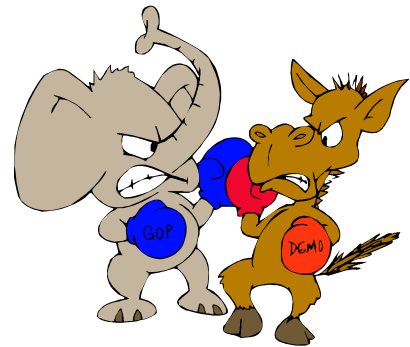


**POLS 1113: *American Federal Government***  
Zap Number  
Meets: MWF  
Place: PH 314  
Instructor: Dr. Ken Hicks  
Fall 2009 Semester

Office: Will Rogers Auditorium Room 110  
Phone: 343-7687  
E-Mail: [kennethhicks@rsu.edu](mailto:kennethhicks@rsu.edu)  
WebPage: [www.rsu.edu/faculty/khicks](http://www.rsu.edu/faculty/khicks)

## Course Description and Objectives

American Federal Government is an introductory survey course that is part of General Education requirement for two- and four-year degrees. The course is designed to familiarize students with the American system of government, and with the broader sphere of political behavior. An important civic theme runs through this course: democratic societies are only as good as their citizens, and citizens must be adequately informed of their rights *and responsibilities*. American Federal Government is designed provide students with the informational foundation necessary to become good citizens.



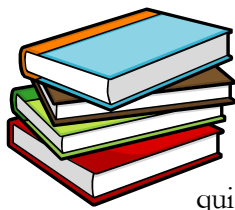
Successful students will develop a number of skills in this course, including:

- Demonstrate knowledge of democratic societies and the political institutions of American federal government;
- Identify major political trends, events, and personalities;
- Identify political systems and processes;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and major social trends of family, education, politics, economics, or religious institutions.

These goals will be pursued through a combination of class discussions, quizzes, examinations, and short written assignments.

## Required Text(s) and Materials

One text is required for this course, and is available at the University's *Barnes and Noble* Bookstore:



Berman, Larry, and Bruce Allen Murphy (2009) *Approaching Democracy*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Upper Saddle River, NJ, Pearson/Prentice Hall, ISBN 0-13-174401-1

Students may also be responsible for purchasing Scantron sheets for taking quizzes and examinations. Students will need approximately 18 Scantron answer

sheets over the course of the semester. Students should also bring a Number 2 lead pencil to class on quiz/examination days.

## Course Requirements

Student performance will be assessed on the basis of the quality of their work in a number of in-class and out-of-class assignments. Please take the time to thoroughly acquaint yourselves with these course requirements:



### In-Class Requirements

- **Attendance/Participation (110 Points).** Experience indicates that attendance is a minimum requirement for student success. Attendance will be tracked over the course of the semester, and students will be penalized for excessive absences (more than 3 unexcused absences). Students who contact the instructor or the SBS Academic Administrator (Danette Boston @ 343-6811) will be excused for reasonable absences (e.g. sickness, doctor's appointment, car trouble, etc.). Excused absences will result in a 1 point deduction from student's participation grade, while unexcused absences will result in a 6 point deduction.

Mere presence is not sufficient to earn full credit. Participation is a subjective factor that the instructor weighs in considering a student's commitment to the course. Students who regularly attend and who consistently and effectively participate in class discussions will receive a higher participation grade, unless attendance is so poor as to render any amount of brilliant participation irrelevant.

**Note on Classroom Etiquette.** Students who need to leave class early should take the time before class to notify the instructor before the start of class in order to avoid disrupting class discussion. Students who need to go to the restroom should discreetly indicate their need to the instructor. Simply picking up one's things and leaving the classroom without explanation is at once disruptive and disrespectful, and may result in the student being assigned unexcused absence. Similarly, students who use their cell phones frequently should turn them off at the start of class, especially on quiz and examination days.

Sleeping is insulting to the instructor, and suggests (at least) one of two things: a) the student is completely indifferent to learning the course material; or b) the student lacks the basic discipline to remain awake at need. In either case, the instructor believes that chronic sleepers should drop out of college until their priorities have been better clarified in their minds. If a student is sufficiently ill that they cannot attend class without sleeping, they should contact the professor before class and alert him to his/her situation.

