

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

Government 310L

38106

Professor Daron Shaw

Fall 2023

MEETING PLACE: GAR 0.102

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MEETING TIME: T, TH 2:00-3:15

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OFFICE HOURS: T, TH 11:00-12:30

TEACHING ASSISTANTS

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COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is an introduction to American government and politics. While the focus is on the national level, additional attention is paid to the state and local governments of Texas. In some instances, the American case is placed in a comparative context derived from the experience of other western democratic nations. In other instances, the focus is on changes over time within the American political system to demonstrate how principles often change with context. At all times we are interested in a better understanding of how this particular system has developed and what it means for citizens of the United States.

There are three primary objectives in this course. The first is to provide basic descriptive information about the American and Texas political systems by examining important political processes, institutions, and actors. The second is to develop analytical skills by which to understand complex relationships and phenomena. The third is to introduce the work of the political scientist by concentrating on the paradigms and techniques of the discipline.

COURSE EVALUATION

The course is broken down into three components.

1. ***Midterm examinations.*** There will be three midterm exams, each worth 100 total points, spread out over the semester. Each exam will be comprised of 30 multiple choice questions (worth two points each) and four short answer questions (worth ten points each). For the multiple-choice items, there will be four response options for each item, and you will be asked to select the one that is most accurate. I am working on the format now, but I think it is likely that we will have traditional scantrons (or something like these) to make test-taking and grading the exams easier. The short answer section will offer 5-6 questions, from which you will answer four. You will write your answers out on a question sheet that we will provide. The exams are based mostly on lectures, although there will be some questions drawn from the readings, videos, and podcasts as well. The exams will be administered in class on the dates noted in the syllabus. Please note that the exams are not cumulative. Make-up exams will only be given under the direst of circumstances; please do not miss any of the exams or you will be in danger of failing the class.

2. ***"Get the Gist" questions from the assigned webtext chapters.*** You are responsible for completing the "get the gist" questions for each of the assigned webtext chapters. Each chapter is worth ten points, and you will keep your 10 highest scores from the 14 chapter assignments (in

other words, you drop your 4 low scores). This means the readings are worth 100 points total. Please note the relevant due dates in the course schedule section of the syllabus. Also, please note that there are many more chapters in the third section of the course (weeks 10-14) than there are in the first and second sections.

3. **Attendance and Participation.** During lecture, I will occasionally offer an opportunity for students to take a poll, or to do a short quiz on the material we are covering. These assignments will be recorded for participation and used as the primary basis for assessing attendance and participation. These are worth 100 points total.

Assignment	Points	Due Date	Time Due
Midterm 1	100	Thursday, Sept. 21	2:00-3:15 pm
Midterm 2	100	Thursday, Oct. 19	2:00-3:15 pm
Midterm 3	100	Thursday, Nov. 30	2:00-3:15 pm
"Get the Gist" questions	100	See schedule	5:00 pm
Attendance/Participation	100	Any given lecture	3:15 pm
TOTAL	500		

Keeping in mind that there are 500 points possible, the grading scale for the course is as follows:

Points	Grade	Points	Grade	Points	Grade
465-500	A	385-399.99	C+	335-349.99	D+
450-464.99	A-	365-384.99	C	315-334.99	D
435-449.99	B+	350-364.99	C-	300-314.99	D-
415-434.99	B			0-299.99	F
400-414.99	B-				

A few other points merit attention. Incomplete grades are highly discouraged and will only be given for a compelling reason. Students must complete ALL assigned work to pass the course. Failure to complete all course requirements will result in a failing grade.

COURSE MATERIALS

We are using the *Texas Politics* (10th edition) webtext. ISBN 978-1-954890-28-2, Soomo Learning (2023). You can purchase access to the webtext which includes all the Texas politics content directly through Canvas at \$55 or buy a passkey from the Co-Op bookstore for approximately \$73.39. The second option will allow you to use your financial aid.

For instructions on how to register for the webtext, use the student quick start guide. You can access it by clicking:

NOTE: If you have already completed a course that has used the Texas Politics webtext, you can have your payment applied to the total price of the webtext by emailing Soomo Learning's Student Support at support@soomolearning.com. Please provide the course information from your previous course.

