**Government 310L:**

## Introduction to American And Texas Government

**Course Number: 37580**

**Classroom: CLA 1.104**

**Meeting times: MWF, 12:00 – 1:00 PM**

**Instructor:** Mr. Matthew Rhodes-Purdy

**Office hours:** Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:00 – 3:30 PM

**Office location:** MEZ 3.228

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**Course Description:** This course provides an introduction to American Government, as well as a brief overview of the Texas political system. The US and Texas political systems are the result of conflict over interests and ideologies. In particular, the course focuses on the debate between liberalism and democracy, and competing visions of federalism, to help students understand the purpose behind the details of institutions of US government. The primary goals of this course are:

* to introduce the basic institutions of the US political system (the legislature, party system, political rights, etc.) and an overview of their historical development
* to examine how these institutions shape the political behavior of individuals, and how the political behavior of individuals shape the institutions
* to encourage students to think critically about the costs and benefits of specific features of the US American political system
* to explore how the design and development of political institutions in the United States has been guided and shaped by the core ideas of American political thought.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

* Understand and discuss some of the core political ideas that have influenced US political development (e.g. liberalism, democracy, federalism)
* Identify the major institutions of US Government, understand how they were shaped historically according to core political ideas, and explain how they relate to other institutions
* Understand and discuss various ways that citizens can organize themselves and how they can influence government and policy, citing historical and contemporary examples
* Understand and discuss the various factors which shape public opinion and policy preferences, and the key divides over issues of economic, social and foreign policy in the US political system
* Identify some key similarities and differences of the US political system and major political systems around the world
* Understand the Texas political system and political development

**Prerequisites:** Twelve semester hours of college coursework and a passing score on the reading section of the Texas Higher Education Assessment (THEA) test, or an appropriate assessment test.

**Readings:** The course will involve a combination of textbook readings, primary source readings and analytical articles. There are three required texts for the course:

* Lowi, et. al. *American Government: Power and Purpose*. 13th full edition. ISBN-13: 978-0393124132
* Ginsberg & Schefter. Politics By Other Means. 3rd edition. ISBN-13: 978-0393977639
* Additional readings posted on Canvas

Reading for this class is absolutely essential. Lectures will deal with course material that is separate from that contained in the readings. You must come to class each day with the assigned reading completed to get the most out of lecture and to succeed in the course.

**Course Requirements and Grading:** Grades for this course will be based on a combination of essays and in class quizzes. There will be three exams, which will cover the material between that exam and the one preceding it (exams are not comprehensive). That said, the course is designed in such a way that ideas from earlier sections are vital to understanding later material. Exams will be multiple choice.

**Lecture Slides:** Slides from lecture will not be available on Canvas. The slides are merely an outline of the lecture, and relying on them without actually attending will not be sufficient to succeed in this course. However if you do miss class, if you come to office hours (either my own or the TA’s) and discuss the material for the day you missed, we will make the slides for that day available to you.

In addition to the exams, 10 percent of your grade will be based on your participation. The participation grade will include in-class discussion, small-group activities, and periodic quizzes which will focus on the readings. Please keep in mind that simply showing up to class will not be sufficient to guarantee full participation points; you must actively engage in discussion. Students may also attend office hours to discuss the course material to gain participation points. You may contact me at any time to discuss your participation grade, and ways you might improve it.

Final grades will be course will be calculated as follows:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Assignment | Weight |
| Exam 1 | 30% |
| Exam 2 | 30% |
| Final Exam | 30% |
| Participation | 10% |

Grades will be assigned on the scale listed below:

93-100 A 90-92 A-

88-89 B+ 83-87 B 80-82 B-

78-79 C+ 73-77 C 70-72 C-

68-69 D+ 63-67 D 60-62 D-

<60 F

All final percentages will be rounded to the nearest percentage point. No exceptions will be made to the scale listed here.

If you feel your grade on an assignment is incorrect, you may explain, in writing, why you feel you have been graded incorrectly or unfairly and submit it to me **no later than one week** from the day the assignment was returned; late appeals will **not be accepted or considered.**

**Office hours and contact policy:** If at any point in the semester you worry about your grade or your understanding of the course, **please come and see me as soon as possible**. This is a difficult course with a great deal of material. Timely requests for help and use of university resources provide the best chance of success.

Any students who wish to discuss any aspect of the course are more than welcome to come to office hours.

Except in extreme circumstances, I will answer e-mails within 24 hours of receipt. I encourage you to contact me with any questions or concerns as soon as possible, as there is no guarantee any issue you may have can be resolved in one e-mail communication. If your issue requires more extensive communication, I will probably ask you to come to office hours to discuss it face to face.

