2311-005: GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES

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

Professor: Brent E. Sasley
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Class location: 116 University Hall
Class time: Mon/Wed/Fri, 1:00-1:50pm

Office hours: Monday, 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 the main 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, 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 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 underline 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.

Communicating by E-mail:

Outside of class, email is the best way to reach me. Please use standard polite greetings and address me not as a close friend but as your professor. Please note that one-line comments or questions are not enough for me to know what you are trying to say: be sure your email provides enough detail and explains the context of your comment or question, including which course you are emailing about.
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 tests. Four of them will be written in class, on Friday, September 16, on Monday, October 10, on Monday, October 31, and on Monday, November 21. The last test will be written during the university’s final exam period, on Monday, December 12, from 11:00am–1:30pm. Note that this last test is not an exam but the same in format, length, and grade as the previous tests. It will also be written in the same classroom.

Each test is worth 20% of the final grade. The first test will cover the material up to and including the class on September 14; the second test will cover the material up to and including the class on October 8; the third test will cover the material up to and including the class on October 29; the fourth test will cover the material up to and including the class on November 19; the fifth test will cover the material up to and including the class on December 9.

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 three 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 three 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 November 4, 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% (Friday, September 16, in class)
Test #2: 20% (Monday, October 10, in class)
Test #3: 20% (Monday, October 31, in class)
Test #4: 20% (Monday, November 21, in class)
Test #5: 20% (Monday, December 12, 11:00am-1:30pm)

GRADING SCALE:

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

COURSE SCHEDULE:

Section A: Introduction

Friday, August 26: Introduction to course

   No readings.

Monday, August 29: What is politics?

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

Wednesday, August 31: Why do we need government?

   Patterson, pp. 525-545.

Friday, September 2: How to write a test for this class

   No readings.

Monday, September 5: Labor Day—No class
Section B: Political Culture

Wednesday, September 7: American political culture
Patterson, pp. 1-7; 568-569; 589-590.

Friday, September 9: The founding of America
John O'Sullivan, “Annexation.” United States Magazine and Democratic Review 17, no.1 (July-August 1845): 5-10. (Blackboard)

Monday, September 12: The founding of America, cont.
Patterson, pp. 26-33.

Wednesday, September 14: The founding of America, cont.
Ibid.

Friday, September 16: Test #1 (in class)

Monday, September 19: The Constitution
Patterson, pp. 33-60.

Wednesday, September 21: The Constitution, cont.
Ibid.

Friday, September 23: Federalism
Patterson, Chapter 3 (66-104).

Monday, September 26: Federalism, cont.
Ibid.

Wednesday, September 28: Civil liberties
Patterson, Chapter 4 (105-148).

Friday, September 30: Rosh Hashanah—No class

Monday, October 3: Civil liberties, cont.
Ibid.
Wednesday, October 5: Civil rights
   Patterson, Chapter 5 (149-188).

Friday, October 7: Civil rights, cont.
   Ibid.

Monday, October 10: Test #2 (in class)

Section C: Institutions

Wednesday, October 12: Congress
   Patterson, Chapter 11 (366-410).

Friday, October 14: Congress, cont.
   Ibid.

Monday, October 17: Presidency
   Patterson, Chapter 12 (411-452).

Wednesday, October 19: Presidency, cont.
   Ibid.

Friday, October 21: Bureaucracy
   Patterson, Chapter 13 (453-487).

Monday, October 24: Review class

Wednesday, October 26: Review class

Friday, October 28: No class

Monday, October 31: Test #3 (in class)

Section D: Politics

Wednesday, November 2: Public opinion
   Patterson, Chapter 6 (189-222).
Friday, November 4: Public opinion, cont.

Ibid.


Monday, November 7: Political parties

Patterson, Chapter 8 (250-292).

Wednesday, November 9: Interest groups

Patterson, Chapter 9 (293-328).

Friday, November 11: Interest groups, cont.

Ibid.

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

Monday, November 14: Elections and voting behavior

Patterson, Chapter 7 (223-249).

Patterson, pp. 355-358.

Barbara Bradley Hagerty, “The Tea Party’s Tension: Religion’s Role in Politics,” NPR, September 30, 2010. (Listen to the story [5.59 minutes] or read the transcript.) (Blackboard)

Wednesday, November 16: Elections and voting behavior, cont.

Patterson, Chapter 7 (223-249).

Friday, November 18: The 2008 presidential elections

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

Monday, November 21: Test #4 (in class)
Section E: Foreign Policy

Wednesday, November 23: Contours of American foreign policy

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


Friday, November 25: Thanksgiving—No class

Monday, November 28: Influences on American foreign policy


Wednesday, November 30: Influences on American foreign policy, cont.


Friday, December 2: US hegemony after the Cold War


Monday, December 5: September 11 and the “war on terror”

Patterson, pp. 602-606.


**Wednesday, December 7:** 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, December 9:** US policy and the Arab Spring

President Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, March 28, 2011. (Blackboard)

Josh Rogin, “Why Has Obama Not Called For Assad to Go Yet?” Foreign Policy—The Cable, August 16, 2011. (Blackboard)

**Monday, December 12:** Test #5 (11:00am – 1:30pm)