

Social Sciences—Government
American Government: 2305-004
Fall 2026 Semester: South Plains College
Credit: 3 Lecture, 0 Lab
T/Th: Tuesday/Thursday: 9:30am – 10:45am
Administration Building #140

Professor: Dr. Dannielle—Danie—Vaughn

Office: Administration #121

Office Hours: *Monday:* 10:00am – 11am & 2:00pm – 3:00pm

Tuesday: 11:00am – 12:00pm & 1pm – 3pm

Wednesday: None

Thursday: 2:00pm – 3:00pm

Friday: 10am – 12:00pm; *also available via Zoom and by appointment*

E-mail: dvaughn@southplainscollege.edu

This course partially satisfies a core curriculum requirement: Government/Political Science Foundational Component Area (070)

Available Formats: Conventional (Fully Face-to-Face)

Campus: Levelland

Course Specific Instructions & Evaluation: Please see the *grading system, description of assignments, and course schedule below.*

Dropping a Course: Students may drop courses through Texan Connect, the Admissions and Records Office, or Advising and Testing Center through the late registration period. After late registration has closed, a student must complete the online [Student Initiated Drop Request](#) to drop a course. Students may also drop courses in person at any campus location by completing a Student Initiated Drop Form. Complete a [Student Initiated Drop Form](#) and return the signed form to the Levelland Admissions and Records Office, the Student Support Center at the Lubbock Downtown Center, the Lubbock Career and Technical Center, or Plainview Center. You must have a picture ID to complete the drop. A mark of “W” will be given for student-initiated drops that occur prior to and through the last day to drop as indicated in the online Academic Calendar found here:

<https://www.southplainscollege.edu/academiccalendar/index.php>.

Attendance/Participation. I take class attendance for this course and your participation is required. If you do not attend the lectures your grade will certainly suffer, as studies tend to show a correlation between class attendance and grades. Please come to class each day prepared to participate in class lectures and/or discussions. Students must make every effort to attend face-to-face courses. Whenever absences become excessive and in the instructor's opinion, minimum course objectives cannot be met due to absences, the instructor may recommend that the student withdraw from the course.

SECTION I: Course Description & Objective

This course explores the origin and development of the U.S. Constitution, structure and powers of the national government including the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, federalism, political participation, the national election process, public policy, civil liberties and civil rights.

Course Objectives addressed:

1. **Critical thinking:** to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation, and synthesis of information.
2. **Communication:** to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication.
3. **Social responsibility:** to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.
4. **Personal responsibility:** to include the ability to connect choices, actions, and consequences to ethical decision-making.

In terms of the Objectives of the Course, and Student Learning Outcomes, students should be able to do the following upon completion of this course:

1. Explain the origin and development of constitutional democracy in the United States.
Method of Assessment: Exam 1, Quiz 1
2. Demonstrate knowledge of our federal system.
Method of Assessment: Exam 1, Homework 3, Quiz 3
3. Describe separation of powers and checks and balances in both theory and practice.
Method of Assessment: Exam 3, Quiz x 2
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the federal government.
Method of Assessment: Final Exam, Quiz 5
5. Evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, and political parties.
Method of Assessment: Exam 2, Homework 2, Quiz x (2)
6. Analyze the election process.
Method of Assessment: Final Exam, Homework 3
7. Describe the rights and responsibilities of citizens.
Method of Assessment: Quiz 3
8. Analyze issues and policies in U.S. Politics.
Method of Assessment: Quiz 6, Homework 3

SECTION II: Course Materials / Textbook

I utilize one textbook in this course that you are ***not required*** to buy. I have provided a pdf version of the text for you via the course page on Blackboard. I strongly recommend purchasing the published text as it has a wealth of useful information, but this is not a requirement. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me.

1. *****Logic of American Politics 12th Edition*; Samuel Kernell, Gary C. Jacobson, Thad Kousser, and Lynn Vavreck: ISBN: 978-1071861257**

**** Please give me at least 24 hours to respond to emails and you must include your course name, number, and section in your email. Using the Blackboard message feature does all of this for you. I don't usually take 24 hours, except weekends ****

SECTION III: Grading System

Grading is based on a 750-point system for this course. Please see assignment details below.