COURSE FORMAT

Class meetings run approximately 75 minutes and rely on a lecture format. However, I ask questions of the class and may call on students at random. On the other side of the lectern, questions and observations are always encouraged. I try to recognize those raising their hand to ask a question as soon as possible.

This seems too obvious to need stating, but here it goes: you are expected to attend all lectures. Attendance and participation are part of your grade both directly (through the in-class quizzes and polls) but also indirectly (through the midterm exams, which draw heavily on lecture materials).

On the same note, it is distracting and discourteous to arrive late or leave during the lecture. I would discourage you from making a habit out of it. There will be no breaks during the hour and twenty minutes, so food, beverage and restroom necessities should be taken care of prior to class. Please turn off all cell phones prior to entering the class. At a more general level, please show respect for the classroom environment.

Anyone having difficulty with the course should feel free to see me after class or in office hours. If I can't help solve the problem myself, I can point you towards one of the many excellent support systems for students who need to improve their writing, research, or study skills.

INFORMATION AND DATA SECURITY

All examinations, exercises, assignments, and online interactions over the TOWER system will be saved and stored. All information will be kept for educational and general academic research. Any research or data sharing with other researchers will involve de-identifying the data, including the removal of names, UT EIDs, email addresses, or other information. To further ensure that your information is secure, please do not include identifying information in your online interactions with others.

Also, remember that all information is stored on secure UT-Austin computer servers. In online interactions with others, remember that the professors and TAs will have access to all information.

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 (512) 471-6259 (voice) or (512) 410-6644 (video phone) or <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

The course format allows us to monitor and detect issues involving identity verification, collusion, collaboration, and plagiarism. A violation of the course policy may include (but is not limited to) the following:

- Providing your UT EID to another person;
- Collaborating or sharing information with another person on an exam or other assignment;
- Recording any quiz, assessment, or assignment material in any format;
- Failing to properly cite ideas, data, or arguments that are not originally yours.

What about the use of Artificial Intelligence? Given the format of the class, this is probably not going to be much of an issue. However, to be clear, in my view the use of AI for constructing a response to a course assignment is a violation of university policy. As such, in the unlikely event that this becomes an issue for a student in this class, I will likely issue a warning, and then (if the warning is ignored) assign a failing grade.

The University of Texas at Austin Academic Integrity Principles call for students to avoid engaging in any form of academic dishonesty on behalf of yourself or another student:

<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/index.php>

Grade-related penalties are routinely assessed ("F" in the course is not uncommon), but students can also be suspended or even permanently expelled from the University for scholastic dishonesty:
<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/academicintegrity.php>

Honor system for quizzes and assignments. By taking this class, you agree to abide by the University of Texas regulations concerning cheating. While working on your activities, you cannot receive help from others or discuss your short answer assignments with other students. If you observe others cheating, you are honor bound to contact the teaching team.

The 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: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/standardsofconduct.php>

TITLE IX REPORTING

Title IX is a federal law that protects against sex and gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, dating/domestic violence and stalking at federally funded educational institutions. UT Austin is committed to fostering a learning and working environment free from discrimination in all its forms. When sexual misconduct occurs in our community, the university can:

1. Intervene to prevent harmful behavior from continuing or escalating.
2. Provide support and remedies to students and employees who have experienced harm or have become involved in a Title IX investigation.
3. Investigate and discipline violations of the university's [relevant policies](#).

Faculty members and certain staff members are considered "Responsible Employees" or "Mandatory Reporters," which means that they are required to report violations of Title IX to the Title IX Coordinator. **We are Responsible Employees and must report any Title IX related incidents** that are disclosed in writing, discussion, or one-on-one. Before talking with us, or with any faculty or staff member about a Title IX related incident, be sure to ask whether they are a responsible employee. If you want to speak with someone for support or remedies without making an official report to the university, email advocate@austin.utexas.edu. For more information about reporting options and resources, visit titleix.utexas.edu or contact the Title IX Office at titleix@austin.utexas.edu.

