POS 2331 American and Texas Government I
Spring 2017

Dr. Jon R. Taylor
Meeting Time: 9:35am – 10:50am MW Strake Hall, Room 204
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Office Hours: MW: 7:00am – 8:00am; 9:00am – 5:00pm; TTH: 7:00am – 8:00am and 11:00am – 3:00pm; F: 7:00am – 8:00am; 9:00am – 12:00pm

Required Text:


Course Description:

A survey of national, state, and local government, including such topics as the U.S. and Texas Constitutions; democratic theory; federalism; political culture; political socialization; public opinion; political participation and electoral behavior; political parties and interest groups; the media; and campaigns and elections.

This course is designed to help students gain a better understanding of the American political system and how it is changing in the modern world; and, the American system as compared to other institutions and processes elsewhere. The course is meant to supply the tools for critical reasoning and analysis of the American political system of government, and the knowledge and understanding needed in order to become a responsible citizen in terms of political participation.

Course Learning Objectives:

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Understand the meaning of power, politics, and political culture, and evaluate the role of government.
- Identify the elements of democratic theory.
- Identify the characteristics and development of the U.S. and Texas constitutions.
- Analyze the concept of federalism and its operation in the U.S.
- Define public opinion, how it is measured, and its impact on public policy.
• Explain the role, activities, and major types of interest groups and describe various techniques used by groups to promote their interests.
• Trace the evolution of political parties and evaluate their role in the American political system.
• Analyze the dynamics of the electoral process.
• Assess the major functions of the media and its role on politics.

Exams and Research Requirements:

There will be two mid-term exams and a final exam – which will cover the approaches and ideas covered in class. The following is the grading breakdown for the course:

• Class participation 10%
• Midterm Examination 1 20%
• Midterm Examination 2 20%
• Research Paper 20%
• Final Examination 30%

Students are expected to prepare thoroughly for each class session, to submit written materials on time, and to participate actively and constructively in class. Attendance is critical.

A research paper is required. A short summary of the research paper topic will be due by February 9, 2017. The completed research paper is due on May 2, 2017.

Research paper expectations: All work submitted must be typewritten and double spaced, using a 12-point font, with 1 inch margins on all four sides and properly footnoted. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade. The grading of the paper will be based on:

• Your ability to provide an analytical viewpoint on the topic to back up your opinions provided with research materials.
• Clarity and organization of the paper.
• Appropriate citations and reference throughout the paper (footnotes, bibliography, etc.).
• Correct grammar, spelling and form.
• Unexcused late papers will be reduced by one-half a grade per day.
• The research paper should be between 4 – 6 pages in length.

Class Rules:

• Arriving late is strongly discouraged.
• Reading course assignments is expected.
• All Electronic devices are to be muted during class.
• Showing respect to other students and the professor is expected.
• Make up work will be limited to special circumstances (and with prior notification only).
• Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will result in a failing grade.

Attendance and Miscellaneous:

I rarely take roll in class. That does not mean I fail to notice the lack of your presence in the classroom. On the contrary. With such intimate classes as offered at the University of St. Thomas, your absence is quite noticeable. I like to have you in class. I value your input. But I make the presumption that since you are in college that you are a reasonably responsible adult. It bothers me very little if you have found someone or something better than attending my class. Of course, it bothers me very little to flunk you as result of your finding that someone/something better. If you don’t show up for class and/or blow-off or do extraordinarily poor on the homework assignments, exams, and the article review, you may be looking at crime or a job in the fast food industry as a succinct alternative to the stresses of higher education.

Let’s face it: Technology breaks. Servers go down. Transfers time out. Files become corrupt. The list goes on and on. These are not considered emergencies. They are part of the normal production process. An issue you may have with technology is no excuse for late work. You need to protect yourself by managing your time and backing up your work.

Academic Integrity:

"It would have been better if he had never been born"– Mark 14:21.

All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own. Absolutely no cheating or plagiarism (using someone else’s words or ideas without proper attribution) will be tolerated. Any cases of cheating or plagiarism will be handled according to university policy and reported to the University’s Academic Misconduct Committee.

As stated in the Academic Misconduct Code for the University of St. Thomas, academic misconduct includes: (a) cheating (using an authorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise), plagiarism, falsification of records, unauthorized possession of examinations, intimidation, and any and all other actions that may improperly affect the evaluation of a student’s academic performance or achievement; (b) assisting others in any such act; or (c) attempting to engage in such acts.

Plagiarism is using the work or another person and claiming it as your own. The most common types of plagiarism include:
- Using a paper or portion of a paper prepared by someone else;
- Quoting someone else's language or words without proper quotation or citation; and
- Paraphrasing someone else’s ideas, framework, or insights without giving credit to the original author in a citation.

Academic misconduct in any form is unacceptable and suspected violations will be pursued aggressively.

**Students with Disabilities:**

Any student with a disability requiring accommodations in this course is encouraged to contact me after class or during office hours. Additionally, students will need to contact Counseling and Disability Services in Crooker Center. This office can be reached at (713) 525-2169 or 6953. If you have a documented disability that will impact your work in this class, please contact me to discuss your needs. Additionally, you will need to register with the Counseling and Disability Services Office in Crooker Center. This office can be reached at (713) 525-2169 or 6953.

**Course Schedule (Readings will be assigned on a weekly basis in class):**

**Introduction to the Course**
**Topic 1:** The Political Landscape
**Topic 2:** The Context for Texas Politics and Government
**Topic 3:** The Constitution: National and Texas
**Topic 4:** Federalism and Intergovernmental Relations

**First Exam**
**Research Paper Topics due February 9th**
**Topic 5:** Public Opinion and Political Socialization
**Topic 6:** Political Participation

**Spring Break March 13th – 17th**
**Topic 7:** Political Parties
**Topic 8:** Voting and Elections

**Second Exam**
**Topic 9:** The News Media
**Topic 10:** Interest Groups

**Holy Week Break April 13th – 14th**
**Topic 11:** State and Local Government (National and Texas)
**Topic 12:** Political Parties, Interest Groups, Elections, and Campaigns in Texas

**Topic 13:** Course Wrap-up

**Research Paper due May 2nd**

**Final Examination May 16th 8:30am – 11:00am**