

# Intro to Political Science

Department of Political Science  
Sam Houston State University



**POLS2304.01: Intro to PS**  
**Fall 2025 II CRN 87783**  
**MW 2:00-3:15p II CHSS 232**



## What's this all about?

This class is your toolkit for thinking like a political scientist. We start by nailing a working definition of politics and spotting it everywhere—from roommates and student orgs to Congress and climate talks. Then we zoom out: how do political scientists *actually* know things? You'll practice the scientific method as our "don't-fool-yourself" guardrail before touring the field's major rooms—American, Comparative, IR, Political Theory, and Public Policy/Admin—and seeing how they connect to that definition.

From there, we go deep on the pieces of the definition. You'll analyze how individual preferences, incentives, and choices add up to collective outcomes, why exchange and bargaining happen, and how transaction costs can stall deals. We'll dissect the rules of the game—voting systems, paradoxes, and agenda control—and why smart procedure can shape results. Then we tackle the messy stuff: collective action, public goods and free riding, and tragedies of the commons, plus interest groups, lobbying, and rent-seeking. We close by practicing strategic thinking and applying the political science toolkit to real headlines.

Bottom line: by December you won't just have opinions—you'll have a framework to analyze how political outcomes emerge, and the habits to test claims against evidence.

### By the end of the course, you will be able to...

- Define politics as collective decision-making under rules and apply it to everyday and institutional contexts.
- Use the scientific method to test political claims and curb confirmation bias or motivated reasoning.
- Identify the five subfields and explain how each connects to our core definition and research questions.
- Analyze individual behavior using preference orderings and rationality to explain choices and trade-offs.
- Explain how incentives—material, social, and moral—shape decisions and aggregate into political outcomes.
- Understand politics as exchange and apply transaction costs—triangulation, transfer, trust—to your analysis.
- Evaluate decision rules (voting systems, agenda control) and predict how procedures shape results.
- Apply strategic reasoning to trust, cooperation, rent-seeking, and institutional persistence in repeated interactions.
- Interpret current events with this toolkit and communicate clear, evidence-based analysis in short writing.

## What do I need to buy?

There are no books to purchase for this course. All readings and course materials are available through Blackboard (Bb). The only materials you will need to purchase are blue books (exam books) for each of the three exams. See below.

## What will I need to do?

### 1. Take two in-class exams (40%)

Exam 1 covers Aug 25-Sep 24. Exam 2 covers Oct 1-29. Each is a blue book exam, given in class (dates below), and worth 20% of your grade. I'll give more information well in advance, and we'll have in-class review sessions prior to each.

### 2. Take a comprehensive final exam (30%)

The final exam is comprehensive. It's a blue book exam scheduled for Wednesday, Dec 10, 3-5p in our regular classroom. I'll give more information well in advance, and we'll have an in-class review as part of our session on Dec. 3.

### 3. Complete five quizzes (20%)

You'll complete five learning check quizzes taken on Blackboard and spread throughout the semester. Any course material is fair game in these quizzes. They are untimed, and you are permitted to use course resources. Each quiz is worth 4% of your grade. Each quiz must be completed by its due date below.

### 4. Complete in-class exit exercises (10%)

At the end of almost every session, we'll have an in-class exit exercise. These will require a couple minutes of thinking and a few minutes of writing. You'll hand them in as you walk out of the room. If you miss the session, you may not make up the exit exercise after. I'll drop the three lowest exit exercise grades.

## Who is the professor?

### Dr. Jason Enia



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**Email:** [jason.enia@shsu.edu](mailto:jason.enia@shsu.edu)

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**Office Hours:** Tu & Th 12-1p; by appt.

# What are the rules?

## Can I turn things in late?

No. All assigned work must be completed and submitted by due date/times indicated. There is no grace period. No late assignments will be accepted.