INTERNET RESOURCES

If you want to use the Internet to keep abreast of what's happening in politics, we recommend the following sites:

Political News Sites

cnn.com
nytimes.com
washingtonpost.com
latimes.com
onlinewsj.com
realclearpolitics.com
politico.com
nationaljournal.com
texastribune.com

Issues and the Basics

vote-smart.org
archives.gov

For the More Adventurous...

fivethirtyeight.com
washingtonpost.com/blogs/monkey-cage/
pollingreport.com
fec.gov

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week	Topic	Readings/Podcasts/Videos	Assignments
WEEK 1 August 22	Introduction		
	August 24 Pre-Constitutional Government		
WEEK 2 August 29	The Constitution	TP: "The Texas Constitution"	GTG Due: Friday, September 22 5:00 pm CDT
	" "		
WEEK 3 September 5	Federalism	TP: "Federalism" "Revisionist History: Divide and Conquer" (https://www.pushkin.fm/podcasts/revisionist-history/divide-and-conquer)	GTG Due: Friday, September 22 5:00 pm CDT
	" "	TP: "Local Government"	GTG Due: Friday, September 22 5:00 pm CDT
WEEK 4 September 12	Civil Liberties		
	September 14 Civil Rights		
WEEK 5 September 19	Interest Groups	TP: "Interest Groups"	GTG Due: Friday, September 22 5:00 pm CDT
	MIDTERM #1		MIDTERM #1
WEEK 6 September 26	The News Media	"Media Business Matters Podcast: Local Media a Conversation with Texas Tribune CEO Evan Smith" (http://www.amandalotz.com/podcast-media-business-matters/2018/8/22/local-media-a-conversation-with-texas-tribune-ceo-evan-smith)	
	" "		
WEEK 7 October 3	Political Participation	TP: "Elections, Voting & Campaigns"	GTG Due: Friday, October 20 5:00 pm CDT
	October 5 Voting	"Stuff You Missed in History Class: Does My Vote Count?" (https://www.iheart.com/podcast/stuff-you-missed-in-history-cl-21124503/episode/does-my-vote-count-30208516/)	

WEEK 8			
October 10	Campaigns	TP: "Elections, Voting & Campaigns"	GTG Due: Friday, October 20 5:00 pm CDT
October 12	Elections	"FiveThirtyEight Politics Podcast: What Does it Mean to be 'Electable'?" (https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/politics-podcast-what-does-it-mean-to-be-electable/). "Stuff You Missed in History Class: How the Swing States Works" (https://www.iheart.com/podcast/stuff-you-missed-in-history-cl-21124503/episode/how-the-swing-states-works-30208426/).	
WEEK 9			
October 17	"The War Room"		
October 19	MIDTERM #2		MIDTERM #2
WEEK 10			
October 24	Public Opinion	TP: "Political Culture"	GTG Due: Friday, December 1, 5:00 pm CDT
October 26	" "		
WEEK 11			
October 31	The Presidency	TP: "The Governor"	GTG Due: Friday, December 1, 5:00 pm CDT
November 2	" "	TP: "The Executive Branch"	GTG Due: Friday, December 1, 5:00 pm CDT
WEEK 12			
November 7	The Congress	TP: "The Legislature"	GTG Due: Friday, December 1, 5:00 pm CDT
November 9	" "	TP: "The Legislative Process"	GTG Due: Friday, December 1, 5:00 pm CDT
WEEK 13			
November 14	The Courts	TP: "The Judicial Branch" "Whistlestop: The Bidding of Biden to Boo Bork" (https://open.spotify.com/episode/4LbVgkjepcBrZeTLZNULdd)	GTG Due: Friday, December 1, 5:00 pm CDT
November 16	" "	TP: "The Criminal Justice System"	GTG Due: Friday, December 1, 5:00 pm CDT
WEEK 14			
November 28	Public Policy	TP: "Texas Public Policy" "FiveThirtyEight: We Let Our Readers Practice International Trade. They Started A Bunch of Trade Wars" (https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/we-let-our-readers-practice-international-trade-they-started-a-bunch-of-trade-wars/)	GTG Due: Friday, December 1, 5:00 pm CDT
November 30	MIDTERM #3		MIDTERM #3