

# **GOV 310L: American Government**

**SPRING 2023 (Unique Number: 37945)**

**Instructor:** A.C. Kuhn, *M.A. Constitutional Law Studies*  
*Ph.D. Candidate in US Politics & Public Policy*

**Meeting Time:** **MWF 10-11 AM (Face-to-Face)**  
**Office Hours:** M: 1:30-3:00 PM, T: 2-3:30 PM on **Zoom**  
**Class Location:** MEZ 1.306  
**Email:** ackuhn@utexas.edu

Please routinely check **CANVAS** for this class. I post grades, assignment files, Powerpoint slides, and other important information. If class is ever canceled, it will be posted there as well.

I believe our classroom is equipped with Lectures Online; if so- lectures will be recorded and uploaded after class, as able (meaning: it is possible some may not be available due to technical difficulties or other unforeseen circumstances; online lecture availability is not guaranteed.).

There is NO TA for this course, just me!

## **Course Description:**

This course is an introduction to United States Government. It is designed to give you a basic idea of the functions, activities, and interactions of the US federal system. The US government is a mish-mash of ideologies, goals, and institutions attempting to fulfill (sometimes conflicting) goals and objectives, and many people think it isn't doing a fantastic job. So, how did we get here, and where could we go in the future?

The goal of this class is to provide you with tools to understand why and how US institutions came to be. By learning the duties, powers, and limitations of the government, you can better appreciate the depth of major issues in US politics and how they came to be. You'll also engage in thinking about and discussing the values, virtues, and weaknesses of political institutions— plus, we will discuss: *why smartphone apps aren't a solution to democracy!*

This course may fulfill three (3) hours of the American and Texas government component of the university core curriculum.

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- Identify the major institutions and features of the US government and the processes that occurred to form them (You'll be able to answer: *How and why did the US choose the institutions and structure that it has? E.g., what's up with checks and balances?*)
- Discuss the key ideological influences on the development of the US government pre- and post-war reconstructions and subsequent social changes (You'll be able to answer: *How did the goals of reconstruction post-Civil War and WWI/WWII impact US politics and institutions?*)
- Analyze and critique US institutions' implementation of their policy goals (You'll be able to answer: *Are US institutions good at what they are trying to do? What are they good at?*)

## **Required Readings:**

There is ONE (1) textbook required for this course. You can purchase it either as a hardcopy version from the bookstore/online/etc or as an electronic version. **We will only use the most recent version.**

I have opted-in to the Longhorn Textbook Access (LTA) program. This means you will have access to the digital copy of the book and materials through LTA (link under “My Textbooks” on Canvas) for a reduced price. You must opt-out (info below) if you do not wish to participate in LTA.

**BOOK:** Greenberg, Edward, S. and Benjamin I. Page. The Struggle for Democracy: 2020 Presidential Election Edition (13th Edition) (ISBN-13: 9780137585137)

This link leads to the direct publisher website, and the textbook:

<https://www.pearson.com/en-us/subject-catalog/p/struggle-for-democracy-the-2020-presidential-election-edition/P200000002866/9780137585137/>

*I reserve the right to assign additional readings from time to time if I feel they are needed. Any additional readings will be added Canvas and also announced in class.*

## **Longhorn Textbook Access (LTA):**

The materials for this class are available through the Longhorn Textbook Access (LTA) program, a collaboration between UT Austin, The University Co-op and textbook publishers to significantly reduce the cost of digital course materials for students. You can access your required materials through the “My Textbooks” tab in Canvas. You are automatically opted into the program but can easily opt-out (and back in) via Canvas through the **12th class day**.

If you remain opted-in at the end of the add/drop period (12th class day fall/spring, 4th class day summer sessions), you will receive a bill through your “What I Owe” page. If you do not pay your bill by the specified deadline, you will lose access to the course materials and your charge will be removed. More information about the LTA program is available at [www.universitycoop.com/longhorn-textbook-access](http://www.universitycoop.com/longhorn-textbook-access).

## **Grades:**

*Grades will based on the following schematics (your choice):*

<u>OPTION 1:</u> Three Multiple Choice (MC) Exams	<u>OPTION 2:</u> Term Paper (8-12 pages)
<b><u>Exams: 75% of total</u></b>  <b>Test 1      Due: Feb 13: 25%</b> <b>Test 2      Due: Mar 24: 25%</b> <b>Test 3      Due: Apr 26: 25%</b>	<b><u>Term Paper: 75% of total</u></b>  <b>Project Statement: Feb. 3 (Friday): 0%</b> <b>Paper Outline: Feb. 13 (Monday): 25%</b>  <b>First Draft: March 24 (Friday): 25%</b>  <b>Final Due: Apr 26 (Friday) 25%</b>

**\*\*\*\*You must select a grading option by Feb. 3, 2023 \*\*\*\***

If you do not let me know, you will opt into the MC exam option by default. Details are below for each assignment.

