

Introduction to American Government

GOV310L Unique 38675

The University of Texas at Austin

Spring 2013

Mezes 1.306

MWF 1-2pm

Instructor: Allison C. White

Office Hours:

Contact Info: allison.white@utexas.edu

Teaching Assistant: Caitlin Andrews

Office Hours:

Contact Info:

I. Course Description

This course will provide a basic survey of American government, including fundamental political institutions, federal, state, and local, with special attention to the United States and Texas Constitutions. Through this class, students will become more informed citizens or observers of the United States and its system of government.

II. Course Aims and Objectives

By the end of the semester, students should be familiar with the basic characteristics of the government of the United States and the government of Texas. Students should leave the class more knowledgeable about 1) major government institutions in the United States, such as the executive, legislature and judiciary, and their relationship to each other, 2) actors, including citizens, interest groups, political parties and the media, and 3) governing documents, particularly the Constitutions of the United States and Texas. Through assignments and in-class activities, students will develop communication skills, critical thinking, the ability to evaluate others' arguments and advance their own in political conversations.

III. Course Requirements

Prerequisites for the Course:

Twelve semester hours of college coursework and a passing score on the reading section of the Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA) test (or an appropriate assessment test).

Course Materials:

I. TEXTBOOK: Theodore J. Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg and Kenneth A. Shepsle and Stephen Ansolabehere. *American Government: Power and Purpose*, Full Twelfth Edition with policy chapters. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012. This textbook is available in Paperback from the UT Co-op, and both Hardcopy and Paperback from Amazon.com

*This textbook is also available for purchase from the publisher in two E-Book formats: downloadable and online access. The E-Book is one-third the price of the print version and allows students to highlight, take notes in electronic post-it format, and search the text electronically (see demo online for instructions on how to use these features). See <http://books.wwnorton.com/nortonebooks/discipline.aspx?DiscId=14> for additional information.

**The textbook website offers an online StudySpace for students such as chapter outlines, practice quizzes and critical thinking exercises, and ready-made flashcards. See <http://wwnorton.com/college/polisci/american-government12/full/>

II. iClicker: iClicker or iClicker2 are both acceptable. Available for purchase at the UT Co-op. Please bring your iClicker to every class meeting.

III. Texas Politics (TEX): <http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/>

IV. BB: Assigned readings can be found under the course documents section on Blackboard.

Class Format and Expectations:

This is not a class where you only come each day, listen, watch, and take notes! The primary method for learning about American and Texas Government will be by completing assigned readings before class (as above), participating in class activities and discussions, and completing homework assignments.

This course makes use of small and large group activities and discussions to introduce ideas and content, as well as to deepen your understanding of material encountered in the reading. Your learning experience is thus dependent—to some extent—on your classmates and vice versa. Because of this, it is essential not only that you attend class each day and participate in the activities and discussions, but also that you show up prepared having completed the homework and reading assigned. Completing the assigned reading before each class is essential for interesting and informed discussions.

Learning about American government requires active participation and questioning both in and out of the classroom. The instructor will provide you with many opportunities to learn the material through class activities, readings, and homework assignments, but in the end, you will have to do all of the hard work of actually learning that material. The format of the course will include both lectures and discussions. The lectures will assume familiarity with the given topic,

as covered in the textbook. Questions and comments are welcomed during lecture. Discussion topics will be based around relevant applications of the reading and films. Films shown in class are an integral part of the course and will provide testable material.

Students are expected to behave professionally and to be respectful of differences in opinion and political perspectives among the class. In addition, students must consult and abide by the University Honor Code (discussed below).

Classroom Conduct:

Cell phones are to be silenced during class. Computer use is permitted only for note taking purposes. The instructor reserves the right to limit or ban the use of laptops for individual students (or the entire class) if they become a distraction or are used inappropriately. Please do not come late to class, as it distracts your peers and the instructor. Finally, please do not leave during class, unless it is an emergency. Also see Class Format above for guidelines on classroom conduct during lecture and discussions.

Assignments and Evaluation:

This course will consist of three multiple-choice exams (each worth 20%) and three homework assignments (each worth 6.67%) that are designed to link the course material to current events and help students develop the skills enumerated under the Course Aims and Objectives section above. Participation will account for the final 20% of the grade. Participation will be assessed based on various in-class activities that will be announced at the beginning of class. There are also two optional assignments, which will count as extra credit toward your final grade (see Course Schedule for assignment topics and due dates).

20% Exam 1: Feb 15

20% Exam 2: Mar 29

20% Exam 3: May 3

6.67% States' Rights Assignment: Feb 1

6.67% USSC Ruling Memo: Mar 8

6.67% News Assignment: Apr 19

20% Class Participation

2.5% Optional Extra Credit Presidency Memo: Mar 1

2.5% Optional Extra Credit Foreign Policy Memo: Apr 26

Grading Scheme:

This course will use plus/minus grading. Grades are non-negotiable. The instructor reserves the rights to adjust students' grades based on class participation and behavior.

