

American & Texas Gov't

Govt. 2301 Classroom Syllabus

Dr. J. Philip Rogers, Fall 2009

Contacting Professor

"Virtual" Contact Email = jphilprogers@yahoo.com. Email is *far and away the best way to reach me*.

"Real" Contact: Office CAC 210 - by appointment. If you wish to see me at my SAC please contact me in advance to set up the appointment. The best way to do so is via email. I encourage all students to make at least one appointment to come see me. You are welcome to set as many appointments as you wish throughout the semester to clarify lectures or text, prepare for the exams, discuss your grades - whatever. I am here to help those who want to work.

Phone Contact: To reach me by phone call my cell-phone: **288-3112**, do not call my office phone.

Course Description & Value of Course

"I Don't Care About Politics" Many students believe that courses in Government and Political Science are irrelevant to their lives and career plans and consequently a waste of time. (One reason for this erroneous attitude is that many students mistakenly equate politics exclusively with issues like voting in the Presidential Election). One SAC student asked me: "Why do I need a course in Government if I want to be an RN?" One objective of this course is to demonstrate that this attitude, common though it is, is seriously flawed. The Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote that man is a "political animal" suggesting that politics is inescapably pervasive in the human experience. For all of us, the political process will touch our lives in many respects. In the case of the nursing student just mentioned, contemporary political debates about issues such as a "patient bill of rights" will have a direct impact on such things as the nature of her job responsibilities. Perhaps she has faced sexual harassment on the job; recent court cases may have impact on the probability that this will or will not continue to occur in the future. Other court cases and laws will affect the ability of nurses to organize unions or to strike; which will, in turn, have an impact on her salary and work conditions. In short, whether she admits it or not, whether she is involved with it or not, the political process will have a profound impact on her life. It would seem, that as a starting point she should know something about the political debates over issues that affect nurses. This course will give you the opportunity to research the policy debates on the issues that matter to you. But in addition to knowledge about debates she also needs to know something about she can get involved in the policy process to attempt to influence these policy debates. If you do not understand the process and/or if you do not become involved in that process – someone else will be making these critical decisions for you. Another purpose of the course is to teach you enough about the political process so that you can get involved to attempt to influence policy decisions for those issues that you care about.

General Course Description: The American and Texas political processes are complex. If you are indeed going to participate and attempt to shape policy for those issues you care about, then you must understand that process. This course is designed to provide that understanding. Gov. 2301 includes a comparison of the US and Texas Constitutions, a comparison of the executive, legislative, and judicial institutions at both levels, and a coverage of other topics such as federalism and political participation. The content of this course meets state requirements for coverage of the Texas and US Constitutions.

Differences from other Government Courses: This course differs from most other Government Courses in that the course has been **"internationalized"** One of the best ways to learn about your own political system is to compare and contrast it (i.e. look for similarities and differences) with other political systems in other places. In this course, esp. in the final section, we will compare and contrast the US & Texas Governments. While that is instructive, it is not nearly enough. In addition, throughout the course we will compare and contrast the American political system, American political culture, and American political behavior with that of other countries. For example, to understand the US Constitution it is useful to contrast it with systems with an "unwritten Constitution" (e.g. the United Kingdom) and systems with "propaganda" constitutions (e.g. the People's Republic of China). To understand the debate over church-state relations in the United States it is useful to examine how those relations are viewed in Israel, Iran and Mexico. To understand the role of the American President it is useful to contrast his power with that of the Mexican President or Japanese Prime Minister or the Russian President. To understand the consequences of the fact that we have a Presidential rather than a parliamentary system, it is useful to look at the relatively low impact that third parties like the American Green Party have on US politics as contrasted with the much greater impact that the German Green Party has on German politics etc. In summary, you will be exposed to international material in four different ways: (1) First comparisons with other countries will be integrated into the lectures (2) Second, your exams will include questions of a comparative nature and (3) Finally you can do some extra credit by writing a "country report." Because this course includes a significant international component, students who take this course can count it toward an International Studies Certificate. For information on the International Studies Program, call Dr. Jon Lee at 733-2565 or visit the [International Studies Website](#).

Reading

Required Reading:

1. **Textbooks:** This course has extensive flexibility in textbook purchase to save you money. You will need to purchase **two** textbooks one Texas Government and one American Government (**OR the combined version sold by SAC bookstore**). Some material on the exams will not be covered in the lecture notes but will come exclusively from the Texas Government and American Government textbooks. **However, you do NOT need to purchase any particular Texas Government and American Government textbooks. You may use any authors, any editions. There are only two requirements: (1) they are college level textbooks and (2) they must be no more than 2006.** The exam questions from the American and Texas Government textbooks will not be peculiar to a particular textbook; instead the test questions of the sort for which the information could be found in any recent American or Texas Government textbooks. At the top of each week of lecture notes, you will see required readings - stated in a generic fashion; e.g. "Read Chapters on American and Texas Constitutions." Find the relevant chapter in your textbook. As per this example, find the relevant chapter on the American Constitution in your American Government text and the relevant chapter on the Texas Constitution in the Texas Government Text. If the lecture is on the President and the Governor, you find the relevant chapter(s)

on the President and the Governor in your textbooks.

