GOVT 310L

The American Political System

Prof. John P. McIver

Unique #: 38650

Spring Semester 2013
Monday/Wednesday/Friday 9:00-10:00
CAL 100

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the institutions, processes and actors that make up the American political system and to encourage you to think critically about the nature and quality of American democracy. To achieve these objectives, I have chosen a textbook that focuses attention of the role of citizens as key actors in the democratic experiment that we call the United States of America.

BOOKS

* The primary (required) textbook is:
Christine Barbour & Gerald C. Wright, *Keeping the Republic*, The Essentials (4th Edition/Paper), Washington DC: CQ Press.

Keeping the Republic provides a simple but powerful framework for helping you to think about how our complicated political system works. The framework will help you see how government, politics and the larger society (economy, society, culture, position in the international system) are deeply and systematically intertwined. The framework is explained in Chapter 1 of the textbook and is referred to frequently throughout the rest of the book.

Keeping the Republic also asks that you think about the American system as a whole, as well as particular political practices and institutions. You will be asked in each chapter to think about "What's at stake?" both for the nation and for you as an individual member of the American political system.

* Texas Government. A second required text is the on-line book *Texas Politics*. We will use this e-book throughout the semester to provide a comparison between the national government and the state government of Texas.

* A Newspaper. You are responsible for keeping up to date on major national and local news.
If you choose not to spend the money, you can access the *Austin American Statesman* as well as hundreds of other local and national papers on-line and in most cases at no charge. See the "Resources" section of the class web pages for links to these papers. You will need access to a daily newspaper.

* Web-based and supplemental readings - See the "Syllabus" section of these web pages. (Check the syllabus regularly for updates and new supplemental materials)

COURSE WEB SITES

https://webspace.utexas.edu/jm59399/www/310L/310L_idx.html. This site includes

a copy of the syllabus, class announcements and other materials the TAs and I believe would be of interest or use to you. Please look at the site at least once per week during the semester.

The "Keeping the Republic" website:

http://republic.cqpress.com/>http://republic.cqpress.com/

This site is a particularly good one for review of course materials and permits self-testing prior to exams.

The Texas Politics website is a project of Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Services (LAITS), a unit of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Texas at Austin. The home page may be found at http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/index.html.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Three examinations will be given - two "midterm" exams each worth 25% of your grade and a final exam worth 30%. Additional assignments, in-class and take-home, based on your own analyses of American politics are required. These are worth 20% of your final grade.

Exam I. Wednesday, February 20th.

This examination will cover the readings and lectures. It will be a multiple-choice and short answer exam. Please bring a #2 pencil (with an eraser).

Exam II. Friday, April 5th.

This examination will cover the reading and lectures since the 1st midterm. It will be a multiple-choice exam. Please bring a #2 pencil (with an eraser).

Final Exam. Wednesday, May 8th. 2:00PM-5:00PM

The final examination will be comprehensive. It will be a multiple-choice exam.

GRADING POLICIES

No makeup exams will be given unless I am notified IN ADVANCE and the reason you cannot attend is valid. (That you've already purchased a plane ticket to go home or on vacation is not a valid excuse.)

Extra Credit will NOT be given for projects not generally assigned. (Complete the assigned work and you will not need "extra credit".)

To complete this class and receive a final grade you must turn in all assignments and take each of the exams.

Attendance: Attendance will not be taken directly but attendance COUNTS. That is, you will probably not perform well on the exams without attending class. And you may miss quizzes or in-class exercises.

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Honesty

The University of Texas operates under an "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.

Please review the following to learn your rights and obligations:

What is Academic Dishonesty? (UT Dean of Students)

http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis_whatis.php

Students with Disabilities

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 have a disability that may have some impact on your work in this class, please see me or a TA, after class or during office hours, so we may accommodate your needs. We are willing to work with any student who needs additional help, but please let us know of any problems in a timely manner.

Religious Observances

The University of Texas acknowledges an obligation to accommodate all students who must be absent from classes or miss scheduled exams in order to observe religious holidays.

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, 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.

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.

EXPECTATIONS

What your TAs and I owe to you:

- We will treat you with respect
- We will try to make this course a worthwhile educational experience
- We will be there for each scheduled class
- We will be available during regularly scheduled office hours
- We will answer your questions to the best of our abilities
- We will evaluate your written work fairly and with care

Your obligations

- To act with civility towards your teachers and classmates.
    - Specifics:
        - If you must leave class before it is over, please sit at the rear of the lecture hall.
        - Cell Phones: Please turn off your cell phone ringers prior to class.
        - Computers: Please use your computers for class related purposes only. Other uses are often disruptive.

- To be honest in your academic performance ....cheating is dishonorable and unfair to others and to yourself. The consequences for cheating will be the maximum allowed by university rules.

- To be prepared for each class ...you will get more out of your class session if you have read all assigned materials prior to the class and formulated questions on matters about which you are unclear.

Please be on time for class and early (if possible) for all exams.

About the Instructor:

Prof. John P. McIver
Office: Batts Hall 3.134
Office Hours: MWF 2:00-4:00 and by Appt.
Telephone: 512-232-7271
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About the Teaching Assistant:

Jessica Price

WEEKLY SYLLABUS

(See updates on electronic links on the class webpage)

Week 1 - Democracy and American Government

Barbour & Wright, Chapter 1
Paul Light (Brookings Institution): Government's Greatest Achievements
Paul Light (Brookings Institution): Government's Highest Priorities

Week 2- The US Constitution and the Founding Period

Barbour & Wright, Chapter 3
Texas Politics: The Constitution

Declaration of Independence
US Constitution & Bill of Rights
Federalist Papers (read #10 and #51)

Week 3 - Federalism

Barbour & Wright, Chapter 4
McCulloch v. Maryland

Week 4 - Structure

Barbour & Wright, Chapter 2
Texas Politics: Political Culture

Week 5 - Public Opinion

Barbour & Wright, Chapter 11
Texas Politics: Polling

Week 6

********** MIDTERM EXAM I **********
********** Monday February 20th ********

Week 7 - The Media

Barbour & Wright, Chapter 15

Week 8 - Social Movements & Interest Groups

Barbour & Wright, Chapter 13
Texas Politics: Interest Groups

SPRING BREAK (March 11th - March 15th

Week 9 - Political Parties

Barbour & Wright, Chapter 12
Texas Politics: Political Parties

Week 10 - Voting & Participation

Texas Politics: Voting, Campaigns & Elections (sections 4 & 5)

Week 11 - Campaigns & Elections

Barbour & Wright, Chapter 14
Texas Politics: Voting, Campaigns & Elections (except sections 4 & 5)

********** MIDTERM EXAM II **********
********** Friday, April 5th **********

Week 12 - The American President

Barbour & Wright, Chapter 8
Texas Politics: The Executive Branch

Week 13 - The Federal Bureaucracy

Barbour & Wright, Chapter 9
Texas Politics: The Bureaucracy

Week 14 - Congress

Barbour & Wright, Chapter 7
Texas Politics: The Legislative Branch

Week 15 - The US Supreme Court

Barbour & Wright, Chapter 10
Texas Politics: Justice System