

POLS 2311: American Government and Politics (Section 28153)
WINTERMESTER 2020 (JANUARY 6-18)
UGLC 216: MTWRF 2:30-5:30 p.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 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; and
6. 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 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. This is especially true, given that this is a very intensive, two-week class. Essential materials and information are sometimes 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 3 or more recorded absences—due to poor attendance, tardies, early departures, or poor behavior— will be dropped from the class with a grade of F. 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 .5 points.

I do not try to determine “excused” and “unexcused” absences because I give extra credit for outstanding attendance and penalize students only for flagrant lack of attendance or poor behavior during class. 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. There is no required textbook for the course. Students should be able to correctly answer the questions on the exams on the basis of the power point slides, commentary and discussion during class, and answers to questions on the videos.

3. Videos. Students will watch two or more streaming videos online for each topic. The links to each video and the questions that students should answer while watching the video are available on Blackboard. The knowledge generated by correctly answering these questions will be the basis for questions on the video that will appear on the exams.

Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox are the best browsers for watching the videos. You also will need to establish a Virtual Private Network (VPN) in order to watch the videos. Please see the information on the home page. Please see the Appendix for other technical requirements.

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

5. Syllabus Test (Extra Credit). This assignment is designed to help you learn the requirements in the course syllabus and introduce you to RLBM. You may complete this test 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. You have 20 minutes to complete 10 questions.

6. Exams. Students will take 6 exams on Blackboard outside of class, using RLBM. Each exam will open at 6 p.m., a half hour after class. Those exams given during the week—Exams 1, 2, 4, and 5—will close at 2 p.m. the next day, a half hour before class. Exams 3 and 6 will open on Friday at 6 p.m. and close in 48 hours at 6 p.m. on Sunday. Each exam must be submitted within the designated window. You may take an exam only once. One exam grade will be dropped.

The exams are not cumulative; rather, each exam covers the lecture, power point slides, and videos since the last exam. Each exam will have 21 questions worth 5 points each, and will last a maximum of 40 minutes. Most questions are multiple choice, but there are some true/ false questions. If necessary, exam grades will be curved, in accordance with overall student performance.

Please note that it is possible to score a total of 105 points on each exam ($21 \times 5 = 105$). Thus, five points of extra credit are built into each exam. Students will be able to see their exam scores and their exam average throughout the semester on Blackboard. After an exam has closed to the class, students can review their answers with the instructor.

Please note that the deadlines for taking the exams are not flexible. The exams will appear on Blackboard only during the designated exam windows. You will not be able to begin an exam outside of these windows. If you begin an 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 exam not taken.

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 exam. I must be notified immediately (gdschmidt@utep.edu) of any medical or personal emergency that is so severe that it prevents a student from taking the exam during the designated window. Proof is required.

Students are encouraged to take exams on a UTEP computer with a wired connection and RLBM (as in the library). If you elect to take an exam on your own device, you are responsible for any technical problems that might arise. The most common problem is weak Wi-Fi signals that throw students out of the exam. If this happens, you should immediately log back into the exam. If the problem persists, you should immediately contact the Helpdesk and the instructor. If you are granted another attempt (proof required), the score will be based on all questions answered from both attempts minus 10 points, unless the original attempt was on a wired UTEP computer and the Helpdesk confirms the technical problem. Remember that you can always use the syllabus test without any risk to see if a configuration is working properly.

7. Academic Integrity. By accessing an exam, students agree to accept no help from others while completing it. Students may use printouts of power point slides and video questions and their own notes, but they may not seek or accept help from others or use 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 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!

8. Extra Credit. I cannot accept extra credit projects to improve low exam grades 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 exam, and you can also earn extra credit through good attendance and the syllabus test. 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.

9. Course Grade. The course grade will be based on the average of the five highest exam grades, plus any extra credit points for attendance, the syllabus test, and class 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.

10. 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.

Once again, 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.

11. 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, or visit their office located in UTEP Union East, Room 106. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at <https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/cass/>

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

MONDAY & TUESDAY, JANUARY 6-7

Introduction to Class

Respondus LockDown Browser and Monitor (RLBM)

Syllabus Test (Extra Credit) (opens 1-6 at 6 p.m.; open until 1-19 at 6 p.m.)

