

Introduction to American and Texas Government

GOV 310L | Unique: [TBD]

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1 Course Description

This course is designed to provide an introduction to the processes and issues of United States and Texas government. The course will cover the relevant institutions in the development of the governmental process as well as discuss the role of the citizens in shaping our government.

2 Instructional Format

This course is taught in person through lecture and discussion; class time is where new material is introduced, so regular attendance and preparation are essential. Most class sessions include a graded in-class activity, and students should expect to be called on — including at random — to answer questions about the assigned material (see Section 5.3). On September 17 and October 29, the instructor will be out of town; the lecture for each of those days will be pre-recorded and posted to Canvas, and students should use that class period to work on their Content Application assignments.

3 Required Texts and Items

1. *American Government: Power and Purpose*, 16th edition. ISBN 978-0-393-53890-8.
2. No. 2 pencil for exams.
3. Additional readings, videos, and podcasts will be posted on Canvas.
4. Students are expected to be aware of current events and regularly read either the *New York Times* or *Washington Post*. Articles from these two media sources will be posted throughout the semester. Students should be prepared to answer questions related to the posted articles for papers and exams.

4 Films and Videos

Several films and videos are available on Canvas. Many of them will not be shown in class; it is the student's responsibility to take the time to watch the film and take notes. Below is a list of some of the films and their purpose.

1. Belton, David. 2010. "[A New Eden](#)." In *God In America*, ed. David Belton. Boston: WGBH Educational Foundation.

The purpose of this film is to establish an understanding of how religion was approached in the early years of the nation. My showing of this film is not an attempt to indoctrinate any thinking about how religion should operate in America. When watching this film, pay

particular attention to the discussion of separation of church and state as well as the discussion of religious freedom.

2. Espinosa, Paul. 1985. [The Lemon Grove Incident](#). Espinosa Productions.

The purpose of this film is to provide a vivid example of how the nation has come to define civil rights. When watching this film, pay special attention to the cause of the conflict, how the decision was contested, the final outcome, and the logic behind the final outcome.

5 Coursework

5.1 Citation

All written assignments require proper citation, including both in-text citations and full citations in a bibliography or footnotes/endnotes. This course uses the American Political Science Association (APSA) citation style.

5.2 Statement on the Use of Artificial Intelligence

The use of artificial intelligence tools (such as ChatGPT) in this class is strictly prohibited. This includes using AI to generate ideas, to outline an approach, to answer questions, to solve problems, or to create original language. All work must be your own.

5.3 Class Activities — 15%

The class activities grade will be determined by student participation in activities that will occur in and outside of class. Students are expected to attend each class session and will be asked to participate in certain activities outside of class. There will be a minimum of fifteen (15) class activities, with the five (5) lowest scores dropped.

As a way to ensure everyone stays mentally prepared and actively processes the material, a portion of the class activity grade will be based on student performance when “randomly” or “cold” called on.

5.3.1 Quizzes

In addition to in-class activities, students will complete a short Canvas quiz for each assigned textbook chapter. Each quiz will open on Canvas 24 hours before the class session covering that chapter and will close when class begins that day; there is no makeup for a missed quiz. Quiz scores count toward the Class Activities grade described above — students only receive credit for that day’s class activity if the corresponding chapter quiz has been completed.

5.4 Content Application Assignments — 15%

One goal of this course is to help students better understand how they can use government to help solve issues or problems of importance to them. Students will complete three (3) content application assignments (300–500 words each) in which they apply what they have learned in a specific section of the course to a particular problem of interest. Students will identify their issue in the first few weeks of the semester. Due dates are listed in the Course Schedule.

5.4.1 What Makes a Strong Content Application

Each content application should be built around a single, narrowly defined issue — not a broad topic. (“Unequal access to education” is workable; “inequality” is not.) At minimum, organize your answer into three paragraphs:

1. **Define the issue.** Describe it clearly, with facts or statistics that establish why it matters,

and note at least one concrete negative consequence.

2. **Explain the relevant class content.** Identify and clearly define the specific concepts, terms, or vocabulary from the course that apply to your issue. A grader should be able to name the key concepts you used after reading your answer. **Naming a course topic is not the same as explaining it.** Writing that your issue “relates to federalism,” “involves civil liberties,” “is a Congress issue,” or “connects to social movements” earns no credit on its own — those are chapter titles, not analysis. For each concept you invoke, you must (1) define it in your own words, (2) explain the underlying logic or mechanism as covered in class, and (3) connect that mechanism specifically to your issue. *Weak example:* “This is an issue of federalism because states and the federal government are both involved.” *Strong example:* “Under federalism, the Constitution reserves police power — including most public health regulation — to the states. Because [your issue] falls under that reserved authority, federal officials have limited direct tools to act, even though the public often holds them responsible; meaningful change is more likely to come from state legislatures than from Congress.”
3. **Apply that content to government action.** Explain how the concepts you identified can be used to understand how *government specifically* — not you personally, and not other private actors — can address the issue.

