Texas A&M University  
**Core Curriculum**  
**Initial Request for a Course Addition to the Fall 2014 Core Curriculum**  

**Foundational Component Area: Government/Political Science**  

In the box below, describe how this course meets the Foundational Component Area description for Government/Political Science. Courses in this category focus on the consideration of the Constitution of United States and the constitution of the states, with special emphasis on that of Texas. Courses involve the analysis of governmental institutions, political behavior, civic engagement, and their political and philosophical foundations.

The proposed course must contain all elements of the Foundational Component Area. How does the proposed course specifically address the Foundational Component Area definition above?

POLS 206 (American National Government) is half of a two-course required sequence (the other is POLS 207, State and Local Government, which covers Texas). The course surveys American national government, politics, and constitutional development. In addition to the week explicitly devoted to the Constitution, two weeks are devoted to the deeply constitutional issues of federalism, civil liberties and civil rights; moreover, such issues reoccur throughout the course. Governmental institutions are explicitly treated in weeks covering Congress, the Presidency, the Bureaucracies, and the federal Judiciary. Political behavior is covered in the weeks devoted to interest groups, political parties, elections, public opinion, voting behavior, and participation. Civic engagement is emphasized throughout the course, but particularly in the week devoted to participation. The political and philosophical foundations of American national government are explicitly covered in the first five weeks of the course, including a full week on "the promise of democracy."

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**Core Objectives**

Describe how the proposed course develops the required core objectives below by indicating how each learning objective will be addressed, what specific strategies will be used for each objective and how student learning of each objective will be evaluated.

The proposed course is required to contain each element of the Core Objective.

**Critical Thinking (to include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, evaluation and synthesis of information):**

The course includes critical thinking explicitly among its goals. Creative thinking is encouraged in class during simulations and exercises (for example, students have to come up with reasons justifying the Miranda process and discuss them in class). Students practice innovation when they defend each other from unjust exclusion during the civil liberties lecture; they also come up with innovative responses to contemporary political issues in open discussion. Inquiry occurs as the students use the original documents and case studies in the textbook to deepen their understanding of the policy process. Analysis is central to this course: students learn to analyze the conditions under which different types of policy and political outcomes occur (for example, when they study interest groups, they learn to identify situations in which free riding is likely to occur and how to overcome it). Students evaluate information when they make use of the many sources of political data from the textbook, website, and provided in lecture (for example, they are provided with many different possible correlates of voter turnout). Synthesis of information happens in class when students complete exercises or engage in discussion with the lecturer, and at the end of each block of topics (the Constitutional Framework, Connecting Citizens to Government, and Official Decision Making). This learning is evaluated mainly by student performance on exams, but also collectively as the class engages in exercises together (for example, the instructor provides feedback orally on how well the class as a whole defended the rights of one of their number). The final exam includes questions that require critical analysis and synthesis of the issues raised in the course. The last section of the course focuses on critical assessment of the performance of American democracy.
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Communication (to include effective development, interpretation and expression of ideas through written, oral and visual communication):

Most communication in this course happens between the instructor and students in lecture, and between the students and instructor on exams. However, there is also communication among the students and with the supplemental instructor. Students develop ideas through reading the text and considering the "key questions" and "takeaway points. They also develop ideas in class by interacting orally with the instructor. Students interpret ideas through engagement with original texts such as James Madison's Federalist Papers 10 and 51. They also engage with visual information in class as the instructor frequently presents quantitative analysis of topics in American politics. Students express ideas frequently in class in response to instructor queries, as well as on exams. The difficult, controversial topics in the course encourage communication in many directions, both in class and among students themselves as they grapple with the evaluation of American democracy. For example, students read and analyze the text of the U.S. Constitution.

Social Responsibility (to include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities):

Social Responsibility is a central aspect of this course in American National Government. Students gain intercultural competence by learning about the many diverse cultures participating in American government (sections of the text specifically focusing on intercultural competence include "Conflicting Values: A Delicate Balancing Act," "Diversity and Difference," "Ideology and Partisanship," Agreement, Disagreement, and Compromise at the Convention," "Civic Rights" (which includes sections on African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans, Women, The Disabled, and Gays and Lesbians), and "Racial and Gender Bias." Students learn about civic responsibility throughout the course, including in-class exercises focusing on duties to fellow citizens; sections in the text devoted to civic responsibility include "The Promise of Democracy," "Civil Rights," "Why People Join Interest Groups," "Membership in American Political Parties," "Facilitate Participation," "Information and Civic Engagement," "Forms of Political Participation," and "The Right to Vote." The course directly addresses students' ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities, both in lecture and in the textbook (for example, students learn how to contact their representatives on the local, state, and federal levels, learn how the different levels of government are connected, and learn how U.S. policies are related to international politics). All of these sections are included on the section exams and the final exam.

Personal Responsibility (to include the ability to connect choices, actions and consequences to ethical decision - making):

Personal Responsibility is a central topic for this course in American National Government. In class, students participate in challenging ethical exercises (having to come up with reasons to respect rights across difference, for example). In the textbook, students engage with the ethical commitment that motivated the founders, as well as the differences among the founders themselves on matters of ethics. For example, students consider alternatives to democratic rule such as autocracy and oligarchy. They engage with the tension between American commitments to equality on one hand and individual rights on the other. These ethical tensions are illustrated with policy examples throughout the course (for example, students study free speech jurisprudence). The sections on voting, juries, and political participation also engage students with issues of personal responsibility. The four exams include questions testing students' understanding of the ethical issues of personal responsibility as they relate to American Government.

Please be aware that instructors should be prepared to submit samples/examples of student work as part of the future course recertification process.