2. **Current Events:** In addition to the texts, it is expected that you keep up with current events. See the following section on evaluating the quality of news sources.

News Sources: Internet, TV, Newspapers: *Caveat lector (Let the Reader Beware)*

Quality of news sources: Don't Believe Everything You Read/Hear News sources differ greatly in quality of their news. Quality is reflected in depth of coverage, objectivity of coverage, and the focus of the news stories. In terms of newspapers, two strongly recommended, high quality newspapers are the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. You may get these hard copy or on-line. An excellent weekly journal is *The Economist* but other good journals include *The Nation (modern liberal)* and the *National Review (conservative)*. On TV, the highest quality news programs are PBS *Lehrer News Hour* and NBC *Meet the Press* and CBS *Face the Nation*.

Multiple Perspectives to Enhance Critical Thought: It is actually good to read both the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*. This is the case because all newspapers - (like all news sources - tv, radio, internet, etc) have their own particular political bias. The *New York Times* has a democratic bias and the *Wall Street Journal* has a republican bias. On TV, MSNBC and CBS have a pro-Democratic bias and Fox News has a pro-Republican bias. If you get all of your news only from CBS or Fox news - you are getting a biased perspective on the news or are either getting only the Democratic slant (CBS) or only the Republican slant (Fox) and both stations tend to leave out information that supports the other point of view. Incidentally, don't be fooled by the pseudo-debates (more like the World Wide Wrestling Federation than informative debates) on these tv stations such as Point-Counter-Point. These are included to create the (false) impression that you have now been exposed to an informed debate; in fact - you are being entertained watch them yell at each other and you are still getting biased coverage on all the rest of the news coverage. Some tv shows or newspapers are less biased than others (e.g. Lehrer News Hour and Meet the Press mentioned above are more objective than most tv news shows) but *all* news sources have their bias. The sophisticated consumer of political information (you) should seek out sources of information that challenge their political views - not simply news sources that merely reinforce what you already believe. Don't be afraid to challenge yourself by seeking alternative points of view. **In fact, in weekly essays, discussion, and exams this course places a heavy emphasis on critical thinking and intellectual honesty. This requires a familiarity with the arguments not just for your point of view - but the strongest arguments AGAINST your position as well.** The best way to get this is by seeking diverse points of view in your research on the questions.

Internet Sources: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

The Good: The internet has some absolutely wonderful sources of information. For example, you can read entire Supreme Court Cases easily on the internet. You also have access to major high quality academic research articles. Prior to the advent of the internet, some of these were extremely difficult if not impossible for many students to access. **Good sources on the web include:**

1. Media websites (see discussion above for differences in quality and perspective) but any mainstream media is, at worst, mediocre and they typically do not include outright lies.
2. Government sources (e.g. US Senate, White House) = keep in mind political bias.
3. "Known" Interest group and "mainstream" political parties can be good sources of information for ONE side of the story but don't expect them to be objective.
4. Academic sources e.g. articles in academic journals, court analysis at Law Schools, etc.
5. For examination of objective coverage of both/sides of debates see <http://www.procon.org/> OR <http://www.politics1.com/issues.htm> OR <http://www.speakout.com/activism/issues/>
6. Another good neutral source are the reports from the [Congressional Research Service](#).
7. The *Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report*, [available on-line at SAC](#), is an excellent objective source on the politics of issues in Congress. At the SAC on-line journal site you can also search for other high quality journals and articles.

The Bad: Unfortunately, that not all that is up in cyberspace. Don't make the assumption that all websites are of equal value. Some may be basically correct but occasionally include some errors - Wikipedia is a good example of a mediocre website. Keep in mind, it is written (for the most part) by laymen who may be well versed but still not experts in the subject matter. On the internet, you may use Wikipedia for an initial overview (it is DECENT for that) and to get citations to good sources **but do NOT make Wikipedia the primary source of information.**

The Ugly: While Wikipedia has some limited utility because it is basically accurate and sometime a good place to start; there are other websites have no intention to impart the truth. There is also "ugly" information on the internet - information that is propaganda and downright false. For example, the Government of the People's Republic of China will tell you that the Tiananmen Square Massacre of 1989 never occurred. There are blog sites and you-tube videos that will "prove" that CIA actually bombed the Twin Towers and Pentagon; that the holocaust never occurred; or that President Obama is a closet Muslim terrorist. Avoid these sites like the plague.

