

**POLS 2311-006
Fall 2015**

**Government of the United States
T/Th 9:30-10:50AM
Room: Nedderman Hall, Room 100**

Instructor: Dr. Brent Boyea
Office: 409 University Hall
E-mail: boyea@uta.edu
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 11:15AM-12:00PM
Graduate Teaching Assistant: Olivia Llanes

I. Introduction

The objective of this course is to familiarize each student with the basic organization and processes of American government. Fundamentally, there are two goals for this course. First, each student should develop an understanding of the functions and responsibilities of each branch of government. Second, the course will explain how citizens control and relate to their government. The class begins by developing an analytical framework that provides tools for each student to understand and evaluate American political institutions. The following section focuses on the structures and functions of the three branches of the American government. After developing an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the national government, we will then explore the linkages between political institutions and mass public preferences, which are expressed through voting, political parties, and interest groups. Again, the objective of this course is to increase each student's ability to comprehend the workings of American government thus providing a framework to analyze and interpret national institutions and the actors operating within American politics.

II. Course Goals

Students will (1) demonstrate a well-rounded knowledge of American government and politics; (2) demonstrate an understanding of how political scientists analyze and interpret the foundations, institutions, processes, and actors that constitute American government and politics; and (3) demonstrate critical thought about American government and politics.

III. Learning Objectives/Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students are expected to be able to (1) define fundamental concepts associated with American politics through appropriate responses on exams; (2) describe the structure and function of the differing branches of American Government; (3) explain the theoretical and historical underpinnings of the U.S. Constitution; (4) demonstrate understanding of the theory and practice of American politics by providing appropriate responses on exams; (5) identify the evolving history and character of civil rights and civil liberties in America; and (6) identify the influence of socio-political movements, interest groups, political parties, campaigns and elections have on American politics.

To these ends, POLS 2311 students will (1) read text that focuses on the foundations, institutions, processes, and actors that constitute American government and politics, (2) employ the appropriate interpretive, critical, and empirical frameworks and methods in order to analyze, interpret, and synthesize material relevant to the study of American government and politics, (3) be tested with regard to recall (remembering terms, facts), comprehension (understanding meanings), application (using information in different situations), analysis (to ascertain the key elements of a theory, structure, institution, process, or event), synthesis (to generalize or create new ideas from existing sources), and evaluation (to discriminate and assess the value of evidence).

IV. Required Text

There is one required textbook, which is available for purchase at the university bookstore or through an on-line bookseller. If purchasing on-line, be sure that it is shipped promptly as readings begin immediately.

1. Benjamin Ginsberg, Theodore Lowi, Margaret Weir, Caroline Tolbert, and Robert Spitzer. 2014. (10th Essentials Edition, Paperback). *We the People: An Introduction to American Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. (ISBN 978-0-393-93705-3)

An alternative ebook version is also available by W.W. Norton & Company at <http://books.wwnorton.com/books/webad.aspx?id=4294989718>. (ISBN 978-0-393-52257-0)

V. Course Requirements

Student grades for this course are a function of three examinations (including two mid-term examinations and a final examination). Further, several (4-8) unscheduled quizzes will be administered on Blackboard. Points earned on quizzes reflect extra credit opportunities. The extra credit quizzes will occur at random throughout the semester and questions will be formed from both lecture material and the textbook readings. Failure to take a quiz will result in a non-grade (0) for that quiz. There will be *no* make-up opportunities for missed quizzes regardless of the excuse. It is strongly recommended that students attend each class, as one's grade on both the examinations and quizzes generally reflects his or her record of attendance. Students should also complete the assigned readings throughout the discussion of a specified topic.

Related to the three examinations, their format will consist of multiple-choice questions. With the multiple-choice format of the examinations, students are required to purchase and bring the official version of scantron form #882-E to each test, as well as a #2 pencil. Scantron form #882-E can be purchased at the university's bookstore. Wrong or non-official scantron forms will not be accepted since they cannot be scanned by the College of Liberal Art's scantron machine. If a student fails to bring the correct scantron form, that scantron will not be graded resulting in a grade of zero for the examination.

Each examination will cover both lectures and assigned readings. Both midterm examinations are non-cumulative and will cover topics only from the beginning of the course or the most recent examination. The final examination, however, will be partially cumulative. All students will take the examinations in the classroom at the designated times with no make-up exams allowed except for situations such as a medical emergency or a death in one's family. In relation to examination absences caused by medical emergencies, students are required to contact me no later than the day of the test and will be required to present proof of a physician's examination. Failure to do so will result in a grade of zero for that examination. When tests are returned, they will be brought to only two consecutive classes. Tests thereafter must be picked up from my office (UH, room 409) during the office hours. Grades will also be posted on Blackboard. To access the extra-credit quizzes and your grades on Blackboard, log in with your UTA NetID and password at <https://elearn.uta.edu/webapps/login/>. If you have difficulty accessing Blackboard, visit <http://www.uta.edu/blackboard/students/index.php> or contact the Office of Information Technology Help Desk at 817-272-2208.

Make-up Examination Policy

Where make-up exams are permitted, those examinations will be scheduled prior to the final examination on Thursday, December 17th from 8:00-9:00AM. Make-up exams must receive the prior permission of the instructor. Importantly, make-up exams are generally more difficult due to the time that has passed since the graded material was covered. Further, make-up exams will include both essay and short answer questions, may be comprehensive, and will require specific, detailed answers. An additional disadvantage relates to the extra points sometimes added to the regular exam, since they are never applied to a make-up exam.

Exam Tardiness Policy

Students entering late disturb other students. Further, tardiness permits students to ask exiting students about the content of an exam – that is obviously not fair for students that have arrived on time. Unless a prior arrangement has been made, students will receive a grade of zero when tardy for an examination.

