

**UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT
GOVT 2305, SECTION 138
SYNONYM 40975
Fall 2009**

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Course Objective

This course is a general introduction to the national government of the United States and is designed to present students with information regarding the basic facts about the U.S. government. The underlying objective is to help students gain an understanding of how the American political system works, both in its separate parts and as a whole, by examining not only the constitutional intent but also the modern reality of government and politics in the United States. In addition, this course seeks to develop your ability to think critically about government and politics in order that you are able to engage in thoughtful and meaningful political deliberation that is central to our system of government.

The course introduces a framework for understanding United States government and politics, its constitutional basis, and its processes, institutions, and policies. The textbook used reflects the variety and diversity of scholarship on the political system as well as the pluralism in the political system itself. The core concepts which characterize the U.S. political system – such as fragmented governing authority, individual rights, and the enduring cultural ideals which serve to unify the people – are examined in the textbook and provide the analytical tools to help you understand both the formal structure of government and the actual day-to-day workings of our national political institutions.

Text

We the People: A Concise Introduction to American Politics, by Thomas Patterson. Eighth Edition, McGraw-Hill, 2009.

Course Policies

Since this is a lecture-based course, each student is expected to attend class regularly and to complete the assigned readings in accordance with the schedule on the last page of this syllabus. Although I do not take attendance, regular attendance is expected; lack of attendance will affect your ability to do well in this course.

With regard to classroom behavior, students are expected to be attentive to the lectures, except when properly recognized by the instructor to interject comments (see Academic Freedom and Class Participation below) or to ask questions. Students who are disruptive, talk out of turn, interrupt other students or the instructor, will simply be asked to leave the classroom for the day and not be able to return until the next class meeting. If the behavior continues, the student may be dropped from the course at the discretion of the instructor.

I will **NOT** withdraw students from this class. It is up to you to monitor your progress throughout the semester and to initiate withdrawal proceedings if necessary. The last day to withdraw is **Monday, November 23, 2009**. To withdraw from a class you must do it officially by filling out the required form with Admissions and Records.

Furthermore, **NO INCOMPLETES** will be given unless there is a valid reason, such as a medical emergency documented by a physician. To request an Incomplete, a student must contact me directly and

explain the reason that they need a temporary grade of “I”, and complete the necessary form. In general, it is better to do the work when it is assigned and thus avoid being disappointed or frustrated if you cannot justify receiving an incomplete.

Scholastic Dishonesty

Acts prohibited by the College for which discipline may be administered include scholastic dishonesty. Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating on an exam or quiz, plagiarism (using another author’s words or arguments without attribution), and collusion (the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing written work for the fulfillment of any course requirement).

Academic work submitted by students shall be the result of their thought, research, or self-expression. Academic work is defined as, but not limited to, tests, quizzes (whether taken electronically or on paper), projects (either individual or group), classroom presentations, papers, and homework.

If a student commits any of the above actions, the instructor will seek disciplinary action in the form of an academic penalty (which will include a zero on the academic work in question and may include a course grade of ‘F’). Such disciplinary action will be at the discretion of the instructor following College procedures outlined in the Student Handbook.

Academic Freedom and Class Participation

Each student is strongly encouraged to participate in class discussions. In any classroom situation that includes discussion and critical thinking, particularly about political ideas, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. Students may not only disagree with each other at times, but the students and instructor may also find that they have disparate views on sensitive and volatile topics.

It is the instructor’s hope that these differences will enhance class discussion and create an atmosphere where students and instructor alike will be encouraged to think and learn from each other. Therefore, be assured that students’ grades will not be adversely affected by any beliefs or ideas expressed in class or in assignments. Rather, we will all respect the views of others when expressed in classroom discussions.

Although this is essentially a lecture oriented course, class meetings are always more productive (and more interesting for both you and me) when you ask questions, interject comments, express opinions, and, in general, contribute to the learning process. Furthermore, borderline grades may be affected by a student’s class attendance, participation, and effort.

Finally, any course in government and politics must, in my view, include a discussion of current events, policy decisions, legislative debates, electoral strategies, and other political events that occur on a daily basis. You will be better able to participate in and learn from these discussions if you remain attentive to current affairs by reading a daily newspaper or watching a daily local newscast.

FERPA

Since this is a college course offered by Austin Community College, different laws regulating access to a student’s academic information apply. FERPA (The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) is a federal law that pertains to the release of and access to educational records. FERPA exists to protect personal identifiable information in educational records of a student. Under this law, a student has the right to inspect or review their own educational records, to request to amend their own educational records; and to have some control over the disclosure of information of their own educational records. In other words, the instructor must keep private all information regarding the student, including grades, from anyone (including your parents or guardians), except those that might be designated by the student to have access to that information. If you wish to allow your academic records (including discussions of your class performance) to be released to your parents/guardians (or anyone else) you must complete a form (which can be provided to you by your professor).

