

## **American Government & Politics**

Political Science (POLS) 2311 – 023

CRN: 28449

The University of Texas at El Paso

Spring 2018

TR: 1:30pm - 2:50pm

Quinn Hall 203

Instructor: Dr. Gregory S. Schober

Office: Benedict Hall 315

Phone: 915-747-7985

Email: gschober@utep.edu

Office Hours: TR, 9:30am-10:15am and 12:15pm-1:15pm

MW, 1:30pm-2:45pm (and by appointment)

Class Website: Blackboard through your MY UTEP PORTAL

### **Course Description**

This course focuses on the politics of the United States. We will examine political foundations, political behavior, political institutions, and key policy areas in American politics. A special emphasis will be placed on identifying the achievements and challenges of democracy in the United States, as well as uncovering how institutions shape the behavior of citizens and politicians. Political behavior and institutions in the state of Texas also will be considered. Through an examination of Texas politics, we will highlight the relationship between the national and state governments.

Throughout the course, the practical applications of key concepts and themes will be discussed. Current events are not the central focus of the course, but they will be considered to help illustrate key points.

In line with the UTEP Edge initiative, the course aims to provide meaningful experiences that will help prepare you for leadership and lifelong success. For example, this course offers opportunities for students to have experiences related to community engagement and student leadership, and these experiences allow you to exercise valuable skills such as social responsibility, leadership, communication, and critical thinking.

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Describe in detail the main institutions and key decision-makers in American politics.
- Communicate how institutions shape the political behavior of citizens and politicians in the United States.

- Understand the challenges posed by democracy, as well as opportunities for citizens to help overcome those challenges.
- Explain the immense influence that politics has on their lives.
- Comprehend the relationship between the national government and the Texas government.
- Recognize the role of civic engagement in American politics and society.

Also, by the end of the semester, students should make improvements in the following skill areas related to the UTEP Edge initiative:

- Social responsibility
- Leadership
- Communication
- Critical thinking

**Required Books** (available at the UTEP Bookstore or elsewhere):

- *American Politics Today* (Essentials Fifth Edition)
  - Authors: Bianco and Canon
  - 2017
- *Governing Texas* (Third Edition)
  - Authors: Champagne, Harpham, and Casellas
  - 2017

### **Course Requirements**

- Exam 1: Exam 1 will consist of multiple choice questions, and it will cover material from the course readings, class lectures, and/or class discussions up until Exam 1 (20% of grade).
- Exam 2: Exam 2 will consist of multiple choice questions, and it will cover material from the course readings, class lectures, and/or class discussions between Exam 1 and Exam 2 (25% of grade).
- Final Exam: The Final Exam will consist of multiple choice questions, and it will cover material from the course readings, class lectures, and/or class discussions from the start of the semester until the Final Exam (25% of grade).
- Civic Engagement Project: Students will have the option of completing service learning in the community through the Center for Civic Engagement or writing a research paper on civic engagement in the local region. Through this requirement (and in line with the UTEP Edge initiative), students will have opportunities to exercise the skills of social responsibility, leadership, communication, and critical thinking (15% of grade).
- Class Attendance and Participation: Students will be able to earn participation points each class session by attending and participating in class discussions. Points will be awarded based on the quantity and quality of participation. Through this requirement (and in line

with the UTEP Edge initiative), students will have opportunities to exercise the skills of leadership, communication, and critical thinking (15% of grade).

## **University Policies**

This instructor abides by university policies, such as excused absences and attendance, as stated in the UTEP undergraduate catalog: <http://catalog.utep.edu/undergrad/academic-regulations/curriculum-and-classroom-policies/>. It is the student's responsibility to understand their rights and university policies. In addition to university policies, I add the following policies below.

## **Attendance Policy**

UTEP expects that students will not miss classes without valid excuses. Students will be asked to sign an attendance sheet for each class meeting. It is expected that you do not miss classes, which will result in a penalty to your grade. More specifically, after two unexcused absences, I will begin to deduct points from your attendance and participation grade for each subsequent unexcused absence. Note that the class participation portion of each student's grade is left solely to the discretion of the instructor.

