

GOV 310L: Intro to American and Texas Politics

Brendan Apfeld

Spring 2017

Unique Number: 38485

Class location: MEZ B0.306

Class Meeting times: MWF 2:00-3:00

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1 Description and Rationale

This course provides an introduction to American and Texas politics. The class will examine the American political system and explore the political 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.

2 Course Objectives

This course has three primary objectives. First, students will analyze complex political phenomena and relationships between important political institutions, actors, and processes in the American and Texan political systems. Second, students will evaluate salient current events through the lens of prominent theories in the political science discipline. Third, students will strengthen their knowledge of and ability to fulfill their role in a well-functioning democracy.

3 Format and Procedures

3.1 Class Structure

Class meetings will be primarily lecture-based, but students will be expected to participate at a high level.

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.

3.2 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. 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. Research supports the finding 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.

3.3 Course Communication and Website

Course materials, including lecture slides and additional readings, will be posted on the course Canvas page: <https://utexas.instructure.com/courses/1188539>. Readings 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 all students to either check the Canvas page daily, or change your Canvas setting to send you an email when an announcement is posted.

You will also use Canvas to submit community engagement assignment and take weekly reading checks, discussed in greater detail below.

4 Course Requirements

4.1 Readings & Course Materials

- Required text: *The American Political System*, Kollman. Norton Publishing.
 - Any edition (1st, 2nd, or 3rd¹, with or without policy chapters)
 - Hard copies of the 2nd edition are available at the University of Texas Coop.
- Additional readings, including all readings on Texas politics, will be available through the course page on Canvas

A preliminary schedule of readings is included at the end of this document. Readings are subject to change and additional readings may be added at a later date. In such cases, at least one week notice will be given.

¹3rd Edition of *The American Political System* is forthcoming in early 2017.

4.2 Assignments

This course will assess your mastery of the material through two in-class quizzes, two in-class exams, regular online reading checks, a series of community engagement projects, and the occasional small assignment.

4.2.1 In-Class Quizzes

There will be two in-class quizzes. The first will occur on January 30 and the second on May 5. The first quiz will be worth 5% of your final grade and will cover our overview of Democratic theory, American federalism, and the US and Texas Constitutions. The second quiz will be worth 10% of your final grade and will cover domestic economic and social policy (including Texas social policy) and US foreign policy. These quizzes will consist of multiple choice questions and a short answer question that will be distributed in advance. More detail will be provided in class prior to the quiz dates.

4.2.2 In-Class Exams

There will be two in-class exams. The first exam will occur on March 1 and will cover the first half of the course on US and Texas political institutions. The second exam will occur on April 21 and will cover the second half of the course on interaction between the government and citizens. Exams will consist of multiple choice questions and short answer/essay questions. Each exam will be worth 20% of your final grade. You will need to provide a “blue book” for each of these two exams. Additional details will be provided in class prior to the exam dates.

4.2.3 Community Engagement Activities

A series of community engagement activities 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. Austonian/Texan
3. American
4. Political scientist (x2)
5. Media consumer

With the exception of numbers 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.

4.2.4 Online Reading Checks

All readings are due before class on the day they are listed on the schedule below.

You will be expected to complete a regular (almost weekly) online check on the readings. Checks will consist of multiple choice questions and will cover all readings due that week. Reading checks will be due by 2:00pm on Friday of the week they are due (i.e. at the start of class). Reading checks will cover all material since the previous one, including any reading due the same day the assignment is due. Any exceptions to this will be announced at least one week ahead of time in class. There will be a total of 12 online reading checks and you will be allowed to drop your 2 lowest scores at the end of the semester.

4.2.5 Small Assignments

From time to time throughout the semester I will assign “small assignments.” These assignments will only take a short time to complete and will not be “academic” in the sense that they are mentally taxing or testable material. Their purpose is to incorporate a broader range of sources into the class and put everybody on the same page in preparing to discuss various topics in class.

4.3 Late Work and Make-up Policy

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

Make-ups for the quizzes and in-class examinations 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.

