

# Introduction to American Politics

## GOV310L

J. Alexander Branham

Spring 2016

**Unique number** 37685

**Course time:** MWF 11-11:50

**Course location:** UTC 3.102

**Office hours:** MW 9:30 - 11 and by appointment

**Office location:** MEZ 3.212

**Email:** [branham@utexas.edu](mailto:branham@utexas.edu)

**Course website:** <http://jabranham.com/GOV310L/>

## 1 Course description

This course serves as an introduction to politics in the United States. The course is broken into two parts. In the first half of the course, we will discuss the founding and the institutions that emerged from the Constitution. During the latter half of the semester, we will attempt to understand the public's role in American politics. At the completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a basic understanding of U.S. politics
2. Participate knowledgeably in the American political process
3. Critically examine key concepts from political science

## 2 Assessment

**Participation: (25%)** You can earn participation points in several ways. You can complete the (weekly) exercises on Canvas, come to office hours, ask questions and/or participate in discussions on Slack or email, participate in civic or academic events, or write a critical essay of an academic article. More information about this is below.

**Quizzes: (25%)** Quizzes will be in class and closed-note. They will not be announced beforehand, so always be prepared. You should expect roughly one quiz every two weeks. I will drop your lowest grade.

**Exams (2): (50%)** There will be two exams, one midway through the semester and the other at the end. They will be in-class and closed-note. The second will not cover material from the first.

- First exam: March 11, 2016
- Second exam: May 6, 2016

### 3 Course Policies

- Participation

**In class** Feel free to ask questions in class! If you're confused, someone else probably is too.

**Slack** Slack is an online chat service. If twitter and email had a baby, it would be something like Slack. More information about this, including how to sign up and join the course, will be given in the first week.

**Online exercises** There will be an online exercise every week. These will usually be multiple choice quizzes. Feel free to use any resource (your brain, the internet, other students) to answer the questions.

**Civic events** You may choose to attend any civic event. Examples include Austin City Council meetings, political rallies, and speeches. Please confirm with me that the event is suitable **before** going. You will need to provide proof of attendance as well as a short write-up of what happened and your reaction to it. Feel free to share that on Slack!

**Academic events** I will announce academic events via Slack and Canvas. These will usually be distinguished speakers giving a lecture on a topic germane to the course. If you go, you should be sure to provide proof in the form of a photo as well as a very short write-up of what happened. Feel free to share your thoughts about the event on Slack!

**Critical essays** If you find one of the topics we discuss particularly interesting, you may ask me for an academic article about it. I'll give you a choice of several and you may read it and write up a critical essay where you (briefly) summarize the article and then critique its main points. These should be no longer than two pages.

- Missing assignments: I do not let students make up assignments (quizzes or exams) barring exceptional circumstances. Let me know **now** if you have a conflict with one of the exams.
- I will make my slides available on the [course website](#).
- You are expected to do the readings listed in the course schedule. The book we are using can be found [here](#), though there are cheaper copies available through other websites.
- The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-6441 TTY.

### 4 Tentative Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Readings
1	18 Jan 2016	Intro and the founding	Ch 2 & Federalist 10 & 51
2	25 Jan 2016	Liberties and rights	Ch 4
3	01 Feb 2016	Federalism & Separation of Powers	Ch 3
4	08 Feb 2016	Congress	Ch 5
5	15 Feb 2016	The Presidency & Executive	Ch 6 & 7
6	22 Feb 2016	The Courts	Ch 8
7	29 Feb 2016	Issue spotlight: TBD	TBA
8	07 Mar 2016	Catch-up and first exam	None additional
9	14 Mar 2016	Spring Break	
10	21 Mar 2016	Public opinion	Ch 9
11	28 Mar 2016	Political parties	Ch 11
12	04 Apr 2016	Campaigns and elections	Ch 10
13	11 Apr 2016	Interest groups	Ch 12
14	18 Apr 2016	The media	TBA
15	25 Apr 2016	Issue spotlight: TBD	TBA
16	02 May 2016	Catch-up and second exam	None additional