The Drafting and Adoption of the Constitution

Constitutional Principles

The Constitution: Adaptability and Survival

Video, *Are We to Be a Nation?* (online)

Video: *A More Perfect Union* (Constitution USA series) (online)

Video: *Built to Last?* (Constitution USA series) (online)

Exam 1 on Blackboard (opens 1-7 at 6 p.m.; closes 1-8 at 2. p.m.)

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8

Congress

Video: *Divided States of America: Part 1* (online)

Video: *Divided States of America: Part 2* (online)

Exam 2 on Blackboard (opens 1-8 at 6 p.m.; closes 1-9 at 2 p.m.)

THURSDAY & FRIDAY, JANUARY 9-10

The Presidency

The Federal Bureaucracy

Video: *President Trump* (online)

Video: *Trump's Road to the White House* (online)

Video: *The Mueller Investigation* (online)

Exam 3 on Blackboard (opens 1-10 at 6 p.m.; closes 1-12 at 6 p.m.)

MONDAY & TUESDAY, JANUARY 13-14

The Judicial Branch

Civil Rights and Liberties

Video: *Supreme Revenge* (online)

Video: *It's a Free Country* (Constitution USA series) (online)

Video: *Created Equal* (Constitution USA series) (online)

Exam 4 on Blackboard (opens 1-14 at 6 p.m.; closes 1-15 at 2 p.m.)

WEDNESDAY & THURSDAY, JANUARY 15-16

Voters and Political Parties

Interest Groups and the Media

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

Video: *Digital Disconnect: Fake News, Privacy, and Democracy* (online)

Exam 5 on Blackboard (opens 1-16 at 6 p.m.; closes 1-17 at 2 p.m.)

FRIDAY, JANUARY 17

The Texas Constitution

Political Institutions in Texas

Video: *Remember the Alamo* (online)

Video: *War and Peace (1942-54): The Latino Americans* (online)

Video: *Starving the Beast: The Battle to Disrupt and Reform America's Public Universities* (online)

Video: *Meet the Frackers: Energy Independence or Environmental Nightmare?* (online)

Exam 6 on Blackboard (opens 1-17 at 6 p.m.; closes 1-19 at 6 p.m.)

There is no final exam for this course!

Appendix

Technology Requirements

You will need the following software on your computers to efficiently work in this course. In some cases, your computer may already have some of these programs installed.

- Adobe Acrobat Reader. You can get the program by going to <http://www.adobe.com/> and then clicking on the icon on the center of the screen which says 'Get Adobe Reader?'. Follow instructions to install the reader.
- Adobe Flash Player. You can get the player by going to <http://www.adobe.com/> and then clicking on 'Get Adobe Flash Player?'. Follow instructions to install the player.
- Apple QuickTime Player. You can get this player by going to <http://www.apple.com/> . Once there, click on the 'Downloads?' tab on the top of the page and then click on QuickTime 'Download?' and follow instructions.
- Microsoft Office. It is my understanding that UTEP students can download this for free.

Help Desk

For technical help, please click on UTEP's Blackboard Help in the course menu or go to helpdesk.utep.edu

You may also call the UTEP HELP desk at (915) 747-4357 (HELP) during regular UTEP business hours.

Respondus LockDown Browser and Monitor (RLBM) + Webcam Requirement

This course requires the use of RLBM 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 RLBM and the webcam feature.

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

Download Instructions

Download and install RLBM from this link:

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

Once Installed

- Start RLBM.
- Log into Blackboard.
- Navigate to the exam.

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

Guidelines

When taking an online exam, 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 exam, 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 exam.

- 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 RLBM will prevent you from accessing other websites or applications; you will be unable to exit the exam until all questions are completed and submitted.

Getting Help

Several resources are available if you encounter problems with RLBM:

- The Windows and Mac versions of RLBM 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. 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 and select "Submit a Ticket". Provide detailed information about your problem and what steps you took to resolve it.