

Course Description

This course, “Introduction to American Government,” is described aptly by its title. This course introduces students to the basics about American government. It is not an advanced course, but a course that covers the fundamentals about the creation, development, and operation of American government. Focus is on the basic constitutional design and how the framers envisioned how American government would function. Special attention is devoted to the federal structure where powers are shared by our national, state, and local governments in the making and execution of public policy, as well the sharing of judicial review functions.

Special emphasis is placed on presenting and scrutinizing the operations of the three basic branches of our government: the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. However, major attention is also given to what is considered the fourth branch of government, the federal bureaucracy, since many scholars legitimately consider this branch the most powerful branch in our governmental system on a daily basis since federal civil servants, practically speaking, make over 90% of the “laws” that we must live under. The public policies that bureaucrats make are technically called rules, but they carry the force of law, as our courts have made clear.

We will also cover presidential and congressional power and especially the battles that take place between the Presidents and the U.S. Congress over agenda issues. Naturally, political parties and interest groups are also major political actors in our political system. We will look at their roles. Brief attention will be given to American campaigns and elections, as well as to major issues pertaining to civil liberties and civil rights. Some attention will also be paid to major domestic and foreign policy issues and problems, especially addressing the most serious challenges to America today: protecting Americans from terrorists at home and abroad.

Course Outline

- I. Introductory Comments
 - A. Overview of Course
 - B. Course Objectives
 - C. Course Business (tests, papers, grading policy, etc.)
 - D. American Government: Then and Now

- II. Constitutional Principles
 - A. The pre-Constitutional setting and the Articles of Confederation
 - B. What did the Constitutional framers create?
 - C. The basics: Articles I, II, and III creates a separation of powers and a checks and balances system
 - D. The Bill of Rights and Amendments XI-XXVII
 - E. Constitutional design created an inherently conservative political system

- F. American Federalism: What is American federalism and how well does it work?
 - G. Modern Constitutional problems: Do we need a more modern Constitution?
- III. The Political Process
- A. The American Political Landscape
 - B. Political Culture and Ideology
 - C. Political Diversity (by region, area, ethnicity, religion, class, gender, occupation, etc.) and Political Process
- IV. Political Parties and Interest Groups
- A. Political Parties: historical and modern role of political parties
 - B. Party dominance by eras in American history: 1789-1828; 1828-1860; 1860-1896; 1896-1932; 1932-1980; and 1980-today
 - C. The increase in safe seats and the rise of polarization and its significance
 - D. Interest Groups and Their Politics
- V. Public Opinion and Political Participation
- A. The Formation of Political Opinions, Attitudes, and Ideologies
 - B. Public Opinion Polling
 - C. Voting Behavior
 - D. Promoting Integrity in American Elections
- VI. Campaigns, Elections, and the Media
- A. Elections: The Rules of the Game
 - B. Presidential Elections: Emphasis on the 2016 Presidential Election
 - C. Congressional Elections: Emphasis on the 2016 Congressional Elections
 - D. All things equal, having more money matters, but money by itself cannot buy elections
 - E. A critique of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*
 - F. The Role of the Media in American Politics/Campaigns/Elections
- VII. Policy-Making Institutions
- A. Congress: The People's Branch
 - B. The Presidency: The Leadership Branch, but do presidents really have the power to lead?
 - C. The Bureaucracy: Where the Real Day-to-Day Power Resides
 - D. The Judiciary: The Balancing Branch
- VIII. Individual Rights and Liberties
- A. Civil Liberties
 - B. Civil Rights
- IX. The Politics of National Policy (note: optional chapters since we may not get this far in the course)
- A. Domestic Policy: Economic and Social Policies

- B. Foreign and Defense Policy
 - C. Homeland Security and Fighting Security Abroad
- X. Concluding Reflections on American Government
- A. American Government's Challenges Today
 - B. American Government's Likely Future Based On Current Trends

Grading Policy

Mid-Term	175 points
Final	175 points
Position Paper	50 points
 TOTAL	 400 points

Required Textbook: *Government By The People*, 2015 by David Magleby, Paul Light, and Christine Nemacheck (or the much cheaper 2012 edition will do since the 2015 edition does not add anything more to the basics; pretty much just election updates that I can provide you with)

Contact Information

My phone, e-mail, office, and office hours:

314-977-3036 (office); 314-963-0451 (home – call when important)

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Office: McGannon Hall, Room 135

Office hours: MWF, 12:35 - 1:05; you also may try to catch me MWF right after my 1:10 o'clock ending at 2:00 and by special appointment.

Attendance Policy

Regular, responsible attendance is expected. Classes should be missed only for very legitimate and compelling reasons. More than **seven** unexcused absences will result in grade penalties. Very excessive unexcused absences (**more than 10**) will result in an "F" grade. Skipping exams is absolutely forbidden unless a formal written medical excuse is submitted and accepted. Other legitimate excuses may be accepted, but you need to inform me before you miss the exam, not afterwards. Note: I give a lot of material in my lectures that does not come from the book. I frequently lecture on "breaking news" pertaining to American government that you will be held responsible for on exams, so this is another reason why attendance is important. In my lectures I try very hard to help simplify the reading material to make it more understandable for you. I try to "cut to the chase" and point out to you what is really important to understand and remember for your exams.

Academic Honesty Policy

Students are expected to be honest in their academic work. The University reserves the right to penalize any student whose academic conduct at any time is, in its judgment, detrimental to the University. Such conduct shall include cases of plagiarism, collusion, cheating, giving or receiving or offering or soliciting information in examinations, or the use of previously prepared material in examinations or quizzes. Violations should be reported to me and will be investigated and adjudicated according to the Policy on Academic Honesty of the College of Arts & Sciences. If the charges are found to be true, the student may be liable for academic or disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion from the University.

(See <http://www.slu.edu.colleges/AS/academichonesty.html>)

Students with Special Needs - Disability Services Academic Accommodations

Students with a documented disability who wish to request academic accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services to discuss accommodation requests and eligibility requirements. Please contact Disability Services, located within the Student Success Center, at Disability_services@slu.edu or 314-977-3438 to schedule an appointment. Confidentiality will be observed in all inquiries. Once approved, information about academic accommodations will be shared with course instructors via email from Disability Services and viewed within Banner via the instructor's course roster.

Grading Scale *

A	93-100	B+	87-89	C+	77-79	D	68-70
A-	90-92	B	83-86	C	73-76	F	below 60
		B-	80-82	C-	70-72		

*An Incomplete for the course requires an agreement between the student and his/her professor with terms of the agreement submitted to SLU administrators.

Course Objectives

Basically, I have a twofold objective in teaching this course. First, I want students to learn about the institutions and processes of American government. Secondly, I want students to learn to think critically about American government and its practices.

Modes of Assessment and Skills/Knowledge Being Assessed

I will use a midterm and final exam to test student knowledge on what they have learned in this American government class. I am particularly interested for this introductory course on whether students can demonstrate basic knowledge about

American government institutions and processes. This material will be covered in my lectures and textbook. I am also interested in the ability of students to evaluate and think critically about how American government operates, so some essay questions will be asked on exams to assess such critical thinking skills. Also, in classes students will be asked on occasion to reflect on certain items about American government.

In-Class Activities

In-class activities will consist of standard lectures combined with a lot of class discussions on topics related to the American presidency. Students will be expected to keep up with the reading assignments, especially the assigned current articles from the Internet and other articles sent to them via email so they can participate meaningfully in class discussions. Participation/class attendance will constitute 10% of a student's final grade in this course.