UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT
GOVT 2305

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COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

1. BRIEF DESCRIPTION: This course is an introduction to United States national government. It is designed to introduce students to a framework for understanding the United States government, including the constitutional foundations, institutions, processes, politics, and policies.

2. INSTRUCTOR’S GOALS: For some students, the study of politics and government is fascinating and fun, while for others watching paint dry offers more excitement. No matter where you may fit in, I intend to share with you my enthusiasm for this subject and make this course as interesting as I can and still meet the academic goals set forth below.

It is my desire that this course helps you be better citizens, successful in your chosen careers, and a little wiser about how things work in the political world. No matter what career you pursue, critical thinking and writing are valuable skills. In this course, students are encouraged to think and write about politics. It is hoped that this will not only promote a deeper understanding of politics, but will enable students to participate effectively in democratic society.

Students earn grade points in multiple ways in this course: quizzes, tests, exams, a research paper, internet assignments, class participation, an oral presentation, and bonus or extra credit options. I use this combination of different assessment methods to increase your chances of performing well. A student’s success in this course is in the student’s hands. I will do my very best as your professor to help you perform your best. The rest is up to you.

3. OVERVIEW OF TOPICS: The first part of the course introduces a framework for political analysis in which we examine such concepts as politics, power, democracy, and the American political culture. We then look at the U.S. Constitution and how it serves as the fundamental legal framework for the national government.

In the second part of the course, we turn our attention to political behavior by looking at public opinion, interest groups, political parties, elections, voting, and the media. We will explore how these processes serve to connect citizens to government.

Next we examine the structure and functions of the Congress, the Presidency, the bureaucracy, and the federal courts. We will explore how these institutions act as the principal players in the policy making process.
We conclude by looking at several areas of public policy. We will focus on the interplay of the “War on Terrorism” with issues concerning civil liberties, equal rights, foreign policy, and selected domestic policies.

4. LEARNING OUTCOMES: Special attention will be given to how government affects citizens and what citizens can do to affect government. The course not only seeks to impart substantive knowledge about the U.S. national government, but also, in the process, to enhance your ability to analyze and to critically evaluate political institutions, processes, policies, and events. Specifically, the basic course objectives for the student are the following:

- To know the institutions and processes of the U.S. national government.
- To understand and evaluate the performance of the U.S. national government.
- To know the current issues dominating public debate concerning the U.S. government.
- To become a better informed citizen by learning how to acquire information from multiple sources, including how to use the internet.
- To become aware of how the study of politics can be enriched by other disciplines such as economics, psychology, and law.
- To develop critical thinking skills by learning to analyze arguments about and explanations of political phenomena.
- To enhance communication competencies both in written work and in oral presentations.

READING MATERIALS

- The required text is Ginsberg, Lowi, and Weir, We the People: An Introduction to American Politics, Fifth Edition, Norton, 2005. Additional assigned reading from the internet will also be required. Students are expected to bring their text, syllabus, and any appropriate handouts to each class. Since writing will be an important component of this course, I recommend the following helpful student guide for writing and research: Diana Hacker, A Pocket Style Manual, Third Edition, St. Martin’s Press, 2000.

- Each student is required to keep current on the news concerning the U.S. government and politics. Libraries carry a selection of newspapers and magazines that will be helpful. Go to the library and sample the various publications. You might actually enjoy it! Some examples include Time, Newsweek, the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, and the Washington Post. The Internet has become a valuable source for viewing a variety of newspapers from all fifty states and around the world. Go to http://www.newslink.org/menu.html for access to thousands of national and international newspapers. Also consult Blackboard for additional resources. Check the ACC library website as well. Please share with the instructor and the class any interesting web addresses that you find for news.
COURSE POLICIES

1. FORMAT: The course plan involves a mix of lectures with discussions. The course will proceed in an informal enough manner so as to encourage student participation in class discussion. Student participation constitutes an essential part of the learning process in this class. With that goal in mind, the class will be divided into teams of four to six students to discuss selected topics and questions, to help students get to know one another, and to form the foundation for study groups.

2. ATTENDANCE: Each student is expected to attend class, to participate in each class meeting, and to complete the assigned readings before each class.

Communication devices, such as cell phones, must be turned off before entering the classroom unless you have prior approval from the instructor. Also, late arrivals and early departures interrupt the class, so plan to be on time and to stay for the entire class period, unless you have previously spoken to the instructor or have an acceptable excuse (see below).

Acceptable excuses for missing a class, leaving early, or arriving late must be sufficiently serious, such as a medical emergency documented by a physician. All such excuses must be supported by documentation.

When you miss all or part of a class for whatever reason, you are responsible for obtaining class notes, announcements, and assignments from a classmate. You remain responsible for all he material covered in class and for staying current on all matters pertaining to your obligations in the class.

