

## Core Course Syllabus Template

Year Course Offered: 2014  
Semester Course Offered: Fall  
Department: Social and Cultural Sciences  
Course Number: POLS 2305  
Name of Course: Federal Government  
Name of Instructor: Dr. William T. Hoston

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The information contained in this class syllabus is subject to change without notice. Students are expected to be aware of any additional course policies presented by the instructor during the course.  
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### Course Description

Origin and development of the U.S. Constitution, structure and powers of the national government including the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, federalism, political participation, the national election process, public policy, civil liberties and civil rights.

### Learning Objectives

1. Explain the origin and development of constitutional democracy in the United States.
2. Demonstrate knowledge of the federal system.
3. Describe separation of powers and checks and balances in both theory and practice.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the federal government.
5. Evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, and political parties in the political system.
6. Analyze the election process.
7. Describe the rights and responsibilities of citizens.
8. Analyze issues and policies in U.S. politics.

### Core Objectives

Federal Government addresses the following core objectives to ensure students develop the essential knowledge and skills they need to be successful in college, in a career, in their communities, and in their lives. The core objectives meet the Texas Core Curriculum objectives for the Government/Political Science Foundational Component Area

- Critical Thinking Skills - to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information
- Communication Skills - to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication
- Social Responsibility - to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities
- Personal Responsibility - to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision-making

### Major Assignments/Exams

#### *Exams:*

Exam I	20%
Exam II	25%
Final Exam	25%

#### *Assignments:*

Political Activity Assignment	25%
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#### *Class Participation*

5%

**Exams:** All exams will consist of essay questions (short) and multiple-choice questions. The exams dictate the student being able to apply the materials taught in class. The exams will cover only lectures and assigned reading materials. LO 1-5, CO: CT, COM

**Political Activity Assignment:** This assignment is designed to introduce students to politics first-hand. It is divided into five exercises. For each exercise, there is a description below. Students *must* complete all five exercises to receive credit. LO 6-8, CO: SR, PR

**1a. Register to Vote** (if you're not already registered): Write 2-3 pages explaining the registration requirements of your voting state. Include a table comparing your state with three other states (e.g., Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico). Discuss how the process is similar and/or different. Evaluate how the rules of registration might affect voter turnout.

Applications to register to vote are available with your county election officer or can be found online at the Secretary of States Office. Simply fill out the application and mail it. **Be sure to attach a copy of the voter registration card for credit.**<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/voter/reqvr.shtml>. Attach as appendix.

**1b. Vote in the 2014 Texas Gubernatorial Election:** Write 2-3 pages analyzing your voting experience. Explain in your analysis what candidate you voted for and why you voted for them (e.g., political background of the candidate; political agenda/position on the issues of education, health-care, economy, immigration, taxes, etc.).

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<sup>1</sup> INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS WILL BE PROVIDED WITH ANOTHER ASSIGNMENT.

**2. Attend a Political Meeting:** Students are required to attend either a gubernatorial, state legislative, mayoral, city council, school board meeting or campaign. Students may need to contact the political office of these officials to find the time and date of the meeting, or sometimes they are listed in the local newspaper. Write 2-3 pages summarizing the topics discussed in the meeting/campaign. In addition, discuss accessibility to the venue and was citizen input permitted. If so, what form did it take? How many people attended the meeting? Was there robust discussion or perfunctory business completed? Be sure to attach the formal agenda from the meeting and note the presiding officer (person running the meeting).

**3. Not-for-Profit:** Identify a Not-for-Profit community-based organization in the greater Houston area. In your 2-3 pages, research the mission of the organization, the population it serves or the problem it addresses, and the activities it undertakes. Interview the Executive Director or other high ranking paid staff member on issues facing the target population the organization serves, how the organization serves the community, and the effectiveness of its service. Be sure to prepare at least five questions in advance for the interviewee. Include your questions and a brief transcript of the respondent's replies in an appendix to your paper. Attach as appendix.

