

# Introduction to American Government

**GOV 310L --- Fall 2011**  
The University of Texas at Austin

## Instructor

Dr. David L. Leal

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## Class Information

Class Location: MEZ 1.306

Class Hours: T, TH 3:30 – 5 PM

Unique Number: 38595

## Teaching Assistants

Alvaro Corral

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David Tomasz

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Office: BAT 1.118

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## Course Description

This course will introduce you to the government and politics of the United States and Texas. We will cover U.S. political history, political institutions, elections, public opinion, rights and freedoms, and public policy issues. The class begins with the creation of the nation and its fundamental features, including the adoption of the Constitution, the development of democracy, and the importance of federalism. The class then examines public input into the political system, particularly public opinion, individual and group participation, and the political parties. Public input is nowhere better found than in congressional and presidential elections, which are separately discussed. In fact, the main textbook of the class argues that American government can only be fully understood by studying the central role of elections. We then explore the basic institutional building blocks of government – the Congress, presidency, bureaucracy, and courts, as well as the media. We continue by studying fundamental civil liberties and civil rights, followed by the key policy issues that face national, state, and local governments today. The class will also discuss the central features of Texas government and politics and make frequent comparisons between American government and Texas government.

## Readings

Morris P. Fiorina, Paul E. Peterson, Bertram Johnson, and William G. Mayer. *The New American Democracy*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition.

John Rourke. *You Decide! Current Debates in American Politics*, 2011.

Texas Politics Project, University of Texas at Austin: Selected websites.

<http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/index.html>

Students are also advised (but not required) to keep up to date with current political events through the daily reading of national and state newspapers, either in paper or online.

## Policies

By taking this class, you agree to all the following policies:

\* Make-up exams and quizzes and late papers will be allowed only for illness certified by a doctor, for family emergencies certified by the Dean, or for official university events with a letter from the appropriate university authority. Athletes and other students who must miss exams should notify the professor in advance. Papers are due at the start of the specified class.

\* Students who require special provisions for exams or class because of a disability should notify the professor before the need arises. Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259,

<http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

\* Accommodations for religious holidays. By UT-Austin policy, you must notify the instructor of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

\* Grades of “Incomplete” are not assigned except in the case of major, documented medical emergencies.

\* Students with an excused absence should obtain notes from a classmate.

\* Important announcements will be made in class and via the class Blackboard email list. It is the responsibility of students to make sure that the University knows their correct email address.

\* The Blackboard class email list can only be used for academic purposes. Do not use it for any commercial or business purposes.

\* This syllabus is subject to change by the instructor at any time. Consistent class attendance is the best way to ensure that no important announcements are missed.

\* There is no “extra credit” in this class. Your grade will only consist of your performance on the items listed under “Course Grade.”

\* Students must be prepared to show their UT identification card during exams.

\* The midterm times listed below are estimates, and students should regularly attend class in order to learn the exact days.

- \* Any complaints about grades must be initiated by your written explanation of why the decisions behind the assignment of your grade should be revisited. You will have one week after an exam, quiz, or essay has been handed back to submit this written explanation. After that period, all grades will be considered final and any discussion that we might have will be restricted to how you can do better on the next exam.
- \* During class discussions, be respectful at all times.
- \* Cell phones cannot be used in class.
- \* Computers can only be used for academic purposes. They cannot be used for email, social networking, etc.
- \* The final exam will take place during the official final exam period.

### Scholastic Dishonesty

\*“‘Scholastic dishonesty’ includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, misrepresenting facts, and any act designed to give unfair academic advantage to the student (such as, but not limited to, submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor), or the attempt to commit such an act.” Section 11-802 (b), *Institutional Rules on Student Services and Activities*. If you have any questions about what constitutes scholastic dishonesty, you should consult with me and the following website:

[http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint\\_student.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php)

\* Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty: Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information please visit the Student Judicial Services Web site: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs>

### Honor Code

“The core values of the University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the University is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.”

## Course Grade

Quizzes: A number of quizzes will be given throughout the semester. They will be held in class and will not be announced in advance. They will ask questions about the readings for the week, which means that you should complete all readings before the first lecture of any given week. Collectively, the quizzes will constitute 20% of your course grade.

Exams: There will be three exams. The first midterm is worth 20% of your grade, the second midterm is worth 25%, and the final exam is worth 30%.

Writing: 5% of your grade is based on two short writing projects, which will be discussed in class.

Class attendance: This is not directly used in determining your course grade, although if you miss class you may miss quizzes, which cannot be retaken without a valid excuse (see Policies section).

Surveys: To further the research and teaching missions of UT, students in this class will be asked to participate in two to three academic public opinion surveys during the semester. These will be used for research and teaching purposes by department faculty and graduate students and will be conducted either online or in the Department of Government survey lab. They are confidential, so I will only know if you took a survey, not your answers. If you do not wish to participate in these surveys, you can participate in an alternative assignment, such as attending a relevant lecture or campus event. Participation in a survey or the alternative activity will count as a quiz.

