

GOV 310L: American Government Honors Syllabus

Fall 2023

Instructor

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Office Hours: Thursday
12:30 PM – 1:45 PM

Class Schedule

Tuesday and Thursday
2:00 PM -3:30 PM
PHR 2.114

Course Description and Objective

This course examines the political system in the United States. We will explore the origins, development, and functions of the government's executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The course will also focus on more significant issues and controversies that surround the study of American politics. As a class, we will analyze the political culture of the United States and examine how the basic structure of the American government is set up to take input from individual citizens and interest groups and turn it into policy outcomes. Additionally, an introduction to Texas politics will be provided.

Trigger Warnings and Safe Spaces

Because we are discussing politics, you may encounter comments that may upset you, revisit past traumatic experiences, or simply make you uncomfortable. While I will work hard to provide a safe space for everyone, I will not be issuing trigger warnings beyond this general call. Some days class may get heated or uncomfortable, while other days, class (likely most) will be relatively calm. What I ask of all students is that they remain open-minded and respectful of one another. Disrespecting anyone in the classroom will not be tolerated. However, it is important to note that disagreement does not equate to disrespect. Ultimately my goal is to push you to have rigorous discussions on the topics of the day while providing you the space to make your claims with strong evidence.

Required Text and Technology

We the People (14th Core edition) – by Benjamin Ginsberg, Caroline J. Tolbert, Andrea L. Campbell, Megan Ming Francis, Theodore J. Lowi, and Margaret Weir **with access to InQuizitive. You are automatically opted into the book with this course. You can access the book on Canvas under the Modules tab. See bookstore for how to opt-out.**

Evaluation

Topic Presentation: You and a partner will complete one in-depth lesson in this course for the class. Topics are listed in the syllabus and match each week's broader theme. Note that the due date of your topic presentation varies according to the issue you are assigned. The class lesson can be presented in any way you see fit to give the rest of the class an in-depth crash course on a relevant topic related to the week's theme. Class presentations should be no shorter than 10 minutes and no longer than 15 minutes. The class presentation will be done at the start of class each Thursday. In addition to making the presentation, you will provide the instructor a written one-page memo on the topic and presentation. Partners will be randomly assigned at the end of

week two. *If you have someone you want to work with, let me know by Monday, August 28, 2023. All topics will be randomly assigned.*

Response Paper: You will complete one short paper in this course. Topics are listed in the syllabus and match each week's theme. Note that the due date of the paper varies according to the topic you choose. The paper should be at least 750 words (double-spaced), and it is due a week after the week's theme, as listed on the syllabus. Also, note that there are only five spots available per topic, and you must sign up by week 3. First come, first served. And please don't use artificial intelligence to write the paper for you. It is expressly prohibited.

Political Campaign Ad: With another student (a group of two), you will make both a positive and negative political advertisement for a politician running in next year's election. You will be randomly assigned to your political candidate. These 30-second ads will be due at 10:00 am on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November of this year. More on this to come. *If you have a partner ready to go, let me know by Monday, September 5th, 2023, or I will randomly assign you to a partner.*

Exam One: The first exam will consist of multiple-choice questions with varying difficulty levels and short answer essays. These questions will cover material from the first half of the semester. *As of now, exam one is scheduled for Thursday, October 12th, in class.*

Exam Two: Exam two is not cumulative and will consist of multiple-choice questions with varying difficulty levels and short answer essays. *As of now, the exam is scheduled for Thursday, November 30th, in class.*

Weekly Assignments: There will be **InQuizitive** weekly assignments that you can access on Canvas. You will access InQuizitive on Canvas under the **Assignments** tab. Inquisitive assignments are **due every Thursday at 8 pm**. The lowest two weekly assignment grades will be dropped; this includes missed weekly assignments. No make-ups or late work allowed.

