

# **Pols 231: American Politics I**

Fall 2026

Section 1: 9:00AM-9:50AM MWF, LNGH 230

Section 2: 10:30AM-11:20AM MWF, LNGH 230

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Student Office Hours: Tuesdays 8:15-9:15 and 1:15-2:15, Thursdays 1:15-2:15

Syllabus Updated: August 28, 2026

**Course Description:** We will examine American politics using the analytic tools of political science. Our approach emphasizes the impact that American politics --- and Texas politics as a part of that --- has on people's lives and highlights the ways in which you can make meaningful political change. We will explore American politics in the context of political systems around the world to analyze the strengths of the American political system and areas for improvement. Our focus will be on gaining the skills necessary to be conversant constituents. We will use these skills to solve local community problems and to prepare you for wide-ranging careers that require critical thinking, writing, research, and collaboration.

Prerequisites: None.

Text: None. See readings on Brightspace.

Optional Text: If you are interested in a more traditional textbook, I recommend the free *American Government* (<https://openstax.org/details/books/american-government-4e>).

Catalog Description: Introduction to American politics, including both U.S. and Texas constitutional structures and processes. (Fulfills requirements to be met by Texas public school teachers). This course supports the students' development in the critical thinking competency: finding and evaluating data and its sources, context, and discourse; analysis of a problem or argument; and development of responsive argument or solution.

## **Student Learning Outcomes:**

At the completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe approaches to studying American politics and compare and contrast American politics with the politics of other countries.
2. Synthesize the field of American politics to identify important future directions of research.
3. Apply political science research to contemporary problems in American and Texas politics and to your local community.
4. Demonstrate capacity to produce different forms of political science writing.
5. Develop policy relevant solutions to political science problems. Consider how these solutions could be implemented in your community.
6. Translate applied political science techniques into relevant, career-focused skills.

## **Course Philosophy:**

My goal for this course is to introduce you to the ways in which political science can help you think about complex topics and provide solutions to local public policy problems. You may not have taken a course with this kind of focus before --- that is totally okay. We will work together

to build up your skills throughout the semester. This course uses a mix of teaching styles to help all students succeed. Most class sessions will consist of a mix of short lectures, discussion, group work, activities, and in class writing. You must come to class having completed the reading for the day; the social annotation assignment is meant to prepare you for our discussions. Your participation is critical to the success of the course.

We will be reading published books and journal articles written by political scientists. These readings will be challenging, and we will work together to learn how to read this work effectively. The benefit of learning to read published work in political science is that you will develop strong critical thinking and comprehension skills and be able to simplify and extract the main meaning from complex texts. You can do it!<sup>1</sup> You should expect to spend on average 2-3 hours outside of class on assignments for every class session.

I expect that we will all work to maintain a positive classroom environment. While we often use data and models to provide evidence, political scientists do not have definitive answers to any question. Thus, we will work to understand others’ perspectives in a constructive and respectful manner. Your consistent effort is the key to success in this course. The content may be challenging, but everyone who puts in consistent effort will succeed. During the course, we will be discussing topics that may be sensitive in nature for some students. Treat these topics with care and ground your comments in theories and methods from political science.

**Assignments:**

Assignment	Due Date	Points
Social Annotation	As indicated (15 classes)	156
Class Engagement	Each class	70
In-Class Writing	20 classes	102
Class Notes	September 30, December 4	100
Community Engagement		
Proposal	October 5	50
Poster, Documents, and Self/Peer Evaluation	November 9	172
Research Memo		
Research Question	September 18	50
Research Memo Draft	October 14	150
Research Memo	December 9	150

**Letter Grade Distribution:**

A ≥ 895; B 795 – 894; C 695 – 794; D 600 – 694; F ≤ 599; Satisfactory ≥ 695

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<sup>1</sup> And others before you have done it and have succeeded! See O’Brochta, William. 2022. “Completing the Research Article Writing Process in an Introductory Course.” *Journal of Political Science Education* 18(1): 35-51.

**Topics and Readings:** Below is the schedule of reading and assignments due on the date indicated. I may change the course outline, but I will give you plenty of prior notice.<sup>2</sup>

Unit 1: Who are we?

August 26: What is Political Science?

- Skill: Describing political science.

August 28: What will we be doing?

- Skill: Connecting political science to your life.
- Assignments Due: Beginning of semester survey. You must complete the beginning of semester survey before you can access the syllabus on Perusall. Use Perusall to annotate the syllabus if you have questions about it (ungraded).
- E-mail me a picture of your favorite cute animal before class August 28 for extra credit!

August 31: What is American identity?

- Skill: Learning how to read and annotate journal articles.
- Reading Due (complete 5+ total substantive annotations):
  - Hoover Green, Amelia. 2013. "How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps."
  - Schildkraut, Deborah. 2024. "How Politics Shapes State Identities in the US" *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 24(3): 250-269.

September 2: Comparing Different Conceptions of American Identity

- Skill: Understanding different arguments.
- Assignments Due: Upload your class notes through September 2. This is an assignment aimed to ensure that you are aware of the class notes submission requirements.

September 4: Community Engagement

- Skill: Connecting political science to community issues you want to solve.
- Reading Due (annotations due): O'Brochta, William. 2025. "Social Benefits Motivate Young Adult Civic Engagement." *PS: Political Science & Politics*.
- Note: Select community project groups in class.

September 9: Research Questions

- Skill: Starting the social science research process.

September 11: Community Engagement and Research Questions

September 14: Where are we now? Who is left out?

- Skill: Thinking critically about how government started.

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<sup>2</sup> I have made a conscious effort to represent gender and ethnic/regional diversity of scholarship in these readings.

- Reading Due (annotations due): Kushner, Aaron. 2021. "Cherokee Political Thought and the Development of Tribal Citizenship." *Studies in American Political Development* 35(1): 1-15.

