

POLS 2311: American Government and Politics (Section 28041) Spring 2021 Online (asynchronous)

Gregory D. Schmidt

gdschmidt@utep.edu or through Course Mail in Blackboard
Appointments by phone also available.

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. federalism, electoral systems, and political parties;
3. the three branches of the federal government;
4. the origins and evolution of civil rights and liberties; and
5. the Constitution and political institutions of the State of Texas.

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

Course Units and Components

This course is divided into six units, each devoted to particular topics (listed below) and lasting two weeks. (Unit 4 has one week before Spring Break and one week after.) The assignments for each unit appear in its respective folder in Blackboard. Open the folder to access the material for the unit.

Each unit includes:

- A presentation on a *major topic* for the unit (Unit 6 has two major topics);

- Two or more *analytical elements* that emphasize particular aspects of these topics and contain brief *quizzes*; (The Introduction in Unit 1 also works like an analytical element but does not have a quiz.)
- One or more *videos* and corresponding *questions*; and
- A *unit test*.

Students will also take three exams. Exam I covers Units 1 and 2, Exam II covers Units 3 and 4, and Exam III covers Units 5 and 6. Students will have at least a week to complete each exam. Exam II will open on the Monday after Spring Break for those students who wish to work ahead or to avoid taking it on Easter, which falls on April 4 (the due date). Exam III will open on May 3—the Monday of the last week of class—and close on Friday, May 14, the last day of final exams.

The unit tests and exams are based on the material on Blackboard: the major topics presentations, analytical elements, and videos. There is no required textbook for the course.

The various components of the course are color coded in Blackboard. Major topics appear in **orange**, analytical elements are listed in black, and the titles of videos and corresponding questions are given in **blue**. Unit tests and exams are presented in **red**.

This course was developed by Dr. Robert Webking, UTEP Distinguished Teaching Professor Emeritus. You will hear his voice presenting the analytical elements. Dr. Gregory Schmidt oversaw the conversion of the materials into the current formats, updated and edited the major topic presentations, added the videos and video questions, and revised the assessments. Sean García and his team at the Extended University provided technical upgrades of the major topic presentations and analytical elements. Steve Varela and his team at Creative Studios embedded a movie and video into Blackboard. Angela Lucero, Lisa Borden, and Lluvia Parral of the UTEP Library have helped Dr. Schmidt obtain and maintain access to other videos used in the course.

Overview of the Course

Unit 1 - The Founding
 Unit 2 – Federalism and Political Parties
 Exam I

Unit 3 - The Executive Branch
 Unit 4 - The Legislative Branch
 Exam II

Unit 5 - The Judicial Branch
 Unit 6 - Equal Rights and Texas Government
 Exam III

For a list of dates, please see the course schedule on Blackboard. The dates for each unit are also indicated on the respective folder in Blackboard.

All unit tests and exams are due on Sundays at 11:59 p.m., except for Exam III, which must be completed by the last day of final exam week (a Friday). Note that the windows for the Unit 4 Test and Exam II overlap in order to give students some flexibility between Spring Break and Easter. Some students may wish to work ahead and/or avoid taking an assessment on Easter. However, one should complete the Unit 4 Test before taking Exam II.

More Detail on Course Components

Major Topic Presentations. Each unit has a major topic presentation at the beginning. There is an additional major topic presentation in Unit 6.

Click on the major topic to access the power point slides. (These sometimes take a minute or two to load.) Then click on the slide show icon in the lower right corner of the screen. You can also advance the slides on the left side of the screen. Some of the presentations have a brief oral commentary by Dr. Webking, which you can access by clicking the play button on the relevant slide.

Analytical Elements and Quizzes. Analytical elements are slide presentations with captioned voiceovers by Dr. Webking. The slides are played as videos on Yuja, a video management system recently acquired by UTEP. For this reason, you are instructed to “Play the video to take the quiz.” You can pause the slides at any time. You can activate the closed captions in the lower right corner of the screen.

A quiz will appear at the end of the analytical element. Answer each question and click on save. Do not skip questions. Most analytical element quizzes have three questions, but there are some exceptions. After you answer all of the questions, a black screen with a white circular arrow pointing clockwise will appear. This means that you have answered all of the questions. Click on the submit button, and you will get confirmation that the quiz has been submitted.

Then check your grade. You can take the analytical element quizzes as many times as you like. Your last attempt is the one that counts. You can even get a perfect score by taking the quiz multiple times and eventually getting the right answers by process of elimination. But the objective here is learning: to *understand why* the correct answers are correct and the other options are not correct. True learning will help you on the tests and exams.

If you want to view the analytical elements in full screen mode, begin by clicking the icon by the submit button at the top of the page. Next click on the play button and then on the full screen icon in the lower right corner of the screen. You will need to exit the full screen mode at the end of the slides in order to begin the quiz.

If you have technical problems with a quiz, you can always take it again. You can also skip to the end of the presentation to retake a quiz.

Videos and Video Questions. Each unit includes videos relevant to its topic(s). The video assigned for Unit 1 is a movie on the drafting of the Constitution. It is embedded into

Blackboard. The *Longoria Affair* in Unit 6 is also embedded. The other videos are accessed via links from the respective files. Closed captions are available.

Questions that students should answer while watching each video are also posted on Blackboard (in different files for embedded videos or in the same file for linked videos). The knowledge generated by correctly answering these questions will be the basis for questions on each video that will appear on the tests and exams.

Unit Tests and Exams. Each assessment focuses on a discrete part of the course. Each unit test covers only the material from the respective unit. Exam I covers only the material from Units 1 and 2, Exam II only the material from Units 3 and 4, and Exam III only the material from Units 5 and 6. There is no final exam.

