

POLS 2311: American Government and Politics (Section 31, CRN 23796)
Spring 2024 Online (asynchronous)

Instructor: William Corbett, MPA, J.D.

Office Hours: Monday 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.in Benedict Hall, Room 106, and by appointment

Email: wjcorbett@utep.edu but use the email function in Blackboard, not UTEP email

Telephone: (575) 522-1372 with voicemail: Monday to Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., no text messaging

POLS 2311 Catalog Entry: American Government and Politics: [Common Course Number GOVT 2301] A survey of contemporary American, national, state, and local political processes and institutions, with emphasis upon the Constitutions of the United States and Texas. This course meets teacher certification requirements for out-of-state graduate students. Prerequisite: Freshman standing.

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 Units and Components

This course is divided into six units, each devoted to particular topics (listed below). Units 1-5 each last two weeks. Unit 6 lasts three weeks, including the Thanksgiving break. The assignments for each unit appear in their respective folders in Blackboard. Open the folder to access the material for the unit.

Each unit includes:

- A presentation on a *major topic* for the unit (Unit 6 has two major topics);
- Two or more *analytical elements* that emphasize particular aspects of these topics and contain brief *quizzes*; (The Introduction in Unit 1 also works like an analytical element but does not have a quiz.)
- One or more *videos* and corresponding *questions*; and
- A *unit test*.

Students will also take three exams. Exam I covers Units 1 and 2, Exam II covers Units 3 and 4, and Exam III covers Units 5 and 6. Students will have one week to complete Exams I and II, and two weeks to complete Exam III.

The unit tests and exams are based on the material on Blackboard: the major topics presentations, analytical elements, and videos. There is no required textbook for the course.

The various components of the course are color coded in Blackboard. **Major topics appear in orange, analytical elements are listed in black, and the titles of videos and corresponding questions are given in blue. Unit tests and exams are presented in red.**

This course was developed by Dr. Robert Webking, UTEP Distinguished Teaching Professor Emeritus. You will hear his voice presenting the analytical elements. Dr. Gregory Schmidt oversaw the conversion of the materials into the current formats, updated and edited the major topic presentations, added the videos and video questions, and revised the assessments. Sean García and his team at the Extended University provided technical upgrades of the major topic presentations and analytical elements. Steve Varela and his team at Creative Studios embedded a movie and video into Blackboard. Angela Lucero, Lisa Borden, and Lluvia Parral of the UTEP Library have helped Dr. Schmidt obtain and maintain access to other videos used in the course.

Overview of the Course

Unit 1 - The Founding
Unit 2 – Federalism and Political Parties
Exam I

Unit 3 - The Executive Branch
Unit 4 - The Legislative Branch
Exam II

Unit 5 - The Judicial Branch

Unit 6 - Equal Rights and Texas Government Exam III

For a list of dates, please see the course schedule on Blackboard. The dates for each unit are also indicated on the respective folder in Blackboard.

All unit tests and exams are due on Saturdays at 11:59 p.m., except for Exam III, which must be completed by the last day of final exam week (a Friday). Note that Unit 6 overlaps with the window for Exam III. Students may complete Exam III as early as the day after Thanksgiving or as late as the last day of final exam week. In any event, one should complete the Unit 6 Test before taking Exam III.

More Detail on Course Components

Major Topic Presentations. Each unit has a major topic presentation at the beginning. There is an additional major topic presentation in Unit 6.

Click on the major topic to access the power point slides. (These sometimes take a minute or two to load.) Then click on the slide show icon in the lower right corner of the screen. You can also advance the slides on the left side of the screen. Some of the presentations have a brief oral commentary by Dr. Webking, which you can access by clicking the play button on the relevant slide.

Analytical Elements and Quizzes. Analytical elements are slide presentations with captioned voiceovers by Dr. Webking. The slides are played as videos on Yuja, a video management system recently acquired by UTEP. For this reason, you are instructed to “Play the video to take the quiz.” You can pause the slides at any time. You can activate the closed captions in the lower right corner of the screen.

A quiz will appear at the end of the analytical element. Answer each question and click on save. Do not skip questions. Most analytical element quizzes have three questions, but there are some exceptions. After you answer all of the questions, a black screen with a white circular arrow pointing clockwise will appear. This means that you have answered all of the questions. Click on the submit button, and you will get confirmation that the quiz has been submitted.

Then check your grade. You can take the analytical element quizzes as many times as you like. Your last attempt is the one that counts. You can even get a perfect score by taking the quiz multiple times and eventually getting the right answers by process of elimination. But the objective here is learning: to *understand why* the correct answers are correct and the other options are not correct. True learning will help you on the tests and exams.