Grading: This class will use pluses and minuses for all exams, papers, quizzes, and the final course grade. The scale is:

93-100%	A	73-76%	C
90-92%	A-	70-72%	C-
87-89%	B+	67-69%	D+
83-86%	B	63-66%	D
80-82%	B-	60-62%	D-
77-79%	C+	Below 60%	F

## Emergency Evacuation Policy

In the event of a fire or other emergency, it may be necessary to evacuate a building rapidly. Upon the activation of a fire alarm or the announcement of an emergency in a university building, all occupants of the building are required to evacuate and assemble outside. Once evacuated, no one may re-enter the building without instruction to do so from the Austin Fire Department, University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

Students should familiarize themselves with all the exit doors of each room and building they occupy at the university, and should remember that the nearest exit routes may not be the same as the way they typically enter buildings.

Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructors in writing during the first week of class.

Information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at <http://www.utexas.edu/emergency>

## Important Dates

Thursday, August 25: Our class begins

November 24, Thursday: No class, Thanksgiving holidays

December 1, Thursday: Our last class day

The final exam will take place during final exam week: Monday, December 12, 9:00 AM -12:00 noon.

For more calendar information, visit: <http://registrar.utexas.edu/calendars/11-12>

## Weekly Topics and Readings

<b>Weeks 1 and 2</b>	Thursday, August 25 Tuesday, August 30 Thursday, September 1
Introduction: Creating a New Democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiorina et al., Chapters 1 and 2, Appendix I and II</li> <li>• Rourke, Chapter 1</li>   <li>• Texas Politics Project: Texas Political Culture Sections 1, 2, 5, and 6 <a href="http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/10_1_0.html">http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/10_1_0.html</a></li> </ul>

<b>Week 3</b>	Tuesday, September 6 Thursday, September 8
The American Political Tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiorina et al., Chapters 3 and 4, Appendix III and IV</li> <li>• Rourke, Chapter 2</li>   <li>• Texas Politics Project: The Constitution, Sections 1, 3, and 6 <a href="http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/7_1_0.html">http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/7_1_0.html</a></li> </ul>

<b>Week 4</b>	Tuesday, September 13 Thursday, September 15
Public Opinion	• Fiorina et al., Chapter 5

Friday, September 17<sup>th</sup> is Constitution Day. To learn even more about the U.S. Constitution, visit the National Archives website:

<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitution-day/>

<b>Week 5</b>	Tuesday, September 20 Thursday, September 22
Political Participation: Individuals and Interest Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiorina et al., Chapters 6 and 7</li> <li>• Rourke, Chapters 6 and 8</li> </ul>

<b>Week 6</b>	Tuesday, September 27 Thursday, September 29
Political Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiorina et al., Chapter 8</li> <li>• Rourke, Chapter 9</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Texas Politics Project: Political Parties, Sections 1, 4, and 7</li> </ul> <p><a href="http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/4_1_0.html">http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/4_1_0.html</a></p>

<b>Week 7 (Part I)</b>	Tuesday, October 4
Midterm #1	Review session on Monday; time and location TBD

<b>Week 7 (Part II)</b>	Thursday, October 6
Congressional Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiorina et al., Chapter 11</li> </ul>

<b>Week 8</b>	Tuesday, October 11 Thursday, October 13
Presidential Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiorina et al., Chapter 10</li> <li>• Rourke, Chapter 10</li> </ul>

<b>Week 9</b>	Tuesday, October 18 Thursday, October 20
Congress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiorina et al., Chapter 12</li> <li>• Rourke, Chapter 11</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Texas Politics Project: The Legislative Branch, Sections 1-2, 4, and 6</li> </ul> <p><a href="http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/2_1_0.html">http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/2_1_0.html</a></p>

<b>Week 10</b>	Tuesday, October 25 Thursday, October 27
The Presidency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiorina et al., Chapter 13 and Appendix V</li> <li>• Rourke, Chapter 12</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Texas Politics Project: The Executive Branch, Sections 1-5</li> </ul> <p><a href="http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/1_1_0.html">http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/1_1_0.html</a></p>

<b>Week 11</b>	Tuesday, November 1
The Bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiorina et al., Chapter 14</li> <li>• Rourke, Chapter 13</li> </ul>

<b>Week 11 (continued)</b>	Thursday, November 3
Midterm #2	Review session on Wednesday; time and location TBD

<b>Week 12 (Part I)</b>	Tuesday, November 8
The Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiorina et al., Chapter 9</li> <li>• Rourke, Chapter 7</li> </ul>

<b>Week 12 (Part II)</b>	Thursday, November 10
The Courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiorina et al., Chapter 15</li> <li>• Rourke, Chapter 14</li> <li>• Texas Politics Project: The Judicial Branch, Sections 1 and 3  <a href="http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/3_1_0.html">http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/3_1_0.html</a> </li> </ul>

<b>Week 13</b>	Tuesday, November 15 Thursday, November 17
Civil Liberties and Civil Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiorina et al., Chapters 16 and 17</li> <li>• Rourke, Chapters 3 and 4</li> </ul>

<b>Week 14</b>	Tuesday, November 22
Public Policy (Domestic Policy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiorina et al., Chapter 18</li> <li>• Rourke, Chapters 15 and 19</li> </ul>

\*\* Thursday, November 24<sup>th</sup> is Thanksgiving (UT holiday) \*\*

<b>Week 15</b>	Tuesday, November 29 Thursday, December 1
Public Policy (Economy Policy, Foreign and Defense Policy)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fiorina et al., Chapters 19 and 20</li> <li>• Rourke, Chapters 16 and 17</li> </ul>

<b>Final Exam Week</b>	Monday, December 12, 9:00 AM -12:00 noon
Final Exam	