

GOV 310L American Government
Tuesday and Thursdays 2:00-3:30

Christine Guo

Office Hour: Wednesday 1-2:30 pm; TH 12:30-2 pm

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Course Description

This course serves as an introduction to American government and politics. While the primary focus is on the American national government, we will also explore key concepts in comparative politics. Additionally, the course will include discussions on public policy and current issues. By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a clear understanding of the structure and functions of the American government.
- Explain the system of checks and balances within the U.S. government.
- Analyze the roles of various actors and their interactions in political issues.
- Develop and effectively communicate strong arguments addressing public problems to target audiences.

Class Format

- Tuesday classes will be lectures on American government.
- Thursday classes will be discussions and policy-focused. This segment is designed to introduce you to a specific writing style and help you prepare for your final memo.

Communications and Technical Support

Announcement

The instructor will post updates and reminders on the course on Canvas via the Announcement page. Students should check the announcement page regularly. Please set your Canvas notifications so that new Announcements are delivered directly to your primary email.

Emails

The best way to reach me is via email at chinguo@utexas.edu. Please give me 24 hours during regular work hours, Monday through Friday, 9AM-5PM, before sending me a follow-up reminder. I can only promise a timely response during working hours.

Required Readings

There is no textbook for this course, but you are responsible for completing readings and activities assigned to each class before class sessions.

Students will read sections of *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving* by Eugene Bardach as well as research reports from Pew Research Center. Readings assigned will be on the course schedule and Canvas modules.

Grades	Weight	Due Date
Attendance and participation	10%	Ongoing
Reading quizzes	10%	Unannounced
Comparative opinion piece	10%	October 22nd
Midterm exam	30%	November 14th
Problem Identification	10%	October 8th
Policy Alternatives	10%	November 7th
Final Policy Memo	20%	December 14th

The grading scale adopted in this course is as follows:

A	94-100
A-	90-93.99
B+	87-89.99
B	83-86.99
B-	80-82.99
C+	77-79.99
C	73-76.99
C-	70-72.99
D	60-69.99
F	Less than 60

Attendance and participation (10%)— You are expected to attend each class session on time and participate in class discussions. Attendance will be recorded via sign-in sheets or class activity sheets.

Reading quizzes (10%) — Quizzes will be administered within the first 10 minutes of select class sessions. These quizzes are non-cumulative. On Tuesdays, the quizzes will cover the assigned readings for that day. On Thursdays, the quizzes may also include material from the Tuesday lectures.

Please ensure you arrive on time for class to take the quiz. If you are absent when a quiz is distributed, you will receive a zero for that quiz. There will be a minimum of 12 quizzes throughout the semester, and your two lowest quiz grades will be dropped.

Midterm exam (30%)—The midterm exam will be held **in class** on **November 14th**. It will consist of definition questions, short answer questions, and multiple-choice questions.

Assignments

All assignments are due by **12:59 PM before class** on the date specified. Assignments turned in any time after the assigned due date are considered late and will be assigned a grade penalty. All assignments should be submitted via Canvas in either .doc or .pdf format.

Assignments in this class require students to conduct research and collect data to demonstrate mastery of the issue and credibility for the arguments. Hence, I expect citations attached to

assignment submissions. Citations or a list of references should be on a separate page in addition to the substantial contents. You may choose your preferred citation style. Here is a list of citation managers from UT library website. <https://guides.lib.utexas.edu/c.php?g=539686&p=3694904> Assignments without proper references will be considered incomplete and will be assigned a grade penalty.

Comparative Opinion Piece (10%) – On October 22nd, you will submit a 1-page opinion piece drawing from the course materials covered in weeks 3 to 5. You will choose one of the following topics:

1. The government system
2. The electoral system

In your opinion piece, you should:

- Discuss the current system in the U.S.
- Compare it to systems used in other countries.
- Argue whether the U.S. system is the most suitable, effective, or efficient, or propose an alternative you believe should be adopted.

The opinion piece should be *at most* 1 page, single-spaced, with 12-point font and 1-inch margins. Points will be deducted for submissions that exceed the page limit.

Policy Memo –You will write a policy memo at the end of this course. The policy memo will consist of:

1. A public problem
2. Feasible policy alternatives
3. Appropriate criteria to evaluate policy alternatives
4. A policy recommendation
5. Expected cost, outcome, and consequences

Your memo should be *at most* two pages, single-spaced, with 12-point font and 1-inch margins. Points will be deducted for memos that exceed the page limit.

