could be one of the most important courses you will take in college—Federal Government! This course is an introduction to American government and its philosophical and historical foundations, institutions, and political processes. We will examine how our political system was designed, how it has changed over time and how public opinion, the media and the "information age" have affected our government institutions and public policy. We will discuss the role and scope of government as the Founders conceived it and as it is viewed today.



Textbook & Course Materials:

We will be using a free, open educational resource (OER) textbook for this class, which is provided in Blackboard. You can also access the book and other resources (including the audio version) [here](#).

If you prefer reading a print book, there is a print copy of the textbook available in the SRSU library in the Reserves section. You can check it out for up to 4 hours for use in the library.

There will also be additional materials for you to read and review each week. All of these items are provided on Blackboard.

Course learning outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Describe some of the most well-known political philosophers and their teachings
- Summarize what is included in the Constitution
- Explain the origin and development of constitutional democracy in the United States.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the federal system.
- Describe separation of powers and checks and balances in both theory and practice.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the federal government.
- Evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, and political parties in the political system.
- Analyze the election process.
- Describe the rights and responsibilities of citizens
- Analyze issues and policies in U.S. politics.
- 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 the ways in which individuals and groups can affect political outcomes in the United States
- Critically analyze information to discern its meaning and validity
- Explain how government impacts your daily life

Core Assessment

In addition to other outcomes listed above, I will also be promoting the following in this class:

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.

GRADING

Grades in this class will be determined **by the number of points you earn by the end of the course.** The point distribution is listed below:

A	895-1000 points
B	795-894 POINTS
C	695-794 POINTS
D	595-694 POINTS
F	BELOW 595 POINTS

You can track your progress by clicking on the “My Grades” tab in Blackboard. You can also view grading rubrics for each assignment in the “My Grades” tab. If I leave you additional feedback outside of the rubric, you will see a message bubble in the grading center.

POINT DISTRIBUTION

Introduction Post	20 points
Syllabus Quiz	30 points
Attendance and Participation	150 points
Reading Quizzes (10 x 30)	300 points
SCOTUS Scorecard Assignment (25, 25, 50, 100)	200 points
Midterm Exam	150 points
Final Exam	150 points
Total	1000 points
BONUS POINTS	TBA

INTRODUCTION POST: By Friday at 11:59 p.m. of the first week of class, you need to post an introduction to the discussion board. More information is on Blackboard. The introduction post is worth 20 points. To receive full points, you must follow the instructions.

SYLLABUS QUIZ: By Friday at 11:59 p.m. of the first week, you need to complete the syllabus quiz on Blackboard in the Week 1 folder. You will have ONE attempt. The quiz is worth 30 points.

ATTENDANCE & PARTICIPATION/CLASS ENGAGEMENT: I expect you to attend and participate—and to do your part to stay healthy and alert so you can attend and participate. Attendance and participation are worth 150 points in this class. Please come prepared to participate. Being prepared to participate means:

- You have read the assigned materials
- You have paper and writing utensils to take notes
- You have removed all distractions—ALL electronics should be turned off and stowed away, earbuds removed, etc. (NOTE: Please do bring your phone and laptop to class on Tuesday to do the reading quizzes).
- **You are on time, and you stay for the entire class**
- You refrain from distracting other students during class
- You fully participate in discussions and other activities

Your participation grade will be based on the items above and a self-assessment at the midterm mark and at the end of the semester. Remember that you play a role in the overall class community and atmosphere. It will be better if everyone participates.

READING QUIZZES: Every Tuesday, during class, there will be a reading quiz. These quizzes will take a variety of forms—Blackboard quiz, Kahoot, or paper quiz. There will be 11 quizzes throughout the semester. The highest 10 grades will be recorded (one quiz grade will be dropped for each person). Make up quizzes will only be available for those with university excused absences (or absences with documentation), and **they must be made up the following week.** Please note that the makeup quizzes will have different questions than the quiz given in class.

