

POLS 4350: Political Science Capstone

Spring 2026

General Information

Course & Section #	POLS 4350
Term & Years	Spring 2026
Course Schedule	Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30am-10:45am
Course Location	Senator Frank Madla 209

Instructor Information

Name and Title	Dr. Daniel Braaten
E-mail	dbraaten@tamusa.edu
Phone Number	210-784-2276
Office Hours	Tuesday, Thursday 11:00am-1:00pm
Office Location	Central Academic Building, Office 347-C

Course Overview

This course is the culminating experience of the political science major. Students will combine their previous experiences, knowledge, and methodologies they have learned in previous political science courses to conduct a semester-long research project. This course will develop research, writing, editing, and presentation skills so that students produce a final research paper which will be presented in a public forum. Prerequisite(s): GOVT 2305, GOVT 2306, POLS 3302. TSI Restriction(s): Reading, Writing, and Math

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course students should be able to demonstrate knowledge of the following topics

- Integrate past learning by making connections between past political science knowledge and your research
- Develop conclusions supported by empirical evidence and theory and effectively communicate them orally and in writing
- Improve reading, research, and writing skills appropriate to the discipline of political science
- Develop presentation skills
- Understand what democracy is in theory and practice

Required Course Materials

The Craft of Political Research 11th edition – W. Phillips Shively and James W. Endersby
On Democracy - Robert S. Dahl

The Right of the People: Democracy and the Case for A New American Founding – Osita Nwanevu

How To Be Civil: Learning To Be Civil Without the State – C.L. Skach

Additional Readings on Blackboard

Course Requirements

Research Project

Students will be required to write a 12–15-page research paper. The research paper must include all the major components of good political science research, including hypothesis development and testing, a review of past research on the topic, appropriate data gathering and analysis, interpretation and synthesis of the results, and quality writing. (100 points total)

Throughout the course of the semester individual components of the research paper will be due (see the schedule below for the specifics). These are all considered rough drafts and will equal between 10-20 points each depending on the length of the assignments (50 points total)

Students will also be required to present the results of their research in a public forum at the end of the semester. These presentations will be graded on the student's ability to accurately and effectively communicate their research to a non-specialist audience (50 points total)

Critical Reading Assignments

Each student is required to submit **three** critical reading assignments each one worth 25 points each. Critical reading assignments are analysis of the reading assignment for the week where students are required to describe the main points of the readings and any criticisms of the readings they have. Assignments will be 2-3 pages in length and must be submitted before class discussion of the reading. (75 points total)

Participation

Students are expected to attend every class, have the assigned readings completed before class begins, and participate in the class discussion. Participation grades are given out based on the discretion of the instructor (basically my perception of how much you contributed to class discussion and of course if you do not attend class you cannot participate.) (50 points total)

Grade Breakdown

GRADE	EQUIVALENT POINTS
A	90%-100%
B	80%-89%

GRADE	EQUIVALENT POINTS
C	70%-79%
D	60%-69%
F	Below 60%

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to attend every class. If a student is unable to attend class, they should notify the professor as soon as possible. Excused absences are those where a student cannot attend class because of an illness, family emergency, or because they are attending a school sponsored event on or off campus.

Electronics Policy

Students can use laptops and/or tablets in class if they feel they are helpful for their educational experience. However, as the professor, I reserve the right to tell students to stop using them if I feel they are causing a distraction to myself or the rest of the class. I prefer that student put their phones away for the duration of the lecture portion of the class.

Make-Up Assignments

I will accept late assignments for one week passed the deadline, but those late assignments must be for excused absences only. The final research paper and the presentation must be completed on their due dates, no exceptions will be made

Penalties for Academic Dishonesty

The faculty of the Department of Arts and Sciences expects students to conduct their academic work with integrity and honesty. Acts of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated and can result in the failure of a course and dismissal from the University. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating on a test, plagiarism, collusion- the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing work offered for credit, the abuse of resource materials, and misrepresentation of credentials or accomplishments as a member of the College. Students are expected to do their own course work. Cheating or plagiarism by an individual student will result in a grade of F on the particular paper or in the course. The University's policy on academic honesty and appeal procedures can be found in this [website](#)

Prohibited Conduct

All forms of prohibited conduct are outlined in the TAMU-SA student handbook. In addition, guidelines and procedures for handling instances of student misconduct are contained therein, which can be viewed online at this [website](#)

No Use of Generative AI Permitted

POLS 4350 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

Academic Freedom Statement

Higher education is predicated on the exchange, vetting, and deliberation of often controversial and unsettled ideas. In this class, for example, we explore how the discipline of political science has addressed issues of racial justice in American politics. We are not here to simply express personal opinions or repeat talking points, but rather to engage a set of ideas and research findings that have a long and complicated history and are therefore subject to ongoing debate. Committed students and scholars can, and do, disagree on the topics we will be discussing.

The syllabus has been designed to bring these controversies and disagreements to the fore. Students are also invited to introduce additional challenges in a serious and open-minded manner.