Readings and Quizzes: The required readings typically include one chapter of the textbook per week. Additional readings that are assigned are available electronically on Canvas. It is essential that you stay current with these readings so that you can follow along with lectures and participate in discussions. I strongly recommend you finish the readings before your class takes place since there will be four short quizzes (3-5 questions) based on the lectures and assigned readings for that week. The dates of the quizzes are listed below. No make-up quizzes are allowed. However, the lowest quiz grade will be dropped; this includes missed quizzes.

Attendance & Participation:

You are expected to attend class, read **all** materials carefully, and contribute to **all** seminar discussions. In short, you are expected to participate in every single class actively. The quality of comments is valued over quantity. If students come to class unprepared, the quality of discussion will be radically diminished. I expect everybody to come to class prepared. **However, if you are sick, please stay home.**

Grading Breakdown by Percentage:

Final Exam: 20%

Midterm: 20%

Class Presentation: 10%

Response Paper: 10%

Candidate Video: 10%

Quizzes: 10%

Participation: 10%

Weekly InQuizitive Assignments: 10%

Grading Scale for Final Semester Grades

100-93 A; 92-90 A-

89-87 B+; 86-83 B; 82-80 B-

79-77 C+; 76-73 C; 72-70 C-

69-67 D+, 66-63 D, 62-60 D-

59-0 F

******Please note that there is no standard rounding policy. Rounding decisions can be made on a case-by-case basis and are largely determined by me.******

Email Policy: Please give me at least 24 hours to respond to emails on weekdays and 48 hours on weekends.

Office Hours: Students having difficulty with the course materials and/or assignments are encouraged to come to office hours. But also, don't be afraid to come by to just introduce yourself. However, please note that office hours are for clarification of material, not for recreating a lecture if you missed class. If you like to talk to me, feel free to stop by my office during office hours by making an appointment via canvas.

Syllabus Policy: I reserve the right to change the syllabus if necessary. I will give you fair notice (at least a week) if something, such as a reading assignment, is to change.

Services for Students with Disabilities (D&A): If you anticipate needing classroom or exam accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you must register for services with Disability & Access (D&A). Additional information can be found here:
<https://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>

Withdrawal Policy: Refer to <https://registrar.utexas.edu/calendars> to see when the last day an undergraduate may: Q-drop a class; withdraw; or change a class to pass/fail.

Culture of Honesty Policy: “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.”

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. The 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. 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.”

Prohibition on Recording Lectures. Without written authorization from the SSD, students may not make a visual or audio recording of any aspect of this course. Students who have a recording accommodation agree in writing that “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.”

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 require 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 to make use of these services for any needed support and that you report any Title IX incidents to the [Title IX Office](#).”

Course Schedule

First Week (August 22 /24)

Topic: Introduction to Class / Americans and Their Political Values / The Founding and the Constitution

Readings: Chapters 1 and 2 in “We the People” & Dahl, Robert A.: *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?*

Second Week (August 29 /31)

Topic: The Founding and the Constitution continued / Federalism

Readings: Chapter 3 in “We the People” Also, read

<https://www.npr.org/2022/06/29/1108251712/roe-v-wade-abortion-ruling-state-constitutions>

Weekly Online Assignment: Chapter 1 and 2 on *Inquizitive*

Third Week (September 5 /7)

Topic: Congress

Readings: Chapter 12 in “We the People”

Student Presentation Topic: Term Limits Pros and Cons

Weekly Online Assignment: Chapter 3 on *Inquizitive*

Potential Short Paper Topic # 1: Think about the medical marijuana issue, which puts state power in contention with national power. Write out your stance on whether the issue should be addressed at the national or state level. Justify your decision. (Due: September 11th)

Fourth Week (September 12 /14)

Topic: Congress

Quiz # 1: September 12th

Readings: Mayhew, David R. *The Electoral Connection*

Student Presentation Topic: Reapportionment and the 2020 Census

Weekly Online Assignment: Chapter 12 on *Inquizitive*

Fifth Week (September 19 /21)

Topic: The Presidency

Readings: Chapter 13 in “We the People” Also, read

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/09/08/this-is-whats-most-shocking-about-the-resistance-op-ed/>

