

Social Sciences—Government
American Government: 2305-181
Fall II 2026 Semester: South Plains College

Professor: Dr. Dannielle—**Danie**—Vaughn

Office: Administration #121

Office Hours: *Monday:* 10:00am – 11am & 2:30pm – 3:30pm

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: Fully Online

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>.

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: 978-1071929537**

SECTION III: Grading System

Grading is based on a 650-point system for this course. Please see assignment details below.

Grading Formula

-Midterm Exam:	<u>120 points</u>	18% (Overall Grade)
-Final Exam:	<u>120 points</u>	18% (Overall Grade)
-Homework #1:	<u>100 points</u>	7.5% (Overall Grade) Discussion Board
-Homework #2:	<u>100 points</u>	7.5% (Overall Grade) Political Typology Quiz
-Quizzes (6):	<u>210 points</u>	32% (Overall Grade)

**** All weekly assignments are due by Friday by midnight, except the final exam which is due Thursday by 5pm Week 8. No deadline extensions ****

**** These assignments are in addition to the weekly recorded lectures, weekly readings, and any other content I deem appropriate to reinforce the topics of the week ****

**** 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 ****

Grading Scale

A = 580 – 650 points (90 – 100%)

B = 520 – 579 points (80 – 89%)

C = 455 – 519 points (70 – 79%)

D = 390 – 454 points (60 – 69%)

F = Fewer than 390 points (less than 59%)

SECTION IV: Description of Assignments

1. (2) Exams: 240 points total (120 points per exam)

There is **one midterm exam** in this course and **one final exam**. Tests will be cumulative in format. Exam format will range between a mix of true/false and multiple-choice type questions, as well as the possibility for fill-in-the blank and/or short essay answers. Each exam will be no longer than 60 questions, is taken largely from lectures, and study guides will be made available. **Exams will be honor-locked, meaning your browser will lock down and I record your screen. You may use notes that you have taken yourself or from the study guide provided.**

2. (3) Homework Assignments: 200 points total

There are 3 homework assignments for this course online via Blackboard and 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. The first assignment is a discussion board about AI where you must respond to the prompts as well as respond to at least two of your peers' responses. The second assignment is a political typology quiz where you will answer a series of questions, respond to a couple of prompts and share your results with me, and **ONLY me**. The last assignment is a small writing exercise on the need for consensus in the political system and discussion board where you must respond to at least two of your peers' responses. **The use of AI, in any form, to complete this—or any—assignment will result in an automatic zero.**

3. (6) Quizzes: 210 points total (35 points per quiz)

There will be six quizzes for this course and these will be given on a week of my choosing, but you will have ample notice. Quizzes will be a mix of essay and multiple-choice type questions. Your quizzes will be administered via Blackboard, will be open book and note, and will be due by **midnight Friday** the week it is assigned. I will make an announcement in class on the week of and send an announcement via Blackboard.

***Extra Credit**

I do not offer extra credit in this course to any individuals, except for extreme and unforeseen circumstances. These are made on a case-by-case basis. There are no make-ups offered for extra credit.

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 must be polite and professional. In any online 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 challenge the arguments or concepts presented by the instructor or other students. However, as you know, inappropriate behavior, irrationality, and even apathy are characteristics that are not conducive to effective learning. Students who disrupt this class mission by rude, sarcastic, threatening, abusive or obscene language and/or behavior will be subject to appropriate sanctions according to SPC policy. Likewise, faculty members are expected to maintain the highest standards of professionalism in all interactions with all constituents of SPC, and you will ALWAYS get this from me, but mostly I foster a non-partisan teaching approach to the presentation of course material. You are free to be partisan, by all means, but I am not and will not be. It is my gift to you!
- B. 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.
- C. 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.*
- D. 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. If you have any problems with Blackboard, please contact the IT Help Desk at (806) 716-2180. You can also email blackboard@southplainscollege.edu.

E. 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.***

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. **I consider this cheating and you will lose significant credit to your assignment score if you do this.**

C. Course Withdrawals

The last day to drop this course “with no penalty” is **August 23rd**. The last day to drop “with a 30% academic penalty” is **September 2nd**. Last day to drop “with 75% academic penalty” is **September 4th**. For additional information on course withdrawals please visit: https://www.southplainscollege.edu/academiccalendar/2025-2026_AcademicCalendar_Final.pdf or other similarly situated South Plains College websites.

D. 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.

E. 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>

F. 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 changes to the syllabus policies set forth by South Plains College policy. Should I decide that reasonable deviations are necessary, I will make announcements beforehand and post notices on Blackboard. This is rare, and you will not be penalized and given ample time to complete assignments.

Fall II 2026 American Government: Course Schedule & Required Readings

This is a self-driven course, and you must read the chapters to supplement the online lectures

Week #1: 10/19 – 10/25; Assignments due by 11:59pm Sunday 10/25

Lectures

- Course Introduction
- The Logic of American Politics

Assignments

- Quiz #1

Week #2: 10/26 – 11/01; Assignments due by 11:59pm Sunday 11/01

Lectures

- The Constitution
- Federalism

Assignments

- Quiz #2

Week #3: 11/02 – 11/08; Assignments due by 11:59pm Sunday 11/08

Lectures

- Civil Rights
- Civil Liberties

Assignments

- Quiz #3
- Homework #1: Discussion Board

Week #4: 11/09 – 11/15; Assignments due by 11:59pm Sunday 11/15

Lectures

- Political Parties

Assignments

- Midterm Exam

Week #5: 11/16 – 11/22; Assignments due by 11:59pm Sunday 11/22

Lectures

- Public Opinion
- Voting, Campaigns, and Elections

Assignments

- Quiz #4

Week #6: 11/23 – 11/29; Assignments due by 11:59pm Sunday 11/29

Lectures

- The Media
- U.S. Congress

Assignments

- Quiz #5
- Homework #2: Partisanship / Ideology Activity

Week #7: 11/30 – 12/06; Assignments due by 11:59pm Sunday 12/06

Lectures

- The Presidency
- Federal Judiciary

Assignments

- Quiz #6

Week #8: 12/07 – 12/10; Assignments due by 5pm Thursday 12/10

Lectures

- The Bureaucracy
- The Logic Underlying American Policy

Assignments

- Final Exam