Course Description & Objectives

This course is designed to provide a survey of the institutions within the American government and the behavioral trends in American Politics. Each week examines, in detail, the scholarly arguments over the complexities of each topic and how to use the literature to identify details necessary when analyzing a question. Upon completion of this class, students should be prepared to take an advanced seminar on a subfield of American politics and evaluate arguments in American politics that are worth of appearing on a comprehensive exam.

Required Books

All texts can be found in the bookstore or online.


Additional required readings can be found on the course web page.

Student Evaluation

Participation

I believe attendance and actively participating in discussion are an important part of a class, which is why participation will make up 150 points of your final grade. The participation grade is a proportion of the high quality contributions to class discussion throughout the class meetings. Note: *Incorrect answers during class discussion will not count against you, but you should not expect points in those cases.* Students attentively taking notes, but not engaging in discussions or helping their peers should expect to receive 113 of the 150 points. Texting, email, and “researching trends in public opinion” via social networks detracts from your participation in class and this score.

Legislative History: Applied Writing Exercise

As a staffer to a politician or an advocate for an issue it is important to know the full history and context of the current law. The outcome of this assignment should be a simple annotated outline that explains the most important details relating to the content of a law. The process of creating the final draft is an involved
research process that requires the researcher to collect all of the relevant information, synthesize the concepts, and determine what the consequences of each course of action was. As you present this information, justify observations by finding the original source documents. Identify each source with either a footnote or by embedding a hyperlink to the actual government document if it is available online.

*Suggested steps to begin this process*

1) Choose a law.

2) Identify all of the stages that legislative action and debate occurred.

3) Map connections between different decisions to see if such decisions were independent or influenced by a past agreement.

4) If an action was to be taken, examine whether the implementation of the law matched the intent of the initial lawmakers.

A legislative history is a research tool used by lawyers and legislative staffs to understand the context that helped galvanize support for a policy in order to explain how a decision was made through the political process. There is no page requirement, but most papers are somewhere between 5 and 7 pages in length to explain what you found through all of your research. Format for the paper should be typed, and single-spaced with one-inch margins. *Reading your own work is helpful, as your grade will be penalized for grammatical and spelling errors, as well as omissions of important topics from the paper.* Late submissions will lose 10 points for each day after the due date.

**Poster: Academic Writing Exercise**

In academia a poster is a way to professionally display your research in a concise manner. With a poster the author is able to separate their analysis into different sections as one would in a paper (literature review, theory, methods, findings, and conclusion). In this environment a researcher’s work is able to stand on its own, while also allowing the author to help guide the audience through their research process.

Ahead of the Presidential Preference Primary, members of the class are to analyze one issue that is expected to play a consequential role in Texas elections. If the opportunity to show how the topic you investigate interacts with other aspects of the electoral process, be sure to highlight those connections in your research.

*Suggested steps to begin this process*

1) Research Prospectus (Sept 21): Identify the aspect of voting you will focus on (money, convenience, registration, etc) and outline hypotheses that will be examined in the project.

2) Concisely develop an argument, present evidence, and draw conclusions in a poster format.

3) Upload poster electronically to Blackboard (before Nov. 30) for the class to view. Also provide a summary to sell why the issue is important. *Poster and summary will be worth 150 points.*

4) Provide thoughtful comments and questions on the work of your peers. *The quality of the comments and question will make up 50 points.*

5) Acknowledge and respond to the peer comments, particularly if they are addressed to concerns you explored as you developed your research. *The quality of the responses will make up 50 points.*

The poster should be one document, however the size can vary. A standard size is 36” high and 48” wide. All text should be typed, single-spaced, and all copyrights for images that were not generated by the author need to be documented. A poster can be created through Microsoft Powerpoint, Adobe Illustrator, InDesign, or other open source softwares. *Reading your own work is helpful, as your grade will be penalized for
grammatical and spelling errors, as well as omissions of important topics from the paper. Late submissions, after 6PM on November 30, will lose 10 points each day.