Give each of these three parts roughly similar weight; do not spend most of your answer describing the issue and only a sentence or two on class content and government action. Begin each paragraph with a clear topic sentence (e.g., “The issue I will be addressing is . . .” or “Concepts from this course can help explain how government might address . . .”). Cite your sources both in-text and in a full bibliography or footnotes/endnotes. Keep your personal opinions and experiences to a minimum — this assignment is about applying analytical tools, not expressing a viewpoint. Do not include introductory “hook” sentences or other filler; open by defining your issue. Do not exceed the word limit.

5.4.2 Requirements Designed to Keep This Assignment Your Own Work

The following requirements are built into each content application specifically so that the assignment cannot be completed by an AI tool in a single sitting, while keeping the total time commitment low:

- **A short in-class check-in.** On the class day before each content application is due, a portion of that day’s class activity will ask you to write two to three sentences identifying your issue and the specific class concept you plan to use. This takes only a few minutes, counts toward your existing Class Activities grade (it is not a separate assignment), and creates a dated record of your own thinking that your final submission should clearly build on.
- **One current news citation.** Each content application must cite at least one *New York Times* or *Washington Post* article about your issue published within 30 days of the due date, with a full citation (outlet, headline, date). Because this requires engaging with something published after any AI tool’s training data, it cannot be generated from memory.
- **Specific course citations.** Cite the specific class session (date and topic, per the Course Schedule) where the concept you are applying was covered, in addition to the textbook chapter and page number. Generic or unverifiable citations to “the textbook” or “class” will be returned ungraded.

A content application whose topic or sourcing is inconsistent with your in-class check-in, or that

cannot be verified against your own record of the semester, will be treated as an academic integrity concern under Section 5.2.

5.5 Career Preparedness Exercise — 10%

Because your time in college will swiftly pass, it is important for students to begin preparing themselves for their careers as soon as possible. The career preparedness exercise is intended to help students think about their future after college. The career preparedness exercise will require students to prepare:

1. Resume
2. Career plan

5.5.1 Guidelines for Career Plan

3–5 pages, double spaced, size 12 font, include page numbers. Your career plan must address each of the following:

1. Develop a refined list of career options by examining your interests, skills, and values through self-assessment.

Online Career Assessment Tests:

- [Princeton Review Career Quiz](#)
 - [Your Free Career Test](#)
 - [Assessment.com](#)
 - [What Career Is Right For Me](#)
2. Prioritize your top skills and interests. Indicate what is most important to you, such as money, family, location, or benefits. Make sure to include potential deal breakers, such as long hours, travel, or high turnover rate.
 3. Provide a realistic description of the aspects of the careers you are interested in pursuing. Make it clear what the day-to-day activities of this career entail and establish what skills are needed to advance in this career.
 4. Compare your most promising career options against your list of prioritized skills, interests, and values.
 5. Consider other factors, such as demand, barriers to entry, and needed qualifications. Discuss what issues may increase or decrease the demand for people in these careers. Make sure to discuss how you plan to overcome barriers to entry and earn the necessary qualifications for that career.
 6. Provide and justify at least one career choice. Describe what you have done to work toward the career choice, such as job experience, internships, and classes. Make sure you are realistic in making your career choice.
 7. Develop a realistic timeline to achieve your career goals.

Below are websites for some of the career services offices in the various colleges that can help you prepare your resume and career plan.

1. Undergraduate Studies: ugs.utexas.edu/vick/career

2. Fine Arts: finearts.utexas.edu/careers
3. Moody College of Communication: moody.utexas.edu/career-services
4. McCombs School of Business: mcombs.utexas.edu/career-services
5. College of Natural Sciences: cns.utexas.edu/career-services
6. Liberal Arts: liberalarts.utexas.edu/career-services
7. Jackson School of Geosciences: jsg.utexas.edu/careers
8. School of Information: ischool.utexas.edu/career/students
9. School of Social Work: socialwork.utexas.edu/dccs
10. College of Education: education.utexas.edu/about/offices/career-services
11. School of Nursing: nursing.utexas.edu/academics/career.html
12. School of Architecture: soa.utexas.edu/resources/career-services
13. Cockrell School of Engineering: enr.utexas.edu/ecac

5.6 Exam 1 — 15%

Exam 1 covers material from the readings, class discussions, and activities from the start of the semester through Civil Rights. The exam will consist entirely of multiple-choice questions, each offering more than five answer options. Some questions will have more than one correct response, and students must select all correct options to receive credit.

