

# American Political Institutions Syllabus

## Welcome to American Political Institutions!!!

This course explores the structure, major issues, and controversies in the study of American political institutions. Specifically, this course will examine the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. It will also discuss the role of checks and balances in our system of government. And, it will explore how the federal bureaucracy interacts with all three branches.

## Student Learning Objectives

- Understand the history, structure, and current role of the Executive, Legislative and Judicial Branches of government
- Describe the impact of money, politics, and interest groups on legislative and judicial outcomes.
- Assess how each branch reinforces the concept of checks and balances.
- Analyze the factors which contribute to successful presidential and congressional leadership
- Describe the role of the bureaucracy in carrying out laws passed by congress.

## Contacts and Communication

*Office Hours:* I will be available in my office every Tuesday and Thursday from noon to 1. However, I am also happy to schedule a zoom meeting at another time, just send me an email and we can arrange a time.

*Email:* [kscofield@tamusa.edu](mailto:kscofield@tamusa.edu)

*Phone Number:* 979-803-1653 This is a google voice number. If you hate to email feel free to call or text. Just make sure I know who you are and what you are texting about.

*Communicating with the Class:* I will leave information that the whole class may need to know on the "Announcement" tab on Blackboard.

## Textbooks

This course has four books (although we will not read all of them cover to cover). Make sure to get them through Perusall, so do not purchase them before the first day of class so we can walk through it. They are all popular press and so should be relatively inexpensive.

- *How Rights Went Wrong: Why Our Obsession with Rights Is Tearing America Apart*  
Greene & Lepore 2021 (ISBN 9781328518149)

- *Republic, Lost: How Money Corrupts Congress—and a Plan to Stop It*  
2015 Grand Central Publishing (Twelve) (ISBN 9781455537433)
- *The Fifth Risk: Undoing Democracy*, Lewis 2018 (ISBN 9781324002659)
- *Who Is Government?: The Untold Story of Public Service*, 1e Lewis (ed)  
2025 (ISBN 9798217047819)

## **Grading Scheme**

### *Participation and Attendance 15%*

This grade will be based on student's attendance in class as well as their willingness to participate in each class/discussion. This is a small class that is largely based on discussion of the readings (rather than lecture) so attendance is very important. More than two absences will count against the student's grade.

### *Discussion Questions 5%*

Students will turn in discussion questions before class time on the days listed in the syllabus. Discussion questions will be graded on quality and relevance to the reading. Each student should come prepared to kick off discussion on their question. Each question will count equally towards a student's grade. Students will have three questions dropped from each grade.

### *Student Lead Discussions 10%*

Each student will be responsible for leading two class discussions. Discussion topics for each date are listed in the syllabus. Students should pay specific attention to the readings for discussion, come prepared to discuss the author's main argument in each chapter, and should bring at least 3 additional discussion questions to kick off discussion with the class. Discussions will be of an informal nature, so students do not need a formal presentation.

### *Exams (15% each)*

There will be a short answer exam after each institution. Each exam will be open to paper notes and print outs (no computers allowed). However, exams will be limited to class time so students should come prepared to write about the exam topics. If a student needs to make-up an exam due to illness or travel he/she must inform me before the start time of the exam.

### *Reading 15%*

Readings for each class will be posted in Perusall. They will be due before class starts. Perusall will evaluate quality of student's reading and comments and give a grade. Ordinarily a 1 will score between a 0 and a 70 depending on the amount of time spent on the reading, a 2=85 and 3=100. These grades will be averaged together to form the reading grade. I will drop two reading grades, so students can miss up to two readings.

#### Podcast Quiz 10%

Each Sunday night, students will have a podcast quiz due. These will be series from the podcast *Presidential*. I will drop two podcast quizzes from your grade.

#### Presidency Reflection Paper 5%

Students will turn in a four page paper reflecting on the podcast series *Presidential*. Students will discuss what we can learn about the presidency as an institution from studying the life and times of various presidents.

### **Class Policies**

#### **Late Work Policy**

I will not be accepting late work, since this class relies on students having readings and articles submitted before class for discussion. However, I will drop two discussion questions and two reading grades and two podcast quizzes.

