

**POLS 2311: American Government and Politics (Section 13390)**  
**Fall 2018, UGLC 106: MW 9:00-10:20 a.m.**

Gregory D. Schmidt  
Benedict 211  
Phone: 747-7973

Office Hours: MW 8:00-8:50 am  
TA Hours TBA  
E-mail: [gdschmidt@utep.edu](mailto:gdschmidt@utep.edu)

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 230 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.

These learning outcomes are most closely related to the social responsibility goal of the UTEP Edge.

**Course Requirements and Policies**

**1. Attendance and Punctuality.** Regular attendance is expected. If you do not attend class regularly, you are not likely to do well. Sometimes essential materials and information are available only in class.

Attendance will be checked several minutes after the class begins and then again several minutes before it ends. Arriving late or 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. Students with more than 10 recorded absences—due to poor attendance or poor behavior— will be dropped from the class. Please let me know if you have extenuating circumstances—such as a serious illness—that might cause you to miss multiple classes.

Extra Credit for Good Attendance: If you have perfect attendance (i.e. no recorded absences), I will add an extra point to your course average. If you have only one recorded absences, I will add .8 points. I will add .6 points if you have two recorded absences, .4 points if you have three recorded absences, and .2 points if you have four recorded absences.

I do not try to determine “excused” and “unexcused” absences because I give extra credit for outstanding attendance, rather than penalizing poor attendance. We all have to balance different obligations, and I know that students sometimes have legitimate reasons for missing class. You will not be penalized if you occasionally miss class, but to give you extra credit is unfair to the students who do attend. Please do not ask me to give you extra credit for classes that you do not attend, whatever the reason may be.

**2. Lectures.** 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 exams on the basis of the power point slides, commentary and discussion during class lectures, and questions on the videos (see below). There is no required textbook for the course.

**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. A few videos may be available online, but some can only be seen in class.

**4. Lockdown Browser and Monitor.** Students will take quizzes and exams on Blackboard outside of class, using Lockdown Browser and Monitor. You must have a webcam on your computer and download Lockdown Browser and Monitor, following the instructions in the appendix to this syllabus. Alternatively, you can take the tests in the library or another UTEP location that has computers with a webcam and LockDown Browser and Monitor. When taking an exam or quiz, you will need to follow the instructions in the appendix.

**5. Test on Syllabus (Extra Credit).** This assignment is designed to help you learn the requirements in the course syllabus and introduce you to LockDown Browser and Monitor. You may complete this exercise as many times as you like throughout the semester, beginning on the first day of class. A perfect score is worth one point added to your course average. The highest grade will count, so there is no penalty for retaking this test multiple times.

**6. Quizzes.** Students will take 10 quizzes on Blackboard outside of class, using LockDown Browser and Monitor. The quizzes are not cumulative; rather, each quiz covers the lecture, power point slides, and videos since the last quiz. Each quiz is 5 or 6 questions and will last 10 minutes. Most questions are multiple choice, but there are some true/ false questions.

Quizzes must be submitted during the designated window, beginning at 1 p.m. on a class day and lasting until 11:59 p.m. the next day (see schedule below). Each quiz may be taken only once.

After the deadline for completing the quiz, you will be able to review the question, alternative answers, and your answer. Blackboard will tell you if you are correct, but if you miss the question, it will not identify the correct answer because the goal is for you to understand the material. Some questions from the quizzes will be repeated on the exam. In order to improve your chances on the exam, you will want to review the presentations and video questions to understand what you missed the first time around.

**7. Exams.** Students will take a first exam on October 15-17 and a second exam on December 5-7, using Blackboard and LockDown Browser and Monitor. The second exam is not a comprehensive final exam; rather, it covers only the second half of the course. Each exam must be submitted within the designated window. Each exam is comprised of approximately 50 multiple choice and true/false questions and must be completed in an hour (60 minutes). You may take an exam only once. If necessary, exam grades will be curved, in accordance with overall student performance.

**8. Timeliness, Student Responsibility, and Academic Integrity.** Please note that the deadlines for quizzes and exams are not flexible. You are responsible for problems that might arise with your computer, internet connection, browser, and the like. Students are encouraged to take quizzes and exams on a UTEP computer with a wired connection and LockDown Browser and Monitor (as in the library). If you experience a technical problem, 10 points will be deducted from any additional attempt that may be granted, unless the original attempt was on a wired UTEP computer and the Helpdesk confirms the technical problem.

I must be notified in advance if a student has an absence authorized by the Dean of Students or the military during the entire window of the quiz or exam. I must be notified immediately ([gdschmidt@utep.edu](mailto:gdschmidt@utep.edu)) of any medical or personal emergency that is so severe that it prevents a student from taking the quiz or exam during the designated window. Proof is required. If a quiz or exam is not completed by the deadline, it will be assigned a score of 0.

By accessing a quiz or exam, students agree to accept no help from others while completing it. Students may use notes and other paper materials of their own, but they may not seek or accept help from others or use other electronic devices. Incidents involving academic dishonesty will be forwarded without exception to the Office of the Dean of Students for investigation and appropriate action. Penalties are detailed in section 3.6, Ch. 6 of the Regents' Rules.

It is also a violation of academic integrity to disseminate questions from quizzes or exams to other students or to post them online. Violators will face academic sanctions and will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law!

**9. Extra Credit.** I cannot 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 the exam. You can also earn extra credit through good attendance and the test on the syllabus, as discussed above. In addition, I reserve the right to add up to a point for outstanding class participation. In assessing class participation, I will emphasize quality, rather than mere quantity.

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

Quiz Average	34%	
First Exam	33%	
Second Exam	33%	
	100%	+ any extra credit points for attendance, test on syllabus, and/or participation

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.