Here are specific situations of absence and whether or not excuses will be accepted as valid or not:

- Valid university excuses include religious holy days, officially recognized university activities (with Dean of Students letter), and military leave. Students must follow the required documentation procedure for each valid university excuse.
- The instructor reserves the right to accept, or not, excuses related to medical issues. Naturally, it is not usually feasible to document in advance any time lost due to illness. The exception is planned surgeries and appointments (not normal check-ups). Any class time missed will not be excused without medical or other valid documentation. Documentation from Mexico is permissible. Students with severe medical problems that result in missing a majority of the semester may want to consider a complete withdrawal from the university for medical purposes.
- Absences due to conflicts with work, child care, etc. that make it impossible for you to regularly attend this class are not permitted. If you know you will have scheduling conflicts with this class, then you should make other arrangements or postpone this class until a future semester.
- According to UTEP Curriculum and Classroom Policies, "When, in the judgment of the instructor, a student has been absent to such a degree as to impair his or her status relative to credit for the course, the instructor can drop the student from the class with a grade of W before the course drop deadline and with a grade of F after the course drop deadline."
- Missed exams due to family hardship or family medical problems may not be accepted by the instructor as valid excuses. For example, helping family members move, picking up at the airport, driving family members to medical appointments when you know they conflict with class, and other such activities, will not be permitted as valid excuses. Emergencies such as deaths in the family must be documented, unfortunately.
- Missing any course assessments and work due to vacations and pre-booked travel arrangements are not valid excuses.

## Final Exam Policy

The date of the final exam is listed below in the Schedule of Classes. The final exam will be cumulative and is used to evaluate student comprehension and retention of the course subject matter. The final exam will draw from all the course readings, class lectures, and class discussions throughout the semester. Some questions may be repeated from the earlier exams. Students are required to bring their own scantrons and pencils. The final exam is considered over when the instructor is no longer in the room (all other students present have completed the exam), so do not be late. The exam must be taken on this day unless you have a valid university accepted excuse.

## Exams 1 and 2 Policies

The dates of Exams 1 and 2 are listed below in the Schedule of Classes. Students are required to bring their own scantrons and pencils. No make-up exam will occur without a student having provided to the instructor valid documentation explaining or excusing the absence. The instructor has the discretion to decide if a make-up exam is allowable outside the university excused absences. If you miss an exam due to an emergency or illness, you must notify me (and confirm with me that I have received your notification attempt) as soon as possible to arrange a make-up exam. A make-up exam may be of a different format than the original exam.

## Civic Engagement Project

Students are to choose one of the following two options for the civic engagement project:

- **Option 1:** Complete a minimum of 10 hours of service learning coordinated by the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE). We will have an in-class session to have class members registered and trained on how to do the project and another session where students will have an opportunity to share and discuss the activities they accomplished during the semester. You must submit your documentation verifying the hours of service learning to the CCE by 5:00pm on the due date (the due date for service learning is listed below in the Schedule of Classes) to receive credit. Further details and instructions will be provided in class.
- **Option 2:** Write a research paper (minimum 10 pages - maximum 15 pages) on current efforts by nonprofit organizations or community organizations to address poverty in the local area. What are the names of four groups or centers in the local area that provide opportunities for adults to help impoverished community members? How do these groups attempt to address poverty? If you could design a new nonprofit organization that aimed to help impoverished individuals in the local community, what would you design and why? You should refer to relevant scholarly work as well as the official websites of the groups or centers that you are researching for the paper (minimum of 8 scholarly and official website sources). Students who choose this option will also have an opportunity to share and discuss their project with other class members during a class session. A printed copy of the paper is due at the start of class on the due date (the due date for the research paper is listed below in the Schedule of Classes). Further details and instructions will be provided in class.

## **Other Course Policies and Expectations**

- Debate and discussion are important in the critical evaluation of politics. It is expected that students will treat the instructor and other students with respect, including refraining from disparaging remarks, personal insults, derogatory comments, and other unprofessional behavior, in person or electronically. Any problem related to rude conduct, or any threats to violence, etc., likely will result in the student being dropped from the course by the instructor.
- Outside work and other non-class related activities are not permitted in our classroom.
- If you engage in behaviors that distract others or create a disturbance, you will be asked to leave the class. If you refuse to leave class, university police will be contacted.
- Cell phone/smart phone/PDA usage is not permitted during exams or at other times when it might pose a class disturbance. Laptops, tablets, or other electronic devices used for note-taking are permissible, but students using such must not engage in any activities that disturb other students.

## **Email Protocol**

When emailing me, please put the course and section number in the subject line. In the body of your email, clearly state your question. At the end of your email, be sure to put your first and last name. Please do not email me about information you can obtain from the syllabus. I generally do not answer substantive material from lectures or readings via email, as it is not an effective means of communicating. If there is class material you are confused about, please come see me during my office hours.

## **Academic Integrity and Dishonesty**

As stated in the UTEP undergraduate catalog, “Any student who commits an act of academic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Academic dishonesty includes, and is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, and any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts. Proven violations of the detailed regulations, as printed in the *Handbook of Operating Procedures (HOP)*, and available in the Office of Student Life and on the homepage of the Office of Student Life at [www.utep.edu/dos](http://www.utep.edu/dos), can result in sanctions ranging from disciplinary probation, to a failing grade on the work in question, to a failing grade in the course, to suspension or dismissal, among others.”