- **Quizzes (140 Points).** Quizzes are designed to evaluate student's comprehension of the text, and expose students to the kinds of questions that will be on examinations. The quizzes will usually be administered on the final day in which the class is scheduled to discuss a chapter topic. Quizzes will be comprised of a combination of eleven multiple-choice and true-false questions that will be shown on the screen at the front of class.

Each question is worth 1 point, with students having eleven opportunities to earn ten points. The best fourteen quizzes will count toward students' grade.

**NOTE:** the instructor will not permit students to make-up quizzes who miss class without contacting the instructor or academic administrator prior to the scheduled quiz date.

- **Examinations (225 Points).** Four examinations will be administered over the course of the semester. The first examination will cover Chapters 1-3 of the text, the second examination will cover Chapters 4-7, the third examination will cover Chapters 8-12, and the final examinations will cover Chapters 13-16. The examinations will be comprised of sixty five-item multiple-choice questions and fifteen true-false questions, for a total of eighty questions. Students will be graded as if the examination had seventy-five questions, thus providing students with eighty opportunities to earn seventy-five points. Student's lowest score will be dropped from their final grade. Students are required to attend the final examination, but may opt to not take the final, provided that they have an "uncurved" average grade of 90%.

Students must notify the instructor before the date and time of an examination if they will be unable to take the examination at the scheduled time. Make-up examinations are considerably more challenging, and will be comprised of short answer and essay questions.

- **"Finding Solutions" Group Presentations (100 Points).** Students will be organized into groups early in the semester, and each will be required to conduct one in-depth presentation on a topic relevant to the course. These presentations require the group to correctly identify the nature of the political problem, and to consider a range of potential resolutions to that problem.

Among the topics available for presentations include:

Chapter	Topic	Presentation Date
2	a. Is the Constitution a moral document? b. A constitutional amendment banning gay marriage?	Unit 1
3	a. The "Constitution in Exile" movement b. Reforming education and the challenge of federalism c. The future of federalism?	Unit 1
4	a. Gerrymander Reform b. Earmark reform: pork for me but not for thee? c. The politics of the filibuster	Unit 2
5	a. Did Pres. Bush violate the Constitution? b. Pres. Obama's Cabinet	Unit 2
6	a. Supreme Court clerks: how powerful? b. Nominations to the Supreme Court c. How powerful is the Supreme Court?	Unit 2
	a. Inside an Iron Triangle b. Defending the bureaucracy	Unit 2

	c. NASA and the <i>Challenger</i> disaster: What went wrong?	
8	a. Are you a liberal, conservative, or “other”? b. Is America a “Center-Right” nation?	Unit 3
9	a. Is there a “majority” party? b. Beyond the two-party system?	Unit 3
10	a. Explaining the “gender gap” b. Reforming the Electoral College	Unit 3
11	a. How do interest groups influence public policy? b. Should interest groups be regulated? c. The future of the Christian Right	Unit 3
12	a. Is the media biased? b. The rise of talk radio in American politics c. Evaluating the media’s coverage of the 2008 presidential election	Unit 3
13	a. Is the U.S. a “Christian” nation? b. Is the death penalty unconstitutional? c. Who has a right to privacy?	Unit 3
14	a. Affirmative action for whom? b. Ending housing discrimination	Unit 3
15	a. Reforming Social Security b. To stimulate or not to stimulate (the economy)	Unit 4
16	a. Was the Iraq War justified? b. A return to isolationism?	Unit 4

The group presentation should involve students working collaboratively to present a topic to the rest of the class. The group should be able to demonstrate to the instructor that they went beyond the textbook in researching the issue, and that the group has fairly considered all sides of a particular controversy. Ideally, one group member would present the facts surrounding a particular issue, another group member would be prepared to advance one ideologically-oriented solution to the problem, another group member would be able to advance a different ideologically-oriented remedy, and the group as a whole would be prepared to respond knowledgeably to any questions that might come from the rest of the class.

