

Course Syllabus

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INTRODUCTORY AMERICAN GOVERNMENT

POLS 2305-62

Dr. Kenneth Bryant Jr.

CAS 125

kbryant@uttyler.edu (<mailto:kbryant@uttyler.edu>)

Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays, 12:30–2:00 PM

www.drkbjr.com  (<http://www.drkbjr.com>)

This syllabus provides the general plan for the course. Adjustments may be made as the semester develops. Changes will be announced through Canvas.

INTRODUCTION

This course approaches American government by asking, how does power work, by design?

People bring different experiences, interests, identities, and values into political life. Institutions establish rules. Rules create incentives and constraints. Political actors make decisions within those environments. Those decisions produce outcomes. Those outcomes then redistribute resources, opportunities, influence, and political power.

Throughout the course, we will return to a common framework:

**PEOPLE → RULES → INCENTIVES → RESOURCES → POWER = OUTCOMES → FEEDBACK →
CHANGE**

The Constitution, federalism, civil liberties, civil rights, Congress, the presidency, courts, bureaucracy, political parties, elections, public opinion, media, interest groups, and public policy are therefore not isolated topics.

They are interconnected parts of a political system.

Our goal is to understand not only **what American government does**, but why the system repeatedly produces some outcomes rather than others.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. **Explain the constitutional foundations of American government**, including federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances, and representative government.
2. **Describe the roles and powers of major American political institutions**, including Congress, the presidency, judiciary, and bureaucracy.
3. **Distinguish civil liberties from civil rights** and explain how constitutional interpretation, institutions, political conflict, and social movements have shaped their development.
4. **Explain how citizens participate in American politics** through elections, political parties, interest groups, public opinion, media, and other forms of political action.
5. **Analyze American politics as a system**, identifying relationships among people, values, institutions, rules, incentives, decisions, outcomes, feedback, and change.
6. **Identify how political rules distribute power** and create different opportunities, constraints, and incentives for political actors.
7. **Evaluate who benefits and who bears costs from political decisions and institutional arrangements**.
8. **Recognize political tradeoffs** and explain why different values or institutional arrangements can produce different policy preferences.
9. **Use evidence to evaluate political arguments** rather than relying solely on ideology, assumption, partisan identity, or unsupported claims.
10. **Explain how political systems change**, including the role of elections, public opinion, institutional reform, social movements, political leadership, and feedback from previous outcomes.

GRADE

Assignment	Percentage
Quizzes	35%
Discussions	25%
Film Screenings	20%
Final Assignment: Balance Your Budget	20%
TOTAL	100%

POWER, BY DESIGN MODULES

Most course modules will include some combination of:

Power, by Design lectures that introduce the concepts, institutions, rules, incentives, and political relationships central to the module.

Readings and course materials that provide evidence, examples, competing interpretations, or additional context.

Quizzes as an assessment of the foundational knowledge necessary to analyze the political system.

Discussions to apply concepts, examine political tradeoffs, make decisions, analyze cases, or explain how a system produces a particular outcome.

Film Screenings that allow you to examine how political power and institutions are experienced by actual people.

QUIZZES

Quizzes account for **35% of the course grade**.

They assess your understanding of the foundational concepts, institutions, constitutional arrangements, political processes, and relationships introduced in the **Power, by Design** lectures and assigned course materials.

Questions are designed primarily to determine whether you understand the material.

You should be prepared to identify concepts, distinguish between related ideas, recognize examples, and explain basic relationships within the American political system.

Specific quiz availability and deadlines are listed in Canvas.

DISCUSSIONS

Discussions account for **25% of the course grade**.

You may be asked to:

- analyze a political scenario;
- make a decision under a particular set of institutional rules;
- compare competing political values;
- apply the systems framework to a contemporary or historical case;
- respond through written, audio, or video formats;
- evaluate how changing one rule might alter political incentives or outcomes.

FILM SCREENINGS

Film Screenings account for **20% of the course grade**.

Films allow us to study politics from a perspective traditional textbooks often cannot provide: **what political systems look and feel like when people experience them**.

For each assigned screening, you may be asked to respond through a short written, audio, or video reflection.

FINAL ASSIGNMENT

BALANCE YOUR BUDGET

The final assignment accounts for **20% of the course grade**.

You will complete a federal budget simulation requiring you to make choices about government spending, taxation, deficits, and competing public priorities.

The exercise is deliberately difficult.