## How do I figure out my grade?

Your current grade will always be available on Blackboard. The final letter grade will be determined as follows per University policy:

% EARNED	GRADE	DENOTATION
90-100	A	Excellent
80-89.5	B	Above average
70-79.5	C	Average
60-69.5	D	Passing (NNSFD)
0-59.6	F	Failure

## Can I cheat?

Please don't. [SHSU Academic Policy Statement 810213](#) states: "The University expects students to engage in all academic experiences both in and out of the classroom with honesty. The University may initiate disciplinary proceedings in response to a student's alleged actions upon an instructor's finding of academic dishonesty, including but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, abuse of resource materials on an exam, quiz or other academic work, or the falsification of data. Any student engaging in academic dishonesty may be subject to academic penalties and may be referred to the Dean of Students' office for additional disciplinary action." Please read the policy carefully as it specifically defines the terms "academic work," "cheating," and "plagiarism" among others.

I have a zero-tolerance approach to these issues. If you engage in academic dishonesty you'll receive a zero (F) for the assignment.

You have a right to appeal any academic dishonesty decision. The procedures are outlined in [Academic Policy Statement 810213](#).

## What about AI?

For each assignment, I'll be very clear about whether you can use it and if so, how. If you use it in a circumstance where I've asked you not to, it falls under the cheating policy above.

## What's the attendance policy?

The in-class exit exercises will serve as an attendance marker for almost session. Please refer to page 1 of this syllabus. If you know you are going to miss (or have missed) time for an excused absence, please see me as soon as possible.

Also, students who receive federal financial aid are required to actively engage in their academic courses, including at the beginning of the semester, as a condition of receiving federal aid. Federal regulations require SHSU to report whether a student has actively engaged in each of their courses or not. A student's lack of engagement in their courses may result in the student losing their eligibility for financial aid and having that aid withdrawn by the federal government. More information on what qualifies as academic engagement may be found on the [Federal Aid Eligibility Validation \(FAEV\) website](#).

## What if I have to miss due to a holy day?

[SHSU Academic Policy Statement 861001](#) states: "Section 51.911 (b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time." Section 2.02 states "A student who is excused under this section may not be penalized, but the instructor may appropriately respond if the student fails to satisfactorily complete the assignment or exam."

## What if I am pregnant or parenting?

Pregnant and parenting students fall under Title IX equal educational opportunities that "prohibits educational institutions from discriminating against students based on pregnancy, childbirth, false pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, or recovery from any of these conditions." Resources are available on the [SHSU Pregnancy & Parenting](#) page. If you have any challenges related to these issues, please just come talk to me.

## Any rules for conduct in the classroom?

Please be in class on time. Please put your cell phones & other electronic devices on vibrate or silent. I have no problems with these devices in the classroom but if you choose to use them for other activities during class, you do so at the risk of being embarrassed. I reserve the right to ask you to leave the class if you are disruptive. If the issue escalates, you may be reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action in accordance with university policy. Overall, our time is short (and expensive!); please don't waste it.

## What if I need accommodations?

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936-294-3786, and e-mail [disability@shsu.edu](mailto:disability@shsu.edu)). They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in class, register with SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and schedule a time to talk with a counselor. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For a complete listing of the university policy, see: [SHSU Academic Policy Statement 811006](#).

## Can I evaluate the course?

Yes. At the end of the term, you will have the opportunity to complete a course evaluation. You'll receive an email with a link to the evaluations for all of your courses. The evaluations remain anonymous, and I won't see the scores or comments until well after the final course grades have posted.

## Can I appeal my final grade?

Yes. You have a right to formally appeal your final grade in any course. You can also file a grievance against an instructor if you feel they've violated university policy. Please see [SHSU Academic Policy Statement 900823](#) (especially section 4) for the procedure. Your appeal needs to start with the instructor and must be initiated within ten (10) working days of the day the final grade posts.