Group Presentation Requirements	
Appearance	20
Information	30
Balance	25
Analysis	25
Total	100 Points

- **Post-Test (25 Points).** On the date of the final examination, students will also complete a post-test, a twenty-five question test instrument that will be described more fully below in the section entitled ‘General Education Assessment.’ All students are obliged to take the post-test, and students who fail to show up for the final examination will receive a grade of ‘Incomplete’ until they arrange to take the post-test.

## Out-of-Class Requirements

Students should commit time beyond class meetings thinking and working on this course. In addition to reading and study, students are responsible for completing the following assignments.

- **Reading (No Points).** Taking the time to read and study the material is a basic commitment to earning a college education, and no student can survive this class without devoting time to reading and studying the material. Students should set aside several hours each week to read and take notes on the week's assigned reading; opening the book a few minutes before class is not sufficient time to adequately absorb the material. Students should refer to the instructor's link "Dr. Hicks' Friendly Advice" for tips on how to read, study, and take notes.
- **Reaction Papers (100 Points).** An important premise of higher education is that writing about a subject improves student comprehension. Learning how to put ideas into written form facilitates a more thorough understanding than rote memorization. At the same time, many first-year students are not adequately prepared to write formal term papers. The writing assignments for this class are designed to encourage learning without imposing unrealistic expectations on students.

Reactions papers require students to write a three-to-six page essay on a selected topic. A list of appropriate topics is provided on the instructor's website (under the listing of 'Questions'). Students are not limited to these topics, but must seek instructor approval for unlisted topics. Each essay is worth fifty points. Essays should be typewritten, double-spaced, and conventionally formatted. The essays are generally evaluated based on a fairly lenient set of criterion, but students should recognize that shorter papers are likely to be viewed as "informationally challenged," and graded accordingly.

Students are required to write a reaction paper for the first unit, which will be due on the date on the first examination. From there, students will have three opportunities to write a second reaction paper, the due dates for each opportunity will correspond to the scheduled date for each unit examination (the exception is the due date for the final reaction paper for Unit 4, which will be due the last scheduled class day prior to finals week). Students should select from the appropriate list of topics.

Additionally, students can earn extra credit by submitting additional reaction papers; however, each essay must be submitted on time in order to earn extra credit.

- **Extra Credit (70 Points).** Students who are dissatisfied with their overall performance in the course may earn extra credit. The maximum extra credit students can earn is 70 points, which is roughly one letter grade.

Students may earn extra credit in a number of ways. First, students can complete all three reaction papers for a possible fifty points. Second, students can complete additional work such as book reviews or website research. The instructor's website contains numerous potential extra credit options in the section entitled 'Credit.' Third, students

can submit copies of their reading and class discussion notes for extra credit. The instructor is open to student proposals for extra credit.

### Grade Summary

Assignment	Points	Percentage
Attendance/Participation	110	.157%
Quizzes (Best 14)	140	.20%
Examinations (Best 3)	225	.322%
Group Presentations	100	.143%
Reaction Papers	100	.143%
Post-Test	25	.035%
Total	700	1.00%

### General Education Assessment

Rogers State University is committed to providing quality educational opportunities for all its students. To that end, the Department of Social and Behavioral Science is participating in an assessment program designed to evaluate the effectiveness of faculty instruction in General Education courses like POLS 1113. Part of the course requirements are for students to complete a pre- and post-test as a means of evaluating students' comprehension of this material entering and exiting the course. Each examination consists of twenty-five multiple-choice questions, which are worth one point each.

The pre-test will be administered in the first week of the semester, and will have no bearing on students' overall grade. The pre-test is designed to measure students' comprehension of American government prior to exposure to the course material. The post-test will be administered as part of the final examination, and will be worth 25 points.

### Submitting Work and Late Assignments Policy

Students should submit their work in class on the dates indicated in the course schedule on the instructor's website. Students should be aware that the course schedule is tentative, and the instructor reserves the right to amend due dates in class as the need arises (generally, alterations in assignment due dates will work in students' favor). Changes will be noted in highlight on the schedule.

