

Course Name: GOVT 2305.003 - Introduction to American Government

Term: Fall 2025

Instructor: Dr. Conrad Sharpe

Email: conrad.sharpe@utdallas.edu

Institution: University of Texas at Dallas

School: Economic, Political, and Policy Sciences

Meeting Time: TTH 2:30PM – 3:45PM (In-Person)

Class Location: HH 2.402

Office Hours: Wednesday 10AM – 12PM or by appointment.

My Office: Green Building Room 3.820

Teaching Assistants:

-Ariel Ai-Men Wang: Ariel.Wang@UTDallas.edu

-Aashutosh Shah: Aashutosh.Shah@UTDallas.edu

Course Description

This course is dedicated to introducing students to the fundamentals of American government and politics. There are three parts to this course. The first examines the ideological, contextual, and developmental aspects of American politics and government. The second part builds upon this understanding and outlines the exact political processes that help create and participate in American politics. The third part focuses on how policies are introduced, debated, decided, and implemented by the legislative, judicial, and executive branches. Students will be exposed to a variety of material that will showcase, explain, explore, and endeavor to understand American Government and American political behavior.

Required Reading Materials

There are two required materials for this course: (1) a textbook, and (2) a subscription to a digital learning platform called Top Hat. Our textbook is fully integrated into Top Hat, which means that you cannot access the textbook without purchasing the Top Hat subscription.

Course Join Code: 980434

Both can be ordered via this link: [TopHat Registration Link](#)

Student Learning Objectives

- Think critically about issues related to government and politics—analyze and appreciate historical trends in the development of government institutions (constitutions, branches of government, political parties, elections, etc.), and apply knowledge of government institutions and theoretical and scholarly approaches to understand government behavior and current events.
- Effectively communicate issues of societal and personal import with others- meaningfully and respectfully express your positions and ideas on political and social issues to fellow students, community members, public officials, and representatives.
- Engage academically and professionally with a sense of social responsibility- recognize that individual actions can have consequences for society just as government actions can have consequences for individuals, and engage with the world around you with awareness and empathy.
- Exercise personal responsibility in how government functions-understand how to effectively interact with government to achieve desired outcomes, and begin a lifetime of active engagement with your government.

Notes About Class Materials

- These materials are only available by ordering through the link above or in the invitation link sent to your UT Dallas email address. You can purchase a voucher through the UT Dallas bookstore and redeem it through the Top Hat website. You will need both the redemption code and the course join code.
- Use your UT Dallas email to subscribe to Top Hat.
- If you already purchased a TopHat subscription for the Spring 2024 term, you only need to purchase the textbook for this course.
- You only need to purchase the semester-length subscription to complete this course.

Academic Honesty

Students are required to abide by the academic conduct policies outlined in the UT Dallas Code of Student Conduct. Examples of academic dishonesty include, but are not limited to cheating on exams, plagiarizing (from published sources or from fellow students), buying or selling assignments, altering grades, intentional deception, and collaborating with others without permission. Be very careful with the writing assignments. Use of another person's words without proper citation or copying from another person's work is considered plagiarism. I reserve the right to investigate when I suspect a violation of any of these policies. All violations of the university's academic conduct policies are turned over to the Dean of Students.

How to Contact Me

The best way to contact me is by e-mail. I will make every effort to answer your questions in a timely manner (usually within 24 hours during the normal work week). If you would like to set up a specific time to talk with me directly, e-mail me and we can schedule a time that it is mutually convenient to speak by telephone through Zoom or in-person if you would prefer.

Homework Submission Notes

- All homework assignments are completed through Top Hat.
- All homework assignments are due at 5:00 PMCT on the specified date.
- All homework assignments are due on Friday at 5:00 PM CT of the assigned week listed below.

Homework- 30%

There are 15 homework assignments in the course. Homework is integrated into the textbook via TopHat and is completed by answering the questions embedded in the weekly readings in each chapter. Final grades are calculated by taking the percent average of a student's 13 highest homework assignment scores, weighted as 40% of the final grade.