SCOTUS SCORECARD ASSIGNMENT: Throughout the semester, you will create a collection of 20 Supreme Court case notecards. The purpose of this assignment is to help you identify, analyze, and evaluate Supreme Court decisions that you believe have had the greatest impact on the United States. Impact may be positive, negative, or mixed, but your rankings should reflect the overall significance and consequences of each decision. **A rubric and complete instructions can be found on Blackboard.**

One goal of this assignment is to create a personalized Supreme Court study guide that you can use throughout the semester and when preparing for exams.

Project Timeline and Point Distribution

- Checkpoint 1 (after Chapters 1, 2, and 3): Have 5 cards completed and submit them for review. (25 points)
- Checkpoint 2 (after Chapters 11, 12, and 15): Have 10 total cards completed and submit them for review. (25 points)
- Checkpoint 3 (after Chapters 13, 4, and 7): Have 15 total cards completed and submit them for review. (50 points)
- Final Submission (after Chapters 9 and 10): Submit all 20 cards, ranked #1-#20, along with the reflection questions. (100 points)
- Total Project Value: 200 points

EXAMS: There will be a midterm exam and a final exam in this class. Both will take place in class on the days specified below. PLEASE PUT THESE IN YOUR CALENDAR NOW. Also, please note that we are not covering all of the chapters in the order they are in the book. I am covering them in the order that I feel makes the most sense.

W	Classes	Topic	Reading	Assignments and Important Dates*
1	Aug 25 Aug 27	Introduction to the course	Syllabus	Syllabus quiz & introduction post due by Friday at 11:59 p.m.
2	Sept 1 Sept 3	Political Philosophers & American Government & Civic Engagement (Ch. 1)	Chapter 1	Reading quiz in class on Tuesday & Work on SCOTUS Scorecard Assignment
3	Sept 8 Sept 10	Chapter 2: The Constitution	Chapter 2	Reading quiz in class on Tuesday & Work on SCOTUS Scorecard Assignment
4	Sept 15 Sept 17	Chapter 3: American Federalism	Chapter 3	Reading quiz in class on Tuesday & First set of cards due by class time on Tuesday (5 cards)
5	Sept 22 Sept 24	Chapter 11: Congress	Chapter 11	Reading quiz in class on Tuesday & Work on SCOTUS Scorecard Assignment
6	Sept 29 Oct 1	Chapter 12: The Presidency	Chapter 12	Reading quiz in class on Tuesday & Work on SCOTUS Scorecard Assignment
7	Oct 6 Oct 8	Chapter 15: The Bureaucracy	Chapter 15	Reading quiz in class on Tuesday & Second set of cards due by class time on Tuesday (10 cards total)
8	Oct 13 Oct 15	MIDTERM REVIEW & EXAM WEEK		Review (10/13 in class) Exam (10/15 in class)

9	Oct 20 Oct 22	Chapter 13: The Courts	Chapter 13	Reading quiz in class on Tuesday & Work on SCOTUS Scorecard Assignment
10	Oct 27 Oct 29	Chapters 4-5 Civil Liberties & Rights	Chapter 4 & watch video on Blackboard before class on Tuesday	Reading quiz in class on Tuesday & Work on SCOTUS Scorecard Assignment
11	Nov 3 Nov 5	Chapter 7: Voting & Elections	Chapter 7	Reading quiz in class on Tuesday & Third set of cards due by class time on Tuesday (15 cards total)
12	Nov 10 Nov 12	Chapter 9: Political Parties	Chapter 9	Reading quiz in class on Tuesday & Work on SCOTUS Scorecard Assignment
13	Nov 17 Nov 19	Chapter 10: Interest Groups	Chapter 10	Reading quiz in class on Tuesday & Final set of cards due (20 cards total)— Don't forget the bonus point opportunity!
14	Nov 24	Thanksgiving Week		Enjoy your Thanksgiving!
15	Dec 1	Final Exam Review		STUDY!
16	TBA	Finals Week		The final exam will take place in person during the scheduled exam time using the final exam schedule (I will notify the class once it is posted. It is likely to be December 7 at 10:15 a.m.).