Calculating Your Cumulative Grade:

To make it easier for you to keep track of your grade throughout the semester, the course grade will be based on a point system with 1,000 points the maximum possible cumulative points (not counting extra credit) for the semester. For each required activity you earn a certain percentage of the 1,000 possible cumulative pts. In addition, you may earn up to 100 extra credit pts. At the end of semester, your regular and extra credit points will be summed and your grade assigned according to the following cutoffs. Because there is so much opportunity for extra credit - these cutoffs will be strictly observed (i.e. an 899 = B not A). This point system will enable you to know exactly what your grade is at any point in the semester.

900-1,000 =	A
800-899 =	B
700-799 =	C

600-699 =

D

Below 600 =

F

Required Activities

General: Your grades is based on three exams and a set of internet assignments. Each of the three exams is worth 300 pts (30%) of your semester grade. You have ten 1 pg. internet assignments. Each assignment is worth 10 pts for a cumulative total of 100 pts or 10% of your semester grade.

Exams: Each of the three exams will focus on the section that immediately preceded it. The exam will include questions from the lectures, the reading, and current events. Each exam will be split into two parts: (1) an in-class short answer exam worth 50% of the exam grade (i.e. 150 pts) and (2) a 3-5 double-spaced take home essay exam worth 50% (i.e. 150 pts).

1. **Short Answer Exam:** One half of the exam (i.e. 150 pts) will consist of an in-class short answer exam consisting of 5-10 short answer questions. These short answer questions are designed to test your knowledge and understanding of key concepts. The questions that appear on the exam will be drawn from a **review sheet** for each of the exams: The material in each exam will be drawn from any and all of the material covered in the course whether that is in: the text readings, lectures, any assigned web site readings, handouts, and major political current events covered in the media. As you will note, each review sheet will include a list of roughly 50-70 possible short answers you might get in that particular exam. While you will not know which of those items will appear on the exam, no questions will appear on the exam that were not on the review sheet. Moreover, before the exam, we will hold a review. You are encouraged to ask questions during the review session that help you prepare for the exam.
2. **Take-Home Essay:** Fifty percent of each exam will consist of one short essay that you will answer as a take-home open book/open notes essay that you will bring to class on the day of the short answer exam. The essays are designed to test critical thinking of the course material. A list of possible essays for each exam is listed on the reviews. You will select one essay question in advance from the list, type a 3-5 double-spaced typed essay in response. There is no required citation style – but you are expected to cite. There is no required format with respect to title page, work cited page, etc. What I will look for is listed below:
 - a. **Well-written, well-organized cogently argued formal essays:** *Be sure to respond in a formal essay format - NOT just as a "stream of consciousness" essay.* For this type of assignments, imagine that you are submitting a formal essay for an English class and not sending an email to a friend. *These essays should be 3-5 double-spaced typed pages in length*
 - b. **Intellectual Honesty and Critical Thinking:** *You must start any controversial essay with summary of Pro and Con arguments.* Most of the essays require taking a position on a controversial issue. At the outset - let me stress as strongly as I can - *there are no politically correct answers. There is absolutely no relationship between the political position you take and the grade you get.* My goal is NOT to make you think like me but to get you to think critically about your own beliefs and positions. *What your grade is based on is the extent to which you are aware of BOTH sides of the debate - in particular the strongest arguments against your own thesis.* If you do not mention these counter-arguments in your essay you will greatly damage your chances for a good grade. So, the easiest way not to forget to mention them - it is start the essay with a summary of pro/con on this issue. Then the heart of your essay you can take on the counter-arguments one at a time and make the point for your own position. If you do this - you will get a good grade whether your values/positions happen to agree with mine or not.
 - c. **Evidence of High Quality Independent Research - Including Citations to Both Sides of Issue:** The third characteristic of a good essay is evidence (through citations) of high quality independent research. You should cite any website you use that is embedded in course lecture. But, for many essays, you will want to find high quality websites (remember, not everything on the internet is factual and not everything is high quality) beyond those included in the lecture. *Of particular importance is to find at least one website that takes a point of view contrary to what you will argue in your essay. By the way, Wikipedia is NOT considered a high quality website.* You will want to include the URL as part of your citation so that I can check out the quality of the websites myself.
 - d. **Original Thinking Beyond Readings and Lectures:** It should go without saying that you should write the essay in your own words. To simply copy an essay off the internet (or Wikipedia) is plagiarism and will result in an F for the entire course. Be careful as well of too great a reliance on quotations or summaries of readings and lectures. Even beyond avoiding plagiarism, you want to use your own ideas as well as your own words as part of the essays. If you can come up with an argument for your thesis that you did not find in the lecture or the readings, that often differentiates an A from a B essay.

