

POLS 2311: American Government & Politics

Fall 2023

Professor: Dr. Marcos Menchaca

Class time: MW 1:30-2:50pm

Class meeting place: UGLC 126

Instructor Information

Email

mmenchaca@utep.edu

Office Location

Benedict Hall 308

Office Hours

Tue 10:20am-1:20pm

General Information

Description

This course gives an introduction to the main institutions of the American federal government. The focus will be on how the U.S. Constitution was constructed and continues to shape the institutions today. The course will also cover the political culture of the United States. This will include topics such as public opinion, the media, and voting behavior. It will cover the major branches of government. Finally, it will cover the economic and social policy of the U.S. This will give you a better understanding of how to be an informed citizen (even if your home country is not the U.S.).

Course Goals

This course will focus on how political scientists think critically about political issues. This will be of great benefit to you even if you are not a political science major. Just as you need to exercise to build muscle strength, so also you need to work out your critical thinking skills to build your intellectual capability. After the completion of this course, students should have the following skills or knowledge:

- Have an understanding of the U.S. Constitution and how the American government functions.
- Have an understanding of the political behavior of Americans.
- Have a basic understanding of social scientific principles.
- Have some foundation to analyze politics in an objective manner.

UTEP EDGE

Students will be able to:

- Communicate information clearly and effectively using a variety of tools, media and genres (oral, written, iconographic) in varied contexts for a variety of purposes.
- Demonstrate strategic and adaptable thinking patterns in learning and working conditions.

- Apply analysis, synthesis, and evaluative processes that enable productive problem solving and decision-making to strengthen performance in university and workforce setting.
- Reflect and assess their interests, abilities, responsibilities, cultural understanding, and ethics in order to more effectively pursue their academic, career and life goals.
- Use real world digital tools, research, and resources to access, evaluate, and apply information appropriate for authentic tasks.

Course Details

Quizzes

There will be 12 quizzes worth 5% each. They are meant to take some of the weight and pressure off of the exams. Usually, quizzes will need to be completed at 11:59pm on the day they are due. The official due dates will be announced on Blackboard—the dates on the calendar below are just the approximate times when you will be taking the quizzes. You are required to follow the instruction in the Taking Exams in Blackboard document. I highly recommend completing them at least a day before they are due. If you have technical problems with the quizzes, you can ask Blackboard (blackboard@utep.edu). Retakes of completed quizzes are not allowed.

Exams

There will be three exams. The first exam will cover material from the beginning of class up until then. The second exam will cover the material since the first exam until then. The third exam will only cover material that is covered since the second exam. All material that is in the assigned book chapters and all lecture material is fair game for the exams. The exams are scheduled to be in-class. During exams, you may not

- Walk out of the classroom (especially if you have the exam with you);
- Use a smartphone, smartwatch, or anything of the like;
- Talk to each other during the exam.

These are just some of the examples of the prohibitions I put during the exam; but they are not limited to these. If you are not sure that you can do something, just ask us (me or one of the TAs) first. There are things that I do allow, such as writing on the exam sheet.

Class Lectures

The class is taught in-person. During class time, you need to devote your attention to my lecture. Talking amongst yourselves is prohibited (especially if it is loud enough to disturb others).

Announcements

If there is important information for this class, I will announce it using Blackboard announcements. These carry the weight of official policy, and it is your responsibility to know them. Think of them like official class reading.

Required Text

Bianco and Canon, *American Politics Today*. 8th edition.

Course Schedule

Topic	Reading	Quiz
Understanding American Politics	Chapter 1	Quiz 1
Constitution and Founding	Chapter 2	Quiz 2
Federalism	Chapter 3	Quiz 3
Civil Liberties	Chapter 4	
Civil Rights	Chapter 5	
Exam 1 (Sept 27)		
Public Opinion	Chapter 6	Quiz 4
The Media	Chapter 7	Quiz 5
Political Parties	Chapter 8	Quiz 6
Elections	Chapter 9	Quiz 7
Exam 2 (Oct 23)		
Interest Groups	Chapter 10	Quiz 9
Congress	Chapter 11	Quiz 10
The Presidency	Chapter 12	Quiz 11
The Bureaucracy	Chapter 13	
Economic Policy	Chapter 15	Quiz 12
Social Policy	Chapter 16	
Exam 3 (Dec 6)		

Grading

Your final grade will be calculated with the following elements.

Quizzes	60%
Exam 1	10%
Exam 2	15%
Exam 3	15%

Letter grades will be given according to your place in the distribution of the cumulative scores (the class will be curved).

Additional Information and Resources

Students with Disabilities

If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, or otherwise seek additional information, 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 Union East, Room 106. CASS' staff are the only individuals who can 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.

Absences During Exams

Student athletes are automatically given the ability to take exams on dates other than the ones stated on the syllabus if they provide documentation. Other than that, generally only documented medical excuses will be accepted as valid excuses for absences during exams. But if something does come up, you can ask me or your TA and we will instruct you on what to do. Given this policy, you should do everything possible to show up to the exams on time. For example, on exam days, make a decent effort to cross the U.S.-Mexico border early if that is something you have to do because occasionally border crossings take longer than usual. Student athletes who need to be away for their athletic activity need to inform me of their absence for the exam at least two week before the date of the exam (and preferably they should inform me at the beginning of the semester).

Academic Integrity

You are expected to abide by the strictest standards of academic integrity. If you are unsure of what this means, please read more about it at <https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/osccr/student-conduct/academic-integrity.html>

Miner Learning Center Tutoring

This class is supported by the Mining Learning Center. The MLC provides assistance in challenging core curriculum class sections in order to improve academic performance. Academic support services include tutoring and peer-led study sessions known as Peers Assisting Student Success (PASS) sessions.

Land Acknowledgement Statement

We, the UTEP Department of Political Science, acknowledge that we are in the unceded territories of the Indigenous Peoples who, along with countless generations of ancestors, are the guardians and keepers of this land, both throughout history and in contemporary times: the Tigua, Mansos, Sumas, Ndé, the Piros, Mescalero Apache, Chiricahua Apache, Tarahumara, Yaqui, Jumano, Comanche, Kiowa, Rarámuri, Tohono O'odham, Yaqui, Kickapoo, Diné, Hopi, Zapotec, Mixtec, Aztec-Nahua-Mexica, Huichol, Tepehuan, Coahuilteco, Chichimeca, and the other Native communities who comprise our multinational region. As scholars and people who reside and work in these lands, we respect and honor the millennia-long history of Native peoples on this land and their ongoing presence today.

Note

I do not plan on making changes to the syllabus. But if I do, I will always inform you of any changes that I make.