

**Introduction to American Government, Gov 310L 38325,  
UT Austin, Fall 2022  
T/Th 9:30-11:00, UTC 1.118**

**Professor:** Hannah Walker

**Office:** BAT 3.122

**E-mail:** hlwalker@utexas.edu

**Office hours:** Monday from 9:30-11:30, or by appointment

**Course Description**

This course provides an introduction to United States politics. The course topics include an introduction to America's constitutional foundations, the function of institutions (Congress, Presidency, Courts), elements of mass public politics (public opinion and participation), and the role of intermediary organizations (the media, interest groups, parties). In addition to mastering the fundamental organization of the national government, students will learn theories addressing "big questions" in American politics and will discuss different arguments based on the evidence brought to bear on these questions.

**Required reading:** All readings on the syllabus are required. All readings assigned throughout the course will either be linked up on the syllabus, provided to you via the course website, or available through the UT library.

**Attendance policy:** I will not take attendance. Instead, the exams will be written such that you cannot do well if you do not participate in lecture/keep up with the readings. There are seven tasks you will complete throughout the semester. The seven tasks are designed to assure your active participation in group project meetings. ***There will not be an option to attend lecture via hybrid format.*** However, I will post my slides on Canvas prior to class, and will happily talk you through them during office hours should you have to miss a lecture. Lectures will be delivered on Tuesdays. Thursdays are reserved for discussion of readings and group work sessions. ***You have a high degree of flexibility in how you conduct group work sessions*** – your group may choose to occasionally meet via zoom if all parties cannot be present in the classroom.

**Course Structure and Grading**

Item	Percent of overall grade	Due date
Constitutions Project	15	Oct 18
Texas State Politics Project	15	Nov 28
Group Project Tasks (7 total)	28 (4 points each)	Various dates
Exam #1	14	Sept 15
Exam #2	14	Oct 13
Exam #3	14	Nov 30
Total	100	

Grade Scale	
A 93-100	C 73-76
A- 90-92	C- 70-72
B+ 87-89	D+ 67-69
B 83-86	D 63-66
B- 80-82	D- 60-62
C+ 77-79	F 0-59

**Overview:** Your final grade will be composed of two group projects, seven tasks you will complete on the way to developing your group projects, and three exams that you will take throughout the semester. There is no formal participation grade. Instead, the seven tasks you will complete as part of your group projects serve as relatively frequent check-ins with you as you work relatively independently. The content of the exams will cover a mix of reading material and information presented during lecture. You cannot pass the exams without actively engaging the course material. The composition of your final grade is relatively balanced between exams (individual work), group projects, and weekly tasks (mix of individual and group work), reflecting the fact that you must be both individually engaged and actively collaborative in order to do well in the class.

***Constitutions project*** (15 percent): The first part of the course will provide you with foundational material to understand the American constitution, how it developed and some of the tensions embedded in its overall structure. Following the conclusion of this part of the course (marked by Exam #1) you will be broken up into groups, and you will be assigned the task of writing a new constitution. Dream big! How would you address some of the flaws we observe in today's constitutional environment? Would you include a bill of rights, or like some of the framers, do you view enumerated rights as limiting? Will you establish a bicameral legislature, divided between proportional and equal representation, or will you choose a parliamentary structure? Each of the tasks leading up to the completion of the project overall will support you in your final effort. Task #1, for example, will invite you to explore other constitutional structures tried, tested, and revised throughout the world. How do we build institutions that support the world in which we wished we lived? Specific details of the assignment are located under the assignments tab on Canvas.

***Texas state politics project*** (15 percent): Every election cycle pundits and academics alike speculate about the likelihood that Texas will become a swing state. That possibility seems unlikely, even as Beto O'Rourke closes the polling gap with Governor Greg Abbott as we approach the 2022 midterm elections. Your task is to review the evidence and develop an argument: how likely is it that Texas will be contested in the 2048 presidential election cycle? Each of the tasks leading up to the completion of the project overall will support your final effort. For example, Tasks #5 and #6 will ask you to consider voting trends over time, and the changing demographic makeup of the state. Task #7 will ask you to compare and contrast Texas with other formerly solidly red states, like Georgia and Nevada, that are now frequently contested. The purpose of this exercise is two-fold: 1) to help you develop analytic and research skills; and 2) to help you (and me!) develop a more sophisticated understanding of Texas state politics. Specific details of the assignment are located under the assignments tab on Canvas.

