

**POLS 2311-004: Government of the United States  
Spring 2016**

**Time and Place of Class Meetings:** Mondays and Wednesdays from 3:00-4:20pm; Room UH104  
**Section Information:** POLS 2311-004

**Instructor:** Dr. Herschel Thomas

**Office Location:** 404 University Hall

**Office Hours:** Thursdays 1:45-3:00pm/4:00-5:30pm and by appointment

**Phone:** 817-272-2991 (Political Science Dept. Main Office)

**Email:** [herschel.thomas@uta.edu](mailto:herschel.thomas@uta.edu)

**Faculty Profile:** <https://www.uta.edu/profiles/herschel%20-thomas>

**Description of Course Content:** This course provides an introduction to American national government. It explores historical foundations and the Constitution, the role of non-governmental actors in politics, the processes of elections and national institutions, and critical issues in public policy. This course also emphasizes the role of information in politics and discusses major topics through an analytical lens.

**Student Learning Outcomes:** At the end of this semester, the successful student should:

- Understand the links between historical foundations and contemporary American government
- Be able to compare the relative roles of non-governmental actors in politics
- Be able to identify and understand the major functions and processes of national institutions
- Recognize important issues in economic, health, and foreign policy
- Be able to thoughtfully consider political and policy-related information

**Blackboard:** This course will make extensive use of our course page in Blackboard. It is available at:  
<http://www.uta.edu/blackboard/students/index.php>

**Required Textbook and Other Course Materials:** Bianco, William T. and David T. Canon. 2014. *American Politics Today, Essentials 4th Edition*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. (ISBN: 978-0393937022). Other readings will be made available online on Blackboard. The textbook is available from the UTA bookstore or other stores. No course password or access code is needed.

**Descriptions of Major Assignments and Examinations:** Students are required to complete three exams and weekly online reading quizzes. Student participation will also be assessed.

- **Exams:** Exams (3) will cover all course material including lectures and discussion content, textbook content, and additional readings on Blackboard. Exams will not be cumulative. Students are required to bring a #882-E UTA scantron form and #2 pencil to each exam. Students are required to take all exams and complete them in the allotted period. Students may bring one 4x6 notecard with study material to the exam.
- **Reading Quizzes:** Weekly reading quizzes will be available on Blackboard and are due each Tuesday by 11:59pm, unless otherwise specified. They will typically be made available one week in advance. These quizzes are intended to help you identify and understand key concepts from the textbook material and so you may discuss the readings and related quizzes with your peers. The lowest reading quiz grade will be dropped.
- **Participation:** Communicating your thoughts to others is an important component of learning and thus participation is a key part of this course. Participation involves not only responding to or asking questions, but also regularly engaging in class activities. For example, I will occasionally ask you to informally write an answer to a question (either individually or in small groups) and share your responses. I also encourage you to participate by visiting my office hours or sending me links to interesting articles or news stories related to course content (especially those that include graphs or figures).

**Attendance:** For this course, daily attendance may be recorded and I expect you to attend all classes. Students should come to class having read and thought about the material. Students who do not attend class will typically do poorly on the exams and will miss opportunities to earn participation points. Students miss class at their own risk. Should you find occasion to be absent, I will be happy to discuss missed material during my office hours once you have obtained class notes from another student.

**Office Hours:** Students are encouraged to visit my office hours with questions related to course content and assessments. Coming to office hours is the best way to receive to an answer to an in-depth question. I am happy to schedule appointments during university business hours as needed.

**Electronic Devices:** Laptops and tablets are permitted in class for the purpose of taking notes. I expect that you will refrain from using your smartphone during class time—any new Snapchats will still be there after class!

**Grading:**

Student grades will be calculated as follows:

Exam 1: 25%

Exam 2: 25%

Exam 3: 25%

Weekly online reading quizzes: 15%

Participation: 10%

Extra credit opportunities may be available on occasion and announced in class. Any extra credit will be added as percentage points to the next exam.

Letter grades will be assigned as follows:

90+ %: A

80-89 %: B

70-79 %: C

60-69 %: D

Below 60 %: F

**In-class Discussion:** On occasion, we may discuss political issues and current events related to course content. Civility and professionalism in all discussions is expected and all opinions will be respected. Though I may present follow-up questions or ask for counter-arguments related to any particular discussion, I have no interest in swaying your views and I encourage the respectful exchange of ideas.

**Grading Questions:** All questions regarding grades or exam questions must be submitted in writing and include reasonable explanation for consideration.

**Makeup Exams:** No makeups will be scheduled for the in-class exams or the final exam except for medical reasons or extraordinary circumstances. Students must notify me in advance of the exam to schedule such a make-up. Written documentation of the extraordinary circumstance will be required and students should expect documentation to be verified.