3. READINGS AND LECTURES: Students are expected to complete the assigned readings in accordance with the schedule contained in this syllabus. Students must read the assignments BEFORE the class date for which they are due. Students are also expected to be prepared to discuss assigned readings when called on in class or to take unannounced pop quizzes covering the assigned readings for that day. Students are expected to stay current on the reading schedule contained in this syllabus regardless of the pace of lectures and discussions.

The lectures will be based on the assumption that you have done the reading assignments before class. Lectures will develop new themes and introduce additional ideas and information not found in the readings. The lectures serve to promote discussion and to complement and to clarify the readings. They will not merely summarize them.

4. WITHDRAWALS: 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. For example, students who find they are missing too many classes should consider withdrawal as an alternative to doing poorly in the course. To withdraw from a class YOU must do it officially by filling out the required form with Admissions and Records. You will get an F on your transcript unless you formally withdraw.
5. INCOMPLETEST: NO INCOMPLETEST 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 in person 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 avoid being disappointed or frustrated if you cannot justify receiving an incomplete.

6. ACC BLACKBOARD: Students are expected to rely upon in-class announcements for the most current and accurate information about the class. Given that caveat, we will use Blackboard in this class. I will post the class syllabus, assignments, announcements, study aides, and other material on our class web site on Blackboard. Check this web site daily. The Web address for ACC Blackboard and how to log-in and use it can be found at http://itdl.austincc.edu/blackboard/stlogin.htm To log in, your username will be your ACC Online Services User ID number. Click on "What's My User ID?" to find this ID number. Your password is set to your birth date (mmdyy) and cannot be changed.

In addition, the first time you log on you must enter an up-to-date email address. This will allow me to send a mass email to everyone in the class. Also, if you send me an email from the Blackboard page and you haven't entered your email address, I can't hit "reply." You may also change your password.

To add your email address, go to the main Blackboard page for this class and click on "Tools" then click "Personal Information" and then "Edit Personal Information." The only information I must have is your current email address. If you have questions or difficulties with the ACC Blackboard system, you must first contact ACC Instructional Technology at (512) 223-7667 or itdl@austincc.edu

7. E-MAILING PROTOCOLS: The best way to communicate with me is through e-mail at jmillsto@austincc.edu. Due to the volume of e-mail I receive, please limit your messages to important matters. When sending me an e-mail, type the following in the subject heading of the message: “Student in ACC US Government class.” Be sure to send the message from your personal e-mail account so that the message will have a return e-mail address to which I can send a reply. In the message, give your first and last name, Govt 2305, time your section meets, and the date and time of the message.

8. AMENDING AND SUPPLEMENTING SYLLABUS: The instructor reserves the right to change the course requirements and the dates that material will be covered and exams will be given. Any such changes will be announced at least one class before the affected date. If a student is absent when the announcement is made, it is the student’s responsibility to get such announcements from another student.

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.

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

1. EXAMINATIONS: Four (4) exams will be given during the course of the semester. Each exam will be worth 100 points and may contain objective, short answer, or essay questions. The lowest of the four scores earned on the exams will be dropped when calculating the semester total points. If a student misses a scheduled exam for any reason, the score for that exam is zero and will be treated as the lowest score. If a student misses
more than one exam, the student will receive a zero for each exam missed. Given this policy, THERE ARE NO MAKE-UP EXAMS.

Some suggestion on how best to prepare for the exams may be helpful.

- You must read the material. Strive to stay up to date.
- Bring a Scantron Answer Sheet, a number 2 pencil, and a pen to each exam.
- Also, you must actively participate in classroom learning by taking notes, participating in discussions, and absorbing the information presented.
- If you miss class, get notes from a classmate. Your instructor will not re-deliver a lecture just for you, but he will be happy to answer your questions after you have reviewed the notes.
- I will also post on the course web site study-guides for reviewing the material in the text and brief topic outlines of the lectures. Keep in mind, however, that these are only “bare bones” sketches of what is found in your text and what is covered in class. You are still responsible for ALL that is covered in the readings, discussions and lectures. To perform well on the exams, complete the readings and attend class.
- The best study-aid for the lectures is your notes, your active learning in the class room, and asking questions.
- Since exams cover the assigned readings (text, handouts and posted selections on web site), lectures, and discussions, be sure to study and review all of them.

2. POP QUIZES AND SIMULATIONS: There will be five pop-quizzes given throughout the semester worth 10 points each for a total of 50 points. Each quiz will consist of questions covering that day’s assigned readings and/or the previous class’s lecture-discussion. The questions should not be difficult, assuming you completed the required reading or attended the previous class. Also, there will be in-class simulations and role-play exercises which will count for 50 points. There will be no make-up quizzes or make-up simulations. If you miss a class on the day of the quiz or simulation, you receive a zero and lose the points for that quiz or simulation.