Grading Formula

-Exam #1:	<u>100 points</u>	13.3% (Overall Grade)
-Exam #2:	<u>100 points</u>	13.3% (Overall Grade)
-Final Exam:	<u>100 points</u>	13.3% (Overall Grade)
-In-Class Homework #1:	<u>60 points</u>	11.3% (Overall Grade)
-In-Class Homework #2:	<u>60 points</u>	11.3% (Overall Grade)
-At-Home Homework #3:	<u>90 points</u>	11.3% (Overall Grade)
-Class Activities (4):	<u>160 points</u>	16% (Overall Grade)
-Participation:	<u>80 points</u>	10% (Overall Grade)

Grading Scale

A = 675 – 750 points (90 – 100%)

B = 600 – 674 points (80 – 89%)

C = 525 – 599 points (70 – 79%)

D = 450 – 524 points (60 – 69%)

F = Fewer than 450 points (less than 60%)

SECTION IV: Description of Assignments

1. (3) Exams: 300 points total (100 points per exam)

There are **two regular exams** in this course and **one final exam**, and tests will be cumulative in format. **Study guides will be made available.** Exam format will range between a mix of true/false, multiple-choice type questions, and fill-in-the blank type questions. Each exam will be no longer than 50 questions and taken largely from lectures and any additional readings required for potential material on each exam. You will only need a pencil on test days.

2. (3) Homework Assignments: 210 points total

There are 3 homework assignments for the course. Each is meant to challenge you into critically thinking about current events within the political arena and the role of government and political parties in shaping this—including assessing current political dynamics. Two of the assignments will be in-class, and one will be an at writing assignment. These assignments are available via blackboard for one week. The last assignment will be open from **Tuesday at 8am** and is in two weeks the following **Tuesday at 11:59pm.**

3. (4) In-Class Activities: 160 points total

There will be four class activities to reinforce various concepts throughout the course. These activities will occur at a time and date of my choosing and none are meant to be time consuming, just to challenge you into critically thinking about politics.

4. Attendance & Participation: 80 points total

Attendance is required in this course. I will take roll at the beginning of each class and assign a participation grade at the end of the semester. This grade will be a mix of your performance on attending lectures, class discussions, and overall class participation. These should be free, easy points for everyone! You will lose 3 points from participation score for each class you miss.

*Extra Credit

I do not offer extra credit to individuals. When I do offer extra credit, the opportunity is offered to all class members equally, provided they have attended the class where the credit is offered, or have engaged in proper due diligence to find out what extra credit was offered (assuming the extra credit is not already past due). There are no make-ups offered for extra credit. *** If you want to take advantage of potential extra credit, come to class. ***

SECTION V: Course Policies

- A. CIVILITY & CRITICAL THINKING.** In this course, civility and critical thinking are both required and go hand in hand. **I will not tolerate instances of incivility;** nor will I tolerate uninformed opinions masked as critical thinking and facts. We are living in an unprecedented political time where civility in public discourse is eroding, so it is understandable that as individuals our emotions and passions are elevated as a result. ***Even still, I expect civility among my students.*** All discussions in class must be polite and professional. In any classroom situation that includes discussion and critical thinking in politics, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. I strongly encourage debate in this course because it helps facilitate learning. You should not hesitate to raise your hand and challenge the arguments or concepts presented by the instructor or other students. However, as you know, shouting, irrationality, and even apathy are characteristics that are not conducive to effective learning. Students who disrupt this classroom mission by rude, sarcastic, threatening, abusive or obscene language and/or behavior will be subject to appropriate sanctions according to university policy. Likewise, faculty members are expected to maintain the highest standards of professionalism in all interactions with all constituents of the university.
- B. I encourage you to utilize my available office hours.** I am here to help you understand government and politics, and I strongly encourage you to take advantage of my office hours. If designated office hours are inconvenient, please feel free to arrange a meeting with me at another time at your discretion.
- C. Please read the syllabus thoroughly.** You will hear this often, and it will get old, but do it. If you email me a question that can be *clearly* answered by simply reading the syllabus (such as, “I was sick. Can I take a make-up?”), you will get an email from me stating “see syllabus”. If you don’t understand the syllabus, please ask me after class or try during available office hours, or call me on the phone, and I will be happy to answer your questions.