Such conversations require mutual trust and respect. It is therefore essential that students feel free to express their deeply held views and continually developing perspectives. This means ensuring that all students and faculty feel included and welcomed to engage in discussion. Because hateful or discriminatory speech and behavior degrades the possibility for a free exchange of ideas, it will not be tolerated.

Schedule of Classes and Assignments

WEEK	TOPICS COVERED	ASSIGNED READINGS	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
WEEK 1 (JANUARY 20, 22)	Introduction	Syllabus, Community Agreement	Community Agreement due in class on 1/22
WEEK 2 (JANUARY 27, 29)	What is Democracy and What is Research	<i>On Democracy</i> part I-II, <i>The Craft of Political Research</i> chapter 1	Critical Reading Assignment due before class on 1/27;

WEEK	TOPICS COVERED	ASSIGNED READINGS	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
WEEK 3 (FEBRUARY 3, 5)	What is Democracy and What is Research Continued	<i>On Democracy</i> part III-IV, <i>The Craft of Political Research</i> chapter 2	Critical Reading Assignment due before class on 2/3, 5-10 research questions due in class on 2/5
WEEK 4 (FEBRUARY 10, 12)	Democracy: Process and Substance and Data Sources	<i>The Right of the People</i> Part I,	Critical Reading Assignment due before class on 2/10, Identify quantitative data sources for research paper due in class on 2/12
WEEK 5 (FEBRUARY 17, 19)	Democracy: Process and Substance and Data Sources Continued	<i>The Right of the People</i> Part II,	Critical Reading Assignment due before class on 2/17, Identify qualitative data sources for research paper due in class on 2/17
WEEK 6 (FEBRUARY 24, 26)	Democratic Habits and Academic Literature	<i>How to Be A Citizen</i> Introduction – Chapter 3	Critical Reading Assignment due before class on 2/24, Identify 10 academic sources for research paper due in class on 2/26
WEEK 7 (MARCH 3, 5)	Democratic Habits and Academic Literature Continued	<i>How to Be A Citizen</i> Chapter 4 - Conclusion	Critical Reading Assignment due before class on 3/3, Annotated Bibliography due on 3/5
WEEK 8 (MARCH 10, 12)	Spring Break	No Reading Assignments	No Class Meetings
WEEK 9 (MARCH 17, 19)	Theory	<i>The Craft of Political Research</i> chapters 3-5	No Assignments due
WEEK 10 (MARCH 24, 26)	Research Design	<i>The Craft of Political Research</i> chapters 6-8	Research Paper Outline due on 3/26

WEEK	TOPICS COVERED	ASSIGNED READINGS	ASSIGNMENTS DUE
WEEK 11 (MARCH 31, APRIL 2)	Quantitative Data Analysis	<i>The Craft of Political Research</i> chapters 9-11	No Assignments due
WEEK 12 (APRIL 7, 9)	Qualitative Data Analysis	Selections from <i>The Active Interview</i> (on Blackboard)	Research Design due on 4/9
WEEK 13 (APRIL 14, 16)	Writing Week	No Reading Assignment	No Class Meetings as students will work on rough draft
WEEK 14 (APRIL 21, 23)	Peer Review	Fellow Students First Drafts	First Draft of Research Paper due April 21
WEEK 15 (APRIL 28, 30)	Presentation Week	No Reading Assignment	Presentations on April 28 and 30
WEEK 16 (MAY 12)	Research Paper Due	No Reading Assignment	Research Paper due on 5/12 at 1:50pm

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. 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:

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:

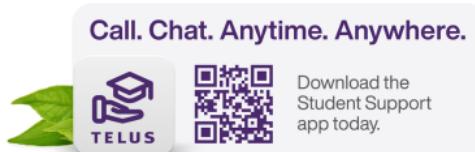
	Appointments available	Walk in Tutoring – No appointment needed
MONDAY	8 am – 6 pm	9 am – 5 pm
TUESDAY	8 am – 6 pm	9 am – 5 pm
WEDNESDAY	8 am – 6 pm	9 am – 5 pm
THURSDAY	8 am – 6 pm	9 am – 5 pm
FRIDAY	8 am – 5 pm	11 am – 4 pm

[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. 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](#). Download the SafeZone App (access the app [here](#)) 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 the first week of class. Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend 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 Jaguar Writing Center provides writing 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 Writing Center offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. Students can schedule appointments with the Writing Center 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 Writing Center can also be reached by emailing writingcenter@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 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 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. 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, 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, 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 Dates: Fall 2025 Regular 16-Week Session

Dates	Event
January 13	Tuition & Fee Payments deadline
January 19	Martin Luther King, Jr. – No Classes
January 20	First day of class
February 4	Census date
February 23-March 6	Midterm grading period
March 9-March 14	Spring Break
April 3	Study Day – No classes
April 17	Last day to drop with an automatic "W"
May 1	Last day to drop a course or withdraw from the University
May 4	Last day of classes
May 5	Study Day – No classes
May 6-May 12	Final exams
May 19	Commencement

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

