

Introduction to American Government

Fall, 2023

GOV 310L

The University of Texas at Austin

Instructor

Professor David L. Leal

Office Hours: T, TH 1:30 – 3:00 PM

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Class Information

Class Location: CAL 100

Class Hours: T, TH 3:30 – 5:00 PM

Unique Number: 38165

This class uses the [Canvas](#) course management system. The [University Resources for Students](#) Canvas site provides a list of resources for students as they engage with and navigate the course and the university.

Teaching Assistant

TBA

Office Hours:

Office:

Email:

Course Description

This course will introduce you to government and politics in the United States. We will cover topics such as the Constitution, political institutions, elections and public opinion, rights and freedoms, and public policy. We also introduce approaches to the social scientific study of politics, particularly data analysis, and make comparisons between American government and Texas government throughout. The class begins with the basic principles of politics, followed by a discussion of the creation of the nation and its fundamental features, including the Constitution, the development of democracy, the importance of federalism, and fundamental rights and liberties. We then explore the institutional building blocks of government – the Congress, presidency, bureaucracy, and federal courts. The class then examines public input into the political system, particularly public opinion, elections, political parties, interest groups, and the mass media. We conclude with the key social, foreign policy, and economic issues facing the nation.

Readings

American Government: Power and Purpose, 17th edition (2023). Theodore J. Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth A. Shepsle, Stephen Ansolabehere, and Hahrie Han. W.W. Norton. ISBN 978-0-393-88888-1

Note: If you see a “Core” edition for sale, be aware that it does not include the three policy chapters.

This class uses the Longhorn Textbook Access program, and you may choose to participate but are not required to do so:

“The LTA (Longhorn Textbook Access) program is a new initiative that will significantly reduce the cost of course materials for students. In addition to having access to low-cost course materials, students enrolled in LTA courses:

- Will have access to course materials on or before the first day of class
- Will be able to access available course materials through Canvas
- Will pay for course materials online through the “What I Owe” Page
- Will be able to shop quickly, online, from home”

For more information, including “Opt In” and “Opt Out” dates, see:

<https://www.universitycoop.com/longhorn-textbook-access>

However, you are free to buy a paper copy online or in some other way, although the UT Co-op will not sell copies.

Assignments

Student understanding of the readings and topics will be assessed in a variety of ways, as noted below.

Course Grade

Exams: There will be three exams.

Exam #1 (100 points; 25% of course grade)

Multiple choice and possibly other questions; covers approximately the first third of the class material.

Exam #2 (100 points; 25% of course grade)

Multiple choice and possibly other questions; covers approximately the second third of the class material.

Exam #3 (100 points; 25% of course grade)

Multiple choice and possibly other questions; covers the remaining class material and may also include cumulative questions.

Reflection Essays (100 points; 25% of course grade)

For any ten (10) weekly topics, students will write a two-page essay (doubled spaced) with reflections, observations, comments, and questions about the readings and corresponding class discussion. This could include, for example, what you found to be the most interesting or unexpected. Due dates for each essay will be listed on our Canvas “Assignments” page. The instructor will discuss this assignment further in class. Each reflection essay is worth up to 10 points.

You may not use ChatGPT or any other AI in the writing of your reflection essays.

Class attendance is not used in determining your course grade. Nevertheless, regular class attendance is *highly* recommended.

The class does not have a “final exam” during the final exam period at the end of the semester.

There are no extra credit assignments.

Grading

To determine your final course grade, divide your total number of points by 400 and find the letter grade that corresponds to your percentage.

Percentages are not rounded up or down. For example, 90.0%, 91.7%, and 92.9% are all A- grades.

93-100%	A	(4)	73-76%	C	(2)
90-92%	A-	(3.67)	70-72%	C-	(1.67)
87-89%	B+	(3.33)	67-69%	D+	(1.33)
83-86%	B	(3)	63-66%	D	(1)
80-82%	B-	(2.67)	60-62%	D-	(.67)
77-79%	C+	(2.33)	Below 60%	F	(0)

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.”

Policies

By taking this class, you agree to all of the following policies:

* All aspects of this course are subject to change depending on the public health context. Directives from UT or the State of Texas may therefore require changes that are large, small, and anything in-between.

* Make-up exams and late essays will only be allowed on a case-by-case basis. Please check with the instructor before an exam or the essay due date to discuss your situation and see what is allowable.