**Recording:** Recording of audio/video during class is not permitted except under special circumstances.

**Bad Weather:** Any bad weather cancellations made by the University will result in the scheduled topic or exam being held on the next class day.

**Incompletes:** Incompletes will be given only in extraordinary circumstances and at the discretion of the instructor.

**Drop Policy:** Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance.** Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://www.uta.edu/aao/fao/>).

**Disability Accommodations:** UT Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including *The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*, *The Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act (ADAAA)*, and *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide “reasonable accommodations” to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of disability. Students are responsible for providing the instructor with official notification in the form of a letter certified by the **Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD)**. Students experiencing a range of conditions (Physical, Learning, Chronic Health, Mental Health, and Sensory) that may cause diminished academic performance or other barriers to learning may seek services and/or accommodations by contacting:

**The Office for Students with Disabilities, (OSD)** [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or calling 817-272-3364.

**Counseling and Psychological Services, (CAPS)** [www.uta.edu/caps/](http://www.uta.edu/caps/) or calling 817-272-3671.

Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

**Title IX:** *The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit [uta.edu/eos](http://uta.edu/eos). For information regarding Title IX, visit [www.uta.edu/titleIX](http://www.uta.edu/titleIX).*

**Academic Integrity:** Students enrolled all UT Arlington courses are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington’s tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.

I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.

UT Arlington faculty members may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents’ Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university’s standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student’s suspension or expulsion from the University.

**Electronic Communication:** UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

**Student Feedback Survey:** At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as “lecture,” “seminar,” or “laboratory” shall be directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student’s feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington’s effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

**Final Review Week:** A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

**Emergency Exit Procedures:** Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit, which is located immediately to the right of the classroom door. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

**Student Support Services:** UT 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. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to [resources@uta.edu](mailto:resources@uta.edu), or view the information at <http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/resources/index.php>.

### Course Schedule

Every attempt will be made to keep to the plan below. As the instructor for this course, I reserve the ability to adjust this schedule in any way that serves the educational needs of the students enrolled in this course. Any adjustments will be announced in class and coming to class will ensure that you know about such changes. Online reading quizzes, unless otherwise announced, are due every Tuesday at 11:59pm and cover new reading assigned up to that day.

Date(s)	Topic	Readings (due by first date listed)
W Jan 20	Introduction	
M Jan 25	Understanding American Politics	BC Ch. 1 *Syllabus reading quiz due on Jan 26
W Jan 27	The Founding	BC Ch. 2 BC Appendix: The Constitution

M/W Feb 1 & 3	The Founding (cont.) & Federalism	BC Ch. 3 *First textbook reading quiz due on Feb 2
M/W Feb 8 & 10	Civil Liberties & Civil Rights	BC Ch. 4 & Ch. 5
M/W Feb 15 & 17	Public Opinion *Exam review	BC Ch. 6 (pgs. 159-178 ONLY)
<b>M Feb 22</b>	<b>EXAM 1</b>	*No reading quiz this week
W Feb 24	The Media	BC Ch. 6 (pgs. 179-186 ONLY)
M/W Feb 29 & Mar 2	Political Parties	BC Ch. 7
M/W Mar 7 & 9	Elections & Voting	BC Ch. 8
M/W Mar 14 & 16	<b>UTA Spring Break – No Class</b>	
M/W Mar 21 & 23	Interest Groups & Lobbying	BC Ch. 9 Blackboard: CQ Researcher - Regulating Lobbying
M/W Mar 28 & 30	Congress	BC Ch. 10
M Apr 4	Congress (cont.) *Exam review	Blackboard: Washington Post - Declines in Congressional Staff *No reading quiz this week
<b>W Apr 6</b>	<b>EXAM 2</b>	
M/W Apr 11 & 13	The Presidency	BC Ch. 11 Blackboard: NYT - Hopes for Presidents
M/W Apr 18 & 20	The Bureaucracy & The Courts	BC Ch. 12 & Ch. 13
M/W Apr 25 & 27	The Courts (cont.) & Economic/Social Policy	BC Ch. 14
M/W May 2 & 4	Health Policy & Foreign Policy *Exam review	BC Ch. 15 Blackboard: CQ Researcher: Will the ACA Survive?
May 7-13 (final exam period*)	<b>EXAM 3</b> <sup>^</sup>	

<sup>^</sup>Note: The final exam will take place during the University-determined final exam period.

**Emergency Phone Numbers:** In case of an on-campus emergency, call the UT Arlington Police Department at **817-272-3003** (non-campus phone), **2-3003** (campus phone). You may also dial 911. Non-emergency number 817-272-3381.