Weekly Online Assignment: Chapter 13 on *Inquizitive*

Student Presentation Topic: Executive Orders

Potential Short Paper Topic # 2: Look up your representative’s recent voting records and ideological placement (<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes>). Make a list of five issues they voted on, and state whether you would have voted the same way on behalf of your district taking into account your district’s economic and socio-economic characteristics. Justify your decisions. (Due: September 25th)

Sixth Week (September 26 /28)

Topic: The Bureaucracy

Quiz # 2: September 26th

Readings: Chapter 14 in “We the People”

Weekly Online Assignment: Chapter 14 on *Inquizitive*

Student Presentation Topic: How did the Department of Homeland Security come to be and what are the pros and cons of creating this type of bureaucratic agency.

Potential Short Paper Topic #3: Consider President Trump’s travel ban or Biden’s Student Loan Debt Relief Program. Explain why you think the president should or should not have the power to act on this issue. In your answer, discuss the reaction of the international community to the travel ban as well as its impact on America’s image abroad. Or focus on the reaction of those who did not attend college or those who went to state college versus a private institution. (Due: October 9th)

Seventh Week (October 3 /5)

Topic: The Federal Courts

Readings: Chapter 15 in “We the People” & Rosenberg, Gerald, N. *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring about Social Change?*

Weekly Online Assignment: Chapter 15 on *Inquizitive*

Student Presentation Topic: Are the courts an equal branch?

Eighth Week (October 10 /12)*

*Exam One on the 12th**

Topic: Political Participation and Voting

Readings: Chapter 8 in “We the People” & Leighley, Jan E. and Jonathan Nagler: *Who Votes Now? Demographics, Issues, Inequality, and Turnout in the United States*

Weekly Online Assignment: Chapter 8 on *Inquizitive*

Student Presentation Topic: What factors explain the levels of voter turnout in the United States and should we be worried?* Presented on October 10th due to Exam One

Ninth Week (October 17 /19)

Topic: Political Parties

Readings: Chapter 9 in “We the People” & Campbell, Angus, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes: *The American Voter: An Abridgement*

Weekly Online Assignment: Chapter 9 on *Inquizitive*

Student Presentation Topic: Why do third parties fail to gain traction in the United States?

Potential Short Paper Topic #4: Write a list of reasons individuals may not vote. Examine the role of personal motivation as well as institutional barriers in your answer and propose possible strategies to increase turnout. (Due: October 23rd)

Tenth Week (October 24 /26)

Topic: Campaigns and Elections

Quiz # 3: October 24th

Readings: Chapter 10 in “We the People” & Achen, Christopher and Larry Bartels: *Democracy for Realists: Why Elections Do Not Produce Responsive Government*

Weekly Online Assignment: Chapter 10 on *Inquizitive*

Student Presentation Topic: Early Primaries States and the nomination process

Eleventh Week (October 31 / November 2)

Topic: Public Opinion

Readings: Chapter 6 in “We the People” & Mason, Lilliana: *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*

Weekly Online Assignment: Chapter 6 on *Inquizitive*

Student Presentation Topic: Explain Public Opinion Polling (are we over reliant on polling?)

Twelfth Week (November 7 / 9)

Topic: Interest Groups

Quiz # 4: November 7th

Readings: Chapter 11 in “We the People”. Also, read:

<https://themonkeycage.org/2013/05/shadow-lobbyists-and-the-revolving-door-or-what-anthony-weiner-and-newt-gingrich-have-in-common/>

Weekly Online Assignment: Chapter 11 on *Inquizitive*

Student Presentation Topic: Super PACs

Thirteenth Week (November 14 /16)

Topic: Civil Liberties

Readings: Chapter 4 in “We the People” & Tesler, Michael: *Post-Racial or Most Racial? Race and Politics in the Obama Era*

Weekly Online Assignment: Chapter 4 on *Inquizitive*

Fourteenth Week (November 21 /23)*

No Classes for Thanksgiving Break*

Fifteenth Week (November 28 /30)*

Topic: Wrap up Class and Review

*Exam Two on November 30th**