Government budgets reveal political values because resources are limited. Increasing funding in one area may require reducing spending elsewhere, raising revenue, accepting additional debt, or making other tradeoffs.

GRADE ASSIGNMENT

Below 60 = F

60 and less than 70 = D

70 and less than 80 = C

80 and less than 90 = B

90 and less than 100 = A

POLITICAL VIEWPOINTS

You do not need to share your political identity or political beliefs with me.

You will encounter controversial issues in this course because controversial issues are part of American politics.

You may also encounter arguments with which you strongly disagree.

Encountering an argument is not the same as being asked to endorse it.

Your grade is based on your ability to:

- **understand concepts;**
- **use evidence;**
- **recognize competing values;**
- **identify rules and incentives;**
- **analyze political outcomes;**
- **and explain your reasoning.**

It is not based on whether your conclusions match mine.

One of the goals of this course is to become capable of explaining a political position accurately **before deciding what you think about it.**

To master the subjective, first master the objective.

ACADEMIC WORK & AI

Artificial intelligence tools can generate plausible political explanations very quickly. They can also confidently produce incorrect information, fabricated evidence, shallow analysis, or responses that do not demonstrate your understanding of the course.

Unless an assignment specifically states otherwise, **the work you submit should represent your own analysis and understanding.**

You remain responsible for the accuracy of anything you submit.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN YOUR OWN WORK? is THE question

If you cannot explain the argument, evidence, reasoning, or decisions contained in a submission, then the assignment has not served its purpose.

ACCESSIBILITY & ACCOMMODATIONS

Students who require academic accommodations should work with UT Tyler's **Student Accessibility and Resources (SAR)** office.

Approved accommodations will be implemented consistent with university policy and the essential requirements of the course.

Because this is an online course, accommodations may apply differently to timed quizzes, videos, discussion formats, screenings, or other digital activities. Students are encouraged to communicate with me early so that approved accommodations can be implemented effectively.

For the final syllabus, I would insert UT Tyler's **current university-required accessibility statement** rather than carrying older institutional language forward unchanged.

Schedule

Refer to Canvas.

Canvas contains the official sequence of modules, assigned materials, quizzes, screenings, discussions, assignments, and deadlines.

Rather than treating the schedule as a separate document, think of the Canvas modules as the roadmap through the course.

UT Tyler Honor Code

Every member of the UT Tyler community joins together to embrace: Honor and integrity that will not allow me to lie, cheat, or steal, nor to accept the actions of those who do. Students Rights and Responsibilities To know and understand the policies that affect your rights and responsibilities as a student at UT Tyler, please follow this link: <http://www.uttyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php>
[↗\(http://www.uttyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php\)](http://www.uttyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php)

[↗\(http://www.uttyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php\)](http://www.uttyler.edu/wellness/rightsresponsibilities.php) Campus Carry

We respect the right and privacy of students 21 and over who are duly licensed to carry concealed weapons in this class. License holders are expected to behave responsibly and keep a handgun secure and concealed. More information is available at <http://www.uttyler.edu/about/campus-carry/index.php> [↗\(http://www.uttyler.edu/about/campus-carry/index.php\)](http://www.uttyler.edu/about/campus-carry/index.php)

[↗\(http://www.uttyler.edu/about/campus-carry/index.php\)](http://www.uttyler.edu/about/campus-carry/index.php) UT Tyler a Tobacco-Free University

All forms of tobacco will not be permitted on the UT Tyler main campus, branch campuses, and any property owned by UT Tyler. This applies to all members of the University community, including students, faculty, staff, University affiliates, contractors, and visitors. Forms of tobacco not permitted include cigarettes, cigars, pipes, water pipes (hookah), bidis, kreteks, electronic cigarettes, smokeless tobacco, snuff, chewing tobacco, and all other tobacco products. There are several cessation programs available to students looking to quit smoking, including counseling, quitlines, and group support. For more information on cessation programs please visit www.uttyler.edu/tobacco-free [↗\(http://www.uttyler.edu/tobacco-free\)](http://www.uttyler.edu/tobacco-free)

[↗\(http://www.uttyler.edu/tobacco-free\)](http://www.uttyler.edu/tobacco-free) 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. (For Fall, the Census Date is Sept. 12.) Grade Replacement Contracts are available in the Enrollment Services Center or at <http://www.uttyler.edu/registrar>. Each semester's 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 (Sept. 12th) is the deadline for many forms and enrollment actions of which students need to be aware. 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/Accessibility Services

In accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA) the University of Texas at Tyler offers accommodations to students with learning, physical and/or psychological disabilities. If you have a disability, including a non-visible diagnosis such as a learning disorder, chronic illness, TBI, PTSD, ADHD, or you have a history of modifications or accommodations in a previous educational environment, you are encouraged to visit <https://hood.accessiblelearning.com/UTTyler> and fill out the New Student application. The Student Accessibility and Resources (SAR) office will contact you when your application has been submitted and an appointment with Cynthia Lowery, Assistant Director of Student Services/ADA Coordinator. For more information, including filling out an application for services, please visit the SAR webpage at <http://www.uttyler.edu/disabilityservices>, the SAR office located in the University Center, # 3150 or call 903.566.7079.

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. (Revised 05/17)

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 instructor's 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.

Student Standards of Academic Conduct

Disciplinary proceedings may be initiated against any student who engages in scholastic dishonesty, including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.

"Cheating" includes, but is not limited to:

- ☐ copying from another student's test paper;
- ☐ using, during a test, materials not authorized by the person giving the test;
- ☐ failure to comply with instructions given by the person administering the test;
- ☐ possession during a test of materials which are not authorized by the person giving the test, such as class notes or specifically designed "crib notes". The presence of textbooks constitutes a violation if they have been specifically prohibited by the person administering the test;
- ☐ using, buying, stealing, transporting, or soliciting in whole or part the contents of an unadministered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program;
- ☐ collaborating with or seeking aid from another student during a test or other assignment without authority;
- ☐ discussing the contents of an examination with another student who will take the examination;
- ☐ divulging the contents of an examination, for the purpose of preserving questions for use by another, when the instructors has designated that the examination is not to be removed from the examination room or not to be returned or to be kept by the student;
- ☐ substituting for another person, or permitting another person to substitute for oneself to take a course, a test, or any course-related assignment;
- ☐ paying or offering money or other valuable thing to, or coercing another person to obtain an unadministered test, test key, homework solution, or computer program or information about an unadministered test, test key, home solution or computer program;
- ☐ falsifying research data, laboratory reports, and/or other academic work offered for credit;
- ☐ taking, keeping, misplacing, or damaging the property of The University of Texas at Tyler, or of another, if the student knows or reasonably should know that an unfair academic advantage would be gained by such conduct; and

- misrepresenting facts, including providing false grades or resumes, for the purpose of obtaining an academic or financial benefit or injuring another student academically or financially.

“Plagiarism” includes, but is not limited to, the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any means another’s work and the submission of it as one’s own academic work offered for credit.

“Collusion” includes, but is not limited to, the unauthorized collaboration with another person in preparing academic assignments offered for credit or collaboration with another person to commit a violation of any section of the rules on scholastic dishonesty.

All written work that is submitted will be subject to review by plagiarism software.

UT Tyler Resources for Students

- UT Tyler Writing Center (903.565.5995), writingcenter@uttyler.edu
- UT Tyler Tutoring Center (903.565.5964), tutoring@uttyler.edu
- The Mathematics Learning Center, RBN 4021, this is the open access computer lab for math students, with tutors on duty to assist students who are enrolled in early-career courses.
- UT Tyler Counseling Center (903.566.7254)

Course Summary:

Date	Details	Due
	 Film Analysis #1 (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142918)	due by 11:59pm
Sun Nov 29, 2026	 Film Analysis #2 (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142919)	due by 11:59pm
	 Film Analysis #3 (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142920)	due by 11:59pm
Sun Dec 6, 2026	 Balance Your Budget - Memo to the President (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142910)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 1 Federalism Discussion (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142911)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 1 Quiz (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142921)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 2 Liberties, Rights, Freedoms, and Equality	due by 11:59pm

Date	Details	Due
	Discussion (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142912)	
	 Module 2 Quiz (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142922)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 3 Public Opinion and the Media Discussion (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142913)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 3 Quiz (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142923)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 4 Political Parties Discussion (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142914)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 4 Quiz (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142924)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 5 Congress Discussion (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142915)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 5 Quiz (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142925)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 6 Quiz (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142926)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 6 The Bureaucracy Discussion (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142916)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 7 Judiciary Discussion (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142917)	due by 11:59pm
	 Module 7 Quiz (https://uttyler.instructure.com/courses/54829/assignments/1142927)	due by 11:59pm