## AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

# Government 310L 38765 Professor Daron Shaw Spring 2011

MEETING PLACE:JESTER A121.AMEETING TIME:MWF 1:00-2:00OFFICE:BATTS 4.146PHONE:232-7275EMAIL:dshaw@austin.utexas.eduOFFICE HOURS:M,F 10:00-11:30

### **TEACHING ASSISTANTS**

Huseyin Alptekin halptekin@gmail.com T 11:00-12:30, 3:30-5:00

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Each TA office at 1.118 Batts Hall.

#### **COURSE OVERVIEW**

This course is an introduction to American government and politics. While our main focus is on the national level, additional attention is paid to the state and local governments of Texas. In some instances, the American case is placed in a comparative context derived from the experience of other western democratic nations. In other instances, we focus on changes over time within the American political system to demonstrate how principles often change with context. At all times we are interested in a better understanding of how this particular system has developed and what it means for citizens of the United States.

There are three primary objectives in this course. The first is to provide basic descriptive information about the American and Texas political systems by examining important political processes, institutions, and actors. The second is to develop analytical skills by which to understand complex relationships and phenomena. The third is to introduce the work of the political scientist by concentrating on the paradigms and techniques of the discipline.

## **COURSE EVALUATION**

There will be two in-class midterm examinations that will determine your grade. Each exam will have two equally weighted components worth a total of 100 points. There are thus 200 total points available in the class.

MIDTERM 1	POINTS	QUESTIONS	DATE
Multiple Choice	50	50	March 7
Short-Answer	50	10	March 9
MIDTERM 2	POINTS	QUESTIONS	DATE
Multiple Choice	50	50	May 4
Short-Answer	50	10	May 6
TOTAL	200		

The exams are not cumulative. The first exam covers material up to and including "public opinion and voting behavior." The second exam covers material from "campaigns and elections" through "public policy." The exams encompass both reading and lecture material; the balance is approximately 60% lecture, 40% reading. As indicated by the figure above, each exam will be spread over two days. The first day will be multiple choice. Each item will have four response options. ("None of the above" or "B and C only" or "All of the above" are possible options.) The

second day will be short answer questions. You will be asked to write a sentence or two in response to specific questions. Your answer will be graded on a 0-5 scale in which you start off with a 0 and work your way up depending upon the quality of your answer. An answer that is basically correct, for example, is worth 3 points. An answer that demonstrates that you can actually apply the appropriate concepts to understand politics more broadly is worth 5 points. My approach is to reward analytical mastery rather than nit-picking you to death.

Overall grades will be based upon a curve. The highest point total achieved in the class will be used as the 100% score, and all other scores will be recalculated as a percentage of that total. For example, if the high score is 180 points and you have a total of 145, your "curved" score/percentage would be 145/180 or 80.5%. This would be a B-.

The "curved" grading scale is as follows:

93%-100%	Α
90-92%	A-
87%-89%	B+
83%-86%	В
80%-82%	B-
77%-79%	C+
73%-76%	C
70%-72%	C-
67%-69%	D+
63%-66%	D
60%-62%	D-
0%-59%	F.

There <u>will</u> be an opportunity for extra credit. The details are being worked out now, but you will be able to earn a few points for participating in a survey/experimental project (non-invasive, of course) for one of the other professors in the Government Department.

There will be <u>no early or make-up exams</u>, except for extreme emergencies (and I am the sole arbiter of what constitutes an extreme emergency). Incomplete grades are highly discouraged and will only be given in the direct of circumstances. Students must complete ALL assigned work to pass the course. Failure to complete all course requirements will result in a failing grade.

## **COURSE MATERIALS**

The following book is available at the University of Texas Coop:

• Theodore Lowi, Benjamin Ginsberg, Kenneth Shepsle, and Stephen Ansolabehere. *American Government: Power & Purpose.* 11<sup>th</sup> edition (2010 Election Update). Norton Publishing.

For information on Texas Government and Texas Politics, see:

http://texaspolitics.laits.utexas.edu/

I expect that you will be doing the readings during the week in which they are assigned, and that you will have them completed by Friday of that week.

## **COURSE FORMAT**

Class meetings run approximately 50 minutes and rely on a lecture format. However, I ask questions of the class and may call on students at random. On the other side of the lectern, questions and observations are always encouraged. I try to recognize those raising their hand to ask a question as soon as possible. Keep in mind that the lectures parallel, but do not repeat the readings. Because of this, not attending class is a particularly bad practice.