## **Students with Different Abilities**

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](mailto:cass@utep.edu), or visit their office located in UTEP Union East, Room 106. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at [www.sa.utep.edu/cass](http://www.sa.utep.edu/cass). CASS’ staff are the only individuals who can validate, and if need be, authorize accommodations for students with disabilities. The student is

responsible for presenting to the instructor any CASS accommodation letters and instructions before arrangements need to be made for exams or other needs.

### Other Resources for Students

- UTEP Counseling and Psychological Services
  - Union West, Room 202
  - 915-747-5302
  - After Hours Crisis Line: 915-747-5302
  - <http://sa.utep.edu/counsel/>
- University Police Department
  - 915-747-5611
  - <https://www.utep.edu/police/>
- UTEP Student Health Center
  - 915-747-5624
  - <https://www.utep.edu/chs/shc/>
- Center Against Sexual and Family Violence
  - 580 Giles Road
  - 915-593-7300
  - 24/7 Crisis Hope Line: 1-800-727-0511
- UTEP Student Food Bank (Student Engagement and Leadership Center)
  - Union West, Room 106
  - 915-747-5670
- UTEP Student Support Services for Challenges with Finances (FHAR)
  - Academic Advising Center
  - 915-747-5290
- If you would like to access other resources, please contact me and I will do my best to help you search for additional resources.

### Schedule of Classes

<b>Part 1: The Foundations of American Government and Politics</b>		
Tuesday	1/16	Introduction to the Course
Thursday	1/18	Understanding American Politics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Politics Today (APT), Ch. 1</li> </ul>
Tuesday	1/23	The Constitution and the Founding <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presentation by the CCE</li> <li>• APT, Ch. 2</li> </ul>
Thursday	1/25	Federalism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APT, Ch. 3</li> </ul>

Tuesday	1/30	<b>Civic Engagement Project</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Training by the CCE (Option 1)</b></li> <li>• <b>Description and Discussion of Research Paper (Option 2)</b></li> </ul>
Thursday	2/1	Civil Liberties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APT, Ch. 4</li> </ul>
Tuesday	2/6	Civil Rights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APT, Ch. 5</li> </ul>
<b>Part 2: Politics (Political Behavior)</b>		
Thursday	2/8	Public Opinion and the Media <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APT, Ch. 6</li> </ul>
Tuesday	2/13	Political Parties <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APT, Ch. 7</li> </ul>
Thursday	2/15	Review Session
Tuesday	2/20	Elections APT, Ch. 8
Thursday	2/22	<b>Exam 1</b>
Tuesday	2/27	Interest Groups <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APT, Ch. 9 (first half of chapter)</li> </ul>
Thursday	3/1	Elections in Comparative Perspective <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APT, Ch. 9 (second half of chapter)</li> </ul>
<b>Part 3: Institutions</b>		
Tuesday	3/6	Congress <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APT, Ch. 10</li> </ul>
Thursday	3/8	The Presidency APT, Ch. 11
Tuesday	3/13	<b>No Class: Spring Break</b>
Thursday	3/15	<b>No Class: Spring Break</b>
Tuesday	3/20	The Courts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APT, Ch. 13</li> </ul>
Thursday	3/22	Economic Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APT, Ch. 14 (first half of chapter)</li> </ul>
Tuesday	3/27	Review Session
Thursday	3/29	Social Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APT, Ch. 14 (second half of chapter)</li> </ul>
Tuesday	4/3	<b>Exam 2</b>

Thursday	4/5	<b>No Class</b>
Tuesday	4/10	Foreign Policy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• APT, Ch. 15</li> </ul>
<b>Part 4: Texas Government and Politics</b>		
Thursday	4/12	Political Culture, People, and Economy of Texas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governing Texas (GT), Ch. 1</li> </ul>
Tuesday	4/17	Political Parties in Texas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GT, Ch. 4</li> </ul>
Thursday	4/19	Campaigns and Elections in Texas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GT, Ch. 5</li> </ul>
Tuesday	4/24	Interest Groups and Lobbying in Texas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GT, Ch. 6</li> </ul>
Thursday	4/26	<b>Civic Engagement Project</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reflection Session (Options 1 and 2)</b></li> </ul>
Tuesday	5/1	Public Policy in Texas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GT, Ch. 12</li> </ul>
Thursday	5/3	Review Session <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Civic Engagement Project Due</b> *Option 1 (service learning): Due by 5pm *Option 2 (research paper): Due by the start of class (submit printed copy to the instructor)</li> <li>• Final Lecture</li> </ul>
Thursday	5/10	<b>Final Exam: 1pm-3:45pm</b>