The assignment is divided into three parts, each contributing a specific proportion to your final grade.

Problem Identification note (10%)– On October 8th, you will submit a problem identification note describing the policy problem you intend to address in your final policy memo. This note clearly specifies the policy issue and explains how the problem should be framed. The note should be one to two paragraphs long.

Policy Alternatives note (10%)—On November 7th, you will submit a policy alternatives note outlining possible solutions to the policy problem you are addressing. This note should include at least three viable policy alternatives.

Final Policy Memo (20%) – On December 14th, your final policy memo should demonstrate a thorough understanding of the public problem you are addressing. It should present three feasible policy options and use appropriate evaluation criteria. Based on your evaluation, make a well-reasoned policy recommendation. Additionally, your memo should analyze the expected costs,

outcomes, and potential consequences of your proposed solution, ensuring that your policy recommendation is both realistic and actionable.

Extra Credit Presentations

From weeks 3 to 15, up to three students each week can make a presentation on Thursdays for extra credit. Each presenter will have up to 8 minutes to discuss a relevant domestic issue using a specific number. For example, you might present data such as "Approximately 23% of U.S. adults with obesity have diabetes" or "USDA to Begin Issuing \$1.75 Billion to Agricultural Producers Through Critical Emergency Relief Programs." The number must be collected from a credible source. For example, from a government institution (the website ending in .gov), ANES poll data, or think tanks such as Pew Research Center. Please communicate with me beforehand if you are unsure of the data source you plan to cite.

Extra credit presentation sign-up will start on our second class day, August 29. If there are slots remaining, I will bring the sign-up sheet to the following class. Sign-ups will be done in person at the end of class sessions. Each student may only sign up for one presentation slot and one commenter slot.

Presentation Format:

- **Page 1:** Include the number and your name.
- **Page 2:** Explain what the number means and provide the official source for the data.
- **Page 3:** Identify the public problem related to the number (e.g., Is the number too high or too low? Too high or too low compared to what?).
- **Page 4:** Discuss what this issue reveals about government or policies.

Presenters:

Presenters will upload their presentation slides before **11:59 p.m. on the day before** their presentation. For example, if you are presenting on Thursday, October 3rd, the slides should be submitted on Canvas via Assignments before 11:59 pm on Wednesday, October 2nd. Presenters failing to do so will be considered unprepared and will be assigned a penalty, as explained below.

Commenters:

Commenter slots will only be available when there is a presenter. The commenter will provide 2 presentation-specific compliments and 1 recommendation for improvement before asking a substantial question related to the presentation.

Extra Points:

- Presenters can earn up to 5 extra points for a well-prepared and insightful presentation.
- Commenters can earn up to 1 extra point for constructive feedback and questions.
- **Unprepared or no-show** presenters will not receive any extra credit points and will have 3 points **taken off** as another student could have signed up for the spot.

Course Policies

Academic Dishonesty

Students who violate University rules on academic 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 academic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity website at: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct>. Given the nature of the written assessments in this course, you may not engage in unauthorized collaboration or use generative AI for assignment composition, and doing so would be considered a violation of academic integrity.

No material used in this class, including, but not limited to, lecture slides, quizzes, exams, activity and review sheets, or assignments, may be shared online or with anyone outside of the class unless you have my explicit written permission.

Disability Accommodations

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities (512-471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>).

Religious Holidays

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.

Personal Pronouns

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. 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/>). I will gladly honor your request to address you by a name that is different from what appears on the official roster, and by the gender pronouns you use (she/he/they/ze, etc). Please advise me of any changes early in the semester so that I may make appropriate updates to my records.

Course Schedule

Week	Agenda	Reading and Discussion Question	Assignment Due
Week 1			
Aug 27	Course overview	Syllabus	
Aug 29	Policy memo	Memo on Memos on CANVAS How to write a memo that matters on CANVAS	
Week 2			
Sep 3	Poli-Sci 101		
Sep 5	Policy tools	Things government do on CANVAS WTO policy tools on CANVAS	
Week 3			
Sep 10	US constitution		
Sep 12	Problem identification	Eightfold path- problem identification on CANVAS	
Week 4			
Sep 17	Check and balances		
Sep 19	Comparative systems	Take the Political Typology quiz https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/quiz/political-typology/?group=7260d45c95bb686ebd3c964841655d38 “What are the Different Types of Democracy?” https://www.scienceabc.com/social-science/different-types-democracy-direct-representative-presidential-parliamentary.html	
Week 5			
Sep 24	Electoral system	Majority of Americans continue to favor moving away from Electoral College https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/09/25/majority-of-americans-continue-to-favor-moving-away-from-electoral-college/	
Sep 26	Comparative system	More U.S. locations experimenting with alternative voting systems https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/06/29/more-u-s-locations-experimenting-with-alternative-voting-systems/	
Week 6			

