

GOV310L: Introduction to American Politics

J. Alexander Branham

Fall 2016

Unique number 38305

Course time: MWF 11–11:50

Course location: UTC 4.102

Office hours: MW 9:30–11 and by appointment

Office location: MEZ 3.212

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Course website: <https://jabranham.com/GOV310L/>

Course description

This course serves as an introduction to politics in the United States. The course is broken into two parts. In the first half of the course, we will discuss the founding and the institutions that emerged from the Constitution. During the latter half of the semester, we will attempt to understand the public's role in American politics. At the completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate a basic understanding of U.S. politics
2. Participate knowledgeably in the American political process
3. Critically examine key concepts from political science

Assessment

Reaction Papers (20%) Two reaction papers are due throughout the course of the semester. These can be based on academic or civic events you attend, such as speakers on campus, or on academic journal articles. The subject should be cleared with me *before* writing the paper. I will distribute information about events and articles periodically throughout the semester. The papers should be no longer than two pages in length and should be submitted through Canvas.

- First reaction paper due: October 10, 2016
- Second reaction paper due: December 2, 2016

Canvas quizzes (10%) There will be weekly quizzes on canvas. You have two attempts to do these quizzes so if you're not satisfied with your first attempt you may retake it.

In-class quizzes: (20%) Quizzes will be in class and closed-note. They will not be announced beforehand, so always be prepared. You should expect roughly one quiz every two weeks. I will drop your lowest grade.

Exams (2): (50%) There will be two exams, one midway through the semester and the other at the end. They will be in-class and closed-note. The second will not cover material from the first.

- First exam: October 14, 2016
- Second exam: December 5, 2016

Course Policies

- Missing assignments: I do not let students make up assignments (quizzes or exams) barring exceptional circumstances. Let me know **now** if you have a conflict with one of the exams.
- I will make my slides available on the [course website](#).
- Email is the best way to get in touch with me. **I may not receive emails through Canvas's email system.** I will try to reply to emails received during weekday business hours within 24 hours. Emails received over the weekend or after business hours may take longer.
- You are expected to do the readings listed in the course schedule. The book we are using can be found [here](#) (American Government: Power and Purpose by Lowi et al, brief 13th edition), though there are cheaper copies available through other websites.
- The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact the Office of the Dean of Students at 471-6259, 471-6441 TTY.

Tentative Schedule

| Week | Week of | Topic | Readings |
|------|---------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Aug 22 | Intro and the founding | Ch 2 |
| 2 | Aug 29 | Liberties and rights | Ch 4 |
| 3 | Sep 5 | Federalism & Separation of Powers | Ch 3 |
| 4 | Sep 12 | Congress | Ch 5 |
| 5 | Sep 19 | The Presidency & Executive | Ch 6 & 7 |
| 6 | Sep 26 | The Courts | Ch 8 |
| 7 | Oct 3 | Issue spotlight: TBD | TBA |
| 8 | Oct 10 | Catch-up and first exam | None additional |
| 9 | Oct 17 | Public opinion | Ch 9 |
| 10 | Oct 24 | Political parties | Ch 11 |
| 11 | Oct 31 | Campaigns and elections | Ch 10 |
| 12 | Nov 7 | Interest groups | Ch 12 |
| 13 | Nov 14 | The media | TBA |
| 14 | Nov 21 | Issue spotlight: TBD | TBA |
| 15 | Nov 28 | Finish week 14 & catch-up | None additional |
| 16 | Dec 5 | Second exam | None additional |