If you want to view the analytical elements in full screen mode, begin by clicking the icon by the submit button at the top of the page. Next click on the play button and then on the full screen icon in the lower right corner of the screen. You will need to exit the full screen mode at the end of the slides in order to begin the quiz.

If you have technical problems with a quiz, you can always take it again. You can also skip to the end of the presentation to retake a quiz.

Videos and Video Questions. Each unit includes videos relevant to its topic(s). The video assigned for Unit 1 is a movie on the drafting of the Constitution. It is embedded into Blackboard. The *Longoria Affair* in Unit 6 is also embedded. The other videos are accessed via links from the respective folders. Closed captions are available.

Questions that students should answer while watching each video are also posted on Blackboard (in different files for embedded videos or in the same file for linked videos). The knowledge generated by correctly answering these questions will be the basis for questions on each video that will appear on the tests and exams.

Unit Tests and Exams. Each assessment focuses on a discrete part of the course. Each unit test covers only the material from the respective unit. Exam I covers only the material from Units 1 and 2, Exam II only the material from Units 3 and 4, and Exam III only the material from Units 5 and 6. There is no final exam.

Most of the questions on the tests and exams are multiple choice. There are a few true/false questions. The questions appear one at a time. You must answer a question in order to move on to the next one. There is no backtracking. You should complete each assessment in one sitting. Do not save a test or exam in order to resume work later because the timer keeps running, even if you are logged out. If your test or exam is disrupted due to technical difficulties, try to log back in as soon as possible.

Each unit test will have 21 questions worth 5 points each and will last a maximum of 45 minutes. Students can review the questions and their answers after taking the test. They may retake a test one time, in which case the grade will be the average of the two attempts. Some questions may be repeated on different attempts, but others will be new.

Each exam will have 42 questions worth 2.5 points each and will last a maximum of 90 minutes. Some questions from unit tests are likely to be repeated on exams, but others will be new. Exams may be taken only once. Students can review the questions and their answers after the due date.

Please note that five points of extra credit are built into each test and exam. Each unit test has 21 questions worth 5 points, so it is possible to score a total of 105 points. Each exam has 42 questions worth 2.5 points, making the maximum possible score also 105.

The deadlines for taking the assessments are not flexible. Students may take the analytical element quizzes in a given unit and the respective unit test only during the dates for that unit. Students will be able to take the exams only during the designated exam windows. If you begin a quiz, test, or exam before the deadline, but finish it after the deadline you will receive 0 points. You will also receive a 0 for any missed assessment.

Makeups (applies to making up quizzes, tests, and exams; there is no provision for submitting graded work early)

Absent documented emergencies and instructor approval, there are no makeups for the quizzes, tests, and exams.

If a student has a truly exceptional circumstance or an “authorized absence,” a makeup quiz, test, or exam may be possible, at the instructor’s discretion, provided the student notifies the instructor by email or in person before the relevant due date, makes up the work on the first day in which he or she is physically able, and the reason for the late submission is documented in writing, scanned, and emailed to the instructor:

1. By the student in the event of the funeral of a parent, spouse, sibling, grandparent, or child, including the obituary.
2. By a doctor in the event of a student’s medical emergency or hospitalization. Illnesses resulting in a request to submit late work or take a makeup exam not accompanied by a visit to the doctor or hospital would not be sufficient for a makeup opportunity. The dates of the medical disability must be included in the doctor’s note.
3. By the appropriate university representative in the event of a mandatory university-sponsored activity.
4. By the student in the event of an instructor-approved truly exceptional, unpreventable, emergency.

Note: Job, travel, work conflicts, visiting, caring, or providing transportation for other people or pets, computer hardware or software problems, ISP problems, or caring for others are not exceptional circumstances that would allow a makeup quiz, test, or exam.

Any approved makeup exam is to be taken the first day the student returns to class. At that time, documentation regarding the absence must be provided to the instructor via hard copy or scanned email attachment in order to take, if approved, a quiz, test, or exam.

Examples of absences in which a makeup may be possible:

Attending a documented funeral of a family member;
Visiting a doctor or hospital in the event of a medical emergency or hospitalization involving the student and documentation is provided;
Attending a mandatory university-sponsored activity and documentation is provided by the sponsor; and
Extraordinary circumstances beyond a student’s control if documented and approved by the instructor.