September 16: Research Questions Review

- Skill: Refining research questions.
- Assignments Due: Read the Literature Search handout on Brightspace and complete the "Before Class Activity" section to the best of your ability. Submit to Brightspace.

## Unit 2: Rights and Liberties

September 18: Prior Literature

- Skill: Finding prior literature.
- Assignments Due: Research Question and 250-Word Paragraph.

September 21: Hypotheses

- Skill: Articulating hypotheses.

September 23: The Constitution

- Skill: Reading and interpreting founding documents.
- Reading Due (annotations due): The United States Constitution and Bill of Rights.

September 25: The Bill of Rights

- Skill: Comparing rights across contexts.

September 28: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

- Skill: Understanding historical context to defining rights.
- Reading Due (annotations due): Chilton, Adam, and Mila Versteeg. 2016. "Do Constitutional Rights Make a Difference?" *American Journal of Political Science* 60(3): 575-589.

September 30: Protecting Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

- Skill: Learning how to get involved with issue-based organizations.
- Assignments Due: Class Notes (with entries through the previous class period). We will complete the self-assessment in class, but you must complete it ahead of time if you will not be in class.
- Note: Optional mid-semester survey.

October 2: Community Group Project Proposal Workday (in class)

October 5: Structures of Government/Federalism

- Skill: Advantages and disadvantages of federalism.
- Assignments Due: Community group project proposal.

October 7: Unitary and Federal Government Conversation

- Skill: Having a civil discussion about politics with a friend/family member.
- Reading Due (annotations due): Grumbach, Jacob, and Jamila Michener. 2022. "American Federalism, Political Inequality, and Democratic Erosion." *The ANNALS of the American Association for Political and Social Science* 699: 143-155.

Unit 3: Making Your Voice Heard

October 9: Social Movements and the Internet

- Skill: Understanding the power of social movements.
- Reading Due (annotations due): McAdam, Doug. 1986. "Recruitment to High-Risk Activism: The Case of Freedom Summer." *American Journal of Sociology* 92(1): 64-90.

October 12: Social Movements

- Skill: How can we update past research?

October 14: Community Engaged Project Workday

- Assignments Due: Research Memo Draft (see rubric criteria later in the syllabus).

October 19: Research Design

- Skill: Testing your hypothesis in a methodologically sound manner.

October 21: Research Design and Policy Implications

- Skill: Translating research to public policy.

October 23 Local Government

- Skill: Know your locally elected officials and when and how to contact them.
- Reading Due (annotations due): Moy, Bryant. 2021. "Can Social Pressure Foster Responsiveness? An Open Records Field Experiment with Mayoral Offices." *Journal of Experimental Political Science* 8(2): 117-127.

October 26: Community Engaged Project Workday

October 28: Voting

- Skill: Describe the process of voting in Texas.
- Reading Due (annotations due): Coll, Joseph, and Courtney Juelich. 2022. "Electoral Double-Bind: How Electoral Environments Affect Racial and Ethnic Youth Voting Behavior." *The Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics* 7: 544-571.

October 30: Researching Candidates

- Skill: Researching local candidates.

## Unit 4: Institutions

### November 2: Party Platforms

- Skill: Critically analyze party platforms.
- Reading Due (annotations due): Mason, Lilliana. 2015. "I Disrespectfully Agree: The Differential Effects of Partisan Sorting on Social and Issue Polarization." *American Journal of Political Science* 59(1): 128-145.

### November 4: Campaigns

- Skill: Articulate campaign priorities.

### November 6: Community Engaged Project Workday

### November 9: Project Presentations

- Skill: Providing constructive feedback.
- Assignments Due: Project Poster (group submission), Documents (group submission), and self and peer evaluation (each student must complete survey on Brightspace).

### November 11: Media

- Skill: Critically analyze political media.
- Reading Due (annotations due): Saks, Jeremy, and Ashley Hopkins. 2024. "US Regional Newspapers and Instagram: A Content Analysis." *Electronic News* 18(1): 49-63.

### November 13: Congress Simulation Preparation

- Skill: Studying a representative's political positions.
- Reading Due (annotations due):
  - Vincent, Carol Hardy and Laura B. Comay. 2020. *The Great American Outdoors Act, H.R. 1957: Selected Provisions*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service.
  - Plus claim your Senator and follow the instructions on the third page of the reading.

### November 16: Congress Simulation

- Skill: Interacting with colleagues in a professional government setting.

### November 18: Presidency

- Skill: Tracing how presidents use power.
- Reading due (annotations due): Goidel, Spencer, and Kirby Goidel. 2025. "If I Could Turn Back Time: The Authoritarian Connection to Nostalgia." *Research & Politics* 12(2): 1-9.

### November 20: Interest Groups

- Skill: Learning how to articulate interest group priorities to presidents.

November 23: Who are Bureaucrats?

- Skill: Understanding the difference between politicians and bureaucrats.
- Reading Due (annotations due): Jackson, William, Milena Neshkova, and Meredith Newman. 2024. "Feminine Leadership and Juvenile Justice Outcomes: The Florida Experience." *Public Administration Review* 84(3): 544-559.