- D. *NO CELL PHONE AND/OR HEADPHONE USE DURING CLASS. PUT THEM AWAY.** You are not to use personal cell phones and/or sit in class with your headphones on. It's just rude so seriously, use your own time for that. This is also something you will hear often and that will get old, so just don't be that person. Issues that are persistent will result in the student's removal from class and/or the course. **I will stop class and make you remove your headphones and/or put away your cell phone, for real.**
- E. Email policies. CHECK IT!** That I didn't see your email, will not be an excuse in this course. We are all busy, but I will always put forth my best effort to make myself available. Although I try to check my email at least once a day, I do not always check emails at frequent intervals during the day. Nevertheless, I make every effort to respond to an email within 24 hours during weekdays. If you send me an email over the weekend, I will respond over the weekend if I am able to. However, please be advised that depending on my access to the internet over the weekend, I may not be able to respond until the next business day (or slightly longer during holidays). If you email me at 5:00 PM on Friday, I may be unable to respond until Monday. *I will only accept emails from South Plains College email accounts.*
- F. Blackboard.** Blackboard is an integral part of this class for accessing the syllabus, course announcements, homework assignments, study guides, additional readings and grades. The URL for Blackboard is <https://southplainscollege.blackboard.com> and you will need your South Plains username and password to access our class site. Do not attempt to message me on Blackboard as I do not regularly check these. If you need to get into touch me, use the email address listed at the top of the syllabus. If you have any problems with Blackboard, please contact the IT Help Desk at (806) 716-2180. You can also email blackboard@southplainscollege.edu.
- G. FERPA Disclosure and Procedures.** I am prohibited from discussing grades with students via e-mail or by telephone by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). If you need to discuss your grade, visit during office hours or make an appointment. Please note that the FERPA prohibits me from discussing grades with your parents without appropriate documentation and prior approval from the student (this includes both well-meaning parents and the helicopter variety). A parent must fill out a FERPA form and I must see it before I can discuss your performance, attendance, and/or syllabus policies. ***Note that I can only discuss your performance, your attendance, and/or the syllabus policies.***
- H. Missed Class.** If you have missed class, it is your responsibility to find out what material you have missed. *******I WILL POST LECTURES TO BLACKBOARD EACH DAY PRIOR TO CLASS*******

SECTION VI: College Policies

A. Disability Statement

Any student who, because of a disability may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements should contact the instructor as soon as possible to make any necessary arrangements. Students should present appropriate verification from Disability Services during the instructor's office hours. For additional information, you may contact the Student Disability Services office (806) 716-2577.

B. Academic Misconduct & Scholastic Dishonesty

Students who engage in cheating, plagiarism, or the use of generative AI tools will receive a 0 on the assignment that they were caught engaging in academic misconduct. While the student will receive a 0 on that particular assignment, it does not rule out the possibility of further sanctions.

****According to the Code of Student Conduct, cheating and plagiarism are defined as follows:**

Cheating: Including, but not limited to: (1) use of unauthorized aid, sources, and assistance or assisting others in taking a course, quiz, test, or examination, writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out assignments; (2) The acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a member of the University community; (3) alteration of grade records; (4) bribing or attempting to bribe a member of the University community or any other individual to alter a grade.

Plagiarism: Including, but not limited to: (1) The use, by paraphrase or direct quotation, of published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; (2) The unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

AI Tools: The use of generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT) is not permitted in this course; therefore, any use of AI tools for work in this class may be considered a violation of South Plains College's academic integrity policy and the student Code of Conduct since the work is not your own. The use of unauthorized AI tools will result in referral to the Dean of Students Office.

C. Observance of a Religious Holy Day

Texas House Bill 256 requires institutions of higher education to excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day. The student shall also be excused for time necessary to travel. An institution may not penalize the student for the absence and allows the student to take an exam or complete an assignment from which the student is excused. No prior notification of the instructor is required.

D. SPC Tutors:

Tutoring is FREE for all currently enrolled students. Make an appointment or drop-in for help at any SPC location or online! Visit the link below to learn more about how to book an appointment, view the tutoring schedule, and view tutoring locations.

