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**UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO**  
**Political Science 2311: American Government and Politics**  
**Fall 2014**

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Course Registration Number: 15055  
Classroom: UGLC 126  
Date/Time: TR 10:30-11:50am

Website: <http://www.faculty.utep.edu/jdvillalobos2>  
Office Hours: Thursdays 3-5pm (or by appointment)

### **Course Overview**

This course provides a broad overview and introduction of American government at the national level. More specifically, we will explore the constitutional principles upon which the American political system is founded, the institutions, structures, and policymaking processes that comprise the federal government, and the role that citizens play in national politics through various means of political participation. We will also incorporate an understanding of Texas politics and the relationship between state and federal government entities. The main goal of this course is to develop a deep understanding of the U.S. national government and to think critically about its development, its current form, and what role the public plays in shaping American politics. In addition, a significant portion of the class will deal with civic engagement issues and the prospects for key policy reforms in the current political environment. I look forward to working with you during the course of the semester and encourage you to be active in our classroom discussions.

### **Course Objectives**

Students can expect to learn the following by the end of this course:

- (1) to explore and understand constitutional principles upon which the American political system is founded
- (2) to define, understand, and use concepts and terms relevant to the study of the American national government
- (3) to identify, formulate, and answer complex questions related to the institutions, structures, and processes that comprise the federal government
- (4) to develop ideas about the role that citizens play in national politics through various means of political participation
- (5) to apply knowledge and general theories from the literature to evaluate the current events and conditions related to American national government

### **Objectives for Good Citizenship**

As a member of this classroom it is vital that you to adhere to the following principles of professionalism:

- interpret the consequences of one's own actions (unprofessional conduct will be dealt with swiftly through the university)

- have responsible civic engagement—that is,
  - respect different points of view and different cultures
  - work effectively as a member of the classroom
  - articulate the value to society and the workplace of a diverse and global perspective

### Grades

Grades will be based on two exams (each weighted according to the depth of information covered during a section). There will also be a civic engagement class project and documentary short essay assignment (see details further below). Last, in-class attendance and participation will count for 10% of the final grade such that one must actively attend and participate in class to earn an “A.”

<b>Grading/Exams</b>	
In-Class Attendance and Participation	10%
Civic Engagement Class Project	10%
Documentary Short Essay	5%
Midterm Exam	35%
Final Exam	40%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

Final grades are based on accumulated weighted points, rounded to the 2<sup>nd</sup> decimal:

<b>Final Grade Scale</b>
≥ 89.50% = A
89.49 – 79.50% = B
79.49 – 69.50% = C
69.49 – 59.50% = D
≤ 59.49% = F

I will not change grades. You have the opportunity to earn extra credit in this class so there is no reason to consider grade changes. If you are concerned about your grade, please come and see me during my office hours. This is particularly important if your grade on the first exam is not what you expected. I will not change the grade, but I can give you feedback and suggestions on how to improve your performance in the class.

### Required Texts

The course includes one required textbook:

O’Connor, Karen, Larry J. Sabato, Alixandra B. Yanus, L. Tucker Gibson, Jr., & Clay Robinson. 2014. *American and Texas Government: Prepared for Dr. José D. Villalobos POLS 2311* (Custom Edition with MyPolisciLab). Pearson Custom Library.

- **ISBN-13 978-1-269-24526-5 (Packaged with MyPolisciLab)**
- **ISBN-13 978-1-269-24525-8 (Textbook Only)**

### Civic Engagement Class Project

Students are to choose from one of the two following options for the main class project (worth 10% of the grade):

**Project Option 1:** Complete a minimum of 10 hours of community service coordinated by the Center for Civic Engagement (CCE). We will have a 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. During the course of the semester, students will also submit short reflection reports for each of their community service activities via Blackboard. You must submit your documentation verifying the hours of community service to the Center for Civic Engagement (Benedict Hall Rm. 101) by 11/25 @ 5:00pm to receive credit (further details and instructions will be provided in class).

**OR**

**Project Option 2:** Write an analytical paper (minimum 15 pages-maximum 20 pages). In the paper, you should first discuss the role of civic engagement in politics and society, and then choose a major issue (for example, poverty, health care needs, domestic violence, helping those with disabilities, etc.) and analyze how civic engagement strategies may be (or already have been) employed to address the needs of a given community for the betterment of society. In doing so, you should refer to scholarly work pertinent to the focus of your paper (at least 10 scholarly sources should be cited). A full rubric for the paper will be provided on Blackboard for those who choose this option. Students who choose this option will also have an opportunity to share and discuss their project with other class members during a class session upon submission of their work. You must submit your paper by 11/25 @ 5:00pm to receive credit (further details and instructions will be provided in class).

*Important Note:* All written work submitted for this course will be checked by the instructor for originality via **Turnitin**—an online originality checking service made available by UTEP ([http://www.turnitin.com/en\\_us/features/originalitycheck](http://www.turnitin.com/en_us/features/originalitycheck)). You are free to use this service to check/confirm the originality of your work. For more information on **Turnitin** and to access training materials, you can visit <https://www.turnitin.com/static/training/student.php>. Refer to the section “Academic Misconduct and Dishonesty” below for plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity, and the consequences of such actions.