December 2: Representative Bureaucracy

- Skill: Writing survey questions and conducting surveys.
- Assignments Due: Attend any local government meeting (either virtually or in-person including a recorded session) from the following list at any point during the semester. Write a 250-word paragraph describing the meeting and reflecting on your experience. Be sure to specify which meeting you attended.
  - NOTE: If you attend the Seguin City Council meeting in-person with me, no paragraph is required. Just write that you attended that meeting.
  1. TLU SGA: Tuesdays at 7PM in Dunne Conference Center (Tschoepe Hall).
  2. Seguin City Council: First and Third Tuesdays at 5:30PM at 210 E. Gonzales Street. Video and livestream: <https://cityofseguintx.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>
  3. Seguin Planning and Zoning Commission: Second Tuesdays at 5:30PM at 210 E. Gonzales Street. Video and livestream: <https://cityofseguintx.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>
  4. Seguin Library Advisory Board: Second Tuesday at 5:30 at 210 W. Nolte Street.
  5. Guadalupe County Commissioners Court: Tuesdays at 10AM at 101 E. Court Street. Recordings: <https://www.guadalupe.tx.gov/page/commcourt.agendas>
  6. Seguin ISD Board Meeting: Fourth Tuesdays at 6:30PM at 1221 E. Kingsbury Street. Stream: <https://www.youtube.com/@SeguinISD/streams>
  7. Other local government meetings open to the public that take place either in Guadalupe County or in your hometown (e.g., New Braunfels City Council, San Marcos City Council). The meeting can be in-person, virtual, or a recording. It must be a local government meeting (no state or federal government meetings).

December 2: Courts

- Skill: Your role as a potential juror.

December 4: Synthesis

- Assignments Due: Class Notes (with entries through the previous class; submit before class).
- Note: We will complete the class notes self-assessment and end-of-semester survey in class.

December 7: Memo Workday (in class)

December 9: NO CLASS

- Assignments Due: Research memo.

Final Exam Period: None. Complete end-of-semester survey.

## Description of Assignments:

### Social Annotation (156 points; 13 points each)

Completing and engaging with course material and other students is essential to your success in this course. We will be using Perusall (linked on Brightspace) for social annotation. The idea behind social annotation is that you can engage with students in the course while reading. This will help you to read in a more active and engaged way, to come to class more prepared for our discussions, and to generate ideas that you would like to raise in class. My motivation in asking you to do social annotations is to help you read efficiently. This is a skill that you *can* develop.

For each assigned reading where annotations are due, complete the following:

- Go to Brightspace and click on the link for an assigned reading. You must access Perusall through Brightspace for your annotations to be saved.
- Read the text. I recommend skimming through the entire text once, marking any points of confusion, and asking clarification or definition questions. These are not substantive annotations that count toward your grade, but they will help you read more effectively.
- Return to the text later and read it again. While doing so, **make at least five substantive annotations**. Examples of substantive and not substantive annotations follow.
- Reading and completing the annotations for a particular class period should take you no less than 1 hour and no more than 2 hours. If you find yourself spending more time on an assignment, refer back to the Hoover Green piece on reading effectively. Feel free to come talk to me if you are having any difficulty.

#### How to write a substantive annotation:

1. Find a part of the reading that is interesting, surprising, or about which you would like to make an annotation.
2. Highlight the relevant text and leave an annotation or, if someone else has already highlighted the text, leave a comment responding to their annotation.
3. In your annotation, go beyond agreeing with or re-stating what the reading is saying. Discuss how you have thought about and processed the information you read. Make connections to concepts from your notes or that you learned in class. Discuss how the reading relates to you personally or to current events. Provide depth by writing at least three sentences per annotation.
4. Complete at least five substantive annotations, spread throughout the reading.

Non-exhaustive examples of substantive and not substantive annotations:

Notice that the substantive comments go far beyond a single sentence and focus on explaining and making connections.

	Not substantive	Substantive
Definition	This term means [description of term].	This term means [description of term]. By introducing this concept, the authors [describe why the concept is important]. In addition, we discussed this concept in class [describe how].
Upvote	[Student uses the green checkmark to upvote another student's comment]	[Upvote comment] This makes a lot of sense to me because [describe why]. But, I can also see how [introduce a different point of view].
Question	What are the impacts of [describe something]?	What are the impacts of [describe something]? I think that the impact is [describe impact] because [describe reason]. This is important because [describe why].
Agreement	I agree.	I agree because [describe why]. [Tell story about experience you have had related to the concept being discussed].
Example	This is true today.	This is true today because [describe specific instance]. I know people impacted by [describe topic and how people are impacted].
Clarification	What does this mean?	What does [describe phrase] mean? My interpretation is that it probably means [describe possible meaning], but I also found a source online [list source] that says [describe what the source says]. Clarifying this definition is important because [describe why].
Interesting	This is interesting. I had not thought about this before.	This resonated with me because I have had [describe some experience]. I also see [describe the topic] mentioned frequently in the news like in a recent story [describe story].

Submission and Evaluation: You should submit annotations for the indicated readings. **Your three lowest annotation grades will be dropped (this includes any annotations you do not turn in, so feel free to skip when you are busy).** Be sure to check your annotation grades frequently, as simply completing five annotations will not get you credit if those annotations are not substantive.

If you experience some problem completing annotations in Perusall, you can e-mail me your annotations by the time they are due.

I evaluate annotations in the following way:

- I will engage with you in Perusall by responding to questions and annotations.
- After annotations are due, I count the number of annotations you submitted to ensure you submitted at least five annotations. I then check to ensure that your annotations are

substantive. This is not an exact science, which is why I drop your three lowest annotation grades. You will receive an evaluation of:

- Complete (13 points): Spends an appropriate amount of time reading the text. Excellent annotations: at least five substantive annotations; material is engaged well. Substantive annotations are typically at least three sentences each.
- Incomplete (0 points): Unsatisfactory annotations: poor quality annotations (only short responses or not substantive responses) or fewer than five substantive annotations. Or does not spend an appropriate amount of time reading the text to make substantive annotations. Or no submission/submitted late.
- Each individual annotation grade is only a small part of your overall course grade. Missing one annotation will not impact you much, but missing many will.

### **Class Engagement (70 points)**

I hope that class time will be a productive space to discuss readings, work in groups to complete activities, teach your peers, and relate the course to your life experiences. Class engagement goes beyond simply showing up for class, though being in class is definitely an important component. If you miss a substantial amount of class, you can expect to receive a 0 on class engagement.