Should a student find him/herself unable to meet a deadline, they are responsible for notifying the instructor and negotiating an alternative submission schedule. Students may e-mail assignments if they cannot attend class when an assignment is due. Students should be aware that university computer protocols prevent faculty computers from opening e-mail attachments that are not formatted in Microsoft Word software. Excused work must be made up and submitted to the instructor by a date agreed to by the instructor. Uncompleted excused work will be assigned a '0' on the final week of the semester.

### Deadlines

Deadlines are an important part of students' and instructors' mutual responsibilities. Respecting deadlines give instructors a clear indication that students are committed to performing well in the course. At the same time, deadlines allow instructors to reasonably distribute work over the course of the semester. Completing assignments by their due dates gives students sufficient time to seriously analyze and absorb the material. By absorbing knowledge a little bit at a time, students are more likely to achieve a lasting and comprehensive understanding of the material.



Deadlines are also important for instructors. Instructors require time in order to fairly evaluate each piece of work that students submit (recall, for every assignment an individual student submits, the instructor is responsible for that student's work multiplied by each student in the class – not to mention the other classes for which the instructor is responsible). Additionally, the instructor is more likely to fairly evaluate students' work collectively, rather than evaluating them in a piecemeal fashion. By respecting deadlines, students give instructors the time they need to grade their work in an even-handed manner.

## Grading Policy



This course is designed to challenge students to think seriously about the issues related to politics and government in the United States. The principal basis for students' grades is the quality of analysis and substantive knowledge as demonstrated through completed assignments and examinations. As a rule, students' grades are not comparative, and the instructor is philosophically opposed to curving. However, a recent switch from a four-item to a five-item format on quizzes and examinations has substantially raised the difficulty of course quizzes and examinations. As a result, the instructor is willing to curve to the highest grade on an individual quiz/examination, provided that there clear evidence of a serious misdistribution of grades (generally, 10% of a class should be able to earn an 'A' on a quiz/examination, assuming a normal distribution).

Generally, students must perform at a consistently high level over the course of the semester to earn an 'A', which is reserved for genuinely excellent work. Conversely, students who are not particularly interested in the course (or their grade point average) can earn a 'C' with relative ease. The instructor is willing to work with any student who indicates a desire to learn, work hard, and who show respect for the academic process. Alternatively, the preponderance of students who fail this instructor's courses can be directly attributed to nonattendance and failure to submit out-of-class assignments. The instructor will *attempt* to intervene in the event that an individual student appears in jeopardy of failing the course, but students should recognize that academic performance is, ultimately, a matter of personal commitment.

Course Point Summary	
A	700-630
B	629-560
C	559-490
D	489-420
F	> 419

Generally speaking, if a student is within a point or two of a higher grade, then the instructor will round up to the higher grade. That is especially true if the instructor has learned the student's name over the course of the semester, and is persuaded that the student made an honest effort. If the instructor doesn't know a student's name by the end of the semester, they should not expect the instructor to make any concessions on grades.

Grade Descriptions	
In order to avoid misunderstanding, the following descriptions capture the instructor's view of each of the following grades.	
A	Consistently excellent performance that generally exceeds the instructor's expectations
B	Very good performance in most categories, with occasional lapses in performance that indicates room for minor improvements
C	Generally mediocre but overall acceptable performance, indicating little aptitude for or commitment to the subject matter and considerable room for improvement
D	Generally unacceptable performance that barely meets the standard for acceptable comprehension of the course material
F	Inadequate performance that indicates the student should retake the course or reconsider their academic aspirations.

## Academic Misconduct Policy

All institutions of higher education rely on the honesty of all its members, including students, faculty, staff, and administration. Instructors especially require an honest effort from their students, and the failure to follow the guidelines described in the Student Handbook (especially Title 12) represents a basic threat to the integrity of the entire academic process. Students should remember that when they cheat they are primarily hurting themselves by denying themselves access to an important resource (e.g. information) for which they or their parents have paid.



Moreover, despite the fact that the biggest victim of academic dishonesty may be the perpetrator, fellow students are also victimized: such cheating undermines the legitimacy of the institution as well, which erodes public confidence that the university is actually providing the resource that is the basis for its existence.