5 Grading Procedures and Grades

Summary of grade categories, weights, and due dates:

<i>Category</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Due Date</i>
Quiz 1	5%	January 30
Quiz 2	10%	May 5
Exam 1	20%	March 1
Exam 2	20%	April 21
Online Reading Checks	10%	Ongoing
Community Engagement	30%	Ongoing
Small Assignments	5%	Ongoing

Please note that there is no final exam in this course.

The final point total will be rounded using mathematical convention in determining the final letter grade. Final grades are based on the following scale:

Grade	Range
A	93-100
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

6 Academic Integrity & Collaboration

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

Students may use their textbooks and other readings during weekly reading checks. However, students should not collaborate on the assignments.

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 this UT library website: <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 web site or call 512-471-2841.

7 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,

8 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.

9 Course Schedule

Date	Topic	Reading Due	Assignments Due
Jan 18	Course Introduction	APS Ch. 1	
Jan 20	Democratic Theory & Federalism 1	APS Ch. 3	RC 1
Jan 23	Federalism 2 & US Constitution 1	APS Ch. 2	
Jan 25	US Constitution 2 & TX Political History	TP Ch. 1 (selections)	
Jan 27	TX Constitution	TP Ch. 2	RC 2
Jan 30	Legislative Branch 1	APS Ch. 5	Quiz 1
Feb 1	Legislative Branch 2		
Feb 3	Legislative Branch 3	TPIR Ch. 6	RC 3
Feb 6	Executive Branch 1	APS Ch. 6	
Feb 8	Executive Branch 2		
Feb 10	Executive Branch 3	TPIR Ch. 7	RC 4
Feb 13	Bureaucracy 1	APS Ch. 7	
Feb 15	Bureaucracy 2 & Judicial Branch 1	APS Ch. 8	
Feb 17	Judicial Branch 2	TPIR Ch. 9	RC 5
Feb 20	Civil Rights & Civil Liberties 1	APS Ch. 4	
Feb 22	Civil Rights & Civil Liberties 2		
Feb 24	Civil Rights & Civil Liberties 3		RC 6
Feb 27	Mop up & Review		
Mar 1	Exam 1	None	Exam 1
Mar 3	Public Opinion 1	APS Ch. 9	
Mar 6	Public Opinion 2		
Mar 8	Public Opinion 3		
Mar 10	Youth Participation	RFO Ch. 1 & 6	CE 1 & 2, RC 7
Mar 13-17	Spring Break - No Class		
Mar 20	Participation 1	APS Ch. 10	
Mar 22	Participation 2		

Date	Topic	Reading Due	Assignments Due
Mar 24	Interest Groups 1	APS Ch. 11	RC 8
Mar 27	Interest Groups 2	CIAG Ch. 8	
Mar 29	Social Movements 1		
Mar 31	Social Movements 2		CE 3, RC 9
Apr 3	Political Parties 1	APS Ch. 12	
Apr 5	Political Parties 2		
Apr 7	Political Parties 3	CIAG Ch. 10	RC 10
Apr 10	Elections & Campaigns 1	APS Ch. 13	
Apr 12	Elections & Campaigns 2		
Apr 14	Elections & Campaigns 3		CE4, RC 11
Apr 17	2016 Elections	TUW (selections)	
Apr 19	Mop up & Review		
Apr 21	Exam 2	None	Exam 2
Apr 24	Economic Policy 1	APS Ch. 15	
Apr 26	Economic Policy 2 & Social Policy 1	APS Ch. 16	
Apr 28	Social Policy 2	CIAG Ch. 26	CE 5, RC 12
May 1	Foreign Policy 1	APS Ch. 17	
May 3	Foreign Policy 2		
May 5	Quiz 2		Quiz 2

The following codes are used in the schedule: APS = *The American Political System*; TP = *Texas Politics - 12th Edition*; TPIR = *Texas Politics: Ideal and Reality - 13th Edition*; CIAG = *Central Ideas in American Government*; RFO = *Running from Office*; TUW = *The Unwinding*; CE = Community Engagement Activity; RC = Online Reading Check