2311-005: GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON, DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
SPRING SEMESTER 2011
COURSE OUTLINE

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Class location: 116 University Hall
Class time: Mon/Wed/Fri, 1:00-1:50pm

Office hours: Wednesday, 11:00am-12:00pm, or by appointment

Please note: The best and fastest way to reach me is by email.

COURSE CONTENT AND DESCRIPTION:

Albert Einstein argued that the purpose of a university education is not to teach students just facts, but to teach them to think. To this end, this course will introduce students to the politics of the United States. It is divided into five sections: Section A introduces the course through a conceptual discussion of politics and American government. Section B considers American political culture, as the underlying foundation of politics in the country. Section C examines various institutions of American government and politics. Section D explores the conduct of American politics at the public and elite levels. Finally, Section E focuses on how all these elements come together and produce outcomes in the form of American foreign policy.

It is advisable that students keep up with current developments in American politics. Although this is not a course on current events per se, these will of necessity be part of the general discussions and may be used as examples to highlight a particular point or issue. Students can follow developments on-line in all major media outlets—such as CNN, The New York Times, The Washington Post, BBC, and so on.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the course students will be familiar with the organization of and various processes within American politics, and the impact of these processes on select aspects of American foreign policy. To meet these goals the course has the following objectives:

- Identify key concepts and theoretical frameworks used for investigating American government and the political process. This provides us with the
appropriate tools for our exploration of this subject, including how political scientists analyze and interpret the foundations, institutions, processes, and actors that constitute American government and politics.

**Describe** the structure and functions of branches of the US government and the political processes that underlie them. This equips us with a range of necessary facts that are vital to informed discussion.

**Understand** the current shape of American government and politics. Building on the previous objective, this takes us into a deeper, more detailed examination of the formation of these facts.

**Think critically** about American government and politics. It is easy to take a stance on a given issue, but more difficult to defend that stance in a logical manner that rests on a judicious, nuanced, and open-minded foundation of understanding. Learning to think critically allows us to do so.

**Connect** this knowledge to a better understanding of politics in general, in any region of the world. By sharpening our critical thinking and analytical skills, we can more effectively take on the problems faced by societies everywhere.

**FORMAT:**

The course is conducted within a lecture framework. But class time will be used for general discussions, in order to give students more time to discuss their own ideas and to understand the material through dialogue. Because this is a university course, students are expected to actively participate in class discussions, and are encouraged to question and debate with the instructor and each other on the various issues. This must be done in a productive and civil manner. Personal attacks and polemics will not be tolerated. The purpose of a freer flow of dialogue is to better understand and absorb the materials covered in class, and offensive actions and ideological or political agendas impede this process. Students who engage in such activities will have to leave the class.

PowerPoint will be used, but only to provide a skeletal outline of the lectures; students must pay attention to and take notes on what is said in class. Otherwise, they will not learn what is necessary for the course and the assignments.

The lectures are based in part on the readings, but will not necessarily directly discuss them; it will be assumed that students have done the readings.

Both the professor and the students have obligations and responsibilities in this course. My responsibilities include making clear the objectives and material of the course; training students to think critically; returning assignments within a
reasonable period of time with adequate comments and suggestions for improvement; treating students with respect and a willingness to hear their opinions and ideas; and keeping my own personal politics out of the classroom.

Students’ responsibilities include taking seriously the purposes and assignments of the course; preparing themselves adequately for the lectures; handing their assignments in on time; treating each other and the professor with respect and a willingness to hear other opinions and ideas; and a readiness to think about the material with an open mind while keeping their own personal politics out of the classroom.

Students are also responsible for their own attendance and participation in class. Students who do miss class are responsible for obtaining the material discussed in class from their colleagues. I will not provide notes from lectures or discussions, but I am happy to discuss the material with a student who has already obtained the information. Poor attendance and poor participation will reflect on your final grade.