#### **AI Policy**

This course assumes that all work submitted by students will be generated by the students themselves, working individually or in groups. Students should not have another person/entity do the writing of any portion of an assignment for them, which includes hiring a person or a company to write assignments and/or using artificial intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT. Use of any AI-generated content in this course qualifies as academic dishonesty and violates Texas A&M-San Antonio's standards of academic integrity. The prohibition on the use of AI extends to answering questions in Perusall and discussion questions turned in at the beginning of class.

Topic	Assignments	In Class Activities	Outside Readings
<b>Week 1 (Aug 26-28)</b>  Syllabus & Course Introduction		8/26: Syllabus overview And Introduction to Congress (Primaries and Elections)	8/26 None

Introduction to Congress	<p>8/28: Bring in one discussion question on either Chapter 1 or 2</p> <p>8/31 Podcast quiz one due</p>	8/28: Intro to Republic Lost. I will lead discussion. Gerrymandering.	8/28: Introduction, Chapters 1 and Chapters 2 Republic Lost
<b>Week 2 (Sep 2-4)</b>  Congress and Republic Lost Continued	<p>9/4: Bring in two discussion questions. At least on must cover Chapter 4</p> <p>9/7 Podcast quiz 2 due</p>	<p>9/2: Congress Continued. Lesson: Recap how a bill becomes a law</p> <p>Covering Veto Points in the Process</p> <p>9/4: Republic Lost Student Led Discussion Of Chapters 3 and 4</p>	<p>9/2 Read Chapter 3 of Republic Lost</p> <p>9/4 Read Chapters 4 of Republic Lost</p>
<b>Week 3 (Sep 9-11)</b>  Congress and Republic Lost Continued	<p>9/11 Bring in three discussion questions, one for each chapter</p>	<p>9/9: Congress Continued Citizens United PACS Stewart and Colbert</p> <p>9/11: Republic Lost Continued I will lead discussion on Chapter 6</p>	<p>Chapters 5 and 6 of Republic Lost</p> <p>Read Chapters 7 and 8 of Republic Lost</p>

	9/17 Podcast Quiz 3 due	Student Led Discussion on Chapters 7 and 8	
<b>Week 4 (Sep 16-18)</b>  Congress and Republic Lost Continued	9/16 Bring in One Discussion Question for Chapter 9          9/19 Podcast Quiz 4 Due       9/21 Podcast quiz 5 Due	9/16: Congress Continued  Lesson The Work of Committees  I will lead Discussion on Chapter 9 and 10     9/18: No Class due to Windshield Tour We have an Extra Podcast Quiz instead of Class	Read Chapters 9 and 10 of Republic Lost          9/18 Read Chapters 11 and 12 of Republic Lost
<b>Week 5 (Sep 23 &amp; 25)</b>  Identifying restorative infrastructure needs	9/23 Bring in two discussion questions total covering Chapters 11 and 12 questions can be about either or both chapters          9/25 Bring in two discussion question for either Chapter 13 or 14  <b>No Podcast</b>	9/23: Congress Continued  Lesson Congress and the Other Branches/Checks and Balances  I will lead discussion of Chapters 11 and 12          9/25: Republic Lost Wrap Up  Student Led Discussion of Chapters 13 and 14	Read Chapter 13 of Republic Lost                      Read Chapter 14 of Republic Lost

<b>Week 6 (Sep 30-Oct 2)</b>  Exam One!!!  The Courts	10/2 Bring one Discussion Question for the Introduction   Podcast quiz Number 6  10/5	<b>9/30: Exam One Over Congress</b>  10/2 Introduction to the Make Up and Structure of the Court  Court Cases regarding Education	<b>9/30 No Reading</b>  10/2 Introduction to How Rights went Wrong
<b>Week 7 (Oct 7-9)</b>  The Courts	10/7 Bring in one Discussion Question over the Introduction   No Podcast Quiz due to fall break	10/7: How Rights Went Wrong I will lead discussion on the Intro Students will Lead discussion on Chapter 1  And summarize Ch 2 and 3 since we will skip  10/9: Influences on Judicial Making  Philosophies of Judicial Review  Interest Groups	10/7 Chapter One of Rights went Wrong   10/9 Introduction to Part 2 and Chapter 4 of Rights went wrong
<b>Week 8 (Oct 16)</b>  Fall Break Oct 14  The Courts	10/16  Two discussion questions; one for each chapter	No Class Oct 14  10/16:  How Rights Went Wrong 2 Student Led Discussions	10/16 Chapter 5 How rights went wrong