**Examples: Not-for-Profit.**

- a. Boys and Girls Club
- b. Goodwill Industries
- c. Nehemiah Neighborhood Center
- d. Red Cross
- e. Star of Hope Mission

**4. Analyze the political content of a musical song:** Choose a song with explicit political lyrics. Write 2-3 pages discussing all of the political themes in the song and relate them to the topics we have discussed in class. What are the messages in popular culture about politics in the United States? Discuss how music influences how people think about American politics. You may choose a song from any genre of music (rap, rock, country, metal, etc.). **Note:** You must provide the lyrics (typed out) of the song, along with information about the artist. Attach as appendix.

**5. Critique a political movie/documentary** (actually view the movie/documentary, not read critique over the internet): Choose a political movie/documentary with an explicit political theme and then critique. It is essential to discuss the political message conveyed in the film as well as the specific political or historical background of the subject matter(s) of the film. Most importantly, students need to show if and how a film succeeds in conveying a political message (or not). Write 2-3 pages discussing the political content of the movie/documentary, what aspects of the film accurately reflect politics and/or inconsistencies, and did the film have an ideological slant.

**Paper Guidelines:** An assembled 12-15-page paper explaining your experiences of the five required exercises will be due on December 7, 2010. The paper **must** contain an introduction and conclusion. It is to be typed (Times News Roman), 12 point font, Justified alignment, doubled-spaced, pages numbered and stapled. Attach a title page with your name, identification number (last four of SSN or student ID), title of the paper, name of the course, course number, and instructor's name. **Papers that do not follow these directions will not be graded. FOLLOW DIRECTIONS.**

<b>Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>CO</b>	<b>Assessment Methods</b>	<b>Criteria/Targets</b>
1. Explain the origin and development of constitutional democracy in the United States.	CT, COM	Exams	Using the rubric of Excellent, Acceptable, and Unacceptable, 80% or higher of students in POLS 2305 will score acceptable or better.
2. Demonstrate knowledge of the federal system.	CT, COM	Exams	Using the rubric of Excellent, Acceptable, and Unacceptable, 80% or higher of students in POLS 2305 will score acceptable or better.
3. Describe separation of powers and checks and balances in both theory and practice.	CT, COM	Exams	Using the rubric of Excellent, Acceptable, and Unacceptable, 80% or higher of students in POLS 2305 will score acceptable or better.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of the federal government.	CT, COM	Exams	Using the rubric of Excellent, Acceptable, and Unacceptable, 80% or higher of students in POLS 2305 will score acceptable or better.
5. Evaluate the role of public opinion, interest groups, and political parties in the political system.	CT, COM	Exams	Using the rubric of Excellent, Acceptable, and Unacceptable, 80% or higher of students in POLS 2305 will score acceptable or better.
6. Analyze the election process.	SR, PR	Political activity assignment	Using the rubric of Excellent, Acceptable, and Unacceptable, 80% or higher of students in POLS 2305 will score acceptable or better.
7. Describe the rights and responsibilities of citizens.	SR, PR	Political activity assignment	Using the rubric of Excellent, Acceptable, and Unacceptable, 80% or higher of students in POLS 2305 will score acceptable or better.

8. Analyze issues and policies in U.S. politics.	SR, PR	Political activity assignment	Using the rubric of Excellent, Acceptable, and Unacceptable, 80% or higher of students in POLS 2305 will score acceptable or better.
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## Required Reading

Ginsberg, Benjamin, Theodore J. Lowi, Margaret Weir and Edward J. Harpham. 2013. *We the People: An Introduction to American Politics*: W.W. Norton and Company: New York. (Shorter 9<sup>th</sup> Edition) ISBN: 978-0393-92111-3

Hoston, William T. 2012. *Listen To Me Now, or Listen To Me Later: A Memoir of Academic Success for College Students* (1<sup>st</sup> Ed.). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt, 2012. ISBN- 978-1-4652-0137-9. Book available @ <http://www.kendallhunt.com/hoston>

