

POLS 2305 · Introductory American Government

Section 003 (80593) · Fall 2026

Instructor: Allan Tellis, Assistant Professor

Class Meetings: Monday, Wednesday, Friday · 1:00–1:55 PM · CAS 104

Term: August 24 – December 12, 2026

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 10:30 AM–11:30 AM, and by appointment

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Course Description

This course introduces the institutions, processes, and conflicts of American national government. We treat politics as a game in the analytical sense: a set of rules (the Constitution and the laws built on it), a set of players (parties, interest groups, the media, voters, and the institutions themselves), and a set of stakes (who gets what, when, and how).

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, you will be able to:

1. Explain the constitutional structure of American government and the reasoning behind its design.
 2. Analyze how federalism, separation of powers, and checks and balances shape policy outcomes.
 3. Evaluate political information critically, including polling data and news coverage.
 4. Describe how parties, interest groups, the media, and elections connect citizens to government.
 5. Trace how a policy problem moves through Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy, and the courts.
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Required Materials

Our textbook is free, no purchase required:

Bryant, Kenneth Jr., Eric Lopez, and Mark Owens. *Game of Politics: Conflict, Power, and Representation*. UT Tyler Press, 2020.

Available as a PDF on Canvas.

Supplemental readings for Week 12 (civil liberties and civil rights) will be posted to Canvas.

Everything else you need, assignment prompts, study guides, slides, and readings, will be on Canvas.

Grading

Component	How it's earned	Points
Quizzes	6 quizzes @ 3 points; lowest score dropped , 5 count	15
Participation	Holistic, per the rubric below	10
Application Assignments	5 @ 3 points each	15
Midterm Exam	Friday, October 16, in class	15
Final Paper	Due Wednesday, December 2	25
Final Exam	Finals week, December 7–11	20
Total		100

Grading scale: A = 90–100 · B = 80–89 · C = 70–79 · D = 60–69 · F = below 60

Quizzes and Exams

- **Quizzes (3 points each):** 2 identifications, 2 multiple choice, 1 short answer.
- **Midterm (15 points):** 4 identifications · 8 multiple choice · 1 of 3 short answers · 1 short essay.
- **Final Exam (20 points):** 4 identifications · 16 multiple choice · 2 of 3 short answers · 1 short essay. *Covers material taught after the midterm only*

The Semester Issue Project

You will choose one political issue in the first week and follow it all semester. Five short application assignments will build your analysis one piece at a time, and your final paper will stitch them all together.

#	Assignment	Due	Focus
1	Your Issue & the Constitutional Foundation	Fri Sep 4	Issue selection
2	Federalism & the Information Environment	Fri Sep 18	Federalism, polling, media framing
3	Political Parties & Interest Groups	Fri Oct 2	Party positions, group strategy
4	The Bureaucracy	Fri Oct 30	Which agency, doing what
5	Courts & Congress (Rule-Making)	Fri Nov 13	A bill or a case
6	Final Paper	Wed Dec 2	5–6 pages; explains <i>why</i>

Each Application Assignment is 150–250 words and worth 3 points.

Assignment 1 requires my approval of your issue. I will return an approval, or a request to revise, with your grade, within one week. An issue that is too broad, not currently contested, or not covered by accessible sources will not work for your project. It is far better to change course in September than to discover in November that your issue cannot sustain a five-page paper.

The Final Paper then asks you to wrestle with an *explanatory* question about your issue; not what is happening, but why it is happening this way. The full prompt and rubric on will be on Canvas.

Course Policies

Attendance

You may miss four class meetings for any reason with no penalty and no explanation required. Use them for illness, work conflicts, car trouble, or a day you simply need. Beyond four, each absence reduces your final course grade by 2 points.

Excused absences that do not count against your four:

- **Observation of Religious holy days.**
- **University-sponsored activities**
- **Active military service**
- **Jury duty or a required court appearance**

- **Documented illness, injury, or family emergency**, including care for a dependent. Contact me as soon as you are able; you do not need to disclose medical details.