I will evaluate class engagement based on the following criteria: Listen respectfully, ask respectful questions, and actively participate. You play a critical part in maintaining an inclusive classroom climate. You must participate both during class and during the work we do outside of class (annotations, projects, et. cetera); if you feel uncomfortable participating, please reach out to me so we can figure out a way for you to be engaged.

Evaluation: The final class engagement grade will be assigned at my discretion based on a holistic evaluation of your performance. If you have concerns about your engagement, please discuss them with me during the semester. We can work together to help you do well in this component of the course.

### **In-Class Writing (102 points; 6 points each)**

Writing clearly and effectively is a difficult skill for all political scientists, and practice is the best way to improve your writing ability. At some point during about half of our classes, we will engage in short writing exercises. These writing exercises are designed to help you think about course content, to develop your writing skills, and to prepare you for completing the research memo assignment. These writing assignments can occur at any time during any given class. You must be physically present in class when the writing assignment is announced to complete it. I highly value these writing exercises to help you improve your ability to express ideas.

**Writing exercises can only be completed if you are physically present in class.** They cannot be made up, and they cannot be completed if you do not attend class. Completing an in-class writing assignment without being in class is academic misconduct and is grounds for a referral to the Student Conduct Office.

Evaluation: Writing exercises will be graded for completion: complete writing exercises provide a thoughtful response to the writing prompt and are of sufficient length given the time we had in class for the writing exercise (at least a few full and complete sentences). Complete writing exercises will be awarded full credit. Writing exercises that do not thoughtfully engage with the writing prompt will receive no credit. **Your three lowest writing assignment grades will be dropped.**

### **Class Notes (100 points; 50 points each)**

Students learn and make connections between different course concepts by taking notes and referring to them throughout the semester. The class notes assignment is meant to help encourage you to take effective notes and to teach effective notetaking.

To complete your class notes, take notes either in a physical notebook or in a computer file. I encourage you to take notes by hand, as doing so improves retention.<sup>3</sup> The dates when the class notes are to be submitted are marked on the syllabus. If you are taking notes in a physical notebook, you should create an electronic copy of your class notes (scan or take pictures) to submit on the indicated class days. In order to earn an “A,” your class notes must meet all of the self-assessment criteria listed below.

Please remember that your class notes must be your own work. If you are absent, talk to a friend about what happened in class, view the slides, and create your own notes for that class period. You are free to collaborate with other students as long as you write the entirety of your class notes. Copying notes from other students without appropriate attribution is plagiarism.

Students often struggle to organize their notes and ask for suggestions to help. There is no one-size-fits all organizational method or process. I recommend the following process:

1. Create a header for each class session before class.
2. As class starts, list the day’s objectives (or continue the objectives from the previous class).
3. Begin taking notes in the notes section. Each topic, discussion, or activity should have its own item in a numbered list. Fill in detailed notes --- phrases, ideas, and descriptions --- as class proceeds. Key tip: good notes are not just copying words from the slides. You need to write in your own words.
4. **Important!** After class is over, go back to your notes and the slides from the class. Fill in key terms, additional notes that you missed, and write a brief reflection. This process should take about 15 minutes per class.
  - a. Slides for this course unlock every other class day at 11:30AM.
  - b. Some class days will mostly or entirely be small group activities, so you may have fewer notes for these classes. You should still capture what you learned from the activity in your notes.

Following this process will result in notes that meet the criteria and will look like this template:

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<sup>3</sup> Smoker, Timothy J, Carrie E. Murphy, and Allison K. Rockwell. 2009. “Comparing Memory for Handwriting versus Typing,” *Proceedings of the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society Annual Meeting* 53(22):1744-1747.

## **August 28: Introductory Class**

Objectives: [bulleted list of objectives]

Key Terms: [bulleted list of at least two key terms from class]

Notes: [numbered list with each topic/discussion/activity from class followed by detailed notes. Be sure not to just copy from the slides, as that is not very helpful!]

Reflection: [two sentence reflection on that day's class]

Evaluation: Twice during the semester, I will ask you to submit your class notes for a grade (plus one practice notes submission). Your class notes should be submitted to Brightspace before class.

We will conduct an in-class activity with your class notes where you will complete a self-assessment; if you are not in class on that day, you must complete the self-assessment before class time. I will read your self-assessment and reserve the right to adjust the grade you give yourself. Your self-assessment will include the following questions exactly as written. This means that your class notes should meet all the criteria listed below.

1. I have notes for each and every class period (including any I have missed). Count the number of classes for which you have notes and write that number here. Each class day must be labeled with a heading to do this. If you are missing notes for classes, at most you can earn the fraction of the points for which some notes are present.
2. My class notes are my own work. Copying notes from other students without appropriate attribution is considered plagiarism.
3. My class note entries are complete and sufficiently detailed and include notes from each class (including any I may have missed). Taking good notes involves summarizing, paraphrasing, and re-stating in your own words. My notes entries contain enough detail that a friend who is not in the class could use them to study for a quiz or test (and get a good grade!). With limited exceptions, each entry should be 200+ words.
4. If you were to evaluate your class notes on a grading scale from A to F based on the "complete and sufficiently detailed" criterion, what grade would you assign and why? Please provide your self assigned grade and a few sentences of explanation.

## **Community Engaged Project (222 points)**

Theories and concepts from political science play out in real ways in local communities. Local political issues and public policy problems often have the most impact on people's lives, meaning that understanding the connection between political science these local issues is of utmost importance. We will work on a community engaged project to help you make this connection and to better understand the needs of the community and how you might contribute.

You will work in groups to implement a community engaged project during the semester.<sup>4</sup> While your group will have a lot of flexibility in determining how you will design and implement your project, your group should choose one project topic from the list below. I have developed these project topics for us to have fruitful discussions about issues in American politics from different perspectives across groups and to ensure that groups do not all work on the same topic and overwhelm local organizations and contacts who are experts on these topics.