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**PLUS, for all students:**

**Paper Assignments: 10% total**

Paper Assignment 1 January 30 (Monday) (5%)  
Paper Assignment 2 April 10 (Monday) (5%)

**Quizzes (approx. every other week): 10% total**

If attendance becomes extremely low, or if I think pop quizzes are in order, I may begin to take attendance or give quizzes in-class. If I do exercise this option, I will announce it in class and on Canvas as well as with the re-weighted grade scale. However, attendance is NOT required for this course.

**Engagement (“Participation”): 5% total**

Each lecture session, an attendance/engagement question will be asked. Students will be asked to answer this question online through a google form or similar venue. Question submissions will be graded for completeness.

I reserve the right to change to the grading system as I see fit during the semester. This may include but is not limited to additional paper assignments (if I determine they are needed), or moving the test dates to accommodate unforeseen circumstances (think hurricanes, freezes, and natural disasters, not doctor's appointments).

**Late assignments are only accepted until \*\*\*Apr 27, 2023\*\*\***

**Grade Scale:**

The University uses a plus/minus system. Here is the scale I will use for the class for grades. I do NOT round up or negotiate grades. You will receive your earned grade based on performance.

A:	93-100	C:	73-76.99
A-:	90-92.99	C-:	70-72.99
B+:	87-89.99	D+:	67-69.99
B:	83-86.99	D:	63-66.99
B-:	80-82.99	D-:	60-62.99
C+:	77-79.99	F:	Less than 60

All grades can only be questioned or challenged for two (2) weeks after the date it is first returned to the class. If the last assignment is returned with less than two (2) weeks of the semester left, then the last day of class is the last day to challenge a grade. If the grade is not questioned or challenged in this time frame, it stands as recorded. This is designed to encourage students to retrieve their papers and not question grades in December that were handed back in September because they decide they do not like their final class grade.

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**ASSIGNMENT DETAILS:**

**- Short Paper Assignments (10% of total): -**

You will have **two** written assignments. These assignments will be posted on Canvas before their due date. The two short paper assignments will involve collecting information about US politics. Topics will be announced at a later date.

If you turn in an assignment that is functionally identical to another student, you will both fail the assignment with a 0 (zero) regardless of which one copied it and which one is copied from.

\*\*\*ONLY **CANVAS submissions** of the assignments will be accepted.\*\*\*

Late papers will be penalized. For every calendar day a paper is late (including weekends, breaks, and non-class days), it will be penalized 5% of the total grade a day until 50%. Additional late penalties will not be assessed after 50% though you may be graded lower than 50% for incorrect information.

- These papers assignment days are noted on this syllabus. They will be posted to Canvas at least a week prior to their due day.
- You must complete the assignment. Incorrect and missing information is always counted wrong.
- These forms introduce you to aspects of American politics. They are in this format this semester to facilitate grading.
  1. The course is quite large and the information collected on the forms would mirror what would be expected if you were to research and write a short paper for the course.

Papers will be graded on a 5-point scale (yes, I will give quarter and half points). (1) will be the lowest and (5) will be full points. (5=100%, 4.75=95%, 4.5=90%, 4.25=85%, etc)

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### **- EXAM \*OR\* TERM PAPER OPTION (75% of total): -**

#### **EXAM OPTION:**

***THREE multiple choice / matching / similar style exams will be given.*** They will cover material presented in lectures and in the readings from the text, as well as any other material assigned/presented in class (including videos if I show any). The final exam is **NOT** cumulative and will only cover material presented since the previous exam. However, most of concepts in this course build upon each other so you will be expected to retain information from earlier portions of the class.

The tests are on Canvas, and are **open-book, open-note, but must be taken solo, without collaboration.** There is no time limit, I expect the test will take about 90 minutes to complete. Tests will be opened in the afternoon on the day announced in the syllabus / on Canvas. The window to complete tests will be around 36 hours (afternoon on day open to 11:59PM on day close).

#### **TERM PAPER OPTION:**

The framework will further be clarified under rubrics and guidelines, but largely, you will develop a thesis (argument) about American institutions, society, and/or politics, and use 2-3 books as supporting evidence for your thesis. Your paper will be roughly 8-12 pages. There are a few books you have the option to read for your term paper response. You should find any books you choose to read on your own. These books are widely available new and used, online, as eBooks, and through libraries.

