

POLS 2311: American Government and Politics (Section 14438)

Fall 2015, UGLC 116: TR 9:00-10:20 a.m.

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This course provides a broad overview of American (U.S.) politics and introduces students to Texas politics. The United States of America is governed under a Constitution that has operated without fundamental change for more than 225 years. This makes the government of the United States one of the most stable and long lasting in human history, and, indeed the very first system of popular government covering a large territory to last for a long time. The people who created that government did so very carefully in the belief that good government does not mean simply popular government or well intentioned government. More than that, a good government, they thought, is ultimately controlled by the governed, but also is built with a complex structure that enables it to use power to manage the community for the people effectively and without tyranny. This course is about that complex structure: what the institutions of government were designed to do, why, and how the people use them to go about managing their community.

I know that most of you are not majoring in Political Science and that many of you would not be taking this class were it not mandated by state law. My goal is to make this class worthwhile for you, the future leaders of the United States and Texas (or our neighbors in Mexico). I hope that by the end of the semester (or at least some day in the future) you will value your experience in this class!

Learning Objectives: By the end of the course students should have gained a solid understanding of

1. the constitutional principles on which the United States was founded;
2. the three branches of the federal government and the national bureaucracy;
3. the origins and evolution of civil rights and liberties;
4. the electoral and party system;
5. the role of interest groups and the media;
6. the constitution and political institutions of the State of Texas; and
7. pluralist and elitist interpretations of U.S. politics.

Course Requirements and Policies

1. Attendance and Punctuality. Regular attendance is expected. If you do not attend class regularly, you will not do well. Moreover, you risk missing frequent quizzes. Attendance will be checked several minutes after the class begins and then again several minutes before it ends. **Leaving class early counts as an absence. Please use the restroom before class. I reserve the right to count students as “absent” if they are using tablets or laptops for purposes unrelated to the class, if they are using their phones, or if their behavior disrupts the learning environment.** I DO NOT DIRECTLY PENALIZE students for missing class, though you will miss quizzes and not do well in the class overall.

Extra Credit for Good Attendance: If you have perfect attendance (i.e. no recorded absences), I will add three extra points to your course average. If you miss only one attendance check, I will add two extra points, I will add one extra point if you miss only two attendance checks. However, I will not give any extra credit to students who leave early or walk in and out of class. I do not try to determine “excused” and “unexcused” absences because I give extra credit for outstanding attendance, rather than penalizing poor attendance.

2. Lectures and reading. I will post the power point slides of my lecture before each class. Students are encouraged to print out the power point slides and bring them to class in order to facilitate note-taking. Students should be able to correctly answer the questions on the quizzes and the exam on the basis of the power point slides and questions on the videos (see below). However, students have different learning styles, and some students may find it useful to read Gary Wasserman, *The Basics of American Politics*, 15th edition (Pearson: 2015). I have identified the pages in this book that correspond to each lecture.

3. Videos. I will show various videos on course-related topics to the extent that time, availability, and scheduling permit. These are not "blow-off" classes; indeed, some quiz and exam questions will be based on audiovisual materials. Questions for each video will be posted on Blackboard. You should print out the questions and answer them in class as the video is playing.

4. Quizzes. I will give about 8 quizzes, following the schedule below as much as possible. Each quiz will cover the lecture, power point slides, and videos since the last quiz. There will be no make-up quizzes. However, the lowest two or three quiz grades will be dropped. Save your quizzes because they will be useful in studying for the exams. And the first quiz will likely contain one or more questions based on the syllabus!

5. Exams. The first exam will be given on Thursday, October 15. The second exam will be given on Thursday, December 3, the last day of class. Each exam will be comprised of multiple choice and true/false questions. Each exam will cover a discrete section of the course, though some of the material has a cumulative character. If necessary, exam grades will be curved, in accordance with overall student performance. ***Please do not leave the room during the exam, except in the case of an emergency.***

A make-up exam will be given only in the case of a documented medical or personal emergency. In such an event, Professor Schmidt (747-7973) or the Political Science Office (747-5227) must be notified before the exam. A make-up exam may be in a format that requires more intensive preparation.