After selecting a topic, your group will develop a short project proposal that details how you will implement your project. I will provide feedback on the project proposal. You will then have time to implement the project and to prepare documents and a poster discussing your results.

#### Project Topics:

1. Needs assessment: Choose a public policy issue that your group cares about. Identify community organizations in Seguin or South-Central Texas working on this issue. Research these community organizations to find out how they operate, what their programs are, and how TLU students might get involved in their organizations. Select one organization of particular interest and reach out to the organization (reach out only after your project proposal is approved). Visit the organization and meet with organization staff to talk about their needs. As a group, take one small action that helps to connect the organization with TLU and/or TLU students (i.e., connect them with an office on campus, make an agreement with a club or organization to host an event at the organization, et. cetera). Do one extra thing beyond these requirements to enhance the project. Then, complete the documents section, poster, and self/peer evaluation.
2. Community contact: Choose a public policy issue that your group cares about. Identify an appropriate elected official to contact to understand their views on this issue. Research the issue and the elected official's views. Contact the elected official (only after your project proposal is approved) and ask them about their views on this issue. As a group, take one small action that supports your group's position on the issue (i.e., share your views with the elected official, talk about the issue with others to spread awareness, et. cetera). Do one extra thing beyond these requirements to enhance the project. Then, complete the documents section, poster, and self/peer evaluation.
3. Improving TLU: Identify a potential problem on campus that your group thinks should be resolved. The potential problem cannot be lack of parking because of the frequency with which this potential problem has already been investigated. Conduct research to show that your potential problem indeed exists and develop a plan to determine a change that could improve the problem. Find out about the process for getting the change implemented, including determining key stakeholders other than Dr. Cottrell (she is a stakeholder in every campus issue!). Contact one stakeholder (only after your project proposal is approved) and meet with them to ask them about this issue. As a group, take one small action that helps to address your issue (i.e., report a specific problem to facilities, go to a student government meeting and raise the issue, et. cetera). Do one extra

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<sup>4</sup> You are responsible for working with your group. Individual projects and alternate assignments are not possible.

thing beyond these requirements to enhance the project. Then, complete the documents section, poster, and self/peer evaluation.

Timeline:

1. At the appointed time during class, form a group of between 4 and 5 members of the course. Think carefully about with whom you want to work.
2. Project Proposal (50 points): Select a project topic and develop a project proposal describing the project your group plans to implement related to this project topic. The project proposal should include the following components and be at least 750 words.
  1. Interest: Why is your group interested in this project topic?
  2. Project goals: Develop a goal that you hope to achieve as a result of this project. What would you like to know about your topic? Ensure that the goal is specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound.
  3. Plan: Create a step-by-step plan to complete your project. This plan should have a list of tasks with each task assigned to a group member. The plan should list the person you are planning to interview, the small action your group is planning to take, and the one extra thing your group is planning to do. The plan should also include how your group will complete both the documents and the poster.
  4. Discussion: How does your project relate to American politics? Your group should describe how your project reflects theories and ideas we are discussing in the course. Specifically mention readings and concepts from class.
3. Turn in the project proposal. Your group cannot complete the project without turning in a project proposal. Only one group member needs to submit your proposal.
4. Implement the project proposal.
5. Poster, Documents, and Self/Peer Evaluation (172 points):

Documents: Each project requires submitting a document with four parts described below. This document must be wholly different from the text you put on your poster. Submit one document per group to Brightspace.

Your documents section should be one document with these sections in this order. The total length of the documents section is at least 2,000 words plus 5 selfies with captions:

1. Annotated Completed Plan (minimum 1,500 words):
  - a. Revise the step-by-step plan you created in your project proposal. Ensure that each student is assigned equal work and that the steps cover all parts of the project including research, the interview, the small step, and the one extra thing.
  - b. Under each step of the plan, include all your research, notes, documents, planning, et. cetera. Describe each step thoroughly so that someone with no knowledge of the project can fully understand what occurred. Ensure that key aspects of the project are thoroughly described including the interview, the small step that your group took, and the one extra thing that your group did.
2. Small Step Reflection (minimum 250 words):
  - a. Each group is required to take one small step to address the problem or issue that they identified. Reflect on the small step that your group took. Is it what

you planned to do? Why or why not? Did the small step have its intended impact? Why or why not? Be specific.

3. One Extra Thing Reflection (minimum 250 words):
  - a. Each group is required to do “one extra thing” as part of the project that meaningfully goes beyond the project requirements. How did your group decide on your particular one extra thing? Whose idea was it? How did your group go about implementing the one extra thing? Did it go as you intended? If you were to give advice to another group completing the project, would you recommend that they complete the same one extra thing? Why or why not?
4. Selfies and Captions (minimum 5 photos):
  - a. Include at least five selfies that your group took of different things during the process of completing the project. The photos must be taken outside of the classroom project work time and must relate to completing the project. Examples include a selfie with the person you interviewed, a selfie of the group working together on the project, a selfie with a problem you identified on campus or in the community, et. cetera. Provide a caption describing each selfie.

Poster: Create a poster of any size using any medium. If your group wants the chance to win the “best poster” prize of your poster hanging on my office door next semester, it must be a 22x28 paper poster (not foam board or a tri-fold). **Submit one poster (or a photograph of it) per group to Brightspace and bring the poster to class.** All group members should be prepared to discuss the poster. The poster should include the following elements, written in enough detail that someone can understand the poster just by reading it.

