

Gov 310L: Intro to American and Texas Politics

Brendan Apfeld

Fall 2018

Unique number 38285

Class meeting times TR 8:00-9:30am

Class location MEZ B.0306

Email

Canvas page <https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/1231198>

Office hours

Office location

Course Description and Rationale

This course provides an introduction to American and Texas politics. The class will examine the American political system and explore the dynamics at play. The course will also examine these topics in the Texas context and present them in a comparative perspective as appropriate. Course topics include an introduction to America's constitutional foundations, the relationship between the mass public and politics (public opinion and participation), the role of intermediary organizations (interest groups, media, parties), and the function of institutions (Congress, Presidency, Courts). In addition to mastering a set of basic facts about American government, students will learn theories addressing "big questions" in American politics, and will explore critical assessments of the evidence brought to bear on these questions.

Course Objectives

This course has two primary objectives. By the end of the semester, students who have met all course requirements at a passing level should:

- evaluate political arguments and analyze current political events through the lens of prominent theories in the political science discipline
- strengthen their knowledge of and ability to fulfill their role in a well-functioning democracy

Format and Procedures

Class Structure

Class meetings will be primarily lecture-based. You are expected to attend all sessions and you should come to class having completed all readings and prepared to apply that knowledge to lecture content. On occasion you will be expected to participate in individual and group activities in class.

Materials for the various parts of this course (i.e. lectures, readings, and assignments) are designed to integrate with one another. This means that lectures will not be mere recitations of the readings, nor will the readings repeat lecture material. In order to succeed in this class, students will need to complete the reading assignments and attend all class sessions.

Technology Policy

In order to create a learning environment in which all students are able to succeed and to reduce classroom distractions, there is a strict no technology policy for this class. Computers, cell phones, and tablets are strictly prohibited in class. I enforce this policy and sitting in the back of the lecture hall does not give you an excuse to ignore this rule.

While I understand that it is increasingly common to take digital notes, my experience has been that students who use pen and paper find class more engaging and better grasp the material. Additionally, research in education and psychology finds that taking notes by hand facilitates recall and comprehension of course material.

Students who require the use of a laptop for leaning accommodations should discuss this with me as soon as possible and in all cases before using a laptop in class.

Email Policy

I find that over 95% of questions asked via email are better discussed in person (or are already answered in the syllabus). Therefore, do not be surprised if your email receives a short response to either check the syllabus or to come to office hours to discuss. If you need to schedule a time to meet outside of my regular hours, please include in your email at least two times when you are free. If I am unable to accommodate those times, I will respond with alternatives.

Do not expect me to respond to email sent or received between the hours of 6:00pm–8:00am, Monday through Friday or over the weekends. Although at times I will work early or late and reply to emails during these times, it is important to know that as a rule, I do not check email when at home. This means that if I send an email during these hours and you reply quickly, you should not expect a reply as I may have already closed my email application.

Course Communication

Course materials, including lecture slides and additional readings, will be posted on the course Canvas page: <https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/1231198>. Readings outside the textbook will be posted at least one week in advance of when they are due and lecture slides will be posted before class.

All important course communication outside of class time will be posted as an announcement on the class Canvas page. I do not anticipate using this feature frequently, but I would encourage you to check the Canvas page daily or change your Canvas settings to email you when an announcement is posted.

You will also use Canvas to submit community engagement assignment and your final project.

Course Requirements

Readings & Course Materials

- Required text: *We the People*, 11th Essentials Edition. Ginsbert, Lowi, Weir, and Tolbert.

- The online edition is significantly cheaper (\$35) than the paperback (\$70) and can be purchased either through the Co-Op or directly from the publisher (here).
- You are strongly encouraged to purchase the assigned 11th Essentials Edition, which will be considered the definitive version for this course.
- Required text: *The Enduring Debate: Classic and Contemporary Readings in American Politics*
 - The reader is offered as a bundle with the primary textbook through the Co-Op
- Additional readings, including all readings on Texas politics, will be available through the course page on Canvas

Assignments

This course will assess your mastery of the material through two exams, a final project, and a series of community engagement activities.

Exams

There will be two exams. The first exam will occur on in-class on October 16 and will cover the first half of the course on US and Texas political institutions. The second exam will be the "final" exam and will take place during the designated finals time assigned to us (Friday, December 14 2:00-5:00pm)¹. The final exam is cumulative in the sense that mastery of early material is required for later material.

Final Project

You will choose a current event in American politics and evaluate the arguments put forth by (at least) two sides in the debate. The final product will be a written paper of 4–5 pages with several intermediate submissions. Greater details will be provided in class.

Community Engagement Activities

A series of community engagement activities (CEs) provide an integral element in your progress toward achieving the course goals. These assignments will generally require that you *do* something outside of class and then submit a brief written assignment related to that activity. There will be six total community engagement assignments, falling into the rough categories of "being a good. . ."

1. Student
2. Astonian/Texan
3. American
4. Political scientist (x2)
5. Media consumer

With the exception of number 1, you will have a range of choices for how to fulfill these requirements. Numbers 2 through 5 (five assignments total) will each be worth 5% of your final grade. Number 1, to be discussed on the first day of class, will not be worth any points, but completion of it is a strict requirement for passing this class. Additional details for all CEs will be provided in class.

Late Work and Make-up Policy

No late work will be accepted for any assignment. There are no exceptions to this policy.

¹Precise time and location will be confirmed later in the semester once the registrar finalizes the exam schedule.

Make-ups for the exams will be given only in the most exceptional cases, such as serious illness or death of a close family member. If you must miss one of these assignments, you must first notify the professor as soon as you become aware you will miss it. You must then request an absence notification through the Dean of Students. Under no circumstances will students be allowed to take the final exam early.

Grading Procedures and Grades

Summary of grade categories, weights, and due dates:

Category	Percentage	Date
Exam 1 (in class)	25%	
Exam 2 (final)	25%	
Final Project	25%	Ongoing
Community Engagement	25%	Ongoing

The final point total will be rounded to the nearest whole number using mathematical convention in determining the final letter grade. This means an 89.5 will round to a 90, but an 89.499̄ never will. Final grades are based on the following scale:

Letter	Percent
A	93+
A-	90-92
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	Below 60

Academic Integrity & Collaboration

All students are expected to abide by the Student Honor Code and the University Code of Conduct.

Students may find it useful to discuss and collaborate on community engagement exercises, but each student must submit their own original work for all assignments. If you have any questions about plagiarism and correct citation, please come discuss the issue with me during office hours or consult the UT library's plagiarism guide: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/services/instruction/learningmodules/plagiarism/>

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. For further information on official university policies and procedures regarding scholastic dishonesty, please visit the Student Judicial Services website or call 512-471-2841.

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://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>.

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, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.