

GOV 310L American Government (Unique Number 37220)

Spring 2024

MWF 10:00-11:00, Parlin Hall (PAR) 1

Instructor

Chris Cassella (He/Him)

Office: Mezes Hall 3.220

Email: chris.cassella@austin.utexas.edu

Drop-In Hours: Tuesday 1:00-2:30, Thursday 12:00-1:30

Course Description

This course is an introduction to American government. We will trace the political history of the United States from the founding through present day. We will learn about the institutions of government, discuss civil rights and civil liberties, and talk about how government is present in our everyday lives. As a class we will also look at the political culture of the United States to understand how well we are represented in our political system through voting and public policies. In addition to the United States government, we will also look at Texas politics.

Reading Materials

American Politics: A Field Guide, by Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox.

The textbook is available online [here](#). I'd recommend the digital edition (it's about \$40) but there's also a paperback available. All other readings will be available on Canvas. All readings will be "due" the day they are assigned. This means come prepared to class having done the reading.

Assignments

Your grade will be composed of the following assignments:

- 20%: Weekly Activity Assignments

- 20%: Short Response Paper

- 25%: Midterm Exam

- 25%: Original Research Paper

- 10% Reading Assignments

Weekly Activity Assignments

There is no participation or attendance grade in this course. Instead, you will have weekly class activity assignments. These assignments will range from quick surveys to brief responses (a paragraph) but **will require to attend class to complete them**. Your **highest eight scores** will count towards your grade.

Reading Assignments

Reading assignments for this class will all be online through the textbook website. They are a great way to check your understanding of the concepts and will not take very long. These assignments have unlimited attempts and are due at the **end of a reading week, without exceptions.**

Short Response Papers

Throughout the semester you will have to complete two short response papers. The prompts for these papers are listed on the syllabus. They will be no longer than two pages double spaced. These assignments will be due on **Mondays before class, without exceptions.** There will be three opportunities to submit these papers. Your **top two papers** will count towards your grade.

Midterm Exam

The midterm exam will take place on March 6th in class. It will be composed of a mix of multiple choice and free response questions from all lectures and readings leading up to that week.

Original Research Paper

In lieu of a final exam, students will write an original research paper on a topic related to American government. We will complete the paper in sections, with a grade breakdown as follows:

- 20% Research Proposal
- 20% Annotated Bibliography
- 20% Rough Draft
- 40% Final Paper

The goal of these benchmarks is to make sure you're working on the paper throughout the second half of the semester. By the time your final paper is due, you might just have to make a few changes to your rough draft!

Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD): If you anticipate needing classroom or exam accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you must register for services with the SSD. Additional information can be found here:

<https://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>

Academic Dishonesty: You should all be familiar with the UT Honor Code (or statement of ethics) and an explanation or examples of what constitutes plagiarism. See the University Honor Code if you have any doubts about what constitutes cheating or plagiarism <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/academicintegrity.php>

Artificial Intelligence: “The creation of artificial intelligence tools for widespread use is an exciting innovation. These tools have both appropriate and inappropriate uses in classwork. The use of artificial intelligence tools (such as ChatGPT) in this class shall be permitted on a limited basis. You will be informed as to the assignments for which AI may be utilized. You

are also welcome to seek my prior approval to use AI writing tools on any assignment. In either instance, AI writing tools should be used with caution and proper citation, as the use of AI should be properly attributed. Using AI writing tools without my permission or authorization, or failing to properly cite AI even where permitted, shall constitute a violation of UT Austin's Institutional Rules on academic integrity.

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.
- 4) Links to an external site.

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 (links to an external site) or contact the Title IX Office at titleix@austin.utexas.edu.

Sharing of Course Materials: No materials used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture hand-outs, videos, assessments (quizzes, exams, papers, projects, homework assignments), in-class materials, review sheets, and additional problem sets, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class without my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials may facilitate cheating. The University is aware of the sites used for sharing materials, and any materials found online that are associated with you, or any suspected unauthorized sharing of materials, will be reported to [Student Conduct and Academic Integrity](#) in the Office of the Dean of Students. These reports can result in initiation of the student conduct process and include charge(s) for academic misconduct, potentially resulting in sanctions, including a grade impact."