1. Topic description: Describe why you chose your topic and how you decided to take the general topic description and narrow it down.
2. Project goals: Discuss your project goals and whether you met your goals.
3. Plan: Briefly describe your project plan, focusing on why you chose to structure your project in this way. Draw on theories and concepts from class.
4. Interview: Describe the interview you conducted in some detail.
5. Impact evaluation: Describe the small action your group took. Describe what you learned about community needs from this project. What could people potentially do in the future to address these needs?
6. Reflection: Describe your experience conducting the project. Reflect on the limitations of the project and the overall impact that your project had.
7. Discussion: Provide specific connections between the results of your project and concepts from this course. Mention connections to readings, themes, and concepts from class.
8. Visuals: Use pictures, graphics, flowcharts, and other visual aids to help describe parts of your project.

Self and peer evaluation: Each individual group member must complete the self and peer evaluation questionnaire for an individual grade. The questionnaire is located on Brightspace.

Evaluation: Your project proposal and poster, documents, and self/peer evaluation will be graded on the below rubrics. I expect that each group will receive the same project proposal and project poster, and documents grade. Should the self and peer evaluations reveal significant inequities in how the work was performed, I reserve the right to score each group member separately based on the components of the project that they directly contributed to. Please see me if your group runs into any difficulties as soon as possible.

### Project Proposal Grading Rubric

50 points	Outstanding	Proficient	Needs Improvement
Is at least 750 words	4	2	0
Describes why you are interested in the topic	10 8	6 4	2 0
Lists and describes at least one well-formed project goal	10 8	6 4	2 0
Presents a step-by-step implementation plan with all tasks assigned to group members (by group member name)	16 12	10 6	4 0
Discussion is robust and mentions specific connections to course concepts and readings	10 8	6 4	2 0

Project Poster, Documents, and Self/Peer Evaluation Rubric

172 points	Outstanding	Proficient	Needs Improvement
<b>Poster (60 points)</b>			
Describes the topic	5 4	3 2	1 0
Lists and explains project goals	5 4	3 2	1 0
Describes project plan, referencing concepts from class as justification for how the plan was developed	10 8	6 4	2 0
Describes interview in detail	5 4	3 2	1 0
Has thoughtful discussion of project impact	5 4	3 2	1 0
Discussion links directly to course content	10 8	6 4	2 0
Is visually appealing	5 4	3 2	1 0
Is well organized	5 4	3 2	1 0
All group members are able to discuss the poster	10 8	6 4	2 0
<b>Documents (100 points)</b>			
Meets length requirements	10	5	0
Annotated completed plan is clearly written	10 8	6 4	2 0
Annotated completed plan covers all steps of the project	10 8	6 4	2 0
Annotated completed plan includes research (scholarly, news stories, websites) and describes the sources thoroughly	10 8	6 4	2 0
Annotated completed plan describes the interview conducted and what was learned	10 8	6 4	2 0
Annotated completed plan describes small action taken to address the problem in detail, with justification of why that action was taken	10 8	6 4	2 0
Annotated completed plan describes one extra thing done in detail with its impact	10 8	6 4	2 0
Annotated completed plan completed plan includes all relevant information	10	5	0
Small step reflection is thorough, specific, and meaningful	5 4	3 2	1 0
One extra thing reflection is thorough, specific, and meaningful	5 4	3 2	1 0
Five selfies included that capture different parts of the project	5 4	3 2	1 0
Five selfies are accompanied by captions discussing what is occurring in the selfie	5 4	3 2	1 0
<b>Self and Peer Evaluation (12 points)</b>			
You complete an evaluation of self and peers and provide a well explained synthesis of what was learned	12	10 8 6	4 2 0

## Research Memo

Political scientists conduct research to provide potential solutions to public policy problems. Conducting political science research also helps to develop key research, writing, and critical thinking skills that will prepare you for a wide range of future careers. A large part of this course helping you to enter the political science community and learning to share your own ideas and theories. Many of the skills taught in this course may be new to you, and you may find them difficult. Rest assured that tenured academics who have been conducting research for years still struggle throughout the research process.

At the end of the semester, you will turn in a research memo that briefly describes a question of interest to you in American politics, reviews relevant literature, proposes a hypothesis, develops a research design, and discusses potential policy implications. The audience for your memo consists of political science students, professors, and policy makers who do not know you and who are not familiar with your research project. You should write all components of your research memo with this audience in mind. We will introduce and work through each component of your memo in class. Your task outside of class will be to expand what you prepared in class to ensure that it meets the rubric requirements.

### Research Question (50 points)

Your research memo will address a research question: a problem that you feel needs to be addressed or a puzzle you have discovered. You will use this research question to write the rest of the memo, though it is perfectly okay if your question shifts slightly as the course progresses. You must choose a research question related to American politics.

For this assignment, write a *one sentence* research question followed by a 250-word description of your question. In the description, include why you think the question is interesting and how the question relates to contemporary issues in American politics.

Evaluation: Your research question and paragraph description will be evaluated based on the following rubric on the next page.

Research Question Grading Rubric

50 points	Outstanding	Proficient	Needs Improvement
<b>Research Question</b>			
Is concise	4	2	0
Presents a puzzle/addresses a debate in the field or in public policy	10 8	6 4	2 0
Sets up a project that is falsifiable, not descriptive	10 8	6 4	2 0
Can plausibly be tested empirically	4	2	0
<b>Description</b>			
States why the question is relevant and important (at least 4 sentences)	12 10	8 4	2 0
Describes how the question fits into contemporary political discourse	10 8	6 4	2 0

You will write a research memo using your research question as a guide. We will work in class to develop each part of your research memo, so you will have the opportunity to obtain feedback during class. You will also turn in a draft of your research memo partway through the semester.

Your sources must be cited using the American Political Science Association (APSA) style guide. This means that each time you draw ideas from a source, you should place an in-text citation at the end of the sentence and put a reference in the references section.

Research Memo Draft (150 points)

Your research memo draft will contain a short introduction describing your research question, discuss how your research question differs from prior literature, and state a hypothesis. We will discuss in class a model of how to format each part of your research memo draft. I strongly recommend that you follow this format, as it follows the grading rubric.

