

Government 310L
American Government – Honors (unique 38410)

Fall 2010
MWF 3-3:50
GAR 0.128

Professor Albertson
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Office Hours: Wednesday 9:00
to 12:00 and by appointment

This course provides an introduction to American politics. The course topics include an introduction to America's constitutional foundations, the function of institutions (Congress, Presidency, Courts), the role of intermediary organizations (parties, interest groups, media), and the relationship between the mass public and politics (public opinion and participation). In addition to mastering a set of basic facts about American government, students will learn theories addressing "big questions" in American politics, and will explore critical assessments of the evidence brought to bear on these questions. Some of these topics will also be examined in the context of Texas politics. This class has no prerequisites.

Readings:

Fiorina, Peterson, Johnson and Mayer. 2009. *The New American Democracy, Alternate 6th Ed.* Pearson. (NAD)

Supplemental readings will be available on Blackboard.

One note on the supplemental readings: They are a mix of traditional political science and opinion pieces. Please note that opinion pieces are included because they apply ideas from political science to a contemporary issue in an interesting way.

Assessment:

20% 1 paper
5%: 3 in class writing exercises
50%: 2 midterms (25% each)
25%: 1 final exam

Midterm and Final Exams:

These 3 exams will each count for 25% of your final grade. The final exam is NOT cumulative. Exams will contain a combination of short essay, definition and multiple-choice questions.

In Class Writing Exercises:

Several times during the course I will pose a question to the class and ask you to get out a piece of paper and write a paragraph (1/2 page). These are opportunities for you to express your opinion about a question relevant to our course and for me to learn more about your ideas. A thoughtful response will earn the writer full credit, a messy, incomplete response

will earn partial credit, and no response will earn no credit. The dates for these writing exercises will not be announced in advance. I understand that your lives are busy and complicated. However, I cannot offer “make ups” for this portion of the course. Therefore, I will offer at least 5 opportunities to earn these points. Students who write in class exercises for more than 3 will receive a point extra credit on the final for each additional assignment (maximum 2).

Paper: Students will be asked to write one short (5-7 page, double spaced) paper this semester. Students will be asked to write about one institutional aspect of American Government that they’d like to see changed. This will be an argument, in which students use evidence to support their claims and address prominent counter-arguments. This assignment is designed to give students an opportunity to think carefully about their own opinions on politics at a structural (rather than policy) level. I will be grading papers for their originality, thoughtfulness, and basic writing proficiency. With these goals in mind, the absolute worst way to approach this exercise is to plagiarize. A more detailed prompt will be handed out by Week 3.

Extra Credit: I encourage students to learn more about politics by attending some of the many political events on campus, and offer extra credit for students who 1) attend the event and 2) write up a one page, double spaced report. The report should describe what you’ve learned at the event, and explain whether it complements or challenges anything you’ve learned so far in class. A hard copy must be turned in to me within 1 week of the event. Papers handed in late are ineligible for extra credit.

Eligible events: I will announce political events on campus that are eligible for this opportunity. If you hear about something happening on campus, great! Let me know in advance and I will announce it to the class. Political events that have not been announced to the entire class are NOT eligible as an extra credit opportunity. Events with a specific political agenda are eligible, and I do not restrict events on the basis of political content.

Extra credit limit: Please attend as many events as you’d like. However, each report is worth 2 points, and I limit extra credit points to 2 per exam. If you'd like to collect extra credit points for an exam you must attend the event and turn in the report prior to the exam.

Grading:

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

Class Policies:

Power Point Slides: Power Point slides will be posted on Blackboard.

Review Sheets: I'll post a review sheet for each chapter on Blackboard. These are meant to help you focus your studies on the most important topics -- ****WARNING**** simply memorizing a short definition for each of the terms **WILL NOT** leave you prepared for the exam.

Disability Accommodations: 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/>. If you require accommodation, it is your responsibility to bring your note to me **EARLY** in the semester so we can work our arrangements.

Academic Integrity: Plagiarism, cheating, and other academic misconduct are serious violations of your contract as a student. I expect that you will know and follow the University's policies on cheating and plagiarism. If you are unsure about the standards of academic integrity, it is your responsibility to ask the professor or the t.a. Any suspected cases of academic misconduct will be handled according to University regulations.