The options available are:

1. **Watchmen** (Alan Moore, 1986), *Graphic Novel*
  - 1.1. ***Summary:*** Set in an alternate history where superheroes emerged during the 1940s, the US wins the Vietnam War, and the Watergate Scandal is never exposed. In the alternate 1985, the US edges toward World War III with the USSR. As distrust grows among law enforcement and the public, the Keene Act outlaws private superheroes; most former superheroes are in retirement or accept government contracts. Only now, a government hero has been murdered. Pressure mounts as the murder is investigated and even government heroes are being blamed for the impact of their powers. Some suspect a government conspiracy targeting the very heroes protecting the nation, or maybe even to create a common enemy?
2. **Dawn** (Octavia Butler, 1987), *Novel*
  - 2.1. ***Summary:*** After humanity destroys itself in nuclear war, a species of alien ‘gene-traders’ save the last humans and select Lilith Iyapo, a Black Californian woman, to prepare the remaining humans to settle a new planet. Repulsed by her alien captors, the Oankali (a three-sexed species that requires new genetic material to live, want to intermix genetic material with humans, and are fascinated by humans’ “talent” for cancer), she must learn to adjust to being human off of Earth and convince the remaining humans to do so as well. But her growing friendship with Nikanji, a third-sex (ooloi) Oankali, leads the remaining humans to mistrust her. Whether she can convince the humans to cooperate with the Oankali or not, she is forced to grapple with what will it mean for the only humans left in the universe: to become something not quite human or to become extinct. Part of the *Xenogenesis / Lilith’s Brood* trilogy.
3. **Whiteness of a Different Color** (Matthew Frye Jacobson, 1998), *Non-Fiction*
  - 3.1. ***Summary:*** Jacobson writes an overarching history of socially constructed whiteness throughout US history. He argues that whiteness is not just socially constructed, but that it's also much more fluid, overlapping, and historically

contingent than we might think. From designating only certain groups “fit for self governance” to hierarchies of European immigrants, to binary white/non-white categorizations, to the “Caucasian-ization” of those European immigrants as Black Americans moved north in the Great Migration of the 1920s. Jacobson argues this has changed Americans’ understandings of what it means to be white, who is white, and who is truly American under questions of expansion, migration and imperialism.

4. *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* (Anne Fadiman, 1997), Non-Fiction

4.1. **Summary:** Sociologist and ethnographer Anne Fadiman examines the struggles of a recently emigrated Hmong family (the Lees) living in Merced, CA, in the 1980s as they attempt to get care for their epileptic toddler (Lia) in a medical system that isn’t equipped to serve them. Doctors and her family struggle to get Lia the best care, but medical care institutions, cultural misunderstandings, policy failures, and miscommunication prevent the Lees from getting the best care for their daughter, despite the best efforts of the Lees, their doctors, and everyone involved. Through direct interviews with the Lees, Merced Children’s Hospital pediatric emergency doctors, and state agents, Fadiman explores how good intentions, endless love, and hard work confront policy barriers, ignorance, and inaccessibility.

5. *If Beale Street Could Talk* (James Baldwin, 1974), Fiction

5.1. **Summary:** Published at the tail end of the Black Arts Movement (1960s-70s), *Beale Street* is a romance following a relationship between a 19-year-old Tish and 22-year-old sculptor Fonny. Neighbors and childhood friends, they fall in love and become engaged when Tish is 21, but Fonny is falsely accused of raping a woman, and arrested and jailed before trial. Tish learns that she is pregnant after Fonny is incarcerated, and must rely on her and Fonny's family for support. The failures of the criminal justice system keep Fonny incarcerated, but in the face of ruin, Baldwin explores what hope, love, family, and community means in the face of despair and injustice.

Some examples of topics might be: (1) contrasting themes of nuclear war, threat, hierarchy, and power in *Watchmen* and *Dawn*; (2) justice, race, and good governance in *The Spirit Catches You, Whiteness of a Different Color*, and *Beale Street*; or (3) health, disability, and perception in *Dawn*, *Watchmen*, and *The Spirit Catches You*.

## Academic Dishonesty/Cheating

You will be expected to adhere to the UT 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://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/index.html>

Though obvious, cheating is not allowed on any assignments or exams. Cheating involves transmitting or receiving any information from any electronic device, paper, hand signals, or other means of communication during a test. Plagiarism is also prohibited. It refers to copying any work from any source (electronic, paper, etc) without noting/citing where it is originally from. It is important to note that using ideas (and not just quotes) from other sources without proper citation also counts as plagiarism. Copying a classmate’s assignment and turning it in counts as plagiarism and cheating. Any assignments turned in will be assumed to be the final version of the assignment and any inappropriate material will be considered intentional and not accidental.