Other important dates:

- August 24, First Day of Classes
- August 27, Last day for registration and schedule changes
- September 7, Labor Day Holiday, No classes
- September 9, Last day to drop a 16-week class without creating an academic record
- October 5, Last day to register to vote in November elections
- October 19, First day of early voting
- October 30, Last day of early voting
- November 2, Registration for Spring 2027 begins
- November 3, Election Day
- November 6, Last day to drop a 16-week course with a "W"

- November 25-27, Thanksgiving Day Holiday (begins after last class meets on Tuesday)
- December 2, Last class day before finals
- December 3, Dead day
- December 4, 7-9, Final Exams

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ME:

- I will provide email responses within 24 hours of receipt during the hours of 9 a.m.-4 p.m., Monday-Friday.
- I will provide grades and feedback for assignments **within one week of the submission due date.**
- I will provide clear and concise instructions on how to complete the course requirements.
- I will provide a range of opportunities to engage in the course content in a meaningful way.
- I will stay current with developments in the field to help you get the best possible experience in the course.

WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU:

- You will check your Blackboard announcements and SRSU email daily.
- You will familiarize yourself with the course syllabus, policies, assessments, evaluation, grading criteria, and course design.
- You will acquire the tools necessary to be successful in this class. This includes paper, writing utensils, reliable Internet access, and a device other than your phone for completing assignments.
- You will complete all assigned readings and coursework by assigned due dates.
- You will take the time to review feedback I provide to avoid repeating mistakes.
- You will engage in the course, with your peers, and with me, using open, appropriate, and respectful communication
- You will be diligent about using communication in a way that shows respect to me and your classmates.
- You will submit college-level work that has been checked carefully for errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
- You will respond to communication from me and your classmates in a timely manner (within 24 hours).
- You will not plagiarize the work of others or yourself, and you will also not collaborate with others or use generative AI on class assignments, quizzes, or exams.
- You will reach out to me immediately if you are having trouble in the class or with access to course materials. For general access issues or technical help, please call the Help Desk-- 888.837.6055.

OTHER COURSE POLICIES & RESOURCES

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Students in this class are expected to demonstrate scholarly behavior and academic honesty in the use of intellectual property. Students should submit work that is their own and avoid engaging in behaviors that violate academic integrity, such as 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. ***In this course, every element of class***

assignments must be fully prepared by the student. The use of generative AI tools for any part of your work will be treated as plagiarism. Violations of academic integrity can result in failing assignments, failing a class, and/or more serious university consequences. These behaviors also erode the value of college degrees and higher education overall.

As an SRSU student, it is your responsibility to read and understand the university's expectations about academic integrity. All violations will be taken seriously and handled through the appropriate university process. 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. If you use your computer for the in-person exam, Respondus Lockdown Browser & Monitor will be used as well. I do NOT like using these tools, but they are an unfortunate necessity in a world with generative AI.

If you have any questions about this, please ask!

LATE WORK:

I have been very intentional about how I have designed this course and distributed the content to optimize your learning and comprehension. Trying to cram weeks of work into a few days or waiting until the end of the semester to do everything isn't conducive to learning. For this reason, you must have an extenuating circumstance and approval from me to submit late work. If you submit late work without an approved extension from me, I reserve the right not to grade it. IMPORTANT NOTE: Since university-related travel (e.g., travel for athletics competition) is planned in advance (with a few exceptions), make sure to plan ahead. Please consult with me if you have concerns about how your university-related travel will impact a submission deadline. This needs to be done BEFORE you leave and before the deadline.

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. NOTE: Please post general, course-related questions to the discussion board forum I have set up for this. Typically, if one student in the class has the question, others do as well. Please allow 24 hours for a response, and then feel free to email me or call me directly with your question.