Make-up Policy: Full credit make-up exams will only be allowed for (1) University sanctioned events (verification required) or (2) extraordinary circumstances (verification -- e.g., physician's note -- required). Make-up exams are any exams taken before or after the scheduled exam time. Make-up exams requested for any other reason will be decided on a case by case basis, and will be subject to a 10% grade penalty. I do not approve make-up exams under any circumstances for vacations or early departure for breaks. Make-up exams will be given within one week of the exam and will be offered at only one time. If you know you are going to miss an exam, notify me as soon as possible **BEFORE** the exam. Students who miss exams without prior notification will face a 20% grade penalty, and will be given the chance to participate in the make-up **ONLY** if they contact me before the make-up administration.

Professor's Pet Peeves:

#1) Cheating: I haven't caught a UT student cheating in my class yet -- don't be the first!

#2) Talking during lecture: I encourage you to engage in class discussion - ask questions, and volunteer when I ask questions. However, I ask that you do not engage in side discussions during lecture.

Course Schedule:

Part 1: Founding, Federalism and Rights. What ideas shaped American government at the founding, and how have they changed?

- August 25: Introduction
August 27: NAD, Chapter 1: Democracy in the United States
- August 30: NAD, Chapter 2: Establishing a Constitutional Democracy
September 1: Federalist Papers: 10, 51 (abbreviated versions are available in the appendix of NAD)
September 3: No class, Professor at APSA.
- September 6: No class, Labor Day.
September 8: NAD, Chapter 3: Federalism: Division of Power Among National, State, and Local Governments
September 10: Rauch, Jonathan, "A More Perfect Union: how the founding fathers would have handled gay marriage."
Detailed paper prompt handed out.
- September 13: NAD, Chapter 16: Civil Liberties
September 15: NAD, Chapter 17: Civil Rights
September 17: Lincoln, The Perpetuation of our Political Institutions
King, Letter from a Birmingham Jail
- September 20: Putnam, Robert. *Bowling Alone*, selections.
September 22: Review
September 24: **Exam 1, In Class**

Part 2: Political Institutions. What are the basic structures of government and how have they changed over time?

- September 27: NAD, Chapter 12: The Congress and Its Work
September 29: Mayhew, David R. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, selections
October 1: Congress, continued.
- October 4: NAD, Chapter 13: The Presidency: Powers and Practice
October 6: Samuel Kernell, *Going Public*, selections
October 8: NAD, Chapter 14: The Bureaucracy
- October 11: NAD, Chapter 15: The Courts
October 13: Bush v. Gore
October 15: Rosenberg, Gerald. *The Hollow Hope?* Selections.
- October 18: NAD, Chapter 8: Political Parties
October 20: Fiorina, Morris P. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*, A 50:50 Nation? Beyond the Red and Blue States.

- October 22: Brooks, David “One Nation, Slightly Divisible” (optional)
 NAD, Chapter 7: Interest Group Participation in American Democracy
- October 25: Olson, Mancur, *The Logic of Collective Action*, selections
- October 27: Paper workshop day – get feedback on your draft from each other and from me, review for Exam 2
- October 29: **Exam 2, In Class**

Part 3: What do Americans know, what do they want, and can elections help them get there?

- November 1: Texas Politics, Voting Campaigns and Elections
- November 3: NAD, Chapter 5: Public Opinion
- November 5: Gladwell, Malcolm. *Blink*, “The Warren Harding Error: Why we fall for tall, dark and handsome men.”
 Bartels, Larry, “Is Popular Rule Possible?”
- November 8: NAD, Chapter 9: The Media
- November 10: “The Persuaders”
Paper Due
- November 12: NAD, Chapter 6: Individual Participation
- November 15: Wattenberg, Martin P. *Where Have All the Voters Gone?*, The New Generation Gap.
- November 17: Carney, Eliza Newlin, “Where are the New Voters?”
 Martin, Courtney E. “The Problem with Youth Activism” (optional)
- November 19: Han, Hahrie. *Moved to Action: Motivation, Participation in American Politics* (selections)
- November 22: Kuran, Timur. *Private Truths, Public Lies* (selections)
- November 24: NAD, Chapter 10: Electing the President
- November 26: No Class: Thanksgiving Holiday.
- November 29: Redlawsk et al, *Why Iowa? How Caucuses and Sequential Elections Improve the Presidential Nominating Process* (selections)
- December 1: NAD, Chapter 11: Choosing the Congress
- December 3: Last day of class, Review

Final Exam: Wednesday, December 8, 7:00-10:00 pm