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-
0-59	F

Make-Up Exams:

Attendance is required at regularly scheduled exams. There will be one makeup exam offered at the end of the semester and students will be permitted to take this exam only under the most extreme and dire circumstances preventing the student from taking the regularly scheduled exam. Students will not be permitted to take the makeup exam without prior documentation and approval by the Instructor. The makeup exam is not an optional exam. For illnesses, a doctor's documentation must be provided. The form letter from University Health Services does not suffice to be granted a makeup exam. Students have one week to notify the Instructor following missing an exam. Notifications later than this will not be granted a makeup exam. Students may make-up only one exam with no exceptions. Note that this means failure to take two of the three exams results in grades of zero for one of the missed exams. Please note the date of the exams.

University of Texas 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. Students who violate University rules on plagiarism and scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, and misrepresenting facts. More information about academic dishonesty is given in "Appendix C, Chapter 11" of the 2012-2013 General Information Catalog. Students found to be in violation of the University's policies concerning academic integrity will be referred to the Dean of Students office. For further information on please see: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

Use of E-Mail for Official Correspondence to Students:

Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, you are responsible for reading your email for university and course-related information and announcements. Email will be used to communicate class changes through Blackboard. You are

responsible to keep the university informed about changes to your email address. You should check your e-mail daily to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-critical. You can find UT Austin's policies and instructions for updating your email address at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php>.

Use of Blackboard in Class:

In this class I will use Blackboard—a Web-based course management system with password-protected access at <http://courses.utexas.edu>. The syllabus, additional readings, grades, and class announcements will be posted on Blackboard. Students are responsible for checking Blackboard on a regular basis and are expected to consult Blackboard (and the syllabus) prior to emailing the teaching assistant or the instructor with questions concerning the course. You can find support in using Blackboard at the ITS Help Desk at 475-9400, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., so plan accordingly.

Students with Disabilities:

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone) or <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd>. If you require accommodation, it is your responsibility to bring SSD certification to me early in the semester so we can work out arrangements or at least two weeks prior to the exam. It is also the student's responsibility to schedule exams with SSD.

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL):

If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

Contacting the Instructor:

Students should address all questions first to the Teaching Assistant, and only then to the Instructor. The Teaching Assistant holds office hours to help students understand the material and field general course questions. In addition, I tend to check my email only once every 24 hours. Depending on when I check my email on a given day, the earliest time at which a response may be expected is within 24 hours. Please be aware that I also do not respond to emails on the weekend.

Religious Holy Days:

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me 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 or an examination 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.

Emergency Evacuation:

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. Faculty members must then provide this information to the Fire Prevention Services office by fax (512-232-2759), with Attn. Mr. Roosevelt Easley written in the subject line. Information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at <http://www.utexas.edu/emergency>.

IV. Tentative Course Schedule

**This syllabus represents my current plans and objectives. As we go through the semester, these plans may need to change to enhance students' learning opportunity. Such changes will be communicated clearly through Blackboard or in class, are not unusual, and should be expected.

Date	Main Topic(s)	Assignment	Evaluation
Week 1: Jan 14-18	Introduction and the 5 Principles of Politics	(T) Chapter 1	
Week 2: Jan 21-25 (No Class on Mon)	Constructing a Government: The Founding and the Constitution	(T) Chapter 2	
Week 3: Jan 28-Feb 1	Federalism and the Separation of Powers	(T) Chapter 3	States' Rights Assignment: Feb 1
Week 4: Feb 4-8	Civil Liberties	(T) Chapter 4	
Week 5: Feb 11-15	Civil Rights	(T) Chapter 5	Exam 1: Feb 15
Week 6: Feb 18-22	Congress	(T) Chapter 6	
Week 7: Feb 25-Mar 1	The Presidency	(T) Chapter 7	Optional Extra Credit Presidency Memo: Mar 1
Week 8: Mar 4-8	Federal Courts	(T) Chapter 9	USSC Ruling Memo: Mar 8
Week 9: Mar 11-15	SPRING BREAK:	HAVE A GREAT	WEEK OFF!!!
Week 10: Mar 18-22	Public Opinion	(T) Chapter 10	
Week 11: Mar 25-29	Elections	(T) Chapter 11	Exam 2: Mar 29
Week 12: Apr 1-5	Political Parties	(T) Chapter 12	
Week 13: Apr 8-12	Groups and Interests	(T) Chapter 13	
Week 14: Apr 15-19	The Media	(T) Chapter 14	News Assignment: Apr 19

Week 15: Apr 22-26	Foreign Policy	(T) Chapter 17	Optional Extra Credit Foreign Policy Memo: Apr 26
Week 16: Apr 29- May 3	Texas: Constitution and Government	(TEX):	Exam 3: May 3