WHAT THIS COURSE IS

THE PEOPLE OF TEXAS, speaking through their State Constitution, have determined that all citizens, in order to properly perform the duties of citizenship, need to be familiar with the Constitution of the United States and those of the several states (especially of the State of Texas). To fulfill this need, Texas Law requires that six semester hours dedicated to that purpose be completed by all students attending institutions of higher learning receiving state funds. Here at Angelo State University, this requirement is met by taking POLS 2305 and 2306.

The United States Constitution is the central legitimating symbol of American political life. American citizens therefore need to understand how it frames political controversy and how it influences political and social development. To that end, we will study important debates concerning American democracy and the meaning of liberty and equality from the Founding until the present day. We will examine the important function of citizenship in democracy and of federalism in American democracy.

TEXTS AND READINGS

Required

2. Additional readings and occasional video/audio clips will be linked in Blackboard Announcements about the Course/Weekly Schedule.

Optional

• Bessette and Pitney, American Government and Politics, any edition, Cengage

COURSE REQUIREMENTS and GRADING

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BLOGS

This weekly written assignment will make use of the “Blog” function on Blackboard. Every week a blog “entry” of at least 500 words is due prior to class on Monday. Each student will then write a 250 word “response” to two of his classmates, which are due each Friday before class. All total, students in this class should be writing at least 1000 words per week. Detailed posting instructions and a schedule will be posted on Blackboard.

The purpose of this assignment is to exercise your analytic skills of thinking and writing about the reading material for the course. It should also provide a good springboard for class discussion, which is critical for your “participation” grade. These are not to be summaries of readings but should be demonstrations that you are grappling with their arguments and ideas in the context of the course as a whole.

TESTS / FINAL EXAM

There will be four tests, and a final exam. Tests consists of written answers to short questions and identifications. The final exam will consist of essays and short answer identifications, which will be written in a blue book. Students will be required to purchase blue books and bring them to the exam. The ASU bookstore has these for sale.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Participation in class discussions is a necessary part of the learning in this class. It is both expected and rewarded in the grading. The good student will be present and attentive and prepared to answer questions about the assigned readings, to ask questions of his or her own, and to volunteer helpful observations about the material. Students may respectfully disagree with one another but are expected to behave with proper courtesy and regard for others’ comments. Because much of this class involves reading and discussing passage from the Nichols book, students should always bring this book to class with them. Frequent class discussion will foster a better classroom environment than one in which the instructor simply lectures every day. STUDENTS WHO REGULARLY PARTICIPATE (THIS INCLUDES HAVING GOOD ATTENDANCE) WILL BE GIVEN THE BENEFIT OF HAVING VERY CLOSE FINAL GRADES ROUNDED UP TO THE NEXT LETTER. THOSE WHOSE PARTICIPATION IS TRULY EXCEPTIONAL WILL BE AWARDED EXTRA CREDIT UP TO HALF A LETTER ON THEIR FINAL GRADES.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance at each class meeting is expected and rewarded. Attendance is defined as “being present when attendance is taken at the beginning of each class and remaining until class is dismissed.” Students who are not present when attendance is taken or who leave class without permission prior to dismissal will be considered absent. Please do not
come to class late, as this is both discourteous and disruptive. The same is true of leaving one’s seat during class. This should be done only in emergencies. If an emergency is expected, the instructor should be informed prior to class and the student should sit in a seat nearest the exit. Special circumstances which affect attendance will always be considered if the instructor is informed ahead of time.

**More than 10 absences will result in automatic failure for the course.**

Students are responsible for keeping track of their own attendance. Students who are failing or very near failing due to attendance, prior to the last day to drop the class, will be notified. No other inquiries regarding attendance will be answered by the instructor.

**POLICIES**

Electronic Devices: Use of electronic devices such as **cell phones**, tablets, and laptops is strictly prohibited. These devices should not be seen or heard by anyone, including (especially) yourself. All cell phones must be stowed away before entering the classroom. Flagrant violators of this rule will be asked to leave and counted absent.

Students with Disabilities: If you have particular learning needs that are documented with the university’s Student Life Office, please contact let me know so arrangements for testing can be made in advance. See [http://www.angelo.edu/content/files/14216-op-1015-providing-accommodations-for-students-with](http://www.angelo.edu/content/files/14216-op-1015-providing-accommodations-for-students-with). If not yet documented, please contact them at: Rm 112 University Center, (325) 942-2126, Student.Life@angelo.edu

Honor Code: Cheating, plagiarism, and other violations of the honor code will not be tolerated. See ASU’s policies at [http://www.angelo.edu/forms/pdf/honorcode5.pdf](http://www.angelo.edu/forms/pdf/honorcode5.pdf)

**Extra Credit**

You may complete up to 2 extra credit Movie Journals. These should be posted on Blackboard under “Movie Journal.” They should be about 500 words and should analyze the movie in relation to the dominant themes of the course. These should not be summaries of the movie. No more than 1 journal may be posted in a single week. And I will not accept any more entries once Finals Week has begun. The following is a list of acceptable movies.