	10 /19 Podcast Quiz number 7		
<b>Week 9 (Oct 21-23)</b>  The Courts		10/21: Courts Policy Out Puts Relationship to Other Branches/ Role in Checks and Balances Looper and Trump V USA  10/23: How Rights Went Wrong I will led discussion of chapter 6 Student Led Discussion of Chapter 7	Chapter 6 of When Rights went Wrong     Chapter 7 of When Rights Went Wrong
<b>Week 10 (Oct 28-30)</b>  The Courts  Exam Two!!!	10/26 Podcast Quiz 8  10/28 Bring One Disucssion Question for Ch 9  11/2 Podcast Quiz 9	10/28: How Rights Went Wrong Student Led Discussion of Chapter 9  10/30: Exam Two the Courts	10/28 Chapter 9 of when Rights went wrong
<b>Week 11 (Nov 4-6)</b>		11/4: Presidency: Lecture Including what is in the	Tail Risk 33-81

The Executive Branch	<p>11/6 Bring in Two Discussion Questions at least one needs to be for “People Risk” Chapter</p> <p>11/9 Podcast Quiz 10</p>	<p>the consituition? And how is the office structured?</p> <p>11/6: The Fifth Risk: Lecture: What is the Buearocracy? Broad overview of organizations/growth over time/ professionalization of civil service</p> <p>I will lead discussion of Both Chapters</p>	People Risk 81-127
<b>Week 12 (Nov 11-13)</b> The Executive Branch	<p>11/13</p> <p>Bring in two discussion questions for “All the Presiden’s Data” Chapter</p> <p>11/16 Podcast Quiz 11</p>	<p>11/11: Presidency: Presidency and Policy Making-Relationship to congress and Buearacy</p> <p>11/13: The Buearocracy Some Key Organizations. IRS, Justice Department Etc.</p> <p>Discussion: The Fifth Risk. I will lead discussion.</p>	<p>11/11 All The President’s Data first part (129-179)</p> <p>11/13 All The President’s Data Second Part 180-21</p>
<b>Week 13 (Nov 18-20)</b> The Executive Branch		<p>11/18: Presidency Powers over time. The imperial</p>	11/18 Who Runs Government the Canary

	<p>11/20 Bring in one discussion question regarding either chapter</p> <p>11/23 Podcast Quiz 12 (<b>Last one</b>)</p>	<p>Presidency theory/controversy</p> <p>11/20: Presidential Powers War Time and Foreign Policy</p> <p>Who Runs Government I will lead discussion</p>	11/20 The cyber sluth
<p><b>Week 14 (Nov 25)</b></p> <p>Executive Branch</p> <p>Thanksgiving!!!</p>	<p>11/25 Bring One Question Regarind the Rookie</p>	<p>11/25 Lecture Presiential Elections</p> <p>I will discuss who runs govrnment</p> <p>Thanksgiving Break!!!</p>	11/25 Who Runs Government the Rookie
<p><b>Week 15 (Dec 2-4)</b></p> <p>Exective Branch</p> <p>Final Paper</p>	<p>12/2 Bring in one discussion question regarding The Free Living Bureaucrat</p> <p>12/4 Presidency Paper Due</p>	<p>12/2</p> <p>Presidency Wrap up: Presidency Checks and Balances</p> <p>I will Lead Discussion on who Runs Government</p> <p>12/4: Presidency Paper Reflection Discussion</p>	12/2 Who Runs Government The Free-Living Bureaucrat

Final Exam Week		12/9 Exam 3 on the Executive	
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## General School Policies and Resources

Academic Accommodations for Individuals with Disabilities: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to providing all students with reasonable access to learning opportunities and accommodations in accordance with The Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, Disability Support Services is located in the Central Academic Building, Suite 210. You can also contact us via phone at (210) 784-1335, visit us <https://www.tamusa.edu/Disability-Support-Services/index.html> or email us at [dss@tamusa.edu](mailto:dss@tamusa.edu). Disabilities may include, but are not limited to, attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability-related needs with Disability Support Services and their instructors as soon as possible.