6. Extra Credit Points. I do not accept extra credit projects to improve low quiz or exam grades because opportunities for extra credit must be available to all students on an equal basis. However, some extra credit opportunities may appear on quizzes or exams. You can also earn extra credit through good attendance, as discussed above. In addition, I reserve the right to add a point or two of extra credit for outstanding class participation. In assessing class participation, I will emphasize quality, rather than mere quantity.

7. Course Grade. The course grade will be determined as follows:

High Exam	50%
Low Exam	30%
Highest 5-6 Quizzes	20%
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	100% + any extra credit points

Course Grades will be distributed as follows:

Final Average and Extra Credit	Final Grade
90-100%	A
80-89%	B
65-79%	C
50-64%	D
Below 50%	F

Incompletes will not be given for reasons other than a medical or personal emergency and then only after presentation of verifiable documentation. Academic hardship does not qualify as an acceptable reason.

8. Classroom Decorum. Please respect the learning process, as well as your instructor and your fellow classmates:

- Please limit the use of laptops and tablets to taking notes for this class.
- Please turn off all phones and other electronic devices.
- Please refrain from chatting, drinking, eating, and disruptive behavior.
- Please do not leave class early, except in an emergency.

9. Adjustments in Course Schedule. I will do my best to follow the course schedule outlined below, but I reserve the right to make reasonable adjustments with adequate warning if unforeseeable or uncontrollable circumstances so warrant. It is not fair, however, to change the schedule or previously set exam dates simply to accommodate the preferences of some students, since other students inevitably suffer.

10. Academic Integrity. Students are expected to know and comply with UTEP policies on academic integrity in the latest online edition of the *Undergraduate Catalog*, Curriculum and Classroom Policies.

Course Outline

August 25

Introduction to Class

The Drafting and Adoption of the Constitution

Wasserman, *The Basics of American Politics*, 15th edition, pp. 17-27

August 27, September 1

Video: *A More Perfect Union*

September 3

Quiz 1

Constitutional Principles

Wasserman, *The Basics of American Politics*, 15th edition, pp. 27-37, box on pp. 41-44.

Begin Video: *Constitution USA*, Episode 1 on Federalism

September 8

Conclude Video: *Constitution USA*, Episode 1 on Federalism

The Constitution: Adaptability and Survival

Wasserman, *The Basics of American Politics*, 15th edition, pp. 37-41, 44-46.

September 10

Video: *Constitution USA*, Episode 4 on Future

September 15, 17

Quiz 2

Congress

Wasserman, *The Basics of American Politics*, 15th edition, pp. 91-129.

September 22

Video: *Obama's Deal* (Frontline)

September 24

Quiz 3

The Presidency

Wasserman, *The Basics of American Politics*, 15th edition, pp. 47-71, box on pp. 85-88.

September 29

The Federal Bureaucracy

Wasserman, *The Basics of American Politics*, 15th edition, pp. 71-90.

October 1, 6, 8

Quiz 4

Video: *The Choice 2012* (Frontline)

October 13

Catch-Up and Review

October 15

First Exam

October 20

The Judicial Branch

Wasserman, *The Basics of American Politics*, 15th edition, pp. 131-161.

Begin Video: *In their Own Words: Conversations with Supreme Court Justices*

October 22

Quiz 5

Conclude Video: *In their Own Words: Conversations with Supreme Court Justices*

Civil Rights and Liberties

Wasserman, *The Basics of American Politics*, 15th edition, pp. 163-194.

October 27

Video: *Constitution USA*, Episode 2 on Bill of Rights and Civil Liberties

October 29

Video: *Constitution USA*, Episode 3 on Equality and Civil Rights

November 3

Quiz 6

Voters and Political Parties

Wasserman, *The Basics of American Politics*, 15th edition, pp. 195-234.

November 5

Video: *The Longoria Affair*

November 10

Quiz 7

Interest Groups and the Media

Wasserman, *The Basics of American Politics*, 15th edition, pp. 235-270.

November 12

Video: *Big Sky, Big Money* (Frontline)

November 17

Video: *Remember the Alamo*

November 19, 24

Quiz 8

The Texas Constitution

Political Institutions in Texas

THANKSGIVING

December 1

Who Wins, Who Loses: Pluralism versus Elitism

Wasserman, *The Basics of American Politics*, 15th edition, pp. 271-283.

Review

December 3

Second Exam