- Shane
- The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance
- Amistad
- Sergeant Rutledge
- Gran Torino
- A Man for All Seasons
- Inherit the Wind
- The Best Man (1964)
- Idiocracy
- Lincoln
Brazil
Advise and Consent
Wag the Dog
The Grapes of Wrath
American Sniper
13 Hours

**Tentative Course Outline** (detailed weekly schedules will be posted on Blackboard)

Introduction: Syllabus, Political Beliefs/Understanding, and Public Opinion

I. Mass Media, Parties, and Elections
   A. The News: Fake, Biased, or just plain Dumb? -- and what to do about it
      1. George Anastaplo on “The Abolition of Television”
      2. Tim Groseclose and Jeff Milyo, “A Measure of Media Bias”
      3. Documentary: A Glitch in the Matrix
   B. Political Ideologies and Parties
      3. Barack Obama, Second Inaugural Address
      4. Donald Trump, Inaugural Address/State of the Union
   C. Elections
      1. How the Electoral College Works
      4. Citizens United v. FEC

Test #1

II. Principles of Government
   A. Freedom and Democracy
      1. Declaration of Independence
      3. Thomas Jefferson, Draft of the Declaration (paragraph on slavery)
      4. Five Founders on Slavery
      5. Lincoln-Douglas Debates, “. . . the Problem of Majority Rule”
   B. The Constitution
      1. Martin Diamond, “The Revolution of Sober Expectations”
      2. Centinel, “The Small Republic Argument”
      3. Records of the Federal Convention
      4. Federalist 10
      5. Federalist 51
   C. Federalism
      2. Federalist 39
3. *McCulloch v. Maryland*

D. Citizenship and Civic Virtue

1. George Washington, *Farewell Address*
2. Robert Putnam, “*Bowling Alone*”
3. Charles Murray, “*Belmont and Fishtown*”

Test #2

III. Governing Institutions

A. Congress and Separation of Powers

2. William F. Connelly, “Congress is Not the Broken Branch”
4. *INS v. Chadha*
5. Senator Ben Sasse, *Maiden Speech*

B. Presidency and the Executive Branch

3. Lincoln, “The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions”
5. Frederick Douglass, “Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln”

C. Judiciary

1. Brutus
2. Federalist 78
4. Lincoln, “The Authority of the Supreme Court”
5. *Marbury v. Madison*
7. Federalist 49

Test #3

IV. Public Policy

A. Politics and Economics

1. Milton Friedman, “Capitalism and Freedom”
2. FDR, “The New Goals of Politics”
3. Alexis de Tocqueville, “Soft Despotism”
7. *Kelo v. City of New London*

B. Foreign Policy and National Security

3. Hamilton, “Selections from Pacificus and Americanus”
4. Madison, “Selections from Helvidius”
5. Arthur Herman, "The Trump Doctrine: American Interests . . .1st”

Test #4

V. Liberty and Equality

A. Civil Liberties
   2. Texas v. Johnson
   3. United States v. Stevens
   4. Masterpiece Cake v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission
   5. Michael Meehan, “Compelled Speech Cuts Civic Friendship ‘Right in Two’”

B. Civil Rights
   1. Plessy v. Ferguson
   2. Eugene J. McCarthy, “A Note on the New Equality”
   5. Thomas Jefferson, “The Natural Aristocracy”
   6. Charles Murray, “Narrowing the New Class Divide”

Final Exam - Monday, 12/10 at 10:30am-12:30pm in the classroom

Course Objectives:

At the end of the course students will

- Understand the core principles of American democracy and how they have guided the American people and their leaders throughout the nation’s history.
- Learn the purposes and benefits of having a written constitution, and of the special constitutional design crafted by the Founding Fathers.
- Understand the duties and rights associated with American citizenship.

ASU Student Learning Objectives

Critical Thinking Skills (CT)

CT1. Gather, analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information relevant to a question or issue.

CT2. Develop and demonstrate a logical position (i.e. perspective, thesis, hypothesis) that acknowledges ambiguities or contradictions.

Communication Skills (CS)

CS1. Develop, interpret, and express ideas through effective written communication.
CS2. Develop, interpret, and express ideas through effective oral communication.

**Social Responsibility (SR)**

SR1. Demonstrate intercultural competence.

SR2. Demonstrate knowledge of civic responsibility.

SR3. Demonstrate the ability to engage effectively in the campus, regional, national or global communities.

**Personal Responsibility (PR)**

PR1. Demonstrate the ability to evaluate choices, actions and consequences as related to ethical decision-making.