Any course material containing any notes, assignments, study guides, outlines, or any other material created by the professor may not be uploaded onto 3<sup>rd</sup> party websites without the professor’s explicit permission. If you do so, it will be considered a violation of the honor code.

Students are allowed to use laptops during lectures for note taking only. Students who need such electronic devices because of a disability are allowed to use them during the exam in the appropriate centers for disability/modified testing (these students are only allowed to use devices to facilitate learning and are forbidden to use them for scholastic dishonesty). You can contact the office at: Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/dcce/ssd/> if you need to talk to them about scheduling tests (but I need to know as well so the test can be sent over there in a timely manner). Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, visit the Student Judicial Services web site <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/>.

## AI and Academic Dishonesty:

You may NOT present AI / algorithmic / computer generated / predictive texts as your own work in this course. Computer generated written works are not considered original, student-generated compositions.

All writing must be original, composed by the student, unassisted by AI, predictive text, or other computer aided generation methods. Spellcheckers and grammar checkers are fine, though only persistent errors or those that impact comprehension will be potentially marked off.

*(Note: I work in political science AI text and sorting models, so I am not the best instructor to test your luck using AI written essays on. I don't want to talk to Academic Dishonesty about this and neither do you.)*

## **Additional information**

Do NOT phone or email me about a grade (i.e. "What did I get?"). Grades will be posted on Canvas electronically as soon as practical.

**If you need extra time on a test and/or require special physical accommodations, please contact me in confidence as soon as possible at the beginning of the course.** Every effort will be made to accommodate your needs within the guidelines set forth by the University.

**Students with disabilities:** 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/>

**Religious Holy Days:** By UT 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 a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

## **Emergency Evacuation Policy**

In the event of a fire or other emergency, it may be necessary to evacuate a building rapidly. Upon the activation of a fire alarm or the announcement of an emergency in a university building, all occupants of the building are required to evacuate and assemble outside. Once evacuated, no one may re-enter the building without instruction to do so from the Austin Fire Department, University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

Students should familiarize themselves with all the exit doors of each room and building they occupy at the university, and should remember that the nearest exit routes may not be the same as the way they typically enter buildings.

Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructors in writing during the first week of classInformation regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at <http://www.utexas.edu/safety>

## **Make-up exams/Excused Absences**

Absences on exam days may be excused if the student provides verifiable documentation of accident, illness, or university or legal obligation. Unexcused absences from examinations will result in a score of zero for that exam.

I STRONGLY encourage you not to miss an exam. The make-up may be different from the exam given to the rest of the class. It may include an essay format, but the exam format is at my discretion.

**One more thing:** *If a true emergency occurs that you know you can document, take care of yourself first and we will sort it out later. You do not need to call me from the ER or jail to let us know you won't be there. In those situations, you have bigger problems than this class at that moment in time.*

## **Class Calendar**

The readings for this day are the readings I expect you to have done PRIOR to that day. This calendar is based on my best estimation of how long it will take to go through the material. On occasion through the semester, I \*may\* get behind a day depending on how long it takes to cover the topic. Tests will ALWAYS only cover the chapters noted in the syllabus.

Date	Day	Topic	Readings	Assignments
1/9/2023	Mon	Syllabus Day / This Class / Goals of US Governance		
1/11/23	Wed	The Founding	Ch 1 - Democracy and US Politics	
1/13/23	Fri	Creating a Nation	Ch 1- Democracy and US Politics / Ch 2 - The Constitution	
1/16/2023	Mon	*No Class- MLK Day*		<b>Due: Syllabus Quiz</b>
1/18/2023	Wed	The Constitution	Ch 2 - The Constitution	