Anyone having difficulty with the course should feel free to see me after class or in office hours. If I can't help solve the problem myself, I can point you towards one of the many excellent support systems for students who need to improve their writing, research or study skills.

## **POLICY & PROCEDURES**

- ✓ It is distracting and discourteous to arrive late or leave during the lecture. I would discourage you from making a habit out of it.
- ✓ There will be no breaks during the class, so food, beverage and restroom necessities should be taken care of prior to class.
- ✓ Please turn off all cell phones and pagers prior to entering the classroom.
- ✓ You are permitted to use your laptops to take notes.
- ✓ You are not permitted to transmit, copy, or otherwise distribute lecture material without my expressed written consent.
- ✓ At a more general level, please show respect for the classroom environment.

#### STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any disabled student may request appropriate academic accommodations from the office of Services for Students with Disabilities (471-6259).

http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/

### **DISHONESTY**

Incidents of cheating, plagiarism, and general academic dishonesty will be treated as per university guidelines. Please note the Honor Code of the University:

http://registrar.utexas.edu/catalogs/gi09-10/ch01/index.html

#### INTERNET RESOURCES

If you want to use the Internet to keep abreast of what's happening in politics, I recommend the following sites:

http://www.cnn.com

http://www.foxnews.com

http://www.nytimes.com

http://www.washingtonpost.com

http://www.latimes.com

http://pcl.stanford.edu/

http://www.localnewsarchive.org/index.html

#### **Advertising**

http://livingroomcandidate.movingimage.us/index.php

http://www.c-span.org/classroom/govt/campaignads.asp

http://polisci.wisc.edu/tvadvertising/Index.htm

#### Money

http://www.fec.gov

http://www.opensecrets.com

http://www.followthemoney.org

#### **Election Data**

http://uselectionatlas.org

http://www.umich.edu/\_nes/index.htm

http://www.tlc.state.tx.us/redist/redist.htm

http://www.princeton.edu/~rvdb/JAVA/election2004/

For data for a specific state, check the Secretary of State's website (Election Division).

#### **Parties**

http://www.dems.org http://www.rnc.org

### **Texas Parties**

http://www.txdemocrats.org http://www.texasgop.org

## Polling

http://www.pollingreport.com/

http://www.vanishingvoter.org/

http://www.gallup.com

http://www.pollster.com

#### General

http://www.realclearpolitics.com

http://www.politicsone.com

http://www.vote-smart.org/index.htm

http://www.kidsvotingusa.org/

http://www.politico.com

http://www.huffingtonpost.com

http://fivethirtyeight.blogs.nytimes.com/

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

PP = Power and Purpose

Week	Dates	Subject	
1	Jan. 19-21	Introduction	PP: Chapter 1
		Pre-Constitutional Government	PP: pp. 32-36
2	Jan. 24-28	Pre-Constitutional Government	PP: pp. 37-43
		The Constitution	PP: pp. 43-50
3	Jan. 31-Feb. 4	The Constitution	PP: pp. 50-64
		Federalism	PP: Chapter 3
4	Feb. 7-11	Civil Liberties & Civil Rights	PP: Chapter 4
5	Feb. 14-18	Interest Groups	PP: Chapter 12
6	Feb. 21-25	Political Parties	PP: Chapter 11
7	Feb. 28-Mar. 4	Public Opinion	PP: Chapter 9
		Voting Behavior	PP: pp. 408-450
8	Mar. 7-9	MIDTERM EXAM	
	Mar. 11	Film: TBD	
	Mar. 14-18	SPRING BREAK	
9	Mar. 21-25	Campaigns and Elections	PP: pp. 451-465
		The News Media	PP: Chapter 13
10	Mar. 28-Apr. 1	The News Media	
		The Congress	PP: Chapter 5
11	Apr. 4-8	The Congress	
		The President	PP: Chapter 6
12	Apr. 11-15	The President	
		The Judiciary	PP: Chapter 8
13	Apr. 18-22	The Judiciary	
		Texas Government:	UT Liberal Arts website: Texas Politics
		Texas Constitution	
		The Legislature	
		The Executive	
		The Judiciary	
		Reforms?	
14	Apr. 25-29	Domestic Policy	PP: Chapter 15
		Economic Policy	PP: Chapter 14
		Foreign Policy	PP: Chapter 16
15	May 2	Catch-Up and Review	
	May 4-6	MIDTERM EXAM	