5.7 Exam 2 — 20%

Exam 2 covers material from the readings, class discussions, and activities on Congress through Political Parties. Like Exam 1, it will consist entirely of multiple-choice questions, each offering more than five answer options, with some questions having more than one correct response.

5.8 Final Exam — 25%

The course will have a comprehensive final exam on **Thursday, December 10, 8:00–10:00 AM**. The exam will cover all of the semester's material and will consist entirely of multiple-choice questions, each offering more than five answer options, with some questions having more than one correct response.

5.8.1 Exam Preparation

The best way to prepare for exams is to make sure that you fully understand the core concepts and how to apply them to a given situation. Because exam questions offer more than five options and may have more than one correct answer, do not rely on eliminating obviously wrong choices alone — you must be able to evaluate every option on its own merits. Remember that most of the concepts and events covered in this course are related to each other; understanding how they connect is critical to doing well.

Using notes during the exam

Students are allowed to use notes during each exam, under specific guidelines. Students may submit a 250-word document, via Canvas, containing notes for that exam. Notes for Exam 1 are due September 24 at 5:00 PM (CDT) — the class immediately before the exam. Notes for Exam 2 are due November 3 at 5:00 PM (CDT) — the class immediately before the exam. Notes for the

Final Exam are due December 3 at 5:00 PM (CDT) — the last class immediately before the final exam period.

6 Coursework Contribution to Final Grade

Class Activities	15%
Content Application	15%
Career Preparedness	10%
Exam 1	15%
Exam 2	20%
Final Exam	25%
Total	100%

Please note, there is no curve and grades are not rounded up. A 92.999% is an A-.

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

7 Expectations

7.1 Preparation

Doing well in this class necessitates that students be informed and prepared. Therefore, you will be expected to complete the readings prior to when class meets. This course covers a large amount of material in a short amount of time. If you do not keep up with the readings, your grade will reflect your preparation.

7.2 Professionalism

Remember that this is an academic environment. Therefore, I ask that you minimize unnecessary disruptions. This includes (but is not limited to) side conversations, cell phone calls, and pagers. If you come to class late or must leave early, please do so quietly. I also ask that you be proactive if any conflict occurs. This means notifying me ahead of time if you are unable to meet the requirements of the course.

7.3 Ground Rules

Because this course will sometimes deal with sensitive material, it is imperative that we set a series of ground rules.

1. Respect others. There will be times when you disagree with an idea that has been presented to the class. Although you have the right to disagree with someone, you must remember to challenge the idea and not the person.
2. Listen attentively. The purpose of this course is to present and discuss different ideas. In order to reap the benefits of such an exchange, you must be willing to pay attention to what others have to say.
3. Think before you speak. Refrain from making broad, general, and/or unsubstantiated comments. Make sure that you use evidence and provide a rationale for your statements.

4. Maintain the dignity of the academic environment. Your ideas should be presented using Standard English, minus the use of any profanity.
5. Raise your hand. This helps to maintain order in the classroom and helps to ensure that everyone has a chance to talk.
6. Be courteous. Refrain from interrupting or engaging in private conversation while others are speaking. Also, limit disruptive behavior, such as newspaper reading, personal grooming, etc.

7.4 Recording of Lectures

Advance, written permission is required to record classroom lectures, discussions, or presentations (“lectures”). When granted, permission to record lectures is subject to the limitations set forth in this policy. Violations of this policy may constitute copyright infringement in violation of federal or state law and may be subject to University disciplinary action.

II. Definitions

A. *Course Materials* mean lecture notes, outlines, slides, PowerPoint presentations, readings, or other content made available to students by the instructor or presenter, or through any University online learning system.

B. *Recording* means a video or audio replication or photographic image recorded on devices including, but not limited to, audio recorders, video recorders, cell phones, smartphones, digital cameras, media players, computers, or other devices that record images or sound.