Order of sections for your research memo draft:

- Introduction: See below for criteria
- Prior Literature: See below for criteria
- Hypothesis: See below for criteria
- References: A list of references in APSA (American Political Science Association) citation style. See Brightspace for formatting guidelines.

You should include a references section formatted in APSA (American Political Science Association) style at the end of your research memo draft; see examples in the course policies section at the end of the syllabus. **Your research memo draft must be at least 1,000 words, not including references. Memos of fewer than 1,000 words (not including references) will receive a 0.** The rubric follows here and on the next page.

Research Memo Draft Rubric

150 points	Outstanding	Proficient	Needs Improvement
<b>Article Title</b>			
Is informative about the entire research project	4	2	0
Is appealing and interesting (not titled “Research Memo Draft”)	4	2	0
<b>Introduction</b>			
Begins with an anecdote, question, surprising case/fact to capture the reader’s attention (at least one paragraph)	5 4	3 2	1 0
States the research question clearly	5 4	3 2	1 0
Discusses the importance of the research question to the author and to contemporary American politics (at least a paragraph)	5 4	3 2	1 0

Provides an overview of each section of the memo (at least a paragraph)	5 4	3 2	1 0
<b>Prior Literature</b>			
Cites at least six sources	4	2	0
Includes a range of publication years	4	2	0
Sources are from peer-reviewed political science journal articles and/or peer-reviewed books published by academic presses (no websites or news stories)	5 4	3 2	1 0
Sources are grouped into topics depending on the theoretical arguments and empirical findings	10 8	6 4	2 0
Each topic is given a meaningful name (use headers to indicate each topic)	4	2	0
There are several sources for each topic	4	2	0
Each topic is synthesized in an individual paragraph using in-text citations	10 8	6 4	2 0
Several paragraphs for each topic describe how your research question contributes to, but is distinct from, the work you cited	12 10	8 4	2 0
No direct quotations are used	4	2	0
<b>Hypothesis Section</b>			
Begins by clearly stating the hypothesis	4	2	0
Hypothesis follows “if/then” format	5 4	3 2	1 0
Hypothesis is clear and concise	5 4	3 2	1 0
Hypothesis is falsifiable	5 4	3 2	1 0
Includes a figure of a “flow diagram” linking the independent variable to the main dependent variable (actually insert a figure into your memo)	10 8	6 4	2 0
Explains each step of the flow diagram in multiple paragraphs under the flow diagram	14 12	10 8	4 0
<b>Formatting</b>			
Includes a word count (not including references) at the top of the first page of the memo	2		0
Introduction, prior literature, and hypothesis sections have headings with informative names (not just “introduction”)	10	5	0
Memo draft ends with reference list in APSA citation style	10	5	0

### Research Memo (150 points)

Your research memo will revise your research memo draft to take into account feedback you received and add a section proposing a research design and a conclusion discussing the policy implications of your research question. You should follow the format described in the rubric that we discussed during class.

**Your research memo must be at least 2,000 words, not including references or your change sheet. Memos of fewer than 2,000 words will receive a 0. There is no set maximum word count, though 2,500 to 3,000 words is a good limit.**

Order of sections for your research memo:

- Change sheet: List all of the changes you have made to the introduction, prior literature, and hypothesis sections of your research memo since turning in your research memo draft. Your change sheet can be written in bullets or sentences.
- Introduction: A revised version of your introduction.
- Prior Literature: A revised version of your prior literature section.
- Hypothesis: A revised version of your hypothesis section.
- Research Design: A new section describing how you would go about testing your hypothesis if you were to have unlimited time and resources. **This is just a proposed design. Do not survey anyone or collect any data.**
- Policy Implications: A new section summarizing your memo, describing policy implications, and describing what you learned.
- References: A list of references in APSA (American Political Science Association) citation style.

Research Memo Rubric

150 points	Outstanding	Proficient	Needs Improvement
<b>Change sheet is detailed</b>	10	5	0
<b>Revisions to Research Memo Draft (introduction, prior literature, and hypothesis sections)</b>	14 12	10 8	4 0
<b>Research Design</b>			
Has an informative title (not “research design”)	4	2	0
Describes the empirical strategy you are using and why it is appropriate (e.g., survey, panel study, aggregate data analysis, trend analysis; at least a paragraph)	10 8	6 4	2 0
Explains case selection (the people or places you are collecting data from) in detail with strengths and weaknesses (several paragraphs)	10 8	6 4	2 0
Precisely describes data sources (including question wording for surveys or specific datasets and sources for geographic areas; at least a paragraph)	12 10	8 4	2 0
Lists independent and dependent variables explicitly	4	2	0

Describes how variables measure parts of your hypothesis (at least a paragraph)	5 4	3 2	1 0
Addresses validity and measurement issues with your variables (at least a paragraph)	5 4	3 2	1 0
Considers and describes control variables (impact both your IV and DV; at least a paragraph)	5 4	3 2	1 0
Discusses robustness checks or supplementary analyses (an additional analysis using a different empirical strategy; several paragraphs)	5 4	3 2	1 0
Concludes by describing how well your research design can test your hypothesis (at least a paragraph)	10 8	6 4	2 0
<b>Policy Implications</b>			
Reminds the reader of the topic, literature, hypothesis, and methods (at least a paragraph)	5 4	3 2	1 0
Describes why your research is interesting and relevant for policymakers and scholars (at least a paragraph)	10 8	6 4	2 0
Discusses one thing you have learned about political science, American politics, or the research process by writing this research memo (at least a paragraph)	5 4	3 2	1 0
<b>Cohesiveness, Creativity, and Effectiveness</b>			
<b>Formatting</b>			
Includes a word count (not including references or the cover sheet) at the top of the first page of the memo	2		0
Introduction, prior literature, hypothesis, research design, and policy implications sections have headings with informative names (not just “introduction”). These sections are organized in this order in the memo	10	5	0
Memo ends with reference list in APSA citation style	10	5	0

## Course Policies:

- General:
  - You agree to the provisions in the Common Syllabus, available on Brightspace.
  - All assignments are to be turned in on Brightspace and are due at class time on the date indicated unless otherwise noted. Your community engaged project poster must be printed/hard copy as well as submitted on Brightspace.
  - You are responsible for ensuring that your assignments submit to Brightspace successfully and that the file you submitted can be displayed. All file submissions except the project poster and class notes must be in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or PDF format. Files in other formats cannot be read by Brightspace. I grade your last Brightspace submission for a given assignment.