Most of the questions on the tests and exams are multiple choice. There are a few true/false questions. The questions appear one at a time. You must answer a question in order to move on to the next one. There is no backtracking. You should complete each assessment in one sitting. Do not save a test or exam in order to resume work later because the timer keeps running, even if you are logged out. If your test or exam is disrupted due to technical difficulties, try to log back in as soon as possible.

Each unit test will have 21 questions worth 5 points each, and will last a maximum of 45 minutes. Students can review the questions and their answers after taking the test. They may retake a test one time, in which case the grade will be the average of the two attempts. Some questions may be repeated on different attempts, but others will be new.

Each exam will have 42 questions worth 2.5 points each, and will last a maximum of 90 minutes. Some questions from unit tests are likely to be repeated on exams, but others will be new. Exams may be taken only once. Students can review the questions and their answers after the due date.

Please note that five points of extra credit are built into each test and exam. Each unit test has 21 questions worth 5 points, so it is possible to score a total of 105 points. Each exam has 42 questions worth 2.5 points, making the maximum possible score also 105.

The deadlines for taking the assessments are not flexible. Students may take the analytical element quizzes in a given unit and the respective unit test only during the dates for that unit. Students will be able to take the exams only during the designated exam windows. If you begin a test or exam before the deadline, but finish it after the deadline 10 points will be deducted from your score. You will receive a 0 for any missed assessment.

I must be notified immediately (gdschmidt@utep.edu) of any medical or personal emergency that prevents a student from taking an assessment by the deadline. Proof is required.

By accessing a quiz, test, or exam, students agree not to give or accept any help in completing the assignment. Students may use printouts of power point slides and video questions, as well as their own notes, but they may not seek or accept help from others or use electronic devices. It is also a violation of academic integrity to disseminate questions or answers from quizzes, tests, 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!

All suspected violations of academic integrity at UTEP must be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR) for possible disciplinary action. To learn more, please see the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures: Student Conduct and Discipline.

Additional Policies and Information

Course Grade. The course grade is based on the analytical element quizzes (10%), the unit tests (30%), and the exams (60%). All of these grades will be posted on Blackboard. Students will also be able to see their average grades for quizzes, tests, and exams, as well as their overall average for the course.

Course grades will be distributed as follows:

Course Average	Final Grade
90% and above	A
At least 80% but less than 90%	B
At least 65% but less than 80%	C
At least 50% but less than 65%	D
Less than 50%	F

If a Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory (S/U) option is available, grades of A-D will be considered to be “satisfactory” (S), and grades of F will be considered as “unsatisfactory” (U).

I cannot accept extra credit projects to compensate for poor performances on assessments because opportunities for extra credit must be available to all students on an equal basis. However, as discussed above, extra credit opportunities are built into each test and exam.

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.

Technology. The content for this course is delivered via the Internet through the Blackboard learning management system, so you will need to have access to a computer or laptop. Make sure that your UTEP e-mail account is working and that you have Internet access and a stable web browser. Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox are the best browsers for Blackboard; other browsers may cause complications. If you have technical difficulties, try updating your browser, clearing your cache, or switching to another browser.

The most common technical problem is weak Wi-Fi signals that throw students out of a test or exam. If this happens, you should immediately log back into the exam. If the problem persists, you should immediately contact the Helpdesk (915) 747-4357 (HELP) and the instructor. If you

are granted additional attempts due to technical difficulties (proof required), the grade will be based on all questions answered from all attempts. Additional penalties may be imposed for repeated technical difficulties. It is your responsibility to acquire reliable Internet access.

If you encounter technical difficulties not related to a test or exam that are beyond your troubleshooting skills, please contact the UTEP Help Desk, whose staff is trained specifically in assisting students. Please do not contact me for this type of assistance. The Help Desk is much better equipped to assist you!

If you do not have access to a computer, you may do course work and take assessments on the second floor of the UTEP Library. You may also be able to check out a laptop there. Please note the rules for visiting campus below and consult with the library regarding their hours and additional requirements for access. Library hours are limited, due to the COVID-19 emergency. For example, the library closes at 6 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

Course Communications. I will send out announcements at least once a week and usually more often. You will receive these by e-mail, and they will also be posted on Blackboard.

UTEP e-mail is the best way to contact me. I will make every attempt to respond to your e-mail within 24 hours of receipt. Indeed, I am usually pretty prompt! When e-mailing me, please be sure to use your UTEP student account and put the course number (POLS 2311) in the subject line. In the body of your e-mail, clearly state your question. At the end of your e-mail, be sure to put your first and last name, and your university identification number.

You can also contact me via course mail on Blackboard, but I check this only about once a day.

Students with Disabilities. If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at 747-5148, or by email to cass@utep.edu. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at <https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/cass/>

COVID-19 Precautions and Requirements. This class is a 100% asynchronous online course delivered via Blackboard. We will not meet face-to-face, and there is no reason to come to campus for this class unless you need access to a computer for course work. If you do come to campus—for any reason—you must complete the questions on the UTEP screening website (screening.utep.edu) prior to your arrival. The website must authorize your visit. You must wear face coverings and practice social distancing while on campus.

Students are not permitted on campus when they have a positive COVID-19 test, exposure to the virus, or symptoms. You must STAY AT HOME and REPORT if you (1) have been diagnosed with COVID-19, (2) are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, or (3) have had recent contact with a person who has received a positive coronavirus test. Reports should be made at screening.utep.edu. If you know of anyone who should report any of these three criteria, you should encourage them to report. If the individual cannot report, you can report on his or her behalf by sending an email to COVIDaction@utep.edu.