ADA STATEMENT

SRSU Accessibility Services. Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with the 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. Students seeking accessibility/accommodations services must contact Ronnie Harris, LPC, Counselor, at 432-837-8203 or ronnie.harris@sulross.edu. RGC students can also contact Alejandra Valdez, at 830-758-5006 or email alejandra.valdez@sulross.edu. Our office is located on the first floor of Ferguson Hall, room 112, and our mailing address is P.O. Box C122, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas, 79832.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES STATEMENT

All full-time and part-time students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the **Student Handbook** and the **Undergraduate & Graduate Catalog** and for abiding by the **University rules and regulations**. Additionally, students are responsible for checking their Sul Ross email as an official form of communication from the university. Every student is expected to obey all

federal, state and local laws and is expected to familiarize themselves with the requirements of such laws.

COUNSELING SERVICES

Sul Ross has partnered with TimelyCare where all SR students will have access to nine free counseling sessions. You can learn more about this 24/7/365 support by visiting [Timelycare/SRSU](https://www.timelycare.com/srsu). The SR Counseling and Accessibility Services office will continue to offer in-person counseling in Ferguson Hall room 112 (Alpine campus), and telehealth Zoom sessions for remote students and RGC students.

ALPINE LIBRARY INFORMATION

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 by phone (432-837-8123).

No matter where you are based, public libraries and many academic and special libraries welcome the general public into their spaces for study. SRSU TexShare Cardholders can access additional services and resources at various libraries across Texas. Learn more about the TexShare program by visiting library.sulross.edu/find-and-borrow/texshare/ or ask a librarian by emailing srsulibrary@sulross.edu.

CLASSROOM DEMEANOR

Political issues can be emotionally charged. It is highly unlikely in a class this size that everyone will share your personal values, beliefs, and opinions. Believe it or not, this is a good thing! The presentation of varying perspectives will help all of us to learn. This can be accomplished if ideas, beliefs, and opinions are presented in a respectful way. I will be expecting all students to follow these basic ground rules for our interactions whether they are face-to-face or virtual.

GROUND RULES FOR DISCUSSION (For VIRTUAL & IN-PERSON discussions)

SOURCE: Center for Teaching and Learning. (2020). Sample discussion board ground rules. Retrieved from <https://ctl.wiley.com/sample-discussion-board-ground-rules/>

- **Ask questions.**
If you find something confusing or want to know more, do not hesitate to ask questions.
- **Participate.**
Do not hide in the background; it is not fair to lurk and let others do all the work. Contribute to discussions to get as much as possible from the course and to maintain your participation grade.
- **Do not dominate a discussion.**
Share your knowledge, but not to the point of excluding others. If you have something to offer, please share it, but allow everyone to contribute equally to a discussion.
- **Be intellectually rigorous.**
Challenge yourself and one another.
- **Be tactful.**
Be critical of ideas but remember there are other people involved. Be tactful and kind. You can hurt the feelings of a person reading your post.
- **Forgive other students' mistakes.**

Just because you do not agree with a student's post does not mean that he or she is wrong. Instead, offer a different perspective to encourage further discussion.

- **Listen carefully before speaking.**
Listen carefully before responding so you don't repeat what others have already said. Try to contribute clarifying information or a new idea to a discussion.
- **Be concise.**
Make your point clearly and quickly.
- **Cite your sources.**
Give credit where credit is due. Include links where appropriate.
- **Maintain confidentiality.**
Respect your classmates' privacy. Do not repeat the personal information that others share.

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

UNDECIDED or UNSURE about YOUR MAJOR?

Political Science may be for you! Hopefully this class and the assignments will help open you up to the various career possibilities in political science, and I would be happy to discuss this with any interested students.

Program Learning Outcomes (Political Science): • SLO 1: Domestic Processes and Concepts: Students will understand key political processes, institutions, and concepts within the United States. • SLO 2: International and Global Processes: Students will develop an awareness of international relations, global issues, and the influence of global organizations on national politics. • SLO 3: Applied Government Experience: Students will gain practical experience working in government settings, applying political science knowledge to real-world policy and decision-making processes.	Marketable skills for Political Science: • 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 policymaking 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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