Further information regarding FERPA and its guidelines can be obtained by going to the website of the Department of Education which deals with aspects of this law:

<http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>

Office for Students with Disabilities

Each ACC campus offers support services for students with documented physical, cognitive, or psychological disabilities. Students with disabilities must request reasonable accommodations through the Office for Students with Disabilities on the campus where they expect to take the majority of their classes. Students are encouraged to do this three weeks before the start of the semester.

Course Requirements and Grading Policy

There will be **THREE** in-class examinations (**October 1, November 3, and December 10**). Each exam will consist of the materials covered in the assigned unit. The tests will consist of thirty (30) multiple choice questions (each worth two points), ten (10) True/False questions (each worth two points), and two short essay questions (each worth ten points) for a total of 100 points on each exam. The test questions will be based on the class notes, handouts, textual readings and key terms that are located at the end of each chapter in your textbook. Make-up exams will only be given if there is an excused absence (such as a medical emergency documented by a physician), which will be determined by the instructor on an individual basis. Makeup exams are in the same format as the original exams, unless the student does not have what is determined to be an excused absence, in which case the format for make-up exams is all essay questions. Make-up exams will be provided in the College and Career Center, and must be completed by noon on **December 10, 2008**. Students will be required to make an appointment with Mr. Terry Sheneman, Transition Counselor, to arrange an appropriate time to take the exams.

In addition to the exams, students will be asked to fulfill a **RESEARCH PROJECT** which will consist of writing a 100 point research paper, five to eight pages in length. Separate class handouts will provide students with detailed explanations of this paper. Between the exams and the papers there will be a possible total of 400 points that can be accumulated.

The final class grades will be based on accumulated points:

Grade	Total Points
A	360-400
B	320-359
C	280-319
D	240-279
F	239 or fewer

The best way to do well in this course is to attend class regularly and take good notes, keep up with the required readings, ask questions when you need to (either in class, during office hours, or by email), get the notes from someone else in the class when you are absent, and find a study partner or study group when it comes time to prepare for exams. If you are concerned about your grades at any time during the semester, please feel free to talk to me. I will be happy to help in any way I can.

Course Outline

Unit 1: Framework (August 25 – October 1)

American Political Culture (Chapter 1)
Constitutional Democracy (Chapter 2)
Federalism (Chapter 3)
Civil Liberties (Chapter 4)
Equal Rights (Chapter 5)
Exam Unit 1 – October 1

Unit 2: Political Participation (October 6 – November 3)

Public Opinion and Political Socialization (Chapter 6)
The News Media (Chapter 10)
Political Participation and Voting (Chapter 7)
Political Parties, Candidates, and Campaigns (Chapter 8)
Interest Groups (Chapter 9)
Exam Unit 2 – November 3

Unit 3: Institutions and Public Policy (November 5 – December 10)

Congress (Chapter 11)
The Presidency (Chapter 12)
The Federal Bureaucracy (Chapter 13)
The Federal Judicial System (Chapter 14)
Economic Policy (Chapter 15)
Exam Unit 3 – December 10

Class Presentations

August 25	Introduction, Lecture (Chapter 1)
August 27	Lecture (Chapter 1)
September 1	Lecture (Chapter 2)
September 3	Lecture (Chapter 2)
September 8	Lecture (Chapter 2)
September 10	Lecture (Chapter 3)
September 15	Lecture (Chapter 3)
September 17	Lecture (Chapter 4)
September 22	Lecture (Chapter 4)
September 24	Lecture (Chapter 5)
September 29	Lecture (Chapter 5)
October 1	Exam, Unit 1
October 6	Lecture (Chapter 6)
October 8	Lecture (Chapter 6)
October 13	Lecture (Chapter 10)
October 15	Lecture (Chapter 7)
October 20	Lecture (Chapter 7)
October 22	Lecture (Chapter 8)
October 27	Lecture (Chapter 8)
October 29	Lecture (Chapter 9)
November 3	Exam, Unit 2
November 5	Lecture (Chapter 11)
November 10	Lecture (Chapter 11)
November 12	Lecture (Chapter 12)
November 17	Lecture (Chapter 12 and 13)
November 19	Lecture (Chapter 13)
November 24	Lecture (Chapter 13 and 14)
November 26	NO CLASS (Thanksgiving Break)
December 1	Lecture (Chapter 14)
December 3	Lecture (Chapter 14 and 15)
December 8	Lecture (Chapter 15)
December 10	Exam, Unit 3

Research Paper Due Date: November 24, 2009