

American Government and Politics

Political Science 2311, Sec. 2, CRN 15881

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(but use the email in Blackboard)

Office Hours via telephone TR 2:00-3:30 p.m. and contact via Blackboard email anytime)

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Textbook

The Basics of American Politics, Gary Wasserman. (15th edition, ISBN 9780133815436). Available at the bookstore and online bookstores in print form, and in a digital edition online at <http://www.coursesmart.com/9780133815436>.

What the Course Is About

The United States of America is governed under a Constitution that has operated without fundamental change for more than 200 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.

UTEP Edge Experience

This is a UTEP EDGE experience where students acquire new skills and research and observe public officials deciding government policy. This three-credit American government and politics course is designed for well-prepared students to gain insight into the workings of government. Well-prepared students will not only have a good GPA, but also working knowledge of American government and politics in action and of contemporary news about public affairs via researching contemporary public issues and observing governmental entities debating public policy. Please see the UTEP EDGE website: <https://www.utep.edu/edge/>.

The Edge Experiences for the assignments below (Analytical Essays/Public Meeting Paper) will include:

1. Research and Scholarly Activities via the two Analytical Essays and the Public Meeting paper
2. Community Engagement via the Public Meeting attendance

The Edge Advantages for the assignments below (Short Projects/Public Meeting Paper) will include:

1. Communication via the two Analytical Essays and the Public Meeting paper
2. Critical Thinking via the two Analytical Essays and the Public Meeting paper
3. Confidence via the Public Meeting attendance
4. Problem Solving via the two Analytical Essays

Course Outline and Assignments

This course is completed over seven weeks, with each week devoted to a particular topic (listed below). The activities for each of these weeks include these things:

- A background reading in the text
- An interactive commentary on Major Themes for the week
- One or more Analytical Elements going in depth on particular aspects from the topic for the week (each including a very brief quiz)
- A weekly quiz and, in some cases, other assignments.

Outline of Topics

Week 1 - The Founding
Week 2 - Federalism; Political Parties
Week 3 - The Executive Branch
Week 4 - The Legislative Branch
Week 5 - The Judicial Branch
Week 6 - Equal Rights
Week 7 - Texas Government

Requirements and Grading

Quizzes: By the end of each of the seven weeks in this course, students will show that they have learned the material for that week by taking a **weekly quiz**. These quizzes will include questions from the Major Themes commentary as well as from the Analytical Elements included in that week's work. The quizzes will usually include about 15 questions, and a student may retake any weekly quiz one time so long as the deadline for completing the week's work has not passed. Ordinarily the second take of the quiz will include different questions. When a student chooses to retake a quiz, the higher grade will count towards the final course grade.

In addition, there is a very brief **quiz at the end of each Analytical Element** to help confirm the student's understanding of that material.

Analytical Essays: Two times during the semester there are short written assignments (an analytical essay) that require students to analyze the material we've been working with so as to develop a more thorough understanding.

Public Meeting Paper: One time during the semester, attendance at a public meeting is required and a brief summary of the meeting then is to be submitted.

The best way to understand American government and politics is to see our government in action. Each student is required to attend a public meeting of a city council; school board; county commission; state legislature; or other public (governmental) commission, board or

regulatory agency. A regular meeting in which voting is conducted or policy is debated is preferred. If you are taking this course and living outside of the United States, an equivalent public meeting in the country in which you are living suffices. Seeing a public speaker give a presentation is not a public meeting appropriate for this course.

Each student is to submit at least a 500-word summary of the meeting. The summary should detail the time and place of the meeting, how long you were there (at least one hour), who spoke, what the issues were, how the issues were resolved, and what your impressions of the meeting were.

Please use a number of paragraphs and 12-point Times New Roman font. Please research and **select which meeting you will attend during the first week of class**, since meetings are not conducted each week. The public meeting paper is due at the beginning of the final week of our class. **Begin working on the Public Meeting Paper assignment the first week of class.**

Major Exams: The most important component in the course grade are the three major exams. Each of these covers the material from the weeks immediately preceding it (that is, they are not comprehensive) and will include about 30 questions selected from the same source that the weekly quizzes are selected from. Each major exam may be taken only once.