<http://www.southplainscollege.edu/exploreprograms/artsandsciences/teacheredtutoring.php>

E. Brainfuse

You also have 180 FREE minutes of tutoring with Brainfuse each week, and your hours reset every Monday morning. Log into Blackboard, and click on the tools option from the left-hand menu bar. Click on the Brainfuse link and you will automatically be logged in for free tutoring. You may access Brainfuse tutors during the following times: Monday – Thursday: 8 pm-8 am 6pm Friday – 8am Monday morning **For questions regarding tutoring, please email tutoring@southplainscollege.edu or call 806-716-2241.**

G. Title IX Sexual Harassment and Misconduct Policy***

The University is committed to providing and strengthening an educational, working, and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from sex discrimination of any kind. South Plains College prohibits discrimination based on sex, which includes pregnancy, sexual orientation and gender identity, and other types of sexual misconduct. sexual misconduct is a broad term encompassing all forms of gender-based harassment or discrimination and unwelcome behavior of a sexual nature. Discriminatory behavior is prohibited regardless of the manner in which it is exhibited, whether verbally, in writing, by actions, or electronically displayed or conveyed. The college expects all members of the campus community to comply with the law. Members of the South Plains community who violate this regulation and related laws may be subject to disciplinary action or sanctions.

SECTION VII: Course Schedule

I reserve the right to make reasonable alterations and/or adjustments to the schedule of readings, quizzes, and exams in accordance with the policies set forth by South Plains College and this syllabus. Should I decide that reasonable deviations are necessary, I will make announcements in class and post notices on Blackboard. Please note that not all Blackboard readings that I will post over the course of the semester are listed in the syllabus.

See below for the full course schedule

Fall 2026 American Government: Course Schedule & Readings

Week	Day	Material
W-1		
<i>Tuesday</i>	August 25th	Course Introduction / Discussion of Syllabus
<i>Thursday</i>	August 27th	The Logic of American Politics *Activity 1*
W-2		
<i>Tuesday</i>	September 1st	The Constitution-1
<i>Thursday</i>	September 3rd	The Constitution-2
W-3		
<i>Tuesday</i>	September 8th	Federalism-1 *Activity 2*
<i>Thursday</i>	September 10th	Federalism-2
W-4		
<i>Tuesday</i>	September 15th	Civil Rights-1 *HW1 Open*
<i>Thursday</i>	September 17th	Civil Rights-2
W-5		
<i>Tuesday</i>	September 22nd	Civil Liberties
<i>Thursday</i>	September 24th	In-Class HW #1 – AI Discussion *HW1 Due by Class*
W-6		
<i>Tuesday</i>	September 29th	Unit Wrap-Up / Review (not mandatory)
<i>Thursday</i>	October 1st	**EXAM #1**
W-7		
<i>Tuesday</i>	October 6th	Political Parties-1 *Activity 2*
<i>Thursday</i>	October 8th	Political Parties-2
W-8		
<i>Tuesday</i>	October 13th	Public Opinion-1 *HW2 Open*
<i>Thursday</i>	October 15th	Public Opinion-2
W-9		

<i>Tuesday</i>	October 20th	Voting, Campaigns & Elections *HW2 Due*
<i>Thursday</i>	October 22nd	Campaign Videos!!!!
W-10		
<i>Tuesday</i>	October 27th	The Media
<i>Thursday</i>	October 29th	Unit Wrap-Up / Review (not mandatory)
W-11		
<i>Tuesday</i>	November 3rd	**EXAM 2**
<i>Thursday</i>	November 5th	U.S. Congress-1 *Activity 3*
W-12		
<i>Tuesday</i>	November 10th	U.S. Congress-2 *HW3 Open*
<i>Thursday</i>	November 12th	The Presidency
W-13		
<i>Tuesday</i>	November 17th	The Judiciary
<i>Thursday</i>	November 19th	Bureaucracy-1
W-14		
<i>Tuesday</i>	November 24th	Bureaucracy-2 *Activity 4* *HW3 Due*
<i>Thursday</i>	November 26th	Thanksgiving Break!!!!
W-15		
<i>Tuesday</i>	December 1st	The Logic Driving American Policy
<i>Thursday</i>	December 3rd	Unit Wrap-Up / Review (not mandatory)
W-16		
<i>Tuesday</i>	December 10th	**Final Exam at 8:00**