Documentation should reach me within one week of your return. Work missed during an excused absence may be made up on a schedule we set together.

Participation (10 points)

Participation means being present, prepared, and engaged. I assess it holistically at the end of the semester using the scale below, and I will post an estimate at mid-semester so no one is surprised.

Points	What it looks like
9–10	Consistently present and prepared. Contributes regularly to discussion, small-group work, or in-class activities. Responds to classmates rather than only to me. Engages seriously with the discussion prompts and the "Your Issue" segments.
7–8	Consistently present and generally prepared. Participates reliably in small-group work and occasionally in full-class discussion.
5–6	Present but rarely engaged. Participates mainly when called on. Frequently unprepared for the day's reading.
3–4	Frequently absent or disengaged. Little evidence of preparation.
0–2	Rarely present, or present but disruptive.

Speaking in front of the whole class is one route, not the only one. Contributions in small groups, written in-class responses, thoughtful questions, and substantive engagement during office hours all count.

Quizzes: Make-Ups and the Dropped Score

There are six quizzes, and your lowest score is dropped, so five count toward your grade.

- If you miss a quiz, that quiz becomes your dropped score. There is no make-up for a first missed quiz, because the drop already covers it. This applies whether the absence was excused or not.
- If you miss a second quiz for a documented, excused reason, you may take one written make-up. Request it within one week of the missed quiz. Only one make-up is available per semester.
- A third missed quiz is recorded as a zero.

Quiz dates are printed on the calendar below and will not move without at least one week's notice.

Late Work

Application Assignments and the Final Paper may be submitted up to three days late, with a penalty of 5% per day. After three days the work is no longer accepted and receives a zero.

- If a documented emergency will prevent you from meeting a deadline, contact me before the deadline whenever possible. I am far more flexible in advance than after the fact.

Exams and Make-Ups

Make-up exams are available only for a documented serious illness or emergency. Request one within one week of the missed exam. Make-ups will be held on a single announced date.

Return of Graded Work

I will return graded work within one week of the due date in most cases, and within two weeks in all cases. Quizzes are usually returned at the next class meeting. Midterm exams will be returned before the university's withdrawal deadline (October 30) so that you can make an informed decision about the course.

Artificial Intelligence

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. Faculty and students must not use protected information, data, or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool. Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources, and/or biased. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

For this course, you may use generative AI tools (ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot, Gemini, and similar) for studying, brainstorming, and explanation: generating ideas, quizzing yourself, asking for a concept to be explained a different way, or checking whether you have understood a reading.

You may not use AI to produce work you submit as your own. Do not use it to draft, write, rewrite, paraphrase, expand, or translate any part of an Application Assignment, the Final

Paper, a quiz, or an exam. Do not submit AI-generated text, whether or not you have edited it.

Disclosure. If you used AI in any way while working on a submitted assignment, add two or three sentences at the end: which tool, what you asked it, and how it affected your work. Undisclosed use is an academic integrity violation.

Ordinary writing tools like spell check, grammar check, citation generators do not require disclosure. Tools that generate sentences or ideas for you do.

If I have a concern. AI-detection software is unreliable and produces false accusations, particularly against multilingual writers. I will not base a grade or an accusation on a detector score. If something in your work raises a question, I will ask you to meet with me and walk me through your sources, notes, and drafts. Keep your notes and drafts until the semester ends.

Classroom Conduct

We will frequently discuss contested political questions. We will observe two rules to ensure these discussions work effectively: critique arguments, not people, and represent a position you disagree with accurately before you argue against it. You are never required to disclose or defend your own political views in this class, and your grade does not depend on them.

Phones away, laptops for notes only.

Course Calendar

No class Labor Day (Sep 7) or Thanksgiving week (Nov 23–27). Readings should be completed according to the schedule.

