

POLS 2311: American Government and Politics (Section 28211)

Wintermester 2017, UGLC 342: MTWRF, 8 a.m. – 1 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 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.

Please be prepared to begin each class at 8 a.m. and stay until 1 p.m. We will take a 15 minute break each day approximately half-way through each class. Please try to use the bathroom at that time.

Course Requirements and Policies

1. Attendance and Punctuality. Regular attendance is expected. If you do not attend class regularly, you will not do well. This is especially true, given the intensive nature of a

Wintermester class. Moreover, you risk missing daily quizzes, which will usually be given at the beginning of each class.

I will take attendance at the beginning of each class (often by means of the daily quiz) and at least one other point during the class. 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 are present for all quizzes and roll calls, I will add three extra points to your course average. If you miss only one roll call or quiz, I will add two extra points, I will add one extra point if you miss only two roll calls or quizzes. 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. 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). There is no required reading for the course.

3. Videos. I will show various videos on course-related topics. 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 quizzes each day on the lecture, power point slides, and videos from the preceding class. Normally, quizzes will be given at the beginning of class. 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 exam. And the first quiz will likely contain one or more questions based on this syllabus!

5. Exam. A comprehensive exam will be given on Friday, January 13 from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. The exam will be comprised of multiple choice and true/false questions. 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 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, 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. I will figure your average two different ways and give you the highest one:

Highest 5-6 Quizzes	50%
Exam	50%
	100% + any extra credit points

Highest 5-6 Quizzes	33%
Exam	67%
	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 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.

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

Monday, January 2

Introduction to Class

The Drafting of the Constitution

Video: *A More Perfect Union*

Tuesday, January 3

Quiz 1

Constitutional Principles

Video: *Constitution USA*, Episode 1 on Federalism

The Constitution: Adaptability and Survival

Video: *Constitution USA*, Episode 4 on Future

Wednesday, January 4

Quiz 2

The Presidency

Video: *The Choice 2016* (Frontline)

The Federal Bureaucracy

Thursday, January 5

Quiz 3

Congress

Video: *Obama's Deal* (Frontline)

Friday, January 6

Día de los Reyes Magos; Congress meets to count votes of Electoral College

Rosca de Reyes

Quiz 4

The Judicial Branch

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

Catch Up

Monday, January 9

Quiz 5

Civil Rights and Liberties

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

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

Tuesday, January 10

Quiz 6

Voters and Political Parties

Video: *The Longoria Affair*

Interest Groups and the Media

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

Wednesday, January 11

Quiz 7

The Texas Constitution

Video: *Remember the Alamo*

Political Institutions in Texas

Thursday, January 12

Quiz 8

Who Wins, Who Loses: Pluralism versus Elitism

Catch-Up and Review

Friday, January 13

Final Exam, 9 a.m. (2 hours maximum)