All cell phones, gadgets for listening to music, playing games, or contacting other people, and all similar devices must be turned off prior to the beginning of class. Students who engage in such activities will have to leave the class.

Please note that topics may change or may not be covered, depending on unforeseen circumstances. Any such changes are at the instructor’s discretion. If there are any changes, they will be announced in class; students then are responsible for knowing whether and when any changes have been made.

**Required Readings:**

There are three sources of mandatory readings for this course:


- Journal articles (in PDF form) available on e-reserves at the library. To access these, log in with your UTA NetID and password to the library’s website (“Catalog,” then “Course Reserves”). Library reserve readings will be referred to as (Library).

- Specific URLs available on the course Blackboard. To access these, log in with your UTA NetID and password at <https://elearn.uta.edu/webapps/login/>. Blackboard readings will be referred to as (Blackboard).
ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADE DISTRIBUTION:

There will be five 50-minute in-class tests on Monday, February 7, on Monday, February 28, on Wednesday, March 23, on Friday, April 15, and on Friday, May 6. Each test is worth 20% of the final grade. The first test will cover the material up to and including the class on February 4; the second test will cover the material up to and including the class on February 25; the third test will cover the material up to and including the class on March 21; the fourth test will cover the material up to and including the class on April 13; the fifth test will cover the material up to and including the class on May 4.

All lectures, class discussions, readings, and any other materials included in the course will be covered in the tests. The format for the tests is: one multiple-choice section and one short answer section. Students may not use books, notes, electronic devices, or anything else to help write their tests. Students who are late to a test will not be given extra time to finish.

There will be no make-up tests, barring a very serious development or illness. Common but invalid excuses include (but are not limited to): car troubles; visiting friends or relatives; having other work. If there is an illness, students will have to provide a medical note—not one in which a doctor writes that the student confirms he/she was sick, but a detailed note explaining that the doctor knows for a fact that the student was sick on the day of the test and could not be expected to write. Documentation must be provided for any missed test within five school days after the missed test, regardless of the reason, and is subject to verification. Any requests for a deferral must be made before the date of the test for a make-up to be considered, and are at the professor's discretion. A missed test must be made up within five school days after the date of the original scheduled test. No make-up will be allowed after five school days, and a grade of zero will be assigned for that test.

Please note that no extra credit work is provided or allowed, regardless of circumstances. Please also note that not completing a given test and instead re-weighting the worth of the other course tests is not an option.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:

Neither the professor nor the university has any tolerance for any form of academic dishonesty. Students who engage in such activities will face serious penalties, ranging from (among others) failure of the assignment, failure of the course, suspension, or expulsion from the university. According to the Regents' Rules and Regulations, academic (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, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.”

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:**

The University of Texas at Arlington is committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation. As the professor I am required by law to provide “reasonable accommodations” to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. It is the students’ responsibility to inform me of their need for accommodation and in providing authorized documentation through designated administrative channels. You may contact the Office for Students with Disabilities for more information: (817) 272-3364, or www.uta.edu/disability.

**DROPPING THE COURSE:**

Students are responsible for deciding whether or not they should drop the course, and for being aware of the consequences of doing so. The last day to drop classes is **April 1, 2011**. Students should see their respective departmental advisors for more information.

**STUDENT SUCCESS PROGRAMS:**

The University of Texas at Arlington supports a variety of programs to help students connect with the University and achieve academic success. These programs include learning assistance, developmental education, advising and mentoring, admission and transition, and federally funded programs. Students requiring assistance academically, personally, or socially should contact the Office of Student Success Programs at (817) 272-6107, or http://www.uta.edu/uac/studentsuccess-home/.