## List of Discussion/Lecture Topics

### I. Foundation of Government

#### Weeks 1-2

##### **\*\*Read [Chapter 1: American Political Culture]**

- Define course criteria; Introduction of the course.
- American Political Culture
- Defining Democracy: Democratic Idea
- The American Core Values: Liberty, Equality, and Democracy

#### Week 3

##### **\*\*Read [Chapter 2: The Founding and the Constitution]**

##### **[Chapter 4: Civil Liberties]**

- The Evolution of the U.S. Constitution: Are amendments warranted?
- History of the Bill of Rights
- Evaluation of the Amendments 1-10

#### Free Speech and Gun Control

- A Comprehensive Examination of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> amendments.

#### Week 4

##### **\*\*Read [Chapter 3: Federalism]**

- Federalism as a System of Government: The State's Role in Government
- U.S. Federalism: Pros and Cons

#### Illegal Immigration

- Discuss the Economic, Social, and Political Impact of Illegal Immigration in the US.

- Case Study of Arizona and Alabama State Ruling; Interjurisdictional Replication
- Birth Tourism

#### **Week 5**

- **Exam 1**

## **II. Institutions of American Government**

#### **Week 6**

##### **\*\*Read [Chapter 12: Congress]**

- Structure and Demographics of Congress
- Representing the American People
- Criticisms of Congress
- The Legislative Process

#### **Same-Sex Marriages**

- Analyze the Economic, Social, and Political Consequences of Same-Sex Endeavors in the US.
- Recent rulings; California Prop. 8 overturned.

#### **Week 7**

##### **\*\*Read [Chapter 13: The Presidency]**

- The Role of the President
- How Powerful is the President?
- The President and Congress: Systematic Analysis

#### **The Obama Effect**

- Political Decisions made in the Obama Era

#### **Week 8**

##### **\*\*Read [Chapter 14: Bureaucracy in a Democracy]**

- The Federal Bureaucracy
- What do Bureaucrats Do? Who are the Bureaucrats?
- The Legal System
- Federal Jurisdiction
- The U.S. Supreme Court: National Policy Maker

#### **The Decline of American Education**

- NCLB
- The Impact of Standardized and Exit Exams in High Schools.
- Education Reform

#### **Week 9**

### **\*\*\*[Chapter 15: The Federal Courts]**

#### **Abortion/Late-Term Abortion**

- Discuss the National Debate on Abortion and Late-Term Abortion.

### **III. Political Behavior**

#### **Week 10**

##### **\*\*Read [Chapter 6: Public Opinion]**

- Political Values: Values to Ideologies
- Democracy and Public Opinion: How do individuals make informed decisions about politics?
- Measuring Public Opinion

#### **Legalization of Marijuana**

- Public Opinion on Marijuana Legislation
- California, Prop. 19

#### **Week 11**

- **Exam 2**

#### **Week 12**

##### **\*\*Read [Chapter 7: The Media]**

##### **[Chapter 8: Political Participation and Voting]**

- The Media Industry and Government
- Media Power in American Politics
  
- Political Participation
- Who Participates, and How?
- The Evaluation of Voter Turnout

#### **Universal Health-Care**

- Discuss the Pros and Cons to National Health-Care Insurance.
- Health-Care Legislation.
- Media Impact on Health Care decisions.

#### **Week 13**

##### **\*\*Read [Chapter 9: Political Parties]**

- What Are Political Parties?
- The Two-Party System: Why a Two Party System?
- Unified vs. Divided Government; Legislative Productivity – Gridlock.

#### **Week 14**

##### **\*\*Read [Chapter 10: Campaigns and Elections]**

- Elections in America
- How Voters Decide
- Issue Voting

#### **IV. Urban and Minority Politics**

##### **Week 15**

##### **\*\*Read [Chapter 5: Civil Rights]**

- The Struggle for Civil Rights

##### **Affirmative Action**

- Does Affirmative Action Advance Racial Equality?

##### **Week 16**

- **Final Exam**