This provides students with the ability to miss up to two homework assignments without penalty. To receive full credit for the homework assignments, students must answer all of the questions in each chapter. The questions are worth one point each and evaluated equally on two factors: participation and correctness. Participation is whether you progressed through the chapter and attempted each question. Correctness is whether you provided the right answer to the question. Questions cannot be reopened after a submission is made. Below is a sample calculation for figuring out a grade on a homework assignment.

- Total number of questions in the chapter: 10
- Total number of questions attempted (participation): 10
- Total number of correct answers (correctness): 8
- Calculation: $(10 * 0.5) + (8 * 0.5) = 9$
- Assignment Score: 90%

Exams – 60% (Lowest Score Dropped)

There are four exams in this course: Exams 1-3 and a Final Exam. Final grades are calculated by taking the percentage of a student's three highest exam scores, weighted as 60% of the final grade. Students may miss up to one exam in the course without adversely impacting their grade. Alternatively, if a student completes all four exams, the three highest exam scores will be used to calculate their final grade.

I must stress that the material in these courses will be mixed with what I present in the classroom but also from the lecture notes that I read off so please pay attention! If I note anything important that is NOT mentioned in the PowerPoint, I will write it on the board.

Content for Exams 1-3 is primarily drawn from the lectures but will include some content from the text. For Exams 1-3, each exam covers chapters worth of content. For example, Exam 1 will only include content from Chapters 1-5 and so on. The Final Exam is comprehensive and will draw on content from Chapters 1-15 in the text.

Exams are conducted online through Top Hat but will be taken in person and will be monitored. Exams 1-3 will consist of 40-55 questions, while Exam 4 will consist of at least 100 questions.

Here is a nifty outline on what to expect from Tophat exams: [Student: Tests \(Exams, Quizzes and Tests\)](#)

Make-Up Exam Policy

Make-up exams are only scheduled for official UT Dallas-sponsored activities and religious holy days. Make-up exams will only be scheduled when the instructor is given sufficient notice of the absence prior to the exam. In this instance, sufficient notice is defined as written (email) notice sent at least 10 business days prior to the start of the exam period. If documentation is required, such as an excuse letter, then sufficient notice is not considered complete until all documentation is received. Plainly, all documentation and notice must be sent to the faculty member by email at least 10 business days prior to the opening of the exam. Students that have a religious holy day observance that conflicts with an exam must notify the faculty member by the end of the second week of this semester so that accommodation can be made.

To qualify for a make-up exam, the excused absence event must cover the entire duration of the exam window. If the student can complete an exam during the normal exam window, they are expected to do so in lieu of scheduling a make-up exam. Since exam content is drawn from lectures, all make-up exams will be scheduled after the regularly scheduled exam has occurred.

Attendance – 10%

- As an in-person course, attendance is expected and taken at the beginning of each class. You will be provided with a code at the beginning of class that will only be viable when near the computer that distributed it. In other words, ONLY students in the assigned classroom will be able to log in.
- To further incentivize attendance, there will be content covered and made available through the lecture which will not appear in the textbook but will appear on the exam. Partial notes are provided through textbook slides. To support the attendance policy, annotations or additions to the slides which are used in the lecture are not provided- students are expected to engage in note taking during the lecture.
- Consistent with the incentive outlined above, if a student misses class, they are encouraged to seek notes from a fellow classmate or to schedule an appointment during office hours. Lectures are not recorded and copies of class notes will not be sent by the instructor if a student misses class.

- A student's attendance record will be determined by the official roll (sign-in) taken during class. It is the student's duty to sign-in at the beginning of class. That means being in-class prior to the start of class. If a student misses the sign-in, then they will not be recorded as having attended class- emails or communications claiming attendance in lieu of signing-in are not accepted.
- If a student is experiencing difficulty utilizing the sign-in portal, they should reach out to the instructor as soon as possible to resolve the issue.

Extra Credit

- There are two types of extra credit opportunities over the course of this semester and they are:
 - **Type 1: Jeopardy Bash!**
 - Jeopardy 1 (Exam 1)
 - Jeopardy 2 (Exam 2)
 - Jeopardy 3 (Exam 3)
- These jeopardy sessions will be hosted the class BEFORE the exam.

