

Introduction to American Government

GOV 310L --- Fall 2010
The University of Texas at Austin

Instructor

Dr. David L. Leal

Office hours: T, TH 3:00 - 4:30 PM

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Class Information

Class location: MEZ 1.306

Class hours: T, TH 5:00 - 6:30 PM

Unique Number: 38405

Teaching Assistant

Alvaro Corral

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Course Description

This course will introduce you to the government and politics of the United States. 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 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*, 6th edition.

John Rourke. *You Decide! Current Debates in American Politics*, 7th edition.

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 daily reading of a national newspaper (such as the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, or *Washington Post*), either in paper or online.

Course Grade

Exams: There will be three exams. The first midterm is worth 25% of your grade, the second midterm is worth 30%, and the final exam is worth 40%. In addition, 5% of your grade is based on two short writing projects, which will be discussed in class. Also, class attendance is not used in determining your course grade.

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

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

Policies

- * Make-up exams 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.
- * 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 who miss class 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.
- * 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 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.
- * The final exam will take place during the official final exam period.

Scholastic Dishonesty

“‘Academic dishonesty’ or ‘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 classes 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 visit the websites http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php and <http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/>

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>

Important Dates

Thursday, August 26: Our class begins

November 25, Thursday: No class, Thanksgiving holidays

December 2, Thursday: Our last class day

The final exam will take place during final exam week: Thursday, December 9, 7:00-10:00 pm

For more calendar information, visit: <http://registrar.utexas.edu/calendars/10-11/>

Weekly Topics and Readings

Weeks 1 and 2	Thursday, August 26 Tuesday, August 31 Thursday, September 2
Introduction: Creating a New Democracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiorina et al., Chapters 1 and 2, Appendix I and II • Rourke, Chapter 1 • Texas Politics Project: Texas Political Culture Sections 1, 2, 5, and 6 http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/10_1_0.html

Week 3	Tuesday, September 7 Thursday, September 9
The American Political Tradition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiorina et al., Chapters 3 and 4, Appendix III and IV • Rourke, Chapter 2 • Texas Politics Project: The Constitution, Sections 1, 3, and 6 http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/7_1_0.html

Week 4	Tuesday, September 14 Thursday, September 16
Public Opinion	• Fiorina et al., Chapter 5

Friday, September 17th is Constitution Day. To learn more about the Constitution, visit the National Archives website: <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitution-day/>

Week 5	Tuesday, September 21 Thursday, September 23
Political Participation: Individuals and Interest Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiorina et al., Chapter 6 and 7 • Rourke, Chapters 6 and 8

Week 6	Tuesday, September 29 Thursday, September 30
Political Parties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiorina et al., Chapter 8 • Rourke, Chapter 9 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texas Politics Project: Political Parties, Sections 1, 4, and 7 http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/4_1_0.html

Week 7 (Part I)	Tuesday, October 5
Midterm #1	Review session on Monday; time and location TBD

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

Week 8	Tuesday, October 12 Thursday, October 14
Presidential Elections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiorina et al., Chapter 10 • Rourke, Chapter 10

Week 9	Tuesday, October 19 Thursday, October 21
Congress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiorina et al., Chapter 12 • Rourke, Chapter 11 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texas Politics Project: The Legislative Branch, Sections 1-2, 4, and 6 http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/2_1_0.html

Week 10	Tuesday, October 26 Thursday, October 28
The Presidency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiorina et al., Chapter 13 and Appendix V • Rourke, Chapter 12 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Texas Politics Project: The Executive Branch, Sections 1-5 http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/1_1_0.html

** Tuesday, November 2nd is Election Day (not a holiday) **

Week 11	Tuesday, November 2 Thursday, November 4
The Bureaucracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiorina et al., Chapter 14 • Rourke, Chapter 13

Week 12 (Part I)	Tuesday, November 9
Midterm #2	Review session on Monday; time and location TBD

Week 12 (Part II)	Thursday, November 11
The Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiorina et al., Chapter 9 • Rourke, Chapter 7

Week 13	Tuesday, November 16 Thursday, November 18
The Courts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiorina et al., Chapter 15 • Rourke, Chapter 14 • Texas Politics Project: The Judicial Branch, Sections 1 and 3 http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/3_1_0.html

Week 14	Tuesday, November 23 Thursday, November 25
Civil Rights and Civil Liberties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiorina et al., Chapters 16 and 17 • Rourke, Chapters 3 and 4

Week 15	Tuesday, November 30 Thursday, December 2
Public Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fiorina et al., Chapters 18, 19, and 20 • Rourke, Chapters 5, 16, and 17

**** The final exam will take place on Thursday, December 9, 7:00-10:00 pm ****