- * Grades of “Incomplete” are generally not assigned, but please discuss your situation with the instructor if you believe an Incomplete may be necessary.
- * If you are a student with a disability, or think you may have a disability, and need accommodations please contact Disability and Access (D&A). You may refer to D&A’s website for contact and more information: <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>. If you are already registered with D&A, please discuss your Accommodation Letter with me as early as possible in the semester so we can review your approved accommodations.
- * Accommodations for religious holidays. By UT 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, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.
- * Important announcements will be made in class and via the class Canvas email list. It is the responsibility of students to make sure that the University knows their correct email address.
- * The Canvas class email list can only be used for class purposes. Do not use it for any commercial or business activities, for example.
- * Students who miss class should obtain notes from a classmate.
- * Any complaints about grades must be initiated by your written or emailed explanation of why the decisions behind the assignment of your grade should be revisited. You will have one week after an exam or paper has been graded to submit this written explanation. After that period, all grades will be considered final and any discussion that we might have will be restricted to how you can do better on the next exam or essay.
- * During class discussions, be respectful at all times.
- * Computers and cell phones can only be used in class for academic purposes.
- * Students must be prepared to show their UT identification card during exams.
- * This syllabus is subject to change or adjustment by the instructor at any time.
- * Consistent class attendance is the best way to ensure that no important announcements are missed.

Scholastic Dishonesty

*“‘Scholastic dishonesty’ includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, misrepresenting facts, and any act designed to give unfair academic advantage to the student (such as, but not limited to, submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor), or the attempt to commit such an act.” Section 11-802 (b), *Institutional Rules on Student Services and Activities*. If you have any questions about what constitutes scholastic dishonesty, you should consult with me and the following websites:

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

* Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty: “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.”

Emergency Evacuation Policy

- * Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.
- * Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- * Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- * In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors.
- * Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.
- * Link to information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: <http://emergency.utexas.edu/>
- * Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL): 512-232-5050,
<http://operations.utexas.edu/units/csas/bcal.php>

Class Recordings

“Class recordings are reserved only for students in this class for educational purposes and are protected under FERPA. 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. I am well 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 sanctions, including failure in the course.”

Senate Bill 212 and Title IX Reporting Requirements

“Under Senate Bill 212 (SB 212), the professor and TAs for this course are required to report for further investigation any information concerning incidents of sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking committed by or against a UT student or employee. Federal law and university policy also requires reporting incidents of sex- and gender-based discrimination and sexual misconduct (collectively known as Title IX incidents). This means we cannot keep confidential information about any such incidents that you share with us. If you need to talk with someone who can maintain confidentiality, please contact University Health Services (512-471-4955 or 512-475-

6877) or the UT Counseling and Mental Health Center (512-471-3515 or 512-471-2255). We strongly urge you make use of these services for any needed support and that you report any Title IX incidents to the [Title IX Office](#).”

Weekly Readings and Topics

Week 1	Introduction
Tuesday, August 22 Thursday, August 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lowi et al., Preface and Chapter 1

Week 2	Creating a New Democracy
Tuesday, August 29 Thursday, August 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lowi et al., Chapter 2• Lowi et al., Appendix (Declaration of Independence; Federalist Papers #10, #51)

Week 3	Federalism
Tuesday, September 5 Thursday, September 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lowi et al., Chapter 3

Sunday, September 17th is Constitution Day.

To learn more about the U.S. Constitution, visit the National Archives website:
<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/constitution-day/>

Week 4 (Part I)	Civil Liberties
Tuesday, September 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lowi et al., Chapter 4

Week 4 (Part II)	Civil Rights
Thursday, September 14	• Lowi et al., Chapter 5

Week 5 (Part I)	Congress
Tuesday, September 19	• Lowi et al., Chapter 6

Week 5 (Part II)	** Exam #1 **
Thursday, September 21	

Week 6 (Part I)	The Presidency
Tuesday, September 26	• Lowi et al., Chapter 7

Week 6 (Part II)	The Executive Branch
Thursday, September 27	• Lowi et al., Chapter 8

Week 7	The Federal Courts
Tuesday, October 3 Thursday, October 5	• Lowi et al., Chapter 9

Week 8	Public Opinion
Tuesday, October 10 Thursday, October 12	• Lowi et al., Chapter 10

Week 9	Elections
Tuesday, October 17 Thursday, October 19	• Lowi et al., Chapter 11

Week 10 (Part I)	Political Parties
Tuesday, October 24	• Lowi et al., Chapter 12

Week 10 (Part II)	** Exam #2 **
Thursday, October 26	

Week 11	Groups and Interests
Tuesday, October 31 Thursday, November 2	• Lowi et al., Chapter 13

Week 12	The Media
Tuesday, November 7 Thursday, November 9	• Lowi et al., Chapter 14

Week 13 (Part I)	Social Policy
Tuesday, November 14	• Lowi et al., Chapter 16

Week 13 (Part II)	Economic Policy
Tuesday, November 16	• Lowi et al., Chapter 15

**** Week 14: November 20 - 25 – Fall Break and Thanksgiving, no class ****

Week 15 (Part I)	Foreign Policy
Tuesday, November 28	• Lowi et al., Chapter 17

Week 15 (Part II)	** Exam #3 **
Thursday, November 30	