Academic Learning Center: The Academic Learning Center provides free course-based tutoring to all currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Students wishing to work with a tutor can make appointments through the Brainfuse online tutoring platform. Brainfuse can be accessed in the Tools section of Blackboard. You can contact the Academic Learning Center by emailing [tutoring@tamusa.edu](mailto:tutoring@tamusa.edu), calling (210) 784-1307, or visiting the Central Academic Building, room 202.

Counseling/Mental Health Resources: As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and negatively impact your daily functioning. If you are experiencing emotional difficulties or mental health concerns, support is available to you through the Student Counseling Center (SCC). To schedule an appointment, call 210-784-1331 or visit Madla 120.

All mental health services provided by the SCC are free and confidential (as the law allows). The Student Counseling Center provides brief individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services. For more information on SCC services visit [tamusa.edu/studentcounseling](http://tamusa.edu/studentcounseling)

Crisis support is available 24/7 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331 (after-hours select option '2').

Additionally, the TELUS Student Support App provides a variety of mental health resources to including support for in the moment distress, an anonymous peer to peer support network, mental health screenings, podcasts, and articles to improve your mental wellbeing.

Emergency Preparedness: JagE Alert is Texas A&M University-San Antonio's mass notification. In the event of an emergency, such as inclement weather, students, staff and faculty, who are registered, will have the option to receive a text message, email with instructions and updates. To register or update your information visit: <https://tamusa.bbcportal.com/>.

More information about Emergency Operations Plan and the Emergency Action Plan can be found here: <https://www.tamusa.edu/about-us/emergency-management/>. Download the SafeZone App (<https://safezoneapp.com/>) for emergencies or call (210) 784-1911. Non-Emergency (210) 784-1900.

Financial Aid and Verification of Attendance: According to the following federal regulation, 34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Title IV regulation, a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which include class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend by the census date will have their financial aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester, a Care report will be submitted, and you will possibly be dropped from the class. Your financial aid may have to be recalculated and a portion of your federal aid may have to be returned to the DoE.

Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center: The Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center supports graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges as well as faculty and staff. Tutors work with students to develop reading skills, prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Our language tutors support students enrolled in Spanish courses and students composing in Spanish for any assignment. Our digital studio tutors support students working on digital projects such as eportfolios, class presentations, or other digital multimedia projects. Students can schedule appointments through JagWire under the Student Services tab. Click on "Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center" to make your appointment. The Center offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. More information about what services we offer, how to make an appointment, and how to access your appointment can be found on our website at <https://www.tamusa.edu/academics/>.

**Meeting Basic Needs:** Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to submit a CARE referral (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/Student-Rights-and-Responsibilities/file-a-report.html>) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to direct you to available resources.

**Military Affairs:** Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcomed and encouraged to visit the Office of Military Affairs for any question involving federal or state VA Education Benefits. Visit the

Patriots' Casa building, room 202, or to contact the Office of Military Affairs with any questions at [military.va@tamusa.edu](mailto:military.va@tamusa.edu) or (210)784-1397.

**Religious Observances:** Texas A&M University-San Antonio recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or course work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes.

**The Six-Drop Rule:** Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231 passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student's GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as "F" grades and will impact the student's GPA.

**Statement of Harassment and Discrimination:** Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equal opportunity, and human dignity. To fulfill its multiple missions as an institution of higher learning, A&M-San Antonio encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality and the uniqueness of the individual within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees should be based on applicable law and individual merit. Texas A&M University-San Antonio, in accordance with applicable federal and state law, prohibits discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or pregnancy/parenting status. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the appropriate offices within their respective units.

