

American Political Institutions
POLS 3310-600, Fall Semester
(8/24/26-12/11/26)
Virtual/Asynchronous
Texas A & M University-San Antonio

Selina J. Lugo, M.A.
Senior Lecturer of Political Science
email: slugo@tamusa.edu

Office Hours: TBD
Location: CAB 351C

Course Description:

American Political Institutions explores the structure, functions, major issues, and controversies involved in the study of American political institutions. Topics include the history of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government, as well as the relationships among these institutions in the American political system. The U.S. political system will be lectured on, debated, & analyzed over within this course. Students will be also expected to practice their writing & critical-thinking skills as they define and apply various topics throughout the semester.

Prerequisites: GOVT 2305 and GOVT 2306

Student Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Develop further insight into the foundational governing document: the U.S. Constitution, its origin & legacy.
2. Demonstrate a deep understanding of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of American government.
3. Develop and apply critical reading skills to political science scholarship and course materials.
4. Develop writing-intensive skills relevant to the study of American political institutions.
5. Evaluate how political institutions shape public policy, representation, accountability, and democratic governance.
6. Communicate clear, evidence-based arguments in written form.

Recorded Lecture Videos:

Zoom lecture videos will be posted weekly within Blackboard's **Course Content** tab of the course. Students are expected to watch each assigned lecture, which will provide key concepts, context, and guidance related to the week's readings, discussions, and assignments.

Blackboard Announcements:

The Announcements tab on Blackboard *will be utilized* this semester. Updates to the syllabus, coursework, or any reminders at all, will be posted as an "*Announcement*". PowerPoints, study guides, & video segments/documentaries will be uploaded into the "Course Content" tab.

--It is incumbent upon you to check Blackboard daily/weekly and check for any updates/announcements--

Required Course Materials

Students are required to **access** the following books:

1. Lessig, Lawrence. *Republic Lost, The Corruption of Equality and the Steps to End It*. Revised ed. (2015).
ISBN-13: 978-1455537013
ISBN-10: 1455537012
2. Skowronek, Stephen. *Presidential Leadership in Political Time: Reprise and Reappraisal*. 3rd ed. (2020).
ISBN-13: 978-0700629435
ISBN-10: 0700629432
3. O'Brien, David M. *Storm Center: The Supreme Court in American Politics*. 12th ed. (2020).
ISBN-13: 978-0393696738
ISBN-10: 0393696731

Additional readings, assignment instructions, data sources, and supplemental course materials will be available through Blackboard.

My TAMUSA Email: slugo@tamusa.edu

Please use my email a tool to set up a one-on-one meeting with me. In every email you **MUST** include *the course title, course section, & class time in your message* so I can identify you quickly and assist you in setting up a meeting, OR, to answer any questions you may have about class or content. NOTE: Use my email when necessary but, be mindful we will utilize Blackboards COURSE MESSAGES throughout the semester for questions as well.

Make-up Policy:

Students will have ample time (& timeframes) in which to complete the assignments but exceptions to late work submissions will be made only in extreme situations in which a student is unable to submit the assignment due to unforeseen, circumstances. On such occasions, speak to me. However, late submissions may be subject to point deductions.

Grading Scale:

Discussion Board Questions — 15%

Discussion Board Questions are designed to encourage thoughtful engagement with course readings, key concepts, and major debates in American political institutions.

Each discussion board assignment consists of a two-step process:

1. Initial Response: Students must respond to the assigned discussion question in full paragraph form. The initial response should be substantive and well developed, approximately the equivalent of one-half page of written work. Responses should demonstrate familiarity with the assigned readings and course materials, clearly address the discussion question, and provide relevant examples or evidence when appropriate.
2. Follow-Up Responses: After submitting the initial response, students must respond to two classmates' posts. Follow-up responses should be respectful, substantive, and relevant to the classmate's argument. Students may agree or disagree, ask thoughtful questions, offer additional evidence, or connect the post to course readings and concepts. Brief statements such as "I agree" or "good post" without further explanation will not receive full credit.

All initial posts and follow-up responses must be submitted by the deadlines listed in Blackboard.

Institutional Assessment Reports — 25%

There are three separate institutional assessment reports (or analytical essay papers) in this course. Each report corresponds to one of the required books:

1. Lawrence Lessig, *Republic, Lost: Revised*
2. Stephen Skowronek, *Presidential Leadership in Political Time*
3. David M. O'Brien, *Storm Center*

Instructions: Throughout the semester, you will complete three, 3–5-page Institutional Assessment Reports, focusing on Congress, the presidency/executive branch, and SCOTUS. Each report will assess the institution's structure, powers, behavior, and effectiveness within the American political system. You will apply course concepts/assigned readings to a contemporary example or issue, and further analyze how the institution operates, what influences its behavior, and what challenges or constraints it faces. These reports are designed to strengthen your ability to apply political science concepts, evaluate institutional performance, and critically assess the role of each branch in American government.