III. Requirements and Limitations

A. Advance Written Permission

Recording of classroom lectures is prohibited unless advance written permission is obtained from the class instructor and any guest presenter(s). An instructor may provide such permission to an entire class as part of the course syllabus or other written description of a course. Students who require recording or other adaptations of lectures as a reasonable accommodation for a disability should contact the Office of Disability Support Services (DSS) in advance of the lecture to obtain permission for the recording.

In the event permission to record classroom lectures is granted, the professor may notify all students, speakers, and other lecture attendees in advance that recording may occur. Every effort should be made to protect the confidentiality of a student with a disability who is being granted an accommodation, i.e., the professor will not name the student who is doing the recording when it is due to a disability accommodation.

B. Limitations on Use of Recordings and Materials

Permission to allow lecture recording is not a transfer of any copyrights in the recording or related course materials. Such recordings and materials may be used only for individual or group study with other students enrolled in the same class, and may not be reproduced, transferred, distributed, or displayed in any public or commercial manner.

Students must destroy recordings at the end of the semester in which they are enrolled in the class.

7.5 Procedures for Dealing with Grade/Evaluation Concerns

Grade/evaluation concerns will only be considered if the following procedure is followed:

All grade complaints must be **TYPED** and must clearly express the student's specific concerns. These written statements must be accompanied by citations of support from course materials, i.e., readings, textbook, and/or lecture notes, to ensure accuracy.

Written statements may be submitted for consideration **AFTER** one week has passed since the assignment was returned to students. This allows the student time to re-read his/her answers and think carefully about what improvements could have been made.

Grade complaints will not be considered once two weeks have passed. For example, if I return a graded assignment on Thursday, September 17, students must submit a complaint **BEFORE** Thursday, October 1. Once class is over on that Thursday, no complaints will be considered for that assignment.

Since class time is limited, we will only deal with questions or concerns during scheduled office hours. You will need to file the grievance with the individual who graded your exam or assignment and, in addition, you will need to meet with them to discuss the grievance.

Finally, submitting a grade grievance will result in a complete re-grade of the assignment.

7.6 Changes to the Course

The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus to better facilitate the needs of the course.

8 University Policies

8.1 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 catalog.utexas.edu.

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.

8.2 Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from Disability and Access (formerly Services for Students with Disabilities), 512-471-6259, disability.utexas.edu. Students who require special accommodations for exams should contact Disability and Access to reserve space at their facility on exam days. Neither the instructor nor the teaching assistants will provide separate accommodations.

8.3 Title IX Reporting

Title IX is a federal law that protects against sex and gender-based discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual assault, sexual misconduct, dating/domestic violence, and stalking at federally funded educational institutions. UT Austin is committed to fostering a learning and working environment free from discrimination in all its forms. When sexual misconduct occurs in our community, the university can:

1. Intervene to prevent harmful behavior from continuing or escalating.

2. Provide support and remedies to students and employees who have experienced harm or have become involved in a Title IX investigation.
3. Investigate and discipline violations of the university's [relevant policies](#).

Faculty members and certain staff members are considered “Responsible Employees” or “Mandatory Reporters,” which means that they are required to report violations of Title IX to the Title IX Coordinator. **We are Responsible Employees and must report any Title IX related incidents** that are disclosed in writing, discussion, or one-on-one. Before talking with us, or with any faculty or staff member, about a Title IX related incident, be sure to ask whether they are a responsible employee. If you want to speak with someone for support or remedies without making an official report to the university, email advocate@austin.utexas.edu. For more information about reporting options and resources, visit titleix.utexas.edu or contact the Title IX Office at titleix@austin.utexas.edu.

8.4 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 to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

8.5 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 instructor in writing during the first week of class.

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

8.6 E-mail

Prof. McDaniel only responds to email if there is an extremely extenuating circumstance. If you have an issue that you need to discuss with him, please attend his office hours. If you cannot attend office hours, you may contact him to make an appointment. Please be aware that if you make an appointment to meet with Prof. McDaniel outside of his office hours and do not show up, there will be a grade penalty. When contacting the teaching assistant, please limit your e-mails to questions about class topics. Any grievances involving the class must be handled during office hours. Make sure to check the syllabus or Canvas first before sending an e-mail. In many cases they will answer your question. Finally, you are required to use proper etiquette when sending e-mail messages. The teaching assistant has been instructed not to reply to any emails that do not follow proper etiquette. For tips on proper e-mail etiquette, visit [101 Email Etiquette Tips](#).

8.7 Canvas

The syllabus, course assignments, and class announcements are posted on Canvas for reference. In addition, a portion of the course reading will also be available on Canvas. In special cases, the lecture notes will be available on Canvas as well. Make sure to regularly check Canvas for announcements and assignments. Before you contact me with a question for the class, *make sure to check Canvas first*.