- Should you have an accommodation, please meet with me during the first two weeks of classes, either during office hours or by appointment, to discuss.
- Plagiarism:
  - Citations must be in American Political Science Association (APSA) style. Use of this style is important, as it governs the writing of professional political science. The APSA style manual is posted on Brightspace.
    - Book format: Grace, Philip. 2016. *Affectionate Authorities: Fathers and Fatherly Roles in Late Medieval Basel*. London: Routledge.
    - Journal article format: Walsh, Germaine Paulo. 2002. "Is Jane Austin Politically Correct? Interpreting Mansfield Park." *Perspectives on Political Science* 31(1): 15-26.
    - In-text citation format: Professors at TLU are doing interesting research (Grace 2016; Walsh 2002).
  - Plagiarism, including inappropriate attribution, is an Academic Honesty Violation and is grounds for failure from the course.
    - Always cite your sources. If you are unsure if you are paraphrasing, rewrite to use either a direct quotation or paraphrase differently. Feel free to talk to me if you are unsure whether or how to cite a source.
    - You can use the Turnitin draft coach on Word Online to run a Turnitin report.
    - Wikipedia is not an appropriate academic source.
    - Artificial intelligence tools will be of little help in this course. Only tools that assist with brainstorming concepts or basic spelling and grammar are allowed in this course. If you use one of these tools, you must cite it. All work must be wholly your own, and sentences must be constructed without assistance. All other uses are Academic Honesty Violations.
- Student Office Hours:
  - Student office hours are a time for you to come by to speak with me without an appointment. Please come by to see me early in the semester. I am happy to discuss your progress in the course, political science topics, and potential career paths. These student office hours are for you; please do not feel like you are imposing by stopping by. If you want to come by but don't know what to ask, ask me about my favorite fruit!
- Extra Credit:
  - I offer five points of extra credit on your research memo draft if you come by my student office hours to talk to me about it before it is due.
- Technology:
  - We will use technology in class. As a result, you are expected to bring a laptop, tablet, or smartphone to each of our class sessions (laptop or tablet preferred). If you will not have regular access to one of these devices, you can borrow a laptop from the bookstore, use a classmate's laptop, or speak with me and we will work out an alternative approach.
  - You are expected to use your devices for class purposes only. Using your device in other ways is distracting to other students, and I reserve the right to deduct up to 10% of your final grade or to drop you from the class in serious cases.

- Taking photos, recording audio/video of class, or distributing any class materials is not permitted.
- Attendance:
  - I understand that there are reasons that you may need to be absent from class. I expect that you will be responsible and attend class as much as possible. Accordingly, **you do not need to let me know when you will be absent** unless it is a university sponsored absence. If you are absent, it is your responsibility to learn what we did from someone else in class, to review all material on Brightspace, and to come speak with me during student office hours.
  - Attending class is the biggest key to success in this course. **It is best to limit absences to 3 or fewer during the semester. 8 or more absences result in automatic failure from the course.**
- Late Work:
  - All assignments in this course are most relevant to you and to the rest of the students if they are turned in the day that they are due. As such, assignments will only be accepted late if prior arrangements for an extension have been made.
  - Extensions will only be given in extraordinary circumstances. Feel free to speak with me if numerous assignments are due around the same time; we can develop a plan together to help you complete everything on time. To request an extension, you must e-mail me at least 48 hours before the assignment is due with the reasons behind your request. We can then work together to figure out how you can turn the assignment in on time or make alternate arrangements in extraordinary circumstances.
- Grading:
  - Everyone can succeed in this course, and it is my goal to help you do so! Coming to class prepared, completing assignments on time, working hard, and doing your best are the biggest tickets to doing well.
  - Grades will only be changed if I made an arithmetic error or mistake. If you feel that this happened to you, please send me an e-mail no later than three days after the assignment is returned detailing the error.
  - If you are concerned about a grade you receive, please discuss it with me. I am happy to discuss how you can improve in future work.
  - I do not give incomplete grades unless there is a documented medical crisis or documented emergency late in the semester and you have communicated about this to me when the incident occurs.
- Checking Your Grade:
  - You can always check your grade in the course by looking at the Grades tab. Be sure to view all rubric feedback on graded items.
  - The course grade reflects the points you have earned thus far in the course (starting at 0 points). You can calculate your estimated final grade using the grade estimator spreadsheet on Brightspace.
- Contacting Me:
  - E-mail is the best way to contact me outside of student office hours. Please do not use Brightspace Messages, as I am unlikely to see your message promptly. You can call my office phone, but my e-mail response time is likely to be quicker.

- I will respond to your e-mails promptly. In general, you can expect a response within 24 hours and that e-mails will be answered between 9AM and 5PM, Monday through Friday. While I understand students work outside of these hours, please plan ahead to give me time to respond.
- Be sure to check the syllabus before e-mailing; questions answered in the syllabus will not be answered via e-mail.
- Often, e-mail is best used to set-up an individual meeting. It is easier for us to understand each other in a meeting rather than via lengthy e-mail exchanges.
- Please treat e-mails as professional correspondence. E-mails may only come from your tlu.edu e-mail address and should include a salutation (e.g., Dear Dr. O'Brochta), a clear message, and a signature with your name and the class you are enrolled in.