Each report should:

- Identify and explain the author's principal argument.
- Summarize the major themes and supporting evidence presented in the book.
- Discuss the relevance to the study of Congress, the presidency, and/or the judiciary.

Online Exams — 45% Total

There are two exams in this course: a midterm exam and a final exam.

Both exams will be administered online through Blackboard via Respondus Lockdown Browser and will consist of some multiple-choice questions and short-essay questions. Exams will assess students' understanding of assigned readings, course concepts, institutional structures, and major debates covered in the course. Study guides will be provided in advance.

- **Online Midterm Exam:** 20%
- **Online Final Exam:** 25%

Students must complete each exam during its designated availability period. Specific instructions, time limits, and deadlines will be posted on Blackboard at a further date.

End-of-Semester Video Presentation – 15%

Students will create a brief video presentation that fuses key course concepts and applies them to an issue involving American political institutions. Presentations should demonstrate analysis, use relevant course readings, and summarize the students' main conclusions. Students will be submitting this on Week 14/15 onto Blackboard.

Grade Distribution

Assignments	Percentages
Discussion Board Questions: 5x	15%
Midterm Exam:	20%
Final Exam:	25%
Institutional Assessment Reports: 3x	25%
End-of-Semester Video Presentation:	<u>15%</u>
Total	<u>100%</u>

Weekly Schedule	Unit	Topic	Assigned Readings
Week			
1: Aug. 24 th	Intro to Course	Understanding American Political Foundations	The End of History Essay Francis Fukuyama
2: Aug. 31 st	Discussion Question #1 due by Sunday 9 p.m.	I. Congress American political institutions	Lessig: Preface, Introduction, Ch. 1, "Tweedism"; Ch. 2, Corrupt because Unequal
3: Sept. 7 th		Congress: legislative organization and behavior	Lessig, Ch. 3, "Consequences: Vetocracy"; Ch. 8, "What So... Much Money Does"
4: Sept. 14 th	Discussion Question #2 due by Sunday 9 p.m.	Congress: capacity, accountability, and reform	Lessig: Ch. 4, "The Fix"; Ch. 11, "How So [Little] Money Makes Things Worse"
5: Sept. 21 st	Institutional Report #1 due by Sunday, Sept. 27 th via TURNITIN	II. Presidency & Executive Branch Presidency: development of executive power	Skowronek: Ch. 1, "The Presidency in American Political Development: A Third Look"; Ch. 2, "Presidential Leadership in Political Time"
6: Sept. 28 th	Discussion Question #3 due by Sunday 9 p.m.	Presidency: leadership and regime relationships	Skowronek: Ch. 3, "The Politics of Leadership at the End of the Twentieth Century"
7: Oct. 5 th	Online Midterm Exam via Respondus	Presidency: George W. Bush and executive authority	Skowronek: Ch. 4, "Leadership by Definition"; Ch. 5, "The Imperial Presidency Thesis Revisited"
8: Oct. 12 th	Institutional Report #2 due by Sunday, Oct. 18 th via TURNITIN	Presidency: Obama, Trump, and contemporary political time	Skowronek: Ch. 6, "Is Transformational Leadership Still Possible?"; Ch. 7, "What's New in the Political Leadership of Donald Trump?"

Weekly Schedule	Unit	Topic	Assigned Readings
Week			
9: Oct. 19 th	III. Federal Judiciary	Judicial Power and the Supreme Court as a Political Institution	O'Brien: Ch. 1, "A Struggle for Power"; Ch. 2, "The Cult of the Robe"
10: Oct. 26 th		Judiciary: appointments and life inside the Court	O'Brien: Ch. 3, "Life in the Marble Temple"
11: Nov. 2 nd		Discussion Question #4 due by Sunday 9 p.m.	O'Brien: Ch. 4, "Deciding What to Decide"
12: Nov. 9 th	IV. Institutional Relationships	Institutional Report #3 due by Sunday via TURNITIN	O'Brien: Ch. 5, "Deciding Cases and Writing Opinions"; Lessig: Ch. 6, "What about 'Free Speech?'"
		Discussion Question #5 due by Sunday 9 p.m.	Week 13: O'Brien: Ch. 6, "The Court and American Life"; Lessig: Ch. 5, "Distractions"; Ch. 12, "Two Conceptions of 'Corruption'"
13: Nov. 16 th		Institutional Reform, Democratic Accountability, and Course Synthesis	Lessig: Ch. 13, "A Proposing Convention"; Ch. 14, "Referendum Politicians"
14: Nov. 23 rd	-Thanksgiving Week-	TBD	
15: Nov. 30 th		End-of-the-Semester Video Presentations	
16: Final Exam			
TBD			

IMPORTANT POLICIES AND RESOURCES

University Email Policy and Course Communications: All correspondence between professors and students must occur via university email accounts. You must have your Jaguar email account ready and working. If it is not working, contact the help desk at helpdesk@tamusa.edu or at 210-784-HELP (4357). If you don't hear back within 48 hours, contact them again. They have many requests during the first part of the semester, so you may need to follow up with them.

