

American Government & Politics

Spring 2015

Department of Political Science

University of Texas at El Paso

POLS - 2311

Instructor – Dr. Todd A. Curry

Lecture – TTh 9:00am – 10:20am – ULC - 116

Office – Benedict Hall 304

Office Hours – Ricardo Romero – 8-8:50am T, Th – Kimberly Smith – 10:30-Noon Wed –

David Uresti – Fri – 2:00-3:20pm

E-mail – tacurry@utep.edu

Overview

This course is intended to be an introductory survey in the American National Government. To this end, we will cover basic theories and principles of government, the institutions of government in the American context, and some of the issues that are current to the day. Students are expected to complete this course with an understanding of the general concepts of American democracy and the way in which the branches of government interact and generate policy.

Catalog Description

A survey of contemporary American, national, state, and local political processes and institutions, with emphasis upon the Constitutions of the United States and Texas. This course meets teacher certification requirements for out-of-state graduate students.

Text

O'Connor, Karen et al. *Essentials of American and Texas Government: Roots and Reform*. Pearson Higher Ed. 2015. Custom Printing ISBN: 1-269-78529-X

Grading

20% - Attendance and Participation

20% - First Exam

20% - Second Exam

20% - Third Exam

20% - Fourth Exam

Policies

Attendance and participation in class will count for the substantial portion of your grade; therefore I expect considerable effort to go into it. This class will exclusively be taught in a lecture format. Students are encouraged to ask questions regarding the materials or current political events. On top of this, you are allowed three absences before I start dropping you

attendance grade by 1 percentage point per absence. If attendance becomes a problem I reserve the right to use surprise quizzes to supplement my grading scheme.

Information for the students will be communicated in two ways 1. In class; 2. Through email. The only email address I will use to contact you is your official “utep.edu” account. This means as a requirement of this course you will need to regularly check this account if you do not already. “I did not receive notification,” is not a valid excuse.

This semester I have decided to ban laptops in the classroom. Recent studies have shown that students who use laptops in the classroom have lower grades (on average) than their peers who do not. While laptops can facilitate good note taking, I have found their use, not unlike cell phones, to be distracting to the student using them. Furthermore, computers can also prove distracting to other students. I will be posting my powerpoint slides (I do not teach from notes) on dropbox the day before class. I hope students will print these out, bring them to class, and take notes in the margin to facilitate better studying habits.

Grading Scale:

The following numerical averages translate into final course grades:

- 90+: A (4.0)
- 80-89: B (3.0)
- 70-79: C (2.0)
- 60-69: D (1.0)
- 60: F (0.0)

Exams

The exams will consist of 50 multiple choice questions, each worth two points. Much of the material on the exams is delivered in class; however, some material from the readings not covered in class is tested on the exams as well. The exam schedule follows:

- Exam 1 – Feb 17
- Exam 2 – Mar 19
- Exam 3 – Apr 21
- Exam 4 – May 12, 10am-12:45pm

Make-Up Exams

It is completely the student’s responsibility to take the exams when they are scheduled. As a general rule, make-up exams **will not be** allowed; thus, a missed exam counts as a zero (0) toward the final course grade. Notwithstanding, at the instructor’s sole discretion make-ups will be permitted, but only the gravest of reasons will be accepted, **if** documented in writing by the proper authority. Even if there is an acceptable reason for missing the regularly scheduled exam, permission to take a make-up will be granted **only** if the student provides the professor with prompt and proper notification; that is, the student **must** inform the professor of the reason for missing the exam with proper documentation **before** the exam takes place, **and** the reason must be acceptable to the instructor. If a make-up is permitted, both the format and questions can, and likely will, be different from the regularly scheduled exam.

Academic Honesty and Integrity

Per UTEP policy: The University of Texas at El Paso prides itself on its standards of academic excellence. In all matters of intellectual pursuit, UTEP faculty and students must strive to achieve excellence based on the quality of work produced by the individual. In the classroom and in all other academic activities, students are expected to uphold the highest standards of academic integrity. Any form of scholastic dishonesty is an affront to the pursuit of knowledge and jeopardizes the quality of the degree awarded to all graduates of UTEP. It is imperative, therefore, that the members of this academic community understand the regulations pertaining to academic integrity and that all faculty insist on adherence to these standards.

Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, and any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts. Proven violations of the detailed regulations, as printed in the *Handbook of Operating Procedures (HOP)* and available in the Office of the Dean of Students and the homepage of The Dean of Students at www.utep.edu/dos, may result in sanctions ranging from disciplinary probation, to failing a grade on the work in question, to a failing grade in the course, to suspension or dismissal, among others.

Special Needs

If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at 747-5148, or by email to cass@utep.edu, or visit their office located in UTEP Union East, Room 106. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at www.sa.utep.edu/cass. *CASS' Staff are the only individuals who can validate and if need be, authorize accommodations for students with disabilities.*

Course Outline

Theme One – Constitutional Foundations of the U.S. Government

Jan 20, 22 – The Political Landscape (CHP 1)

Jan 27, 29 – The Constitution (CHP 2)

Feb 3, 5 - Federalism (CHP 3)

Feb 10, 12 – Civil Liberties/Rights (CHP 4/5)

Feb 17 – Exam 1

Theme Two - Institutions of Government

Feb 19, 24 – Congress (CHP 6)

Feb 26 – The Presidency (CHP 7)

Mar 3 - Bureaucracy (CHP 8)

Mar 5, 17 - Judiciary (CHP 9)

Mar 19 - Exam 2

Theme Three – Political Behavior/Public Policy

Mar 24, 26 – Public Opinion (CHP 10)

Apr 7, 9 – Political Parties and Interest Groups (CHP 11)

Apr 14, 16 – Campaigns & Elections (CHP 12)

Apr 21 - Exam 3

Theme Four - Texas Government

Apr 23 – The Texas Constitution (CHP 13)

Apr 28 - The Texas Legislature (CHP 16)

Apr 30 - The Governor and Bureaucracy in Texas (CHP 17)

May 5 - The Texas Judiciary (CHP 18)

May 7 - Political Parties, Interest Groups, Elections (CHP 14/15)

May 12, 10AM-12:45pm - Exam