**11. 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.

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.

**12. 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.

### **Course Outline**

August 27

Introduction to Class

LockDown Browser and Monitor

The Drafting and Adoption of the Constitution

Test on Syllabus (Extra Credit) (opens 8-27 at 1 p.m.; open until end of course)

August 29 and September 5

Video: *A More Perfect Union*

Quiz 1 on Blackboard (opens 9-5 at 1 p.m.; closes 9-6 at 11:59 p.m.)

September 10

Constitutional Principles

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

September 12

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

The Constitution: Adaptability and Survival

September 17

Video: *Constitution USA*, Episode 4 on Future

Quiz 2 on Blackboard (opens 9-17 at 1 p.m.; closes 9-18 at 11:59 p.m.)

September 19, 24

Congress

September 26

Video: *Obama's Deal* (Frontline)

Quiz 3 on Blackboard (opens 9-26 at 1 p.m.; closes 9-27 at 11:59 p.m.)

October 1

The Presidency

October 3 and 8

Video: *The Choice 2016* (Frontline)

Quiz 4 on Blackboard (opens 10-8 at 1 p.m.; closes 10-9 at 11:59 p.m.)

October 10

The Federal Bureaucracy

Quiz 5 on Blackboard (opens 10-10 at 1 p.m.; closes 10-11 at 11:59 p.m.)

October 15

Catch-Up and Review

First Exam (opens 10-15 at 1 p.m.; closes 10-17 at 11:59 p.m.)

October 17

No Class (First Exam)

October 22

The Judicial Branch

October 24

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

Quiz 6 on Blackboard (opens 10-24 at 1 p.m.; closes 10-25 at 11:59 p.m.)

October 29

Civil Rights and Liberties

October 31 (Trick or Treat!)

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

November 5

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

Quiz 7 on Blackboard (opens 11-5 at 1 p.m.; closes 11-6 at 11:59 p.m.)

November 7 and 12

Voters and Political Parties

Midterm Elections

November 14

Video: *The Longoria Affair*

Quiz 8 on Blackboard (opens 11-14 at 1 p.m.; closes 11-15 at 11:59 p.m.)

November 19

Interest Groups and the Media

Quiz 9 on Blackboard (opens 11-19 at 1 p.m.; closes 11-20 at 11:59 p.m.)

November 21

No class if we are on schedule

November 22

THANKSGIVING

November 26

*Video: Remember the Alamo*

November 28 and December 3

The Texas Constitution

Political Institutions in Texas

Quiz 10 on Blackboard (opens 12-3 at 1 p.m.; closes 12-4 at 11:59 p.m.)

December 5

Who Wins, Who Loses: Pluralism versus Elitism

Catch-Up and Review

Second Exam (opens 12-5 at 1 p.m.; closes 12-7 at 11:59 p.m.)

There is no final exam for this course!

## Appendix: LockDown Browser + Webcam Requirement

This course requires the use of LockDown Browser and a webcam for online exams. The webcam can be the type that's built into your computer or one that plugs in with a USB cable.

Watch this brief video to get a basic understanding of LockDown Browser and the webcam feature.

<https://www.respondus.com/products/lockdown-browser/student-movie.shtml>

### Download Instructions

Download and install LockDown Browser from this link:

<https://download.respondus.com/lockdown/download.php?id=586140509>

### Once Installed

- Start LockDown Browser
- Log into Blackboard
- Navigate to the quiz or exam

Note: You won't be able to access tests with a standard web browser. If this is tried, an error message will indicate that the test requires the use of LockDown Browser. Simply start LockDown Browser and navigate back to the exam to continue.

### Guidelines

When taking an online test, follow these guidelines:

- Ensure you're in a location where you won't be interrupted
- Turn off all other devices (e.g. tablets, phones, second computers) and place them outside of your reach
- Before starting the test, know how much time is available for it, and also that you've allotted sufficient time to complete it
- Clear your desk or workspace of all external materials not permitted, such as other electronic devices
- Remain at your computer for the duration of the test
- If the computer, Wi-Fi, or location is different than what was used previously with the "Webcam Check" and "System & Network Check" in LockDown Browser, run the checks again prior to the exam

- To produce a good webcam video, do the following:
  - Avoid wearing baseball caps or hats with brims
  - Ensure your computer or device is on a firm surface (a desk or table). Do NOT have the computer on your lap, a bed, or other surface where the device (or you) are likely to move
  - If using a built-in webcam, avoid readjusting the tilt of the screen after the webcam setup is complete
  - Take the exam in a well-lit room, but avoid backlighting (such as sitting with your back to a window)
- Remember that LockDown Browser will prevent you from accessing other websites or applications; you will be unable to exit the test until all questions are completed and submitted

## Getting Help

Several resources are available if you encounter problems with LockDown Browser:

- **The UTEP Help Desk may be reached during normal business hours at 747-4357 (HELP) or [helpdesk@utep.edu](mailto:helpdesk@utep.edu)**
- The Windows and Mac versions of LockDown Browser have a "Help Center" button located on the toolbar. Use the "System & Network Check" to troubleshoot issues. If an exam requires you to use a webcam, also run the "Webcam Check" from this area
- Respondus has a Knowledge Base available from [support.respondus.com](http://support.respondus.com). Select the "Knowledge Base" link and then select "Respondus LockDown Browser" as the product. If your problem is with a webcam, select "Respondus Monitor" as your product
- If you're still unable to resolve a technical issue with LockDown Browser, go to [support.respondus.com](http://support.respondus.com) and select "Submit a Ticket". Provide detailed information about your problem and what steps you took to resolve it