- **Test #1:** 20% (Monday, February 7, in class)
- **Test #2:** 20% (Monday, February 28, in class)
- **Test #3:** 20% (Wednesday, March 23, in class)
- **Test #4:** 20% (Wednesday, April 15, in class)
- **Test #5:** 20% (Friday, May 6, in class)
**Grading Scale:**

A  80-100%
B  70-79%
C  60-69%
D  50-59%
F  0-49%

**Course Schedule:**

*Section A: Introduction*

**Wednesday, January 19:** Introduction to course

*No readings.*

**Friday, January 21:** What is politics?

Patterson, pp. 15-20; 7-12.

**Monday, January 24:** Why do we need government?

Patterson, pp. 525-545.

**Wednesday, January 26:** *How to write a test for this class*

*No readings.*

*Section B: Political Culture*

**Friday, January 28:** American political culture

Patterson, pp. 1-7; 568-569; 589-590.

**Monday, January 31:** The founding of America

John O'Sullivan, “Annexation.” *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 17, no.1 (July-August 1845): 5-10. (Blackboard)

**Wednesday, February 2:** The founding of America, cont.

Patterson, pp. 26-33.

**Friday, February 4:** The founding of America, cont.

Ibid.
Monday, February 7:  
*Test #1 (in class)*

Wednesday, February 9:  
The Constitution  
Patterson, pp. 33-60.

Friday, February 11:  
The Constitution, cont.  
Ibid.

Monday, February 14:  
Federalism  
Patterson, Chapter 3 (66-104).

Wednesday, February 16:  
Federalism, cont.  
Ibid.

Friday, February 18:  
Civil liberties  
Patterson, Chapter 4 (105-148).

Monday, February 21:  
Civil liberties, cont.  
Ibid.

Wednesday, February 23:  
Civil rights  
Patterson, Chapter 5 (149-188).

Friday, February 25:  
Civil rights, cont.  
Ibid.

Monday, February 28:  
*Test #2 (in class)*

Section C: Institutions

Wednesday, March 2:  
Congress  
Patterson, Chapter 11 (366-410).

Friday, March 4:  
Congress, cont.  
Ibid.
Monday, March 7: Presidency

Patterson, Chapter 12 (411-452).

Wednesday, March 9: Presidency, cont.

Ibid.

Friday, March 11: Bureaucracy

Patterson, Chapter 13 (453-487).

Monday, March 14: Spring break—No class

Wednesday, March 16: Spring break—No class

Friday, March 18: Spring break—No class

Monday, March 21: Bureaucracy, cont.

Ibid.

Wednesday, March 23: Test #3 (in class)

Section D: Politics

Friday, March 25: Public opinion

Patterson, Chapter 6 (189-222).

Monday, March 28: Public opinion, cont.

Ibid.

Wednesday, March 30: Political parties

Patterson, Chapter 8 (250-292).

Friday, April 1: Political parties, cont.

Ibid.

Monday, April 4: Interest groups

Patterson, Chapter 9 (293-328).
Wednesday, April 6: Interest groups, cont.

Ibid.

James Madison, “Federalist No.10.” In Patterson, pp. 651-655.

Friday, April 8: Elections and voting behavior

Patterson, Chapter 7 (223-249).

Patterson, pp. 355-358.

Monday, April 11: Elections and voting behavior, cont.

Ibid.

Wednesday, April 13: The 2008 presidential elections

Patterson, pp. 347-354, 358-359.

Friday, April 15: Test #4 (in class)

Section E: Foreign Policy

Monday, April 18: Contours of American foreign policy

Patterson, pp. 596-602, 614-622.

Wednesday, April 20: Contours of American foreign policy, cont.


Friday, April 22: Foreign policy during the Cold War


Monday, April 25: Influences on American foreign policy

Wednesday, April 27: Influences on American foreign policy, cont.


Friday, April 29: US hegemony after the Cold War


Monday, May 2: September 11 and the “war on terror”

Patterson, pp. 602-606.


Wednesday, May 4: Foreign policy toward the Middle East

US President Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on a New Beginning,” Cairo, Egypt. 4 June 2009. (Blackboard)

Friday, May 6: *Test #5 (in class)*