Texas A&M University-San Antonio faculty are committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of sex- or gender-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or dating violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. A&M-San Antonio's Title IX Coordinator can support those impacted by such conduct in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The university strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the Title IX Coordinator. Please be aware that all A&M-San Antonio employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors and trained victim advocates) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the university. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment, sexual violence, or other related misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the university's Title IX Coordinator ([titleix@tamusa.edu](mailto:titleix@tamusa.edu), 210-784-2061, CAB 439K). If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting requirement, you can contact the Student Counseling Center at (210) 784-1331 or visit them in Madla 120.

Pregnant/Parenting Students: Texas A&M-San Antonio does not require a pregnant or parenting student, solely because of that status or issues related to that status, to (1) take a leave of absence or withdraw from their degree or certificate program; (2) limit the student's studies; (3) participate in an alternative program; (4) change the student's major, degree, or certificate program; or (5) refrain from joining or cease participating in any course, activity, or program at the University. The university will provide such reasonable accommodations to pregnant students as would be provided to a student with a temporary medical condition that are related to the health and safety of the student and the student's unborn child. These could include maintaining a safe distance from substances, areas, and activities known to be hazardous to pregnant individuals and their unborn child; excused absences because of illness or medical appointments; modified due dates for assignments; rescheduled tests/exams; taking a leave of absence; and being provided access to instructional materials and video recordings of lectures for excused absences, if these would be provided to any other student with an excused absence.

Pregnant/parenting students are encouraged to contact the Title IX Coordinator with any questions or concerns related to their status ([titleix@tamusa.edu](mailto:titleix@tamusa.edu); 210-784-2061; CAB 439K).

Texas A&M-San Antonio has also designated the Title IX Coordinator as the liaison officer for current or incoming students who are the parent or guardian of a child younger than 18 years of age. The Title IX Coordinator can provide students with information regarding support services and other resources.

Students' Rights and Responsibilities: The following statement of students' rights and responsibilities is intended to reflect the philosophical base upon which University Student Rules are built. This philosophy acknowledges the existence of both rights and responsibilities, which is inherent to an individual not only as a student at Texas A&M University-San Antonio but also as a citizen of this country.

#### Students' Rights

1. A student shall have the right to participate in a free exchange of ideas, and there shall be no University rule or administrative rule that in any way abridges the rights of freedom of speech, expression, petition and peaceful assembly as set forth in the U.S. Constitution.
2. Each student shall have the right to participate in all areas and activities of the University, free from any form of discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and pregnancy/parenting or veteran status in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.
3. A student has the right to personal privacy except as otherwise provided by law, and this will be observed by students and University authorities alike.
4. Each student subject to disciplinary action arising from violations of university student rules shall be assured a fundamentally fair process.

#### Students' Responsibilities

1. A student has the responsibility to respect the rights and property of others, including other students, the faculty, and administration.
2. A student has the responsibility to be fully acquainted with the published University Student Rules found in the Student Handbook, Student Code of Conduct, on our website, and University Catalog, and to comply with them, as well as with federal, state, and local laws.
3. A student has the responsibility to recognize that student actions reflect upon the individuals involved and upon the entire University community.
4. A student has the responsibility to recognize the University's obligation to provide a safe environment for learning.
5. A student has the responsibility to check their university email for any updates or official university notifications.

We expect that students will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful, and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation, or disability. Conduct that infringes on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

Students are expected to exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity in their pursuit of higher education. Students engaging in an act that violates the standards of academic integrity will find themselves facing academic and/or disciplinary sanctions. Academic misconduct is any act, or attempt, which gives an unfair advantage to the student. Additionally, any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion may be considered as academic misconduct. For more information on academic misconduct policies and procedures please review the Student Code of Conduct (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/student-rights-and-responsibilities/documents/Student-Handbook-2022-23.pdf>) or visit the resources available in the OSRR website (<https://www.tamusa.edu/university-policies/student-rights-and-responsibilities/academic-integrity.html>).