By accessing a quiz or exam students agree to accept no help from others while taking any quiz or exam during the course. Students may use notes and other materials of their own, but they may not seek or accept help from others. If a quiz or exam is not completed within the allotted time, it will be assigned a score of 0.

Please note that all assignments, quizzes, and exams are due by 11:59 p.m. Mountain Daylight Time (MDT) on the day indicated. MDT is two hours behind Eastern Daylight Time and one hour behind Central Daylight Time, but one hour ahead of Pacific Daylight Time. Final grades will be assigned according to the following formula:

Weekly Quizzes	30%
Analytical Element Quizzes	10%
Analytical Essays/Public Meeting Paper	10%
Major Exams	50%

Course Objectives

The course is designed so that students who complete it successfully will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the key fundamental principles underlying American politics and especially the Constitution of the United States.
- Show the development of the fundamental principles of American politics in basic documents of the founding period.
- Analyze the systems of separation of powers and checks and balances, showing their manifestations in the various branches of the United States government.

- Show the importance of formal and informal structures both for the principles of American political life and for what government does and does not do.
- Demonstrate knowledge of the operation of the major institutions of the United States politics, including the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, as well as political parties.
- Explain the basic structure and operations of Texas state government as compared to U.S. national government.
- Use critical thinking skills to analyze key political texts and speeches so as to understand and articulate their assumptions and inferences that might be drawn from them.

Academic Dishonesty

The following summary of the University's policy on academic dishonesty applies to this class:

Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic dishonesty includes but 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, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts. (Regents' Rules, Ch. 6, section 3.22).

Specifically, in this course, acts of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to, copying on exams or quizzes, making unauthorized use of notes or books on exams or quizzes, seeking or receiving assistance from others in answering exam or quiz questions (when not expressly authorized to do so by the instructor), giving or attempting to give assistance to others in answering exam or quiz questions (when not expressly authorized to do so by the instructor), changing or attempting to change examination answers after the examination has been turned in, putting someone else's name or pad number on an exam or quiz, answering a quiz question for another, accepting credit for a quiz answer when the answer was entered by another, and presenting someone else's writing on an exam or paper as one's own.

Incidents involving academic dishonesty will be forwarded without exception to the Office of the Dean of Students for investigation and appropriate action. Penalties are detailed in section 3.6, Ch. 6 of the Regents' Rules.

Makeups

(applies to making up quizzes, exams and submitting written assignments late)

Absent documented emergencies and instructor approval, there are no makeups for the exams, assignments, or discussions.

If a student has a truly exceptional circumstance or an "authorized absence," a makeup exam, paper submission, or discussion submission 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 death of a parent, spouse, sibling, grandparent, or child, including the obituary.
2. By a doctor in the event of a 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 university-sponsored activity.
4. By the student in the event of an instructor-approved truly exceptional, unpreventable, emergency.

Note: Job, travel, work conflicts, providing transportation for others, computer hardware or software problems, ISP problems, or caring for others are not exceptional circumstances that would allow a makeup exam, late paper submission, etc.

Any approved makeup exam is to be taken the first day the student returns to class. In the event of an approved late assignment or discussion, it is to be submitted 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, an exam or submit an assignment or discussion late. Absent instructor prior approval, **do not email** discussions, written assignments, short papers, quizzes or examinations to the instructor. Such emailed items are neither read nor graded.

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;
Missing class to fulfill a work, moving, or job commitment—even an unexpected one;
Missing class to transport, supervise, visit, or care for someone, including family members;
Missing class due to a failure of transportation;
Missing class for a permissible reason and failing to provide documentation upon returning to class; and
Computer hardware, software or ISP problems.

Extra Credit: None.