2311-004: Government of the United States

University of Texas at Arlington, Department of Political Science
Fall Semester 2012
Course Outline

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

Office hours: Wednesdays, 11:00-12:00, 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. Section E focuses on the politics and some of the practice 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, Politico.com, 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. To meet these goals the course has the following objectives:

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.

Explain the foundations and shaping 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 discussed 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. Laptops and other electronic devices are acceptable for taking notes, but I reserve the right to prohibit their use if I determine they are being used for other activities.

Please note that the syllabus and course content may change, 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. Note that students must use their UTA MavMail account when communicating by email with me. I will *not* respond to any correspondence sent by a non-UTA email account. Students are responsible for regularly checking their UTA accounts, for information and correspondence both from the university and from me regarding course matters.

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 14, on Monday, October 8, on Wednesday, October 24, and on Friday, November 16. The last test will be written during the university’s final exam period, on Monday, December 10, from 11:00–11:50am. Note that this last test is *not* an exam
but the same in format, length (50 minutes), 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 12; the second test will cover the material up to
and including the class on October 5; the third test will cover the material up to and
including the class on October 22; the fourth test will cover the material up to and
including the class on November 14; the fifth test will cover the material up to and
including the class on December 5.

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 **multiple-choice and short
answer**. Students should purchase scantron forms for the multiple choice section.
Students may not use books, notes, electronic devices, or anything else to help write
their tests; phones or other electronic devices are also not allowed. 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 that, 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 **October 31, 2012**. 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/.

SUPPLEMENTAL INSTRUCTION:

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is a FREE voluntary academic development program that increases student performance and retention. The program is offered to all students in this class, as well as for other historically difficult subjects on campus. SI provides regularly scheduled out-of-class peer facilitated sessions. Senior students (SI Leaders), who have successfully taken the course before, facilitate structured group study sessions to support students to master course content and learn effective study skills. It is a great way to study while also getting to know students in your class. All SI Leaders receive extensive training. Session times will be presented by your SI Leader during the first week of class; alternatively you can visit our website at www.uta.edu/SI.

Test #1: 20%  (Friday, September 14, in class)
Test #2: 20%  (Monday, October 8, in class)
Test #3: 20%  (Wednesday, October 24, in class)
Test #4: 20%  (Friday, November 16, in class)
Test #5: 20%  (Monday, December 10, 11:00-11:50am, in class)
**Grading Scale:**

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

**Course Schedule:**

*Section A: Introduction*

**Friday, August 24:**  *No class – Watch introduction lecture on video on Blackboard*

*No readings.*

**Monday, August 27:**  *Special Instruction session on how to study and write a test for this class*

*No readings.*

**Wednesday, August 29:**  *What is politics?*

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

**Friday, August 31:**  *Why do we need government?*

Patterson, pp. 525-545.

**Monday, September 3:**  *Labor Day—No class*

*Section B: Political Culture*

**Wednesday, September 5:**  *American political culture*

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

**Friday, September 7:**  *The founding of America*

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

**Monday, September 10:**  *The founding of America, cont.*

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

Friday, September 14: Test #1 (in class)

Monday, September 17: Rosh Hashanah—No class

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

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

Monday, September 24: Federalism
   Patterson, Chapter 3 (66-104).

Wednesday, September 26: Yom Kippur—No class

Friday, September 30: Civil liberties
   Patterson, Chapter 4 (105-148).

Monday, October 1: Civil liberties, cont.
   Ibid.

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

Friday, October 5: Civil rights, cont.
   Ibid.

Monday, October 8: Test #2 (in class)

Section C: Institutions

Wednesday, October 10: Congress
   Patterson, Chapter 11 (366-410).
Friday, October 12: Congress, cont.
   Ibid.

Monday, October 15: Presidency
   Patterson, Chapter 12 (411-452).

Wednesday, October 17: Presidency, cont.
   Ibid.

Friday, October 19: Bureaucracy
   Patterson, Chapter 13 (453-487).

Monday, October 22: Bureaucracy, cont.
   Ibid.

Wednesday, October 24: Test #3 (in class)

Friday, October 26: Public opinion
   Patterson, Chapter 6 (189-222).

Monday, October 29: Public opinion, cont.
   Ibid.


Wednesday, October 31: Political parties
   Patterson, Chapter 8 (250-292).

Friday, November 2: Political parties, cont.
   Ibid.

Monday, November 5: Interest groups
   Patterson, Chapter 9 (293-328).
Wednesday, November 7: Interest groups, cont.

Ibid.

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

Friday, November 9: 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)

Monday, November 12: Elections and voting behavior, cont.

Patterson, Chapter 7 (223-249).

Wednesday, November 14: The 2008 presidential elections

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

Friday, November 16: Test #4 (in class)

Section E: Foreign Policy

Monday, November 19: Contours of American foreign policy

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

Walter Russell Mead, “The Carter Syndrome.” Foreign Policy, January/February 2010. (Blackboard)

Wednesday, November 21: Influences on American foreign policy


Josh Rogin, “Congress Prepares to Go After All Iranian Banks.” Foreign Policy—The Cable, March 6, 2012. (Blackboard)

Friday, November 23: Thanksgiving—No class
Monday, November 26: Influences on American foreign policy, cont.


Wednesday, November 28: US hegemony after the Cold War


Friday, November 30: September 11 and the “war on terror”

Patterson, pp. 602-606.


Monday, December 3: Foreign policy toward the Middle East

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

Wednesday, December 5: 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 10: Test #5 (11:00-11:50am)