8.8 Excused Absences

An absence from class will only be excused if proper documentation from a university representative is presented. If you have an emergency which prevents you from attending class, please contact the [Emergency Services Office in the Office of the Dean of Students](#) to gain documentation. In the case of planned activities, the documentation must be presented at least two weeks before your scheduled absence. I will not accept a planned activity as a valid excuse for an absence after the fact. In the case of unexpected circumstances, the documentation must be turned in within a week of your return.

8.9 Make-up Exams

Students will only be allowed to take the make-up exam if they have an excused absence.

9 Course Schedule

***The instructor expects the assigned materials to be completed before class begins.**

Date	Topic	Materials
Aug. 25	Course Introduction	
Aug. 27	What is Government?	Chapter One
Sept. 1	Public Policy	Chapter Fifteen
Sept. 3	Public Policy	Chapter Sixteen Video: Understanding the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill and the Fight for Reconciliation (PBS NewsHour) Video: The Story of Medicare: A Timeline (KFF)
Sept. 8	Constitution	Chapter Two
Sept. 10	Constitution	Primary Source: Madison, James. Federalist No. 51 (1788) Article: Checks and Balances In the U.S. Body Politic (Dartmouth News)
Sept. 15	Federalism	Chapter Three

Date	Topic	Materials
Sept. 17	Federalism (<i>No In-Person Class</i>)	No class meeting — Prof. McDaniel out of town. Watch the pre-recorded lecture on Canvas and complete: Primary Source: Madison, James. Federalist No. 10 (1787) Primary Source: Brutus. Brutus No. 1 (1787) Use this class period to work on your Content Application.
Sept. 22	Civil Liberties	Chapter Four Video: God in America, Ch. 2, “A New Eden”
Sept. 24	Civil Rights	Chapter Five Video: The Lemon Grove Incident
Sept. 29	EXAM 1	Bring No. 2 Pencil Content Application One Due
Oct. 1	Congress	Chapter Six
Oct. 6	Congress	Podcast: Stuff You Missed in History Class: Elbridge Gerry’s Monstrous Salamander
Oct. 8	Presidency	Chapter Seven Article: 12 of the Boldest Executive Orders in U.S. History
Oct. 13	Presidency	Chapter Eight
Oct. 15	Courts	Chapter Nine Article: Tracking the Major Supreme Court Cases of 2026 (CNN) Video: What We Learned About the Court This Term: An Animated Explainer (SCOTUSblog)
Oct. 20	Media	Chapter Fourteen Article: Overview and Key Findings of the 2026 Digital News Report (Reuters Institute)
Oct. 22	Interest Groups	Chapter Thirteen Article: Lobbying Firms Took In a Record \$5 Billion in 2025 (OpenSecrets)

Date	Topic	Materials
Oct. 27	Interest Groups	Video: Martin Luther King: But Not (Social Movements)
Oct. 29	Political Parties (<i>No In-Person Class</i>)	No class meeting — Prof. McDaniel out of town. Watch the pre-recorded lecture on Canvas and complete: Chapter Twelve Primary Source: Washington, George. Farewell Address (1796) — focus on the passage warning against “the baneful effects of the spirit of party” Article: This 1950 Political Science Report Keeps Popping Up in the News (Washington Post) Use this class period to work on your Content Application.
Nov. 3	Political Parties	Podcast: Stuff You Missed in History Class: Alabama Governor George Wallace
Nov. 5	EXAM 2	Bring No. 2 Pencil Content Application Two Due
Nov. 10	Public Opinion	Chapter Ten
Nov. 12	Public Opinion	Article: “Belonging Is Stronger Than Facts”: The Age of Misinformation (New York Times) Career Preparedness Exercise Due
Nov. 17	Political Participation	Article: 52nd Edition, Harvard Youth Poll (Institute of Politics, Harvard Kennedy School)
Nov. 19	Campaigns and Elections	Chapter Eleven
Dec. 1	Campaigns and Elections	<i>Electoral Systems: A Primer for Decision Makers</i> (Canvas)
Dec. 3	Foreign Policy	Chapter Seventeen <i>The Structure of Foreign Policy Attitudes in Transatlantic Perspective</i> (Canvas)
Mon., Dec. 7	No Class — Deadline Only	Content Application Three Due
Thurs., Dec. 10	FINAL EXAM, 8:00–10:00 AM	Bring No. 2 Pencil