Graphs and charts to display your data analysis should be created by the author in Excel, Stata, R, or another program.

Dartmouth College provides directions and a template to use: http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ugar/undergrad/posterinstructions.html

Grading

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<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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<td>Discussion Leadership (x2)</td>
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<td>Weekly Journal Reports</td>
<td>150</td>
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<td>Election Research Prospectus (Sept 21)</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legislative History (Oct. 26)</td>
<td>200</td>
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<td>Academic Poster (Nov 30)</td>
<td>250</td>
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<td>Written Exam (Dec 7)</td>
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<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
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Student Conduct

I have high expectations for each student in this class, which are based on your academic performance to get to this point and my belief that you will treat each of your fellow classmates with respect. My goal is to facilitate a supportive and engaging classroom for everyone and one part of that is eliminating disruptive behavior. I will allow computers in-class for note taking. However, it is unacceptable to use your cell phone or computer during class to chat, surf the web, talk, or text. Using technology in this way during class is distracting to others and demonstrates a lack of respect for the instructor.

Academic Honesty

It is your responsibility to avoid plagiarism, cheating, and dishonesty. The University of Texas at Tyler Policies and Procedures for Student Affairs will be strictly followed and can be found here at: http://www.uttyler.edu/mopp/documents/8Student%20Conduct%20and%20Discipline.pdf. Tests and assignments are designed to assess your understanding of the material—do not reference another student’s answers.

Violations of academic integrity are serious and will have a negative consequence on your classroom performance. In each instance a violation occurs, a failing grade will be assigned for the assignment or the course, require work to be redone, and have you identify what the cause of the violation was. The matter will be referred to the Dean of Students if institutional action is necessary. Reference the rights and responsibilities of students: http://www.uttyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php.

Grade Replacement/Forgiveness and Census Date Policies:

Students repeating a course for grade forgiveness (grade replacement) must file a Grade Replacement Contract with the Enrollment Services Center (ADM 230) on or before the Census Date of the semester in which the course will be repeated. Grade Replacement Contracts are available in the Enrollment Services Center or at http://www.uttyler.edu/registrar. Each semesters Census Date can be found on the Contract itself, on the Academic Calendar, or in the information pamphlets published each semester by the Office of the Registrar.
Failure to file a Grade Replacement Contract will result in both the original and repeated grade being used to calculate your overall grade point average. Undergraduates are eligible to exercise grade replacement for only three course repeats during their career at UT Tyler; graduates are eligible for two grade replacements. Full policy details are printed on each Grade Replacement Contract.

The Census Date is the deadline for many forms and enrollment actions that students need to be aware of. These include:

- Submitting Grade Replacement Contracts, Transient Forms, requests to withhold directory information, approvals for taking courses as Audit, Pass/Fail or Credit/No Credit.
- Receiving 100% refunds for partial withdrawals. (There is no refund for these after the Census Date)
- Schedule adjustments (section changes, adding a new class, dropping without a “W” grade)
- Being reinstated or re-enrolled in classes after being dropped for non-payment
- Completing the process for tuition exemptions or waivers through Financial Aid

State-Mandated Course Drop Policy:

Texas law prohibits a student who began college for the first time in Fall 2007 or thereafter from dropping more than six courses during their entire undergraduate career. This includes courses dropped at another 2-year or 4-year Texas public college or university. For purposes of this rule, a dropped course is any course that is dropped after the census date (See Academic Calendar for the specific date).

Exceptions to the 6-drop rule may be found in the catalog. Petitions for exemptions must be submitted to the Enrollment Services Center and must be accompanied by documentation of the extenuating circumstance. Please contact the Enrollment Services Center if you have any questions.