Class Schedule

Week One: Course Introductions

January 17th Syllabus Day

January 19th American Government Crash Course

Pew Research Center: The Nation's Top Problems

<https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/06/21/inflation-health-costs-partisan-cooperation-among-the-nations-top-problems/>

Week Two: The Founding and the Constitution

January 22nd The Constitution

American Politics Field Guide 1.1-1.4

January 24th Federalism and the Bill of Rights

American Politics Field Guide 1.5-1.8

January 26th Amending the Constitution

Class activity: Making your own Constitution.

Week Three: Institutions I | Congress and Legislatures

January 29th The House of Representatives

American Politics Field Guide 6.34-35

January 31st The Senate

Hurley, Patricia. 2001. "Congress: The Electoral Connection' after 25 Years." *PS. Political Science and Politics*. Vol 34.2. pp. 259-261

February 2nd

Class activity: Who is my legislator?

Week Four: Institutions II | The Executive Branch and the Bureaucracy

February 5th The Executive Branch

American Politics Field Guide 6.36

February 7th The Bureaucracy

American Politics Field Guide 6.37-38

February 9th

Class activity: PANIC! Who deals with which problems?

Week Five: Institutions III | The Courts

February 12th The Supreme Court and Lower Courts

American Politics Field Guide 6.39-6.40

February 14th Key Cases

February 16th

Class activity: How would you rule as a Supreme Court justice?

Week Six: Political Parties and Voting

February 19th Political Parties

American Politics Field Guide 3.17-3.18

SHORT RESPONSE PAPER ONE DUE: Pick an institution that we've discussed so far in class and talk about how it works. Then, describe one to two ways the actions of these institutions are present in your day-day life.

February 21st Voting Patterns in the United States

American Politics Field Guide 3.19-3.20

February 23rd

Class activity: New political parties and platforms.

Week 7: Campaigns and Elections

February 26th Campaigns and Candidates

American Politics Field Guide 5.27-5.28, 5.31

February 28th Elections

American Politics Field Guide 5.29-5.30, 5.32-5.33

March 1st

Class activity: The right stuff—a winning candidate in a runoff election.

Week 8: Midterm Week

March 4th

Review session, bring questions!

March 6th

Midterm Exam

SPRING BREAK NO CLASS: March 8th – March 16th

Week 10: Political Sophistication

March 18th Political Beliefs

American Politics Field Guide 4.22-4.24

March 20th News and the Media

American Politics Field Guide 4.25-4.26

March 22nd Writing Research Papers

Week 11: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

March 25th Introduction to Civil Rights and Liberties

American Politics Field Guide 2.9-2.12

SHORT RESPONSE PAPER 2 DUE: What are some ways we form our political beliefs?
How do our political beliefs inform our behavior as members of a political society?

March 27th Constitutional Protections

American Politics Field Guide 2.13-2.16

Due: Research Question

March 29th Social Movements

Class activity: Studying social movements.

Week 12: Interest Groups

April 1st Introduction to Interest Groups

American Politics Field Guide 6.41-6.42

April 3rd Interest Groups as Policymakers

American Politics Field Guide 3.21

April 5th NO CLASS

DUE: Annotated Bibliography

Week 13: Representation

April 8th Introduction to Representation

REVIEW *American Politics Field Guide* 4.34

Chris Wlezien. 2004. Patterns of representation: Dynamics of public preferences and policy. *The Journal of Politics*, 66(1), pp.1-24.

April 10th Who Gets Represented

Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page. 2014. Testing theories of American politics: Elites, interest groups, and average citizens. *Perspectives on politics*, 12(3), pp.564-581.

April 12th

Class activity: How well are we represented?

Week 14: Introduction to Public Policy

April 15th The Policy Process

American Politics Field Guide 7.43-7.45

April 17th Issues

American Politics Field Guide 7.46-7.48

April 19th

Class activity: Fixing the policy problems.

DUE: Paper Draft

Week 15: State Politics

April 22nd State Politics

The Legislative Process in Texas

SHORT PAPER THREE DUE: Pick a policy problem that is important to you. How would you try to solve it, and what institutions/players would be required to get to your solution?

April 24th Local Politics

Einstein, Katherine Levine, Maxwell Palmer, and David M. Glick. 2019. "Who participates in local government? Evidence from meeting minutes." *Perspectives on politics* 17.1: 28-46.

LAST CLASS DAY April 26th

FINAL PAPER DUE May 3rd 5:00 PM CST