**Seven tasks** (28 percent total, 4 percent each): Group projects can be stressful, especially when students perceive that the bulk of their grade will be dependent on other people's work. Each of the seven tasks are designed to alleviate this concern. The seven tasks reflect a mix of group and individual work. Every student is responsible for completing a task sheet. The task sheet asks you to answer a few questions that reflect the work you did in your group for the week. You and your group mates should have similar responses to this part of the task. The task sheet also asks you to reflect on the assignment and connect it to class material. This reflects your own analysis and no one else's. The tasks provide you a way to communicate with me about your own learning, and stand in for a more traditional participation grade. In other words – you must complete them, but if you complete them and do so on time, you will be awarded the full four points for a given assignment.

**Exams** (42 percent total, 14 percent each): You will take three exams during the course of the semester. Exams will be completed via canvas; you will not need to physically come to campus to complete the exam. The exams will be timed; they will open at 9:00 am on the day they are assigned, and they will close at 12:00 pm that same day; they will be open-note, open-book, and will consist of a mix of multiple choice and short answer questions. Exam questions will reflect information delivered via the readings and in lecture.

### **Administrative Policies**

**Grade Complaints:** If you have a grade complaint you must do the following: write up a summary of your complaint, with a clear request to re-grade a specific question or set of questions and explanation for why you think you were unfairly graded. You must check in with via phone or video-chat. If I agree to re-grade your work, this raises the possibility that you may lose points.

**Plagiarism and Cheating:** Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and are treated as such by both the university and by me. I have a zero-tolerance policy for plagiarism/cheating and I will impose the most severe penalty allowed by university rules, which includes but is not limited to issuing an automatic grade of 0.0 for the course if a verified case of plagiarism/cheating occurs. The University's policies surrounding cheating and plagiarism can be found here: <https://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/academicintegrity.php>

**Students with Disabilities:** This class respects and welcomes students of all backgrounds, identities, and abilities. If there are circumstances that make our learning environment and activities difficult, if you have medical information that you need to share with me, or if you need specific arrangements in case the building needs to be evacuated, please let me know. I am committed to creating an effective learning environment for all students. Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 512-410-6644 (Video Phone) as soon as possible to request an official letter outlining authorized accommodations. For more information, visit <http://ddce.utexas.edu/disability/about/>.

***Preferred Name and Pronouns (She/He/They/Ze/Etc):*** Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name, unless they have added a "preferred name" with the Gender and Sexuality Center (<http://diversity.utexas.edu/genderandsexuality/publications-and-resources/>). If you prefer to be address by a name that is different from what appears on the official roster, or have pronoun preferences of which you would like me to be aware, please advise me early in the semester so I may adjust accordingly.

***Safety and Class Participation:*** Dr. Walker *will be wearing a mask* when in doors with other people. Students are *strongly encouraged* to do the same. Our class will be held in person, pending alternative university policies. Do not come to class if you are showing symptoms (of any kind! If you have a mere cold, stay home!). Information regarding safety protocols with and without symptoms, and with and without vaccination can be found here: [https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/coronavirus\\_exposure\\_action\\_chart.html](https://healthyhorns.utexas.edu/coronavirus_exposure_action_chart.html)

***FERPA and Class Recordings:*** In the event that class discussions are recorded they are reserved only for students in this class for educational purposes and are protected under FERPA. "Protected under FERPA" means that you and your fellow students, and your participation in my class, have a right to keeping that participation private to the class, and that right is protected by law. The recordings should not be shared outside the class in any form. Violation of this restriction by a student could lead to Student Misconduct proceedings.

***Sharing of Course Materials is Prohibited:*** 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 unless you have my explicit, written permission. Unauthorized sharing of materials promotes cheating. It is a violation of the University's Student Honor Code and an act of academic dishonesty. Any 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 sanctions, including failure in the course.

## Course Schedule

### Week 1: Introduction

Tuesday Aug 23

- Introduction and course overview, no reading assigned

Thursday Aug 25 – Introducing the Constitution

- Federalist Essays #10 & 51: <https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/full-text>
- Centinel 1: <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/centinel-i/>

### Week 2: *Constitutional Reformation*

Tuesday Sept 1

- Dahl, How Democratic is the American Constitution? Chapter 1-2, available on Canvas

Thursday Sept 3

- Dahl, How Democratic is the American Constitution? Chapter 3, available on Canvas

### Week 3: *Institutional In(Equality) and the Bill of Rights*

Tuesday Sept 6

- Rogers M. Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz: The Multiple Traditions in America," American Political Science Review, 87 (September 1993), pp.555-566; available on Canvas

Thursday Sept 8

- Debate over the Bill of Rights, documents found at: <https://csac.history.wisc.edu/document-collections/constitutional-debates/bill-of-rights/>
  - Publius, the Federalist 84
  - James Wilson, Speech in the House Sate Yard
  - Federal Farmer, letters to the Republican

### Week 4: *Access to the Vote*

Tuesday Sept 13

- Martin Luther King, Letter from Birmingham Jail: [https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html)
- Grumbach, Jacob and Hill, Charlotte. 2020. "Rock the registration: Same day registration increases turnout of young voters." Available via Canvas.