Wk	Date	CI	Topic	Reading	Due
1	Mon Aug 24	1	Welcome to the Game of Politics	—	
1	Wed Aug 26	2	What Is Politics? Conflict, Power & Representation	—	
1	Fri Aug 28	3	The Declaration & the Social Contract	Ch. 1	
2	Mon Aug 31	4	The Articles of Confederation	Ch. 1	
2	Wed Sep 2	5	The Constitutional Convention	Ch. 1	

Wk	Date	Cl	Topic	Reading	Due
2	Fri Sep 4	6	The Constitution: Structure & Principles	Ch. 1	Quiz 1 · App 1
3	Mon Sep 7	—	<i>Labor Day — no class</i>		
3	Wed Sep 9	7	Federalism: Dual vs. Cooperative	Ch. 1	
3	Fri Sep 11	8	Federalism in Action + Public Opinion	Ch. 1–2	
4	Mon Sep 14	9	Public Opinion: Measurement & Polling	Ch. 2	
4	Wed Sep 16	10	Media Literacy & Public Opinion	Ch. 2	
4	Fri Sep 18	11	Political Parties: Functions & History	Ch. 10	Quiz 2 · App 2
5	Mon Sep 21	12	Political Parties Today	Ch. 10	
5	Wed Sep 23	13	Interest Groups	Ch. 7	
5	Fri Sep 25	14	The Media as a Political Institution	Ch. 9	
6	Mon Sep 28	15	Campaigns & Elections	Ch. 11	
6	Wed Sep 30	16	Voting Behavior & Turnout	Ch. 11	
6	Fri Oct 2	17	Elections & Representation	Ch. 11	Quiz 3 · App 3
7	Mon Oct 5	18	Congress: Structure & Bicameralism	Ch. 3	
7	Wed Oct 7	19	Committees & Leadership	Ch. 3	
7	Fri Oct 9	20	How a Bill Becomes a Law	Ch. 3	
8	Mon Oct 12	21	Representation & Redistricting	Ch. 3	
8	Wed Oct 14	22	Midterm Review	—	
8	Fri Oct 16	23	MIDTERM EXAM		Midterm

Wk	Date	CI	Topic	Reading	Due
9	Mon Oct 19	24	The Presidency: Constitutional Powers	Ch. 4	
9	Wed Oct 21	25	Presidential Leadership & Persuasion	Ch. 4	
9	Fri Oct 23	26	The Modern Presidency	Ch. 4	Quiz 4
10	Mon Oct 26	27	The Bureaucracy: Structure & Role	Ch. 5	
10	Wed Oct 28	28	Bureaucratic Power & Oversight	Ch. 5	
10	Fri Oct 30	29	Street-Level Bureaucracy	Ch. 5	App 4
11	Mon Nov 2	30	The Federal Judiciary	Ch. 6	
11	Wed Nov 4	31	Judicial Review & <i>Marbury</i>	Ch. 6	
11	Fri Nov 6	32	The Supreme Court Today	Ch. 6	Quiz 5
12	Mon Nov 9	33	Civil Liberties	Canvas	
12	Wed Nov 11	34	Civil Rights	Canvas	
12	Fri Nov 13	35	Liberties & Rights in Context	Canvas	App 5
13	Mon Nov 16	36	Public Policy Making	Ch. 8	
13	Wed Nov 18	37	Policy Types & the Policy Process	Ch. 8	
13	Fri Nov 20	38	Policy Feedback & Evaluation	Ch. 8	Quiz 6
—	Nov 23–27	—	<i>Thanksgiving — no class</i>		
14	Mon Nov 30	39	Final Paper Workshop	—	
14	Wed Dec 2	40	Synthesis: Conflict, Power & Representation	—	FINAL PAPER
14	Fri Dec 4	41	Final Review & Farewell	—	

Wk	Date	CI	Topic	Reading	Due
—	Dec 7–11	—	FINAL EXAM — date, time, and room posted on Canvas		Final Exam

This syllabus is subject to minor revision. Any change will be announced in class and posted on Canvas with reasonable notice.