Disability Services:

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) the University offers accommodations to students with learning, physical and/or psychiatric disabilities. If you have a disability, including non-visible disabilities such as chronic diseases, learning disabilities, head injury, PTSD or ADHD, or you have a history of modifications or accommodations in a previous educational environment you are encouraged to contact the Student Accessibility and Resources office and schedule an interview with the Accessibility Case Manager/ADA Coordinator, Cynthia Lowery Staples. If you are unsure if the above criteria applies to you, but have questions or concerns please contact the SAR office. For more information or to set up an appointment please visit the SAR office located in the University Center, Room 3150 or call 903.566.7079. You may also send an email to cstaples@uttyler.edu.

Student Absence due to Religious Observance:

Students who anticipate being absent from class due to a religious observance are requested to inform the instructor of such absences by the second class meeting of the semester.

Student Absence for University-Sponsored Events and Activities

If you intend to be absent for a university-sponsored event or activity, you (or the event sponsor) must notify the instructor at least two weeks prior to the date of the planned absence. At that time the instructor will set a date and time when make-up assignments will be completed.
Social Security and FERPA Statement:

It is the policy of The University of Texas at Tyler to protect the confidential nature of social security numbers. The University has changed its computer programming so that all students have an identification number. The electronic transmission of grades (e.g., via e-mail) risks violation of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act; grades will not be transmitted electronically.

Emergency Exits and Evacuation:

Everyone is required to exit the building when a fire alarm goes off. Follow your instructors directions regarding the appropriate exit. If you require assistance during an evacuation, inform your instructor in the first week of class. Do not re-enter the building unless given permission by University Police, Fire department, or Fire Prevention Services.

If you have any questions or concerns about what is expected or permissible in this course or about academic integrity in general, please contact me.

Class Schedule

**August 24**  
Studying American Politics and Democratic Theory  
*Readings:* La Raja, Raymond. 2013. *New Directions in American Politics.* (Introduction)


**August 31**  
*Online:* The U.S. Constitution and its Development  
*Readings:* La Raja, Raymond. 2013. *New Directions in American Politics.* (Chapter 1)


**Sept 7**  
Labor Day

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1Should the class schedule need to be amended, I will advise the class in advance by email and via the Lyceum page
Sept 14  Coalition Formation and Agenda-Setting

Readings: Harbridge, Laurel. 2015. *Is Bipartisanship Dead?*


Sept 21  Online: Congress: Competition and Representation


Sept 28  Veto Politics and Executive Action

Readings: La Raja, Raymond. 2013. *New Directions in American Politics.* (Chapter 3)


Oct 5  
**Online:** Institutional Design, Oversight, and Policy Outcomes  
**Readings:** La Raja, Raymond. 2013. *New Directions in American Politics.* (Chapter 2)


Oct 12  
**The Court System and Judicial Politics**  

La Raja, Raymond. 2013. *New Directions in American Politics.* (Chapter 4)


Oct 19  
**Online:** Interest Groups  
**Readings:** La Raja, Raymond. 2013. *New Directions in American Politics.* (Chapters 5 and 6)


Oct 26  Polarization and Voting


La Raja, Raymond. 2013. *New Directions in American Politics.* (Chapters 8 and 9)


Nov 2  Online: Political Parties

Readings: La Raja, Raymond. 2013. *New Directions in American Politics.* (Chapter 5)


Nov 9  Online: Who Votes?

Readings: La Raja, Raymond. 2013. *New Directions in American Politics.* (Chapter 11)


Nov 16 Online: Presidential Campaigns: The Primary and Electoral College

Readings: La Raja, Raymond. 2013. *New Directions in American Politics*. (Chapter 9)


Nov 30 Online: Poster Work Shop - Help Texas Vote: Reflections on Diversity, the Electoral Process, and Public Support

Readings: Shaw, Daron and James Gimpel. 2012. “What if We Randomize the Governor’s Schedule? Evidence on Campaign Appearance Effects from a Texas Field Experiment.” *Political Communication* 29: 137-159.

Dec 7 Written Exam