Examples of absences in which a makeup will not be possible:

Failure to provide documentation for an authorized makeup the first day you are able to return to class;

Missing to fulfill a work, travel, moving, vacation, or job commitment—even an unexpected one;
Missing to transport, supervise, help, visit, or care for someone, including family members and pets;
Missing due to a failure of transportation or not having a computer;
Financial distress;
Missing for a permissible reason and failing to provide documentation the first day returning to class; and
Computer hardware, software, or ISP problems.

By accessing a quiz, test, or exam, students agree not to give or accept any help in completing the assignment. Students may use printouts of power point slides and video questions, as well as their own notes, but they may not seek or accept help from others or use electronic devices. It is also a violation of academic integrity to disseminate questions or answers from quizzes, tests, or 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!

All suspected violations of academic integrity at UTEP must be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR) for possible disciplinary action. To learn more, please see the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures: Student Conduct and Discipline.

Additional Policies and Information

Course Grade. The course grade is based on the analytical element quizzes (10%), the unit tests (30%), and the exams (60%). All of these grades will be posted on Blackboard. Students will also be able to see their average grades for quizzes, tests, and exams, as well as their overall average for the course. Note that **the course points are not equally weighted** and fractional grading is not used.

Course grades will be distributed as follows:

Course Average	Final Grade
89.5-100%	A
79.5-89.4%	B
69.5-79.4%	C
59.5-69.4%	D
0-59.4%	F

Extra Credit: I cannot accept extra credit projects to compensate for poor performances on assessments 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 test and exam.

Incompletes are rarely given and will not be given for reasons other than a medical or personal emergency and then only after presentation of verifiable documentation. Academic hardship or

failure does not qualify as an acceptable reason. It is better to withdraw from the course instead of relying on the approval of a request for an incomplete grade.

Technology. The content for this course is delivered via the Internet through the Blackboard learning management system, so you will need to have access to a computer or laptop. Make sure that your UTEP e-mail account is working and that you have Internet access and a stable web browser. Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox are the best browsers for Blackboard; other browsers may cause complications. If you have technical difficulties, try updating your browser, clearing your cache, or switching to another browser.

The most common technical problem is weak Wi-Fi signals that throw students out of a test or exam. If this happens, you should immediately log back into the exam. If the problem persists, you should immediately contact the Help Desk (915) 747-4357 (HELP). It is your responsibility to acquire reliable Internet access.

If you encounter technical difficulties not related to a test or exam that are beyond your troubleshooting skills, please contact the UTEP Help Desk, whose staff is trained specifically in assisting students. Please do not contact me for this type of assistance. The Help Desk is much better equipped to assist you.

If you do not have access to a computer, you may do course work and take assessments on the second floor of the UTEP Library. You may also be able to check out a laptop there. Please note the rules for visiting campus below and consult with the library regarding their hours and additional requirements for access. Library hours are limited, due to the COVID-19 emergency. For example, the library closes at 6 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays.

Course Communications. I will send out announcements at least once a week. You will receive these by e-mail, and they will also be posted on Blackboard.

Blackboard e-mail is the best way to contact me—please do not use UTEP email. If you telephone me, do so only between M-F from 8-5 and slowly and clearly state your name, course, section number, and state your phone number twice. I will make every attempt to respond to your e-mail or phone call on or before the next business day.

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. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at <https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/cass/>

The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and auxiliary services to students, staff, faculty, job applicants, applicants for admissions, and other beneficiaries of University programs, services and activities with documented disabilities in order to provide them with equal opportunities to participate in programs, services, and activities in compliance with sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008. Students who become pregnant or have parenting responsibilities may also

request reasonable accommodations. Reasonable accommodations will be made unless it is determined that doing so would cause undue hardship on the University. The UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) will process requests for accommodations based on a disability, pregnancy, or parenting. Contact the Center for Accommodations and Support Services at 915-747-5148, email them at cass@utep.edu, or apply for accommodations online via the CASS portal.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.utep.edu/titleix/pregnancy-and-parenting.html>

COVID-19 PRECAUTION STATEMENT

Please stay home if you have been diagnosed with COVID-19 or are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. If you are feeling unwell, please let me know as soon as possible, so that we can work on appropriate accommodations. If you have tested positive for COVID-19, you are encouraged to report your results to covidaction@utep.edu, so that the Dean of Students Office can provide you with support and help with communication with your professors. The Student Health Center is equipped to provide COVID-19 testing.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that people in areas of substantial or high COVID-19 transmission wear face masks when indoors in groups of people. The best way that Miners can take care of Miners is to get the vaccine. If you still need the vaccine, it is widely available in the El Paso area. For more information about the current rates, testing, and vaccinations, please visit epstrong.org.