**Make-ups:** Exams can be made up, provided that:

1. You have a reasonable excuse for missing the exam. These include a university-sponsored athletic event, serious illness or accident, or a death in the family. You will be required to submit documentation of your excuse.
2. You provide as much notification as possible. I reserve the right to refuse make-up exams to students who fail to provide timely notification. If an absence is foreseeable, “timely” means as before the assignment, preferably as soon as you know you will be absent.

There will be a single make-up exam period for each exam. All students with approved excuses must make up the exam they missed during the make-up period corresponding to that exam (i.e. you cannot make up the first exam during the make-up period for the second exam).

**Technology in class:** Students will be allowed to use laptops to take notes. Mobile phones are not allowed; please keep them stowed away during class time. I also ask that you limit use of your laptops to class-related activities; individuals who use technology in a manner that interrupts lecture or distracts other students will be asked to leave their laptops at home permanently.

**Academic Dishonesty:** The University defines scholastic dishonesty in the following way:

“According to the Institutional Rules, scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, and falsifying academic records.” For a detailed explanation of the University’s honor code and definition of plagiarism please refer to the following website: http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/index.html

In the event that a student violates the University policy on scholastic dishonesty, he or she will be 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.

**Students with Disabilities** Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/

**Religious Holy Day Observance:** By UT Austin policy, you must notify your instructor 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.

**Emergency Evacuation Policy:** In the event of a fire or other emergency, it may be necessary to evacuate a building rapidly. Upon the activation of a fire alarm or the announcement of an emergency in a university building, all occupants of the building are required to evacuate and assemble outside. Once evacuated, no one may re-enter the building without instruction to do so from the Austin Fire Department, University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

Students should familiarize themselves with all the exit doors of each room and building they occupy at the university, and should remember that the nearest exit routes may not be the same as the way they typically enter buildings.

Students requiring assistance in evacuation shall inform their instructors in writing during the first week of class. Faculty members must then provide this information to the Fire Prevention Services office by fax (512-232-2759), with "Attn. Mr. Roosevelt Easley" written in the subject line.

Information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at http://www.utexas.edu/emergency

**Course Plan**

**Section 1:** This section introduces the course, including a brief introduction to how political scientists form questions, develop hypotheses, and test them with data. It also introduces the three primary ideologies which shape US political development: liberalism, republicanism, and federalism; note that the first two have little to do with how those terms are used in the modern era. We then apply this approach to the founding of the US political system. The US Constitution, and the political system it creates, are heavily influenced by liberalism and a relatively constrained federal government.

Week 1 (Aug 26-28): Introduction to the Course and to Political Inquiry

* + Lowi et. al., Ch. 1

Week 2 (Aug 31 – Sept 4): The Founding and the Constitution

* Lowi et. al., Ch. 2

Week 3 (Sept 9 – 11): Core Ideas of US Political Thought: Liberalism, Democracy, and Federalism

* Lowi et. al., Ch. 3&4

Week 4 (Sept 13 – 18): The Legislature

* + Lowi et. al., Ch. 6

Week 5 (Sept 21 – 25): The Presidency

* + Lowi et. al., Ch.7-8

Week 6 (Sept 28 – 30): The Courts

* Lowi et. al., Ch.9

**Oct 2: EXAM 1**

**Section 2:** This section picks up after the ratification of the Constitution. Gradually, a broad array of political actors push to democratize the US political system. This section describes how citizens organize to increase and broaden political participation and civil rights. This section traces the gradual erosion of strict liberalism and the expansion of federal power, covering the era of Jacksonian democracy, the civil war, the Great depression and the New Deal, and the civil rights movements 1960s. It then covers the modern era, emphasizing the return of liberal ideas regarding limitations on the proper domain of government action and renewed concerns of States’ rights.

Week 7 (Oct 5 – 9): Political parties

* Lowi et. al., Ch. 12

Week 8 (Oct 12 – 16): Campaigns and Elections

* Lowi et. al., Ch. 11&14

Week 9 (Oct 19 – 23): Interest Groups & social movements

* Lowi et. al., Ch. 5&13

Week 10 (Oct 26-28): Institutional conflict

* Politics by other means

**Oct 30: EXAM 2**

**Section 3:** In the previous sections, the course focused on **how** the government makes decisions, and how that changed over time. In the first part of this section, we focus on **what** the government does, i.e. on policy. In the final weeks, we put the institutions and policy trends of the US in comparative perspective, by introducing details of other systems in Europe as well as the political system of Texas.

Week 11 - 12 (Nov 2 – 16): Public Policy

* Lowi e. al., Ch. 15-17

Week 13 (Nov 18 – 25): American Politics in Comparative Perspective

* Readings for this week will be posted on Canvas

Week 14 (Nov 30 – Dec 4): Texas Politics

* Readings for this week will be posted on Canvas

**Final Exam: December 9, 9:00 AM – 12:00 Noon, Location TBD**