Thursday Sept 15

- **Exam #1**, to be completed independently, online via Canvas

### Week 5: *The Presidency*

Tuesday Sept 20

- *Introduction to The Constitutions Project (Project #1); group assignments*
- Alexander Hamilton, Federalist #70: <https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/full-text>
- Howell, W.G., 2005. Introduction: Unilateral Powers: A Brief Overview. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 35(3), pp.417-439. Available via Canvas.

Thursday Sept 22

- Task #1: Brainstorming -- <https://www.constituteproject.org/>

## **Week 6: *Congress***

Tuesday Sept 27

- Smaller states find outsized clout growing in the Senate:  
<http://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2013/03/11/us/politics/democracy-tested.html/#smallstate>
- Losing common ground: Social sorting and polarization:  
<https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.1515/for-2018-0004/html?lang=en>

Thursday Sept 29

- Task #2: Identifying your values

## **Week 7: *The Courts***

Tuesday Oct 4

- To Have and to Hold: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/05/25/to-have-and-to-hold>
- Lemieux and Lovell, “Legislative Defaults: Interbranch Power Sharing and Abortion Politics,” available via Canvas.

Thursday Oct 6:

- Task #3: Drawing up a basic constitutional framework

## **Week 8: *The Bureaucracy***

Tuesday Oct 11

- Inside Trump’s Cruel Campaign Against the USDA’s Scientists:  
<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2017/11/usda-food-stamps-school-lunch-trump-administration>
- The Fifth Risk – Selected chapters TBD, available via Canvas.

Thursday Oct 13:

- **Exam #2** to be completed independently, online via Canvas

## **Week 9: *WORK WEEK***

Tuesday Oct 18

- **Constitutions project due**
- No new material

Thursday Oct 20

- You worked hard! Class Cancelled

### **Week 10: *The media***

Tuesday Oct 25

- *Introduction to The Texas Project (Project #2); New group assignments*
- ‘Outright Lies’: Voting misinformation flourishes on Facebook  
<https://www.propublica.org/article/outright-lies-voting-misinformation-flourishes-on-facebook>
- Most Americans think they can spot fake news:  
<https://www.cnn.com/2021/05/31/health/fake-news-study/index.html>
- Time and skeptical opinion content erode the effects of science coverage on climate beliefs and attitudes, available on Canvas

Thursday Oct 27

- Task #4: Describe the Texas state government

### **Week 11: *Public Opinion***

Tuesday Nov 1

- The irrational electorate: [https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/international-relations-dam/Teaching/pwgrundlagenopenaccess/Weitere/how\\_stupid.pdf](https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/international-relations-dam/Teaching/pwgrundlagenopenaccess/Weitere/how_stupid.pdf)
- Can inattentive citizens control their representatives?  
<https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/arnold/files/congressreconsidered.pdf>
- What 2020’s election poll errors tell us about the accuracy of issue polling:  
<https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2021/03/02/what-2020s-election-poll-errors-tell-us-about-the-accuracy-of-issue-polling/>

Thursday Nov 3

- Task #5: Is Texas becoming bluer over time? Go get data!

### **Week 12: *Voting and Elections***

Tuesday Nov 8

- Telling Americans to vote, or else:  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/06/opinion/sunday/telling-americans-to-vote-or-else.html>
- Additional material TBD

Thursday Nov 10

- Task #6: Do changing demographics help or hurt the likelihood that the state will turn blue? Go get some data!

### **Week 13: Political Parties and Interest Groups**

Tuesday Nov 15

- American democracy is doomed: <https://www.vox.com/2015/3/2/8120063/american-democracy-doomed>
- America's political system isn't going to collapse, it's going to muddle through. <https://www.vox.com/2015/3/4/8140911/american-politics-crushing-disappointment>
- Podcast: Sarah Kliff, "The Seattle Experiment," <https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2018/11/02/663492385/episode-873-the-seattle-experiment>

Thursday Nov 17

- Task #7: Investigate other states – what makes Texas similar to/different from states like Nevada and Georgia?

### **Week 14: Thanksgiving Break**

### **Week 15: Conclusion**

Tuesday Nov 28

- **Texas state politics project due**
- Exam review

Thursday Nov 30

- **Exam #3**, to be completed independently, online via Canvas