1/20/2023	Fri	Changing the Constitution	Ch 2 - The Constitution	<b>Due SUN: Quiz 1 (Ch 1, 2)</b>
1/23/2023	Mon	Federalism and the Right Level of Gov't	Ch 3 - Federalism: States and Nation	
1/25/2023	Wed	The State vs. the United States	Ch 3 - Federalism: States and Nation	
1/27/2023	Fri	Red, Blue, and Green (\$\$\$)	Ch 4 - Structural Foundations of American Politics	
1/30/2023	Mon	American Virtues (and Vice)	Ch 4 - Structural Foundations of American Politics	<b>Due: Short Paper 1</b>
2/1/2023	Wed	Measuring Democracy	Ch 5 - Public Opinion	
				<b>Due: Essay Option: Subject Submission;</b>
2/3/2023	Fri	Skewing Democracy	Ch 5 - Public Opinion	<b>Due SUN: Quiz 2 (Ch. 3, 4, 5)</b>
2/6/2023	Mon	Reporting the Nation	Ch 5 - Public Opinion / Ch 6 - The News Media	
2/8/2023	Wed	"This Network News, and I'm Mad as Hell"	Ch 6 - The News Media	
2/10/2023	Fri	Making Sense of a Nation	<i>Wrap Up Part I: The Founding &amp; Basis of US Governance</i>	<b>Open: Exam 1 (Ch: 1-6)</b>
2/13/2023	Mon	Executive Authority	Ch 12 - The Presidency	<b>Due: Exam 1</b>
2/15/2023	Wed	A Republic, if You Can Keep It	Ch 12 - The Presidency / Ch 11 Congress	
2/17/2023	Fri	Friction: A Feature and a Bug	Ch 11 - Congress	
2/20/2023	Mon	Agents of the State (or, The Feds)	Ch 13 - The Executive Branch	
2/22/2023	Wed	Interstate Commerce and the Great Broadening	Ch 13 - The Executive Branch	
2/24/2023	Fri	"Do You (Political) Party?"	Ch 9 - Political Parties	<b>Due SUN: Quiz 3 (Ch 11, 12, 13)</b>
2/27/2023	Mon	Polarization and How to Measure Opinion Distance	Ch 9 - Political Parties	
3/1/2023	Wed	The NeverEnding Election Cycle	Ch 9 - Political Parties / Ch 10- Voting, Campaigns, and Elections	
3/3/2023	Fri	What's in a Name?	Ch 10 - Voting, Campaigns, and Elections	
3/6/2023	Mon	Gerrymandering, or: Whose Constituent are they Anyway?	Ch 10 - Voting, Campaigns, and Elections	
3/8/2023	Wed	(Un)Constitutional	Ch 14 - The Courts	
3/10/2023	Fri	A More Perfect Union	Ch 14 - The Courts	<b>Due SUN: Quiz 4 (9, 10, 14)</b>
3/13/2023	Mon	No Class - Spring Break		
3/15/2023	Wed	No Class - Spring Break		
3/17/2023	Fri	No Class - Spring Break		
3/20/2023	Mon	Belief in a Nation / Keeping the Faith	Ch 14 - The Courts	<b>Open: Exam 2 (Ch: 9 - 14)</b>
3/22/2023	Wed	We, the People	<i>Wrap up Part II: Institutions and Component Parts</i>	<b>Due: Exam 2</b>
3/24/2023	Fri	(In)Divisible	Ch 7 - Interest Groups	

3/27/2023	Mon	Citizens United	Ch 7 - Interest Groups / Ch 8 - Business Politics	
3/29/2023	Wed	How to Succeed in Business Politics Without Really Trying	Ch 8 - Business Politics	
3/31/2023	Fri	Promising Change, Making it Happen	Ch 15 - Civil Liberties / Ch 16 - Civil Rights	<b>Due SUN: Quiz 5 (7, 8)</b>
4/3/2023	Mon	Playing the Game	Ch 15 - Civil Liberties / Ch 16 - Civil Rights	
4/5/2023	Wed	By Any Means Necessary	Ch 15 - Civil Liberties / Ch 16 - Civil Rights	
4/7/2023	Fri	Secret Government Conspiracies Aren't All Fiction	Ch 15 - Civil Liberties / Ch 16 - Civil Rights	<b>Due: Short Paper 2</b>
4/10/2023	Mon	Home-Work	Ch 17 - Domestic Policy	
4/12/2023	Wed	Directing the Nation	Ch 17 - Domestic Policy	
4/14/2023	Fri	The World's Police	Ch 17 - Domestic Policy	<b>Due SUN: Quiz 6 (15 - 17)</b>
4/17/2023	Mon	Colonialism v. Imperialism v. Nationalism	Ch 18 - Foreign and National Defense Politics	
4/19/2023	Wed	America Abroad	Ch 18 - Foreign and National Defense Politics	
4/21/2023	Fri	Catch-Up Day	<i>Wrap Up Part III: Doing Politics</i>	
4/24/2023	Mon	Catch- Up Day (Last Day of Class)	<i>Wrap Up Part III: Doing Politics</i>	<b>Open: Exam 3 ( 7, 8, 15/16, 17, 18)</b>