

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
Department of Government
Spring 2013
Introduction to American Government
GOV 310L
Unique #: 38672

Instructor: Eric Svensen
Office: MEZ 3.212
Office Hours: TTH 2:00 – 3:30
Email: ericsvensen@utexas.edu

Course Information:
Meeting Place: MEZ B0.306
Meeting Time: TTH 12:30 – 2:00

Course Overview

This course is an introduction to American government and politics. Subjects we will cover are U.S. political history, political institutions, political parties, elections, public opinion, civil rights and freedoms, public policy issues, and Texas state politics. The class will be divided into three thematic sections. The first section begins with the creation of the nation and its fundamental features, including the development of democracy, the adoption of the Constitution, federalism, and the institutional features of government – Congress, the presidency, and the courts. The second section explores mass democratic behavior including American political parties, elections, public opinion, individual level and interest group participation, and the media. The final section of class focuses on economic, social, and foreign policy, as well as exploring Texas political history and politics.

Prerequisites

Students must have completed twelve semester hours of college credit and received a passing score on the reading section of the Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA) or another appropriate test before enrolling in this course.

Course Evaluation

For this course, there will be two exams, quizzes following the conclusion of each chapter in the book, and a final. The percentage toward your overall grade total is as follows:

25% - Exam #1 – Tuesday, February 19
25% - Exam #2 – Thursday, April 4
35% - Final (Cumulative) – Saturday, May 11, 7:00 – 10:00 PM
15% - Quizzes (I will drop the two lowest scores)
100%

Exams: There will be two exams and a final to evaluate your performance. Exams will be multiple-choice and a few mixed matching questions where I either provide the definition and you the appropriate term or concept or I provide the term and you the appropriate definition. The final is cumulative.

Quizzes: Because there is a large amount of material to cover in this course, quizzes will be held a day or two after the conclusion of each chapter to help students prepare for the exams. These quizzes should provide two aids to students. First, the repeated testing will help keep the material fresh and somewhat familiar. Historically, students enrolled in GOV310 courses can become overwhelmed during examination time simply because there is so much material to memorize and understand. Reading and preparing for quizzes should make a distant exam covering 300 pages more manageable. Second, these minor quizzes are a way of helping to build your overall grade total since I am shifting the substantive weight of exams to the quizzes.

Grading: The class uses the plus and minus system for your final 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+ | 60% F |

Course Expectations

I have only a few expectations of students. First, though I do not take attendance, students are strongly encouraged to attend each class meeting. In addition to missing valuable course information for exams, engaging discussions that will undoubtedly enhance your civic knowledge, and important announcements, historically, students with poor attendance records tend to score lower on their final course grade. Second, please do not conduct private conversations during lecture. It is discourteous. Finally, I would like to reserve some time (10 minutes or so) for class discussion on the week's material. I hope this will be a fun, interactive discussion where students can debate the positives and negatives of issues related to the material. Of course, this will be an orderly and respectful discussion atmosphere.

Texts and Required Materials

Theodore J. Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere. 2012. *American Government: Power and Purpose* (12th Edition). New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co. ISBN: 978-0-393-91207-4

Texas Politics Project: <http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/> (This is an additional resource for Texas government material and is free)

Make-up Exams

Make-up exams will be allowed only for illness certified by a doctor, family emergencies certified by the Dean, or official university events with a letter from the appropriate university authority. Athletes and other students who must miss exams should notify me in advance. Since I drop the two lowest quizzes, I will only consider make-up quizzes if you missed two prior quizzes. A make-up quiz requires the same documentation as make-up exams.

Accommodations for Religious Holidays

By University of Texas at 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 an examination or a quiz 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.

Special Needs

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/>.

Academic Integrity

All students are expected to adhere to the University of Texas Honor Code. Students who violate University rules are subject to disciplinary penalties. Each student must do their own work during exams. Any copying or collaboration is prohibited. Minimum penalties will result in failure for that exam.

The UT Honor Code: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/downloads/HonorCode.pdf>

UT Standards of Conduct: http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php

Additional Sources

The following are additional sources for both the political hungry and students seeking additional political knowledge that can aid in both life and, more importantly, exams:

General

<http://www.realclearpolitics.com/>

<http://www.politico.com/>

<http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/>

Polling

<http://www.pollingreport.com/>

<http://www.gallup.com/>

Election Data

<http://uselectionatlas.org/>

<http://www.princeton.edu/~rvdb/JAVA/election2004/>

Institutions

<http://www.house.gov/>

<http://www.senate.gov/>

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/>

<http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php>

Course Schedule and Reading Assignments

Please note: The syllabus should be used as a guideline for course objectives and student responsibilities. The instructor reserves the right to modify the syllabus, including the course schedule, shown below. Any modification to the schedule will be announced. Students are responsible for announcements and other information presented in class, posted on Blackboard, and/or sent via email.

Jan. 15: Class Introduction

- Review Syllabus
- Making Sense of Government (Chapter 1, p. 4-7)

Jan. 17: The American Founding (Chapter 2)

- The Constitution, Federalist Papers (p. A13-42)

Jan. 22: Ratification and Federalists vs. Antifederalists (Chapter 2, p. 54-70)

- Separation of Powers (Chapter 3, p. 94-97)

Jan. 24: Federalism (Chapter 3, p.72-93)

Jan. 29: Civil Liberties (Chapter 4)

Jan. 31: Civil Liberties - Conclusion

Feb. 5: Civil Rights (Chapter 5)

Feb. 7: Begin Congress (Chapter 6)

Feb. 12: The Legislative Process (Chapter 6, p. 212-234)

- Intro to Presidency (Chapter 7, p. 238-258)

Feb. 14: Presidency Continued (Chapter 7, p. 259-288)

- Review Session sometime in early P.M. (Time and Place TBA)

Feb. 19: **EXAM #1**

Feb. 21: The Bureaucracy Part I (Chapter 8, p. 290-307)

Feb. 26: The Bureaucracy Part II (Chapter 8, p. 307-327)

Feb. 28: The Judicial Process (Chapter 9, p. 330-356)

Mar. 5: The Supreme Court (Chapter 9, p. 356-380)

Mar. 7: What are Political Parties? (Chapter 12, p. 504-533)

Mar. 12: Spring Break – **NO CLASS**

Mar. 14: Spring Break – **NO CLASS**

Mar. 19: Party Systems/American Third Parties (Chapter 12, p. 533- 550)

Mar. 21: What is an Interest Group and Who's in Them (Chapter 13, p. 552- 569)

Mar. 26: Interest Group Influence (Chapter 13, p. 569-590)

Mar. 28: The Media as a Political Institution (Chapter 14, p. 592-610)

Apr. 2: What Affects News Coverage? (Chapter 14, p. 610-626)

- Review Session sometime in early P.M. (Time and Place TBA)

Apr. 4: **EXAM #2**

Apr. 9: What is Public Opinion? (Chapter 10, p. 382-411)

Apr. 11: **NO CLASS – (MidWest Political Science Conference)**

Apr. 16: Shaping and Measuring Public Opinion (Chapter 10, p. 411-438)

Apr. 18: Elections Nuts and Bolts (Chapter 11, p. 440-468)

Apr. 23: Campaigns (Chapter 11, p. 468-502)

Apr. 25: Economic Policy (Chapter 15)

Apr. 30: Foreign Policy (Chapter 17)

May 2: **Last Day of Class**

- Social Policy (Chapter 16)
- Texas State Politics

FINAL EXAM – May 11: 7-10 PM