

American Government

Professor Susan H. Allen
Texas Tech University
Political Science 1301
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Contact Information

Dr. Susan Allen
Department of Political Science
Office Hours: Wed 10-11:30 AM & by appt.
11 Holden Hall
Phone: 806.742.2991
Email: susan.allen@ttu.edu

Course Description

In this course, we will explore the nature of the politics and the political process both in the broader U.S. context as well as within Texas. A strong and functioning democracy requires an informed and interested citizenry of which you are a part. To this end, we will examine the historical and philosophical foundations of democracy in the United States, examine the institutions of our government that shape policy, and scrutinize some of the policies that have created by our political process.

Course Goals

At the end of the semester, students will be able to:

1. Describe the institutional framework the Constitution creates for the United States government. *(To be evaluated on Exam I & the Final Examination)*
2. Contrast the place of equality and liberty in American political culture. *(To be evaluated on Exam I & the Final Examination)*
3. Evaluate the role of public opinion and the media in American politics. *(To be evaluated on Exam II & the Final Examination)*
4. Explain recent trends in voter turnout. *(To be evaluated on Exam II & the Final Examination)*
5. Distinguish key differences between political parties and interest groups. *(To be evaluated on Exam II & the Final Examination)*
6. Describe the ability of presidents to influence the political process. *(To be evaluated on Exam III & the Final Examination)*
7. Delineate the role of the bureaucracy for implementing public policy. *(To be evaluated on Exam III & the Final Examination)*
8. Trace the emergence of the Supreme Court as a pivotal actor in American politics. *(To be evaluated on Exam III and the Final Examination)*
9. Describe the evolution of political institutions in Texas and the role of the state constitution in that evolution. *(To be evaluated on the Final Examination)*

Expectations

- Come to class. I know that seems like an obvious one, but it's important nonetheless. You will have a tough time passing this course without attending it. Class attendance is not mandatory, but as Woody Allen pointed out, 80% of success comes from showing up, and so it will likely be in this class.
- Do the readings beforehand; you will find that they provide important background for the lectures. Without that background, you may have a difficult time keeping up during class sessions. Most practically, questions for the exams will come from both the lecture and the readings. Not all relevant material will be duplicated in both sources.
- Keeping up with the world around you is not only important for discussion in this class, it is also important to becoming a good citizen. While not required for this course, I highly recommend keeping up with national political events during the course of the semester. Good resources online include The New York Times (www.nytimes.com), the Washington Post (www.washingtonpost.com), CNN (www.cnn.com) or the International Herald Tribune (www.iht.com). Examples for discussion in class or exam questions are likely to be drawn from current events.
- In addition, please show respect to your classmates and to me by turning off all cell phones and pagers before entering classroom. Failure to do so may result in a request to leave the class for the duration of the session. Sleeping or unnecessary chatting may also lead to a request to leave the lecture.

Readings

The readings for this course will be drawn from several sources. Two books will be required for this course and are available at the Tech Bookstore:

- Wilson, James Q. and John J. Dilulio. 2006. *American Government: The Essentials*, 10th edition. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.
- Crain, Ernest and James Perkins. 2005. *Introduction to Texas Politics*, 5th edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Any other materials will be handed out in class or will be available online.

Course Requirements

Course grades will be determined by each student's performance on three in-class exams, four weekly writing assignments (2 pages each), and one cumulative final examination. Grades will be assigned on a ten point scale. The exams will be given:

- First Exam: June 5 (15%)
- Second Exam: June 17 (20%)
- Third Exam: June 24 (20%)
- Weekly Writing Assignments (20%)
- Cumulative Final Exam: June 27 (25%)

Requests to take examinations at times other than those listed above must be made in advance and will be granted at the discretion of the instructor. If a student fails to take an exam, the decision to allow a makeup and the penalty associated with that makeup, if granted, is again at the discretion of the instructor. There will be no opportunity for additional assignments for extra credit.

Academic Integrity: Students will be expected to adhere to the university honor code for all assignments. Work handed in by any student should be solely the work of that student – end of story. If you draw on the ideas of others, please cite them. Failure to do so will result in a failing grade in the course.

ADA: Any student with a learning disability or physical handicap that might affect class performance should notify me as soon as possible. TTU can make a variety of arrangements that help insure equal opportunity. It is your right and we are glad to work with you on this. For necessary accommodations to be made, please let me know prior to the first exam.

Religious Observance: A student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known to the instructor prior to the absence. A student who is absent from classes for the observance of a religious holy day shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment scheduled for that day within a reasonable time after the absence.

Course Outline

May 28: Course Basics

May 29: Who Governs?

- Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 1

May 30: Congress

- Wilson and DiIulio, pp. 316-333.

June 2: Congress

- Wilson and DiIulio, pp. 334-366.

June 3: The Presidency

- Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 14.

June 4: The Courts

- Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 16.
- **First Writing Assignment Due** (*Topic: What role does the Supreme Court play in the policy process today? How has that role changed over time?*)

****** June 5: First Exam ******

June 6: Class Cancelled

June 9: Public Opinion

- Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 7.

June 10: Participation

- Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 8.
- **Second Writing Assignment Due** (*Topic: Although Americans have low voter turnout, they are more likely to participate in other forms of political action (i.e. contacting government) than citizens of other countries. What do you believe voter turnout reflects? Is low voter turnout a sign of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the government? Explain and defend your answer.*)

June 11: Political Parties

- Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 9.

June 12: Elections

- Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 10.

June 13: Interest Groups

- Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 11.
- Birnbaum Excerpt from *The Lobbyists*

June 16: The Media

- Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 12.
- **Third Writing Assignment Due** (*Topic: The American media is for the most part independent and free of government regulation. It is this freedom, in part, that has allowed the media to become an important actor in American politics. What are the benefits and downfalls of this arrangement?*)

****** June 17: Second Exam ******

June 18: The American Constitution

- Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 2.
- *Federalist Papers 10 & 51* (W & D, pp. A21-29).

June 19: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

- Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 5 & 6.

June 20: Federalism

- Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 3.
- **Fourth Writing Assignment Due** (*Topic: What is the difference between democracy and individual liberty? How did (does) the Constitution seek to balance these sometimes contradictory two goals?*)

June 23: American Political Culture

- Wilson and DiIulio, Chapter 4.

****** June 24: Third Exam ******

June 25: Introduction to Texas Politics and the Executive

- Crain & Perkins, Chapters 1-3 & 6

June 26: Texas Institutions – The Legislature and the Courts

- Crain & Perkins, Chapters 4-5 & 7

****** June 27: Final Exam ******