### **Documentary Short Essay**

I will provide the full details and instructions for this essay on the day it is assigned.

### **Classroom Policies**

- In-class attendance and participation counts for 10% of the final grade. After three absences, I will begin to deduct 10 points from your attendance and participation grade for each absence thereafter. Accordingly, you must attend and participate in class to earn an “A.” Students will be asked to sign an attendance sheet for each class meeting. I expect everyone to attend class on the scheduled dates and times. This means coming to class alert, willing to ask and answer questions, and prepared to contribute intellectually to the class discussions. Remember that you are expected to have completed the weekly readings before the class meeting. Coming to the class prepared is important particularly because when calculating your final grade, I will consider your class participation. In addition, exams will cover material from the readings and the lectures, so doing just one or the other will leave you at a disadvantage. If I consistently detect a pattern of only a few students reading, there will be graded “pop-quizzes,” which will become part of the 10% attendance and participation portion of the final grade. Note that the class participation portion of each student’s grade is non-negotiable and left solely to the discretion of the instructor.

- Make-up exams will only be given if you have a university excused absence and follow university guidelines (see “Excused Absences” section below for more details). If you miss a test due to an emergency or illness, or if you have a university-approved excuse ahead of time, you must notify me *as soon as possible* to arrange a make-up exam. Note that if you miss an exam, I expect you to contact me *immediately* afterward (I expect later that day or the following day at the latest). You may contact me by e-mail, telephone, or visit during office hours to arrange a make-up. If you miss a test and do not have a university acceptable excuse, you will receive a “0” on the test. Keep in mind that a make-up exam may be of a different format than the original exam.

### **Excused Absences**

I will excuse absences only when a student participates in an official university-recognized activity, observes a recognized religious holiday of her/his faith that happens to coincide with a class meeting, is called to and participates in active military service for a reasonably brief period, or confronts extraordinary circumstances, such as a prolonged illness, extended jury duty, or a major personal crisis. Any excused absences must be documented. Please do not ask me to excuse absences for minor illnesses or scheduling conflicts (e.g. sports practices or games, play rehearsals, meetings, conferences, appointments with other professors or advisors, student teaching, doctor's appointments, court dates, jobs, job interviews, having your cable installed, etc.). I am aware that students have other interests and obligations, but you should nevertheless make this class a priority. If you are likely to have recurring conflicts, please take another course.

See academic regulations in UTEP Undergraduate Catalogue for a list of excused absences: <http://academics.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=54418>. 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 may 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.”

### **E-mail Protocol**

When e-mailing me, please put the course and section number 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 UIN (University Identification Number). Please do not e-mail me about information you can obtain from the syllabus. I do not answer substantive material from lectures or readings via e-mail as it is not an effective means of communicating. If there is class material you are confused about, please come and see me during my office hours.

### **Extra Credit**

If, during the semester you have zero absences, three bonus points will be added to your final grade. Having only one absence will earn you two extra points and if you have only two absences, you will get one extra point. If you have more than two absences, you will not receive extra credit points. University-excused absences will not be counted against you, so long as you provide documentation the day you return to class. Again, it is your responsibility to document excused absences in a timely fashion. Other extra credit opportunities may be offered at the sole

discretion of the instructor and will be assigned in-class to all students on an equal opportunity basis.

### **Academic Dishonesty and Misconduct**

Academic integrity and standing require a respect and adherence to the grading policies and rules against cheating, collusion, and plagiarism. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student and possessing unauthorized materials during a test. Collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. *One example of collusion is signing in for another person (or having someone sign for you) on the class attendance sheet.* As commonly defined, plagiarism consists of passing off as one's own the ideas, words, writings, etc., which belong to another. In accordance with the definition, you are committing plagiarism if you copy the work of another person and turn it in as your own, even if you should have the permission of the person. Plagiarism is one of the worst academic sins, for the plagiarist destroys the trust among colleagues without which research cannot be safely communicated.

I encourage students to study together and work collectively; however, working together to write any part of a written assignment, research paper, and/or exam is plagiarism. If you are unsure whether a citation is required, err on the side of caution and provide one. A document detailing different forms of plagiarism is provided on Blackboard. Here is an informative webcast on plagiarism: <http://www.plagiarism.org/resources/webcasts>

Be aware, just as the internet has made it easier to find material, it has also made it easier to trace the source of any written work. All written work submitted for this course will be checked by the instructor for originality via **Turnitin**—an online originality checking service made available by UTEP ([http://www.turnitin.com/en\\_us/features/originalitycheck](http://www.turnitin.com/en_us/features/originalitycheck)).

Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Violations will be taken seriously and will be subject to disciplinary action. Students may be suspended or expelled from UTEP for such actions. For further information, please refer to <http://studentaffairs.utep.edu/Default.aspx?tabid=4386>.