## Introducing “Political Science”

August 25 (M): The Big Game: What is Politics Anyway?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Download and read the syllabus</li><li>• Familiarize yourself with the course Blackboard page</li><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
August 27 (W): Politics Spotting: From Your Dorm Room to Global Summits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
September 1 (M): No class; Labor Day	
September 3 (W): Foolproof? What Does it Mean to Study Politics Scientifically?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
September 8 (M): The Many Rooms in the Mansion of Political Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li><li>• <a href="#">Complete Quiz 1 by 9/10. Covers all material up to and including 9/8. (4%)</a></li></ul>

## Individuals, Preferences, and Incentives

September 10 (W): It Starts With One: Why Individuals are the Key to the Political Puzzle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li><li>• <a href="#">Complete Quiz 1 by 9/10 at 11:59 PM. Covers all material up to and including 9/8. (4%)</a></li></ul>
September 15 (M): What Do You Want? Rationality and Self-Interest in Life & Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
September 17 (W): Carrots, Sticks, and Choices: The Power of Incentives in Politics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
September 22 (M): Let's Make a Deal: Politics as Exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li><li>• <a href="#">Complete Quiz 2 by 9/24 at 11:59 PM. Covers all material up to and including 9/22. (4%)</a></li></ul>
September 24 (W): Exam 1 Review Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prepare for exam 1.</li><li>• Purchase blue book for exam 1 on 9/29.</li></ul>
September 29 (M): Exam 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Exam 1 covers all course material between 8/25 and 9/24. Bring a blue book. (20%)</a></li></ul>

## The Rules of the Game

October 1 (W): The Rules of the Game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
October 6 (M): Majority Rules? (And Other Ways to Decide): Exploring Voting Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
October 8 (W): The Voter's Paradox: When "The Will of the People" Gets Complicated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
October 13 (M): Setting the Table: Agenda Control and the Power to Decide What Gets Decided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li><li>• <a href="#">Complete Quiz 3 by 10/15 at 11:59 PM. Covers all material up to and including 10/13. (4%)</a></li></ul>

## Weird Things Can Happen in Groups

October 15 (W): Herding Cats is Easy (Said No One Ever): The Challenge of Getting Groups to Act	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li><li>• <a href="#">Complete Quiz 3 by 10/15 at 11:59 PM. Covers all material up to and including 10/13. (4%)</a></li></ul>
October 20 (M): Whispers & Megaphones: Lobbying, Special Interests, and "Bootleggers & Baptists"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
October 22 (W): Why Pay if It's "Free"? Public Goods and the Sneaky Free-Rider Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
October 27 (M): Oops, We Used It All Up: The Tragedy of the Commons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li><li>• <a href="#">Complete Quiz 4 by 10/29 at 11:59 PM. Covers all material up to and including 10/27. (4%)</a></li></ul>
October 29 (W): Exam 2 Review Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prepare for exam 2.</li><li>• Purchase blue book for exam 1 on 11/3.</li></ul>
November 3 (M): Exam 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">Exam 2 covers all course material between 10/1 and 10/29. Bring a blue book. (20%)</a></li></ul>

## Analyzing the Strategy of Politics

November 5 (W): Political Poker Face: An Introduction to Strategic Thinking (The Prisoner's Dilemma)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
November 10 (M): Beyond a Single Showdown: Trust, Cooperation, and Playing the Long Game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
November 12 (W): Getting Yours (Without Making Anything New): Rent-Seeking and Political Extraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
November 17 (M): Who's Minding the Store?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li><li>• <a href="#">Complete Quiz 5 by 11/17 at 11:59 PM. Covers all material up to and including 11/17. (4%)</a></li></ul>
November 19 (W): Stuck in a Political Rut? Why Meaningful Change is So Darn Hard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li><li>• <a href="#">Complete Quiz 5 by 11/19 at 11:59 PM. Covers all material up to and including 11/17. (4%)</a></li></ul>
November 24 (M): The Insiders' Club: Unpacking Iron Triangles and Policy Feedback Loops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
November 26 (W): No class; Thanksgiving Break	

## Using the Toolkit

December 1 (M): The Political Science Toolkit: Deconstructing Today's Headlines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consume any course materials posted for the session.</li></ul>
December 3 (W): The Big Picture & Final Countdown: Course Conclusions & Final Exam Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Prepare for final exam.</li><li>• Purchase blue book for final exam on 12/10.</li></ul>
December 10 (W 3p-5p): Final Exam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <a href="#">The final exam covers all course material. Bring a blue book. (30%)</a></li></ul>