3. RESEARCH PROJECT:
ALL PAPERS SHOULD HAVE NO LESS THAN 5 REFERENCES. Sources must be indicated in the body of the paper, and listed in a bibliography at the end. Further instructions about this assignment will be posted on the class Blackboard site.

4. INTERNET RESEARCH REPORTS: Two (3 to 4 pages) internet research reports will be assigned. Each report is worth 50 points. Further instructions about this assignment will be posted on the class Blackboard site.

5. EVALUATING ESSAYS AND PAPERS: Since writing is an integral part of this course, the criteria used when grading essays and papers are set forth below. If you have difficulty writing expository prose or you simply wish to improve you writing skills, go to the Learning Lab and Tutoring Center on campus for help.
(20%) **Thought:** How thoughtful is the analysis? Do the ideas presented demonstrate that you put time, effort, and thought into the assignment? Is the tone set in the essay fair minded and serious?

(40%) **Content:** Did you answer all the questions directly and clearly? Is the organization of the essay logical and coherent? Do you have a clear train of thought? Do you use evidence to support your assertions? Do you effectively use your references to marshal evidence in support of your thesis or position?

(20%) **Form, Structure and Style:** Have you followed the instructions for the format of the assignment? Is the paper typed with 12 point font, double spaced, and stapled? Have you included all the required information on the first page? Did you use correct grammar, spelling and punctuation? Did you cite properly to your evidence? Is your bibliography in the appropriate form?

6. EXTRA CREDIT: Options for extra credit will be announced in class. Every extra credit option will have a due date that must be met in order to receive extra credit for that assignment. Extra credit options are offered to the entire class, never on an individual basis for individual students. **No late extra credit options will be accepted.**

**EXTRA CREDIT POINTS WILL NOT COUNT IN CALCULATING THE SEMESTER POINT TOTALS UNLESS YOU HAVE TAKEN AT LEAST THREE EXAMS AND HAVE TIMELY SUBMITTED ALL REQUIRED WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS.**

7. BORDERLINE SEMESTER GRADES: If at the end of the semester, a student’s raw total point value, including extra credit, is within two points of the next highest grade, the instructor may “bump-up” the grade to the next grade level. The factors taken into consideration in making this decision are the student’s quality and frequency of class participation, the student’s preparation to answer questions in class, extra credit work done, and the student’s showing of a trend of improvement on the exams. Students with raw score totals for the semester, including extra credit, which are more than 2 points from the next highest grade do not qualify; their grades will not be “bumped up.”

8. **GRADING:**
You will be graded based on the total points scored during the semester from the pop quizzes, exams, research project, and internet research reports. Extra-credit points earned will be added to the requirements raw total point value

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Points Each</th>
<th>Total Point Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pop-quizzes &amp; simulations</td>
<td>5 quizzes &amp;</td>
<td>50 pnts for quizzes &amp; 50 pnts for</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>simulations</td>
<td>simulations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>4 drop lowest 1=3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Project</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Research</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirements Total</td>
<td></td>
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<td>600</td>
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Final Grade = Requirements’ Raw Total Point Value + Extra Credit Points (Final grade will be based upon the total raw points achieved from pop quizzes, exams, the research project, internet research reports, plus extra credit points earned) Extra credit points will be added ONLY IF student has 3 exam scores and timely submitted the research project and the two internet research assignments.

LETTER GRADES ARE BASED UPON THE FOLLOWING SCALE:

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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>540 or more</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>480 - 539</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>420 - 479</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>360 - 419</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>359 or less</td>
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SUMMARY ADVICE FOR STUDENTS
1. Be sure you have and keep the syllabus, assignments, handouts, and other materials.
2. Follow instructions carefully for each assignment.
3. Submit your work on time. No late papers are accepted. Keep one copy of each completed essay or paper you hand in.
4. Neatly type papers in clear, correct English.
5. If extra credit opportunities are offered, take advantage of them.
6. Come to class and participate.
7. Be attentive and take notes during class. Research shows that students who take careful notes do better than those who do not.
8. Feel free to visit with the instructor. If you are having problems or concerns in class, see the instructor in his office hours or make an appointment. The longer you delay, the harder it will be to address your needs. I will work with you in developing strategies to help you improve your performance in this class. But I cannot help if I'm not informed of your concerns. So please come in.
9. Don't feel that you must have a problem to drop by the instructor's office. If you want to pursue topics raised in class in additional depth, or if there are subjects we didn't get to that you find interesting, please stop by.

Schedule of Assignments and Topics posted on the class Blackboard site