V. Grading

1. Midterm Examination #1 – 25%
2. Midterm Examination #2 – 37.5%
3. Final Examination – 37.5%
4. Extra Credit Quizzes – Up to 10 extra points added to the semester grade
 - a. E.g., if a student earns an 88 as a semester grade based on their midterm and final examinations performance, they may earn up to a 98 semester grade with their extra credit points added.
 - b. The value for the extra credit sum reflects the average quiz performance. For example, if five quizzes are given and 12 of 15 questions (80%) are answered correctly, then 8 extra credit points (the product of 80% multiplied by 10) will be earned.

The grading scale is as follows:

90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
0-59	F

VII. Current Events

With the 2016 elections coming soon, we will discuss current events as they unfold. Where current events are relevant such as the activities of presidential candidates for both major political parties, they will be discussed and included in both the extra credit quizzes and examinations. I will also integrate general aspects of the upcoming elections and policy debates into the course, as they provide assistance for understanding topics relating to the U.S. Constitution, the Congress, the presidency, political participation, elections, and other topics. Otherwise, where students have questions, I will be happy to set aside time when convenient to discuss political and policy matters.

VIII. Class Schedule

Subject 1: Introduction and American Political Culture

August 27-September 3

- Ginsberg, Lowi, Weir, and Tolbert, chapter 1

Subject 2: The Founding and the Constitution

September 8-22

- Ginsberg, Lowi, Weir, and Tolbert, chapter 2

Midterm Examination #1: September 24

Subject 3: Federalism

September 29-October 6

- Ginsberg, Lowi, Weir, Tolbert, and Spitzer, chapter 3

Subject 4: Civil Rights and Civil Liberties

October 8-15

- Ginsberg, Lowi, Weir, Tolbert, and Spitzer, chapter 4

Subject 5: Congress

October 20-27

- Ginsberg, Lowi, Weir, Tolbert, and Spitzer, chapter 9

Subject 6: The Presidency

October 29-November 5

- Ginsberg, Lowi, Weir, Tolbert, and Spitzer, chapter 10

Midterm Examination #2: November 10

Subject 7: The Federal Courts

November 12-17

- Ginsberg, Lowi, Weir, Tolbert, and Spitzer, chapter 12

Subject 8: Public Opinion

November 19-24

- Ginsberg, Lowi, Weir, Tolbert, and Spitzer, chapter 5

Subject 9: Political Parties, Political Participation and Elections

December 1-8

- Ginsberg, Lowi, Weir, Tolbert, and Spitzer, chapter 7

Thanksgiving Recess: November 26

Final Examination: Thursday, December 17th at 9:15AM

IX. Core Expectations and Citizenship

Expectations of Students

While an introductory course, I have strong yet reasonable expectations for students. To perform well, students are expected to work - meaning a combination of recurrent attendance, frequent class participation, and careful attention to the readings is required. Students that do not attend class regularly, do not take careful class notes, and do not carefully read the assigned material will have a more difficult time with the exams. Additionally, I encourage students to see me during my office hours. Where questions arise about the content of the course or a student's grade, office hours represent important opportunities for interaction between students and their instructor. Meetings during office hours will always take place in my office (University Hall, room 409).

Citizenship

While each student pays a significant cost to attend this course, sometimes an individual is less interested in learning, and disturbs others during class by talking, reading newspapers, listening to music, receiving or making phone calls, or text messaging. As a result of student complaints, use of cell phones during class will result in a two-point deduction from a student's final semester grade for each offense (one offense equals 2 points, two offenses equals 4 points, etc.). The instructor also reserves the right to ask the students to leave class when cell phone use is observed. Otherwise, do not walk in late, leave early, or push around others to find a seat once class has begun - it disturbs others! Be careful with laptop computers. Unfortunately, a majority of students use their laptops to access the web for non-related material, play games or read email

rather than paying attention to the lecture. Where I see a laptop being used, I assume (rather accurately) that it is being used for something other than class purposes.

X. Special Notes

1. Cell Phones and Electronic Devices – Students are instructed to turn off their cell phones prior to class. See comments about cell phone usage in the Citizenship section. Usage of a cell phone or other non-permitted electronic device during an examination or quiz will result in a grade of zero on that examination or quiz.
2. Test Conduct – All materials must be removed from one's desk during an examination or quiz. Additionally, headwear (e.g., hats, scarves, etc.), sunglasses, and earphones are absolutely not permitted during an examination.
3. Academic Integrity - All students are expected to obey the civil and penal statutes of the State of Texas and the United States, the Regents' Rules and Regulations of The University of Texas System, the rules and regulations of the University, and the orders or instructions issued by an administrative official of the University or U.T. System in the course of his/her duties, and to observe standards of conduct that are compatible with the University's function as an educational institution. Any student found to engage in cheating, plagiarism, or collusion will be sanctioned.
4. Inclement Weather – If a class is canceled due to inclement weather, its subject will be delayed until the following class. Similarly, all tests canceled because of inclement weather will be delivered during the following class. For information related to weather related class cancellations please call (972) 601-2049.
5. Students with Disabilities - Any student with a documented disability needing academic accommodations is requested to speak with the instructor during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain confidential.
6. Diversity Policy – It is the policy of the University of Texas at Arlington that, to the extent provided by applicable laws, no person shall be denied employment or admission, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or subject to discrimination under, any program or activity which it sponsors or conducts on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, disabilities, veteran status, or sexual orientation.
7. Student Support Services - The University of Texas at Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. These resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For more information, students may contact the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107 or visit www.uta.edu/resources.
8. Syllabus Changes – The instructor reserves the right to change the syllabus at any time during the semester.