III. Internet Assignments: . You will be given 10 internet exercises. You will write a one page assignment based on each exercise. Each is worth 10 pts. for a cumulative 100 pts. All internet assignments will reappear (in an expanded form) as possible essay questions

Make-Up Exams: Make-up policy will be announced prior to first exam.

Optional Extra Credit

You can earn a cumulative maximum of 100 extra credit points (a full letter grade) through any of these extra credit activities.

I. Participation in a Political Event: You may earn UP TO 10 possible pts. for attending any political event (speech, school board meeting, City Council Meeting) & writing a 1-2 page description of what happened at that event. Note: the importance of the political event and the quality of your paper will dramatically effect how many of the 10 potential points you can earn.

II. Email to US or Texas Congressman About Pending Legislation: You may earn UP TO 10 pts for each email you send to your Texas or US Representative or Senator on pending legislation. You would send a copy of the email to Dr. Rogers.

III. Joining a Political Interest Group and Writing a 2 page description of group. You may earn UP TO 10 pts for joining such a group and writing this report. Check with Dr. Rogers to be sure that the group is, in fact, a political interest group.

IV. Participation in a Debate as researcher or speaker: You can earn up to 25 extra credit pts.

IV. Country Reports: With the prior approval of Dr. Rogers, You may also earn points by presenting an oral presentation to class (with visual aids such as power point) on a country. This oral report must be 20 minutes in length. All country reports must also be submitted in an outline to accompany the oral report. You may - if you wish - present this with another student (both would evaluate the other one and both could potentially earn the full points). *The country reports are worth UP TO 25 possible pts.* . All reports must cover the following pts:

- Key Historical Background & Geographic Facts about Country
- Summary of Key Facts About Government & Economy of Country
- Summary of at least one major problem country Face
- Key Foreign Policy Issues and Relations with the US

Rules, Withdrawals, Incompletes, & Academic Dishonesty

Withdrawal Policy - MUST Go Through Dr. Rogers NOT Counseling Center:

1. If are considering requesting a withdrawal you must contact Dr. Rogers (**BEFORE 17:00 hrs. Thursday November 12**) - first with a phone call (210-288-3112) or in person (through appointment). The point of speaking with Dr. Rogers is to explore other options before taking the drastic action of withdrawing (more time for catching up with work or make-ups, incompletes).
2. Following the conversation with Dr. Rogers if you still want to withdraw, you must send an email to jphilprogers@yahoo.com with a brief description of WHY you want to withdraw. **The formal withdrawal deadline is Friday November 13 at 17:00 hrs.**

Academic Dishonesty: Warning Plagiarism & Cheating = F in Course: It is impossible to overstate how seriously I take academic dishonesty. Academic dishonest on exams (e.g. googling test questions will taking exam) or by plagiarizing weekly essays is considered to be a very serious offense. The full text of the policy may be found in the "Student Code of Conduct," in the San Antonio College Catalog. The text reads, in part: "Students found guilty of an act of academic dishonesty may be subject to..."

Academic penalty including one or more of the following when not inconsistent: (a) A requirement to perform additional academic work not required of other students in the course; (b) A reduction in grade; (c) Assignment of a grade of "F" in the course. **In this course, the only option is option (c) i.e. any student who plagiarizes will receive an F in the course; not just the assignment.**

Opportunities to Plagiarize on Internet Abound - Resist the Temptation or Risk an F: Unfortunately, there are two common forms of plagiarism. (1) Purchase of essays (2) Copying significant portions of text without attribution (e.g. from Wikipedia, an essay on line, or a government website). Unless you are using a few useful quotes, you should ALWAYS translate material into your own words. And, under no circumstances, include material from any source without attribution. When in doubt, cite.

Treating Each Other with Respect: All participants in this course (including the Professor) are expected to treat each other with proper respect and in a manner appropriate for an academic environment. This means that all forms of sexual harassment or disparaging remarks about ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation are prohibited. Additionally, that means that even in the midst of the lively debate that I hope to engender in the class, that all participants will continue to respect the right of others to hold different points of view.

No Food or Drink in Class.

Cell Phones or Pagers Ringing in Class = Donuts for Class: Because of the serious distraction of cell phones going off in the middle of class – the policy is that if your cell phone or pager goes off in class – you must bring donuts for everyone in class the next class period. Note: if you have an emergency or work situation that requires that you keep your cell or pager on – simply notify Dr. Rogers of your circumstance in advance.

[Schedule](#)

[Course Homepage](#)