### **ADA Statement**

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal antidiscrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the university regarding services for students with disabilities.

### **Copyright Statement for Course Materials**

The course materials used in this course are copyrighted. By course materials, I mean all materials generated for this class, which include but are not limited to syllabi, quizzes, exams, lecture notes and PowerPoint slides, in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets. This also includes any information posted on the course webpage. Because these are

copyrighted, you do not have the right to distribute the course materials, unless I expressly grant permission.

## Course Schedule

Note: This is a provisional schedule of our course. With advanced notice, I may introduce specific changes based on progress in class.

<b>Section I: The Constitutional Foundations of the U.S. Government</b>		
Tuesday	8/26	<b>Course Introduction</b> Discuss syllabus, course schedule, and civic engagement project
Thursday	8/28	<b>NO CLASS – American Political Science Association Conference</b> *Begin reading Ch. 1 and looking over the CCE website/materials
Tuesday	9/2	<b>American Government: Roots, Context, and Culture</b> <i>American and Texas Government</i> , Ch. 1
Thursday	9/4	<b>The Constitution</b> <i>American and Texas Government</i> , Ch. 2
Tuesday	9/9	<b>The Federal System</b> <i>American and Texas Government</i> , Ch. 3
Thursday	9/11	<b>Civic Engagement Class Project (Training and Registration)</b> *Class discussion on the role of civic engagement/CCE training and registration session
Tuesday	9/16	<b>Civil Liberties</b> <i>American and Texas Government</i> , Ch. 4
Thursday	9/18	<b>Civil Rights</b> <i>American and Texas Government</i> , Ch. 5
<b>Section II: The Role of Citizens &amp; Public Opinion in Politics</b>		
Tuesday	9/23	<b>Public Opinion and the News Media</b> <i>American and Texas Government</i> , Ch. 10
Thursday	9/25	<b>Political Parties and Interest Groups</b> <i>American and Texas Government</i> , Ch. 11
Tuesday	9/30	<b>Elections, Campaigns, and Voting</b> <i>American and Texas Government</i> , Ch. 12
Thursday	10/2	<b>Midterm Exam Review</b>
Tuesday	10/7	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b>

<b>Section III: Institutions and Policy Making in the Federal Government</b>		
Thursday	10/9	<b>Social/Economic and Foreign/Defense Policy</b> <i>American and Texas Government, Ch. 13 &amp; Ch. 14</i>
Tuesday	10/14	<b>Congress</b> <i>American and Texas Government, Ch. 6</i>
Thursday	10/16	<b>Documentary Presentation and Assignment</b> “Chisholm ’72: Unbought & Unbossed” *Short Essay assigned (due by 10/21)
Tuesday	10/21	<b>The Presidency</b> <i>American and Texas Government, Ch. 7</i> *Short Essay is due
Thursday	10/23	<b>The Executive Branch and the Federal Bureaucracy</b> <i>American and Texas Government, Ch. 8</i>
Tuesday	10/28	<b>The Judiciary</b> <i>American and Texas Government, Ch. 9</i>
<b>Section IV: Texas Government and Politics</b>		
Thursday	10/30	<b>Texas Constitution</b> <i>American and Texas Government, Ch. 15</i>
Tuesday	11/4	<b>The Party System in Texas</b> <i>American and Texas Government, Ch. 16</i>
Thursday	11/6	<b>Elections, Campaigns, and Political Behavior in Texas</b> <i>American and Texas Government, Ch. 17</i>
Tuesday	11/11	<b>The Texas Legislature</b> <i>American and Texas Government, Ch. 18</i>
Thursday	11/13	<b>The Texas Executive</b> <i>American and Texas Government, Ch. 19</i>
Tuesday	11/18	<b>The Bureaucracy and Policy Implementation in Texas</b> <i>American and Texas Government, Ch. 20</i>
Thursday	11/20	<b>The Judicial System in Texas</b> <i>American and Texas Government, Ch. 21</i>
Tuesday	11/25	<b>Civic Engagement Class Project (Submission/Class Discussion)</b> *Civic Engagement project documentation due and class discussion

		<p>session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>For those who chose <b>Project Option 1</b> (doing community service): You must have all documents submitted to the Center for Civic Engagement (Benedict Hall Rm. 101) by 5pm to receive credit.</i></li> <li>• <i>For those who chose <b>Project Option 2</b> (writing a research paper): You must submit your paper via Blackboard by 5pm to receive credit.</i></li> </ul>
Thursday	11/27	<b>NO CLASS – Thanksgiving Holiday</b>
Tuesday	12/2	<b>Local Government/Contemporary Public Policy Issues in Texas</b> <i>American and Texas Government, Ch. 22 &amp; Ch. 23</i>
Thursday	12/4	<b>Final Exam Review</b>
Thursday	12/11	<b>FINAL EXAM</b> <b>UGLC 126 @ 10am-12:45pm</b>