Oct 1	The Executive branch	Nearly three-quarters of Americans say it would be 'too risky' to give presidents more power https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/02/28/nearly-three-quarters-of-americans-say-it-would-be-too-risky-to-give-presidents-more-power/	
Oct 3	Eightfold path	Eightfold path-policy alternatives on CANVAS Eightfold path-criteria	
Week 7			
Oct 8	The Legislative branch	Narrow majorities in U.S. House have become more common but haven't always led to gridlock https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/05/05/narrow-majorities-in-u-s-house-have-become-more-common-but-havent-always-led-to-gridlock/ The changing face of Congress in 8 charts https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/02/07/the-changing-face-of-congress/	Problem statement note
Oct 10	Logic model	Eightfold path-Outcome and trade-offs on CANVAS Eightfold path-conclusion	
Week 8			
Oct 15	The Judiciary branch	Positive Views of Supreme Court Decline Sharply Following Abortion Ruling https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2022/09/01/positive-views-of-supreme-court-decline-sharply-following-abortion-ruling/	
Oct 17	Policy frameworks	Look around the Comparative Agendas Project website https://www.comparativeagendas.net	
Week 9			
Oct 22	Public Opinion	Complete the quiz, come to class with a note of your score and which questions you got incorrect, if any. https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/quiz/how-much-do-you-know-about-public-opinion-polling/ Read AFTTER completing the quiz Public Opinion Polling Basics on Pew Research https://www.pewresearch.org/course/public-opinion-polling-basics/	Opinion Piece

Oct 24	Non-profit organizations	Public and Nonprofits-Practical Guide to policy analysis on CANVAS	
Week 10			
Oct 29	Media and Interest Groups	About half of TikTok users under 30 say they use it to keep up with politics, news https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/08/20/about-half-of-tiktok-users-under-30-say-they-use-it-to-keep-up-with-politics-news/	
Oct 31	Memo workshop	CDC Policy Analytical Framework on CANVAS Bring memo draft to workshop with your peers	
Week 11			
Nov 5	Political Parties	10 Facts about Democrats and Republicans on Pew Research https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/08/16/10-facts-about-democrats-in-the-us/ https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/07/12/10-facts-about-republicans-in-the-us/ Many Americans are confident the 2024 election will be conducted fairly, but wide partisan differences remain https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/08/01/many-americans-are-confident-the-2024-election-will-be-conducted-fairly-but-wide-partisan-differences-remain/	
Nov 7	Voting	Turnout in U.S. has soared in recent elections but by some measures still trails that of many other countries https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/11/01/turnout-in-u-s-has-soared-in-recent-elections-but-by-some-measures-still-trails-that-of-many-other-countries/ Republican Gains in 2022 Midterms Driven Mostly by Turnout Advantage	Policy Alternatives

		https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2023/07/12/republican-gains-in-2022-midterms-driven-mostly-by-turnout-advantage/ I side with quiz https://www.isidewith.com/political-quiz	
Week 12			
Nov 12	Midterm review		
Nov 14	Midterm day		
Week 13			
Nov 19	Policy topics:	Americans’ Largely Positive Views of Childhood Vaccines Hold Steady https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2023/05/16/americans-largely-positive-views-of-childhood-vaccines-hold-steady/ How Americans View the Coronavirus, COVID-19 Vaccines Amid Declining Levels of Concern https://www.pewresearch.org/science/2024/03/07/how-americans-view-the-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccines-amid-declining-levels-of-concern/	
Nov 21	Policy topics	UT food desert feeds unhealthy eating habits https://thedailytexan.com/2016/03/07/ut-food-desert-feeds-unhealthy-eating-habits/ UT students fighting food insecurity in West Campus https://thedailytexan.com/2023/11/30/ut-students-fighting-food-insecurity-in-west-campus/	
Week 14			
Nov 26	Happy Thanksgiving!		
Nov 28			
Week 15			
Dec 3	Tax and Budgets	Tax Policy Center, “How do U.S. Taxes Compare Internationally?”	

		https://www.taxpolicycenter.org/briefing-book/how-do-us-taxes-compare-internationally	
Dec 5	Legislative game		
Week 16			
Dec 14			Final Memo