The central element of all academic misconduct is the intent to deceive. Seeking to persuade an instructor that a student knows something they do not know (e.g. cheating on an examination), or attempting to pass off the words or thoughts of another person as the student's own (e.g. plagiarism) are the two most common examples of cheating, and should be avoided at all costs.

To avoid cheating, refer to the Student Handbook's section on academic dishonesty, and follow the guidelines for citing references carefully when writing research papers.

The instructor approaches each student in the belief that they are honest and want to *earn* an education. However, cheating is easily discerned by experienced instructors who know what to look for, and if confronted with clear evidence of academic misconduct, the instructor will notify the RSU Academic Integrity Committee for further investigation. Conviction of academic misconduct may result in the student receiving discipline ranging from 'learning experiences' all the way to failure in the course and potentially to expulsion from the university.

Please remember, honest people who work hard to not need to cheat!

## Students With Disabilities

### Americans with Disabilities Act

Rogers State University is committed to providing students with disabilities equal access to educational programs and services. Any student who has a disability that he or she believes will require some form of academic accommodation must inform the professor of such need during or immediately following the first class attended. **Before** any educational accommodation can be provided, it is the responsibility of each student to prove eligibility for assistance by registering for services through Student Affairs.

Students needing more information about Student Disability Services should contact the Director of Student Development in the Office of Student Affairs at Rogers State University, 1701 W. Will Rogers Blvd., Claremore, OK 74017 (918) 343-7707.

Students needing more information about Student Disability Services should contact:

Misty Smith  
Director of Student Development  
Rogers State University  
1701 W. Will Rogers Blvd.  
Claremore, OK 74017  
918-343-7579

## Teaching Philosophy

The instructor employs the Socratic Method, which is a question-oriented approach to teaching, because he believes that students learn best when they take an active role in learning the material. Class time is not viewed by the instructor as an extension of mandatory educational experiences like high school, where students are often spoon-fed the course material; instead, class time is viewed as a time for questions and discussion of the material that challenge students' understanding of politics and how it relates to them.



Students are expected to come to class having read the material and to be prepared to discuss prepared to offer substantive and effective commentary on the assigned readings. Unprepared students will probably not get much from the class, and may find themselves singled out for

questioning from the instructor. The purpose of such questioning is not to embarrass the student – although that will often be a logical by-product of being asked questions for which one is unprepared to answer! Rather, the idea behind the questioning is to challenge students to take their studies seriously, and to recognize a simple fact: whether or not you are interested in politics, politics is interested in you!

## About the Instructor



Kenneth S. Hicks received his Doctor of Philosophy in political theory from the Department of Government and International Studies at the University of South Carolina. His doctoral training focused on contemporary political theory, especially on the challenges related to sustaining communities in multicultural societies with a strong emphasis on individual rights. He is currently serving as interim head of the newly-organized Department of History and Political Science.

Dr. Hicks has broad interests both within and outside the discipline of political science. He offers many of the upper division courses in political science, including international relations, comparative politics, democratic theory, media and politics, American foreign policy, and classical political theory. Additionally, Dr. Hicks teaches several of the core courses in Social and Behavioral Science, including Perspectives on Human Behavior, Methods of the Social Sciences, and the senior Capstone seminar.

Dr. Hicks is a past president of the Oklahoma Political Science Association, and serves on the OPSA’s executive board, and is currently serving as *Oklahoma Politics*’ book review editor.

Dr. Hicks lives in Claremore, and is married to Kelly Hicks, who works in the Financial Aid Office at RSU.

## Course Schedule

The instructor has provided extensive resources on his website for American Federal Government students, including study guides, PowerPoint presentations, extra credit assignments, guidelines for the homework assignments, and a grade book that will enable students to see how they are doing in the course.

The course schedule is posted on the instructor’s website, which should be viewed as the definitive guide to assignment due dates and assigned reading. This schedule is tentative and subject to change. Included in this schedule is space for students to take note of any changes the instructor may announce in class. The blank schedule provided below will allow students to note important due dates and reading assignments.

Week #	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
1			
2			

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