Rules:

- As our class size is a bit large, I will split the classroom up into distinct teams.
- I will randomly nominate a person to be their representative and they will compete in the jeopardy game.
- The winning team will be given 2 extra credit points on the exam. (This is weighted by percentage. As there is 50 questions per exam which equals 2 points per question, the extra credit is worth one question.)
- To receive these extra credit points a team member MUST be present in the audience.
 - I check for this through Top Hat since I will take attendance at the end of class as usual.
- **Type 2: Movie Essays (2 points each)**
 - Mr. Smith Goes to Washington
 - [Mr Smith Goes To Washington : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)
 - All the King's Men (1949)
 - [All The King's Men \(1949\) Directed By Robert Rossen Starting Broderick Crawford, John Ireland, Mercedes McCambridge, Joanne Dru : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)
 - 12 Angry Men
 - [12 Angry Men \(1957\) : Sidney Lumet : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive](#)

Rules:

Remember, you need to do the following to get your extra credit:

1. Watch the Movie
2. Write a 250-word essay detailing the movie and how it relates to American Politics

3. Submit your essay with the following title in the Email Title: "Your Name" "Movie Name" "Course Name" "Class Section" and upload it to the designated elearning section. That way I have everything organized 😊
4. If you want to choose another movie, you have to get it approved by me.
5. These points can be applied to ANY exam of your choice and are worth 2 points each once you submit them. This is following the same scale as the Jeopardy bash (2 points = 1 question on an exam).

Exam Schedule

Exam	Date	Content
1	October 2 nd	Chapters 1 - 5
2	November 6 th	Chapters 6 - 10
3	December 9 th	Chapters 11 - 15

Class Schedule

August 26th	Introduction
August 28th	Chapter 1
September 2nd	Chapter 2
September 4th	Chapter 2 continued
September 9th	Chapter 3
September 11th	Chapter 3 continued
September 16th	Chapter 4
September 18th	Chapter 4 continued
September 23rd	Chapter 5
September 25th	Chapter 5
September 30th	Jeopardy Bash!
October 2nd	Exam 1 (Chapters 1 – 5)
October 7th	Chapter 6
October 9th	Chapter 6 Continued
October 14th	Chapter 7
October 16th	Chapter 7 continued
October 21st	Chapter 8
October 23rd	Chapter 8 continued
October 28th	Chapter 9
October 30th	Chapter 10
November 4th	Jeopardy Bash!
November 6th	Exam 2 (Chapters 6 – 10)
November 11th	Chapter 11
November 13th	Chapter 12
November 18th	Chapter 13
November 20th	Chapter 14
November 25th	No Class
November 27th	No Class
December 2nd	Chapter 15
December 4th	Jeopardy Bash!
December 9th	Exam 3 (Chapter 11 – 15)

Grading Scale

Consistent with UT Dallas policy, students are graded on a plus/minus scale. Please see the grade table below:

Grade	Top of Range	Bottom of Range
A+	100	≥ 97
A	< 97	≥ 93
A-	< 93	≥ 90
B+	< 87	≥ 84
B-	< 84	≥ 80
C+	< 80	≥ 77
C	< 77	≥ 74
D+	< 70	≥ 67
D	< 67	≥ 64
D-	< 64	≥ 60
F	< 60	

Comet Creed

- This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same: “As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.”

Mental Health Services

- Students experiencing anxiety or distress, either from the topics discussed in this class or from other stressors, are encouraged to seek self-care via the on-campus services provided:

Student Counseling Center

- Phone: 972-883-2575
- Location: Student Services Building SSB 4.600
- If you are having a mental health crisis you can call the 972-UTD-TALK or 911 24 hrs/7 days a week

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

- Please review the section within the UT Dallas Syllabus Policies and Procedures webpage.

Academic Support Resources

- Please visit the Academic Support Resources page to view the University’s academic support resources for all students.

UT Dallas Syllabus Policies and Procedures

- Please visit the Syllabus Policies page to view the University’s policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus.
- Please review the catalog sections regarding the credit/no credit or pass/fail grading option and withdrawal from class.

You read the entire syllabus! Good on you!