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 at the [website](#) or email us at dss@tamusa.edu. All students are encouraged to discuss their academic accommodation with Disability Support Services and their instructors as soon as possible.

Academic Learning Center: All currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio can utilize the Academic Learning Center for subject-area tutoring. 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, calling (210) 784-1307, or visiting the Central Academic Building, room 202. Online tutoring is also available for after hours and weekend assistance.

While tutoring hours may change based on tutor schedules and availability, the current tutoring hours for MATH in the ALC are as follows:

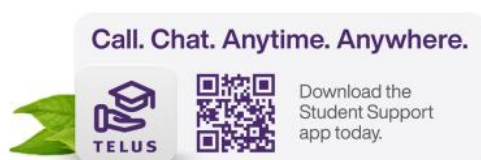
Appointments available MATH Walk in Tutoring – No appointment needed

	Appointments available	Walk in Tutoring – No appointment needed
MONDAY	8 am – 6 pm	9 am – 5 pm
TUESDAY	8 am – 6 pm	9 am – 5 pm
WEDNESDAY	8 am – 6 pm	9 am – 5 pm
THURSDAY	8 am – 6 pm	9 am – 5 pm
FRIDAY	8 am – 5 pm	11 am – 4 pm

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, visit our website, call 210-784-1331 or visit Madla 120 between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM.

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. *Crisis support is available 24/7/365 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331 or through the TELUS student support App.*

The TELUS Student Support App provides a variety of mental health resources to including 24/7/365 support for in the moment distress, crisis support, 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 system. 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 on emergency response may be found at: [Emergency Operations Plan](#) and the [Emergency Action Plan](#). 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. Faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended by the published Census Date (the first week of class). Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend prior to the published Census Date (the first week of class) will have their aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester may also need to return a portion of their federal aid.

Jaguar Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center (WLDCC):

The WLDCC provides support to graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges as well as faculty and staff. Writing 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. The WLDCC offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. Students can schedule appointments with the

WLDCC in JagWire under the Student Services tab. Click on “Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center” to make your appointment. Students wanting to work in realtime with a tutor can schedule an “Online Appointment.” Students wishing to receive asynchronous, written feedback from a tutor can schedule an “eTutoring” appointment. More information about what services we offer, how to make an appointment, and how to access your appointment can be found on our [website](#) . The WLDCC can also be reached by emailing wldcc@tamusa.edu.

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 report](#) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to direct you to available resources. A food pantry is available on campus; click [here](#) for hours and contact information.

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 or (210)784-1397.

Religious Observances: Texas A&M University-San Antonio recognizes the wide variety 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 on our campus and within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees are to 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, or pregnancy/parenting status. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the University’s Civil Rights Officer at 210-784-2061 or titleix@tamusa.edu.

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 discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or dating violence, or stalking based on sex, 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 sex-based misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the university's Title IX Coordinator (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; 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.

Young Jaguars can support parenting students with daycare if students meet this criteria: (1) must be enrolled in classes at Texas A&M-San Antonio in the current semester, (2) must be Pell eligible or a single parent, (3) child(ren) must be aged 3 to 12-years-old, and (4) child(ren) must be enrolled in Pre-K-3 through 6th grade. Hours of operation is Monday-Thursday 3:30pm-9:00pm. For more information, please contact Young Jaguars at youngjaguars@tamusa.edu or call (210) 784-2636.

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, 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, 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](#) or visit the resources available in the [OSRR website](#)

Important Fall 2026 Dates:

Dates	Event
August 20	Tuition & Fee Payments deadline
August 24	First day of class
September 7	Labor Day Holiday – No Classes / University Closed
September 9	Census Date – Students not paid in full or enrolled in a payment plan by 4:59 pm may be dropped for non-payment
October 5 – October 16	Midterm grading period
November 13	Last day to drop with an automatic “W”
November 25	Study Day – No classes
November 26-November 28	Thanksgiving Holiday – No Classes / University Closed
November 30	Last day to drop a course or withdraw from the University
December 4	Last day of classes
December 5 – December 11	Final exams
December 15	Commencement

The complete [academic calendar](#) is available online

No Use of Generative AI Permitted

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.