

**Government of the United States (POLS: 2311)**  
**Spring 2026**  
**Mondays and Wednesdays 2:30 - 3:50 PM in University Hall, 115**

**Instructor:** Dr. Matthew C. Nowlin, Ph.D.

**Office:** University Hall, 404

**Phone:** (817) 272-2991 (POLS Department)

**Email:** [matthew.nowlin@uta.edu](mailto:matthew.nowlin@uta.edu)

**Website:** [matthewcnowlin.com](http://matthewcnowlin.com)

**Office hours:** By appointment on Teams

### **Course Description**

This course is designed to introduce students to the core concepts of American government and politics. The emphasis of this course will be on approaching topics associated with government and politics as *social scientists*; therefore, it will be organized around social science concepts and methods.

The course consists of four parts:

#### **Part I: The Constitutional Order**

The first part of the course provides a foundational understanding of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and its origins, and the US system of federalism.

#### **Part II: Individual Agency**

The second part of the course examines individual agency and actions in the US context. In this section, we will discuss civil liberties, civil rights, public opinion, and voting and elections

#### **Part III: Mediating Institutions**

Building up from individuals, the third part of the course examines mediating institutions, which are institutions that exist between individuals and the government. These include the media, political parties, and interest groups.

#### **Part IV: Formal Institutions**

Finally, in part four of the course, we examine the formal institutions of the US federal government, including Congress, the presidency, the bureaucracy, and the courts. We end the course with a discussion of the federal budget.

### **Student Learning Outcomes**

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

1. Identify and explain the central principles, institutions, procedures, and decision-making processes of the American political system
2. Evaluate the basic strengths and weaknesses of the American political system through the application of political concepts and ideas
3. Relate historical events and/or developments to contemporary political issues, debates, and outcomes in the United States
4. Develop an analytical, social science disposition toward American politics.

## Course Information

[Canvas](#) is the course management software we will use for this class. It will be used to provide the syllabus, class materials, and grades for each assignment, which will be regularly posted. Check [Canvas](#) regularly.

## Readings and Required Texts

The following book is **required**. It is free and will be made available on [Canvas](#). You can also access the book at the link below.

- Krutz, Glen, and Sylvie Waskiewicz. 2025. American Government. 4th ed. OpenStax. <https://openstax.org/details/books/american-government-4e>.
- Additional Readings:
  - [The Declaration of Independence](#)
  - [The Constitution](#)
  - [Hamilton: Federalist 1](#)
  - [Madison: Federalist 10](#)
  - [Madison: Federalist 51](#)
  - [Madison: Federalist 55](#)
  - [Madison: Federalist 62](#)
  - [Hamilton: Federalist 68, 70, 72](#)
  - [Hamilton: Federalist 78](#)
  - [Introduction to the Federal Budget Process](#)

## Technology Policy

You are encouraged to bring a laptop or tablet to class; however, during class lectures and discussions, please put away your computer, phone, and tablet to ensure a focused learning environment. Tablets are allowed if you are taking notes with an Apple Pencil, stylus, or similar device. *You should take notes by hand, using a pen and paper.* [You learn better that way](#). Also see [Why You Should Stop Bringing Your Laptop to Class](#). I recommend taking notes using the [Cornell Method](#). I will consider exceptions if you send me an email explaining why you need a laptop to take notes in class.

Please keep cell phones stored and remove earphones or AirPods from your ears during class.

## Attendance Policy

Attendance will be taken for each class session using aPlus+ attendance in [Canvas](#). *Each class session is worth four points*. Attendance will be taken at different times during class, and you must be present when attendance is taken to receive the points.

## Late Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted. Make-up exams are available only if 1) you let me know beforehand, or 2) a true emergency occurs that is beyond your control.

## AI Use

In this course, the focus is on developing independent critical thinking and mastering subject-specific content. To ensure that all submitted work accurately reflects personal understanding

and original thought, **the use of Generative AI (GenAI) tools in completing assignments or assessments is strictly prohibited.**

This policy supports our commitment to academic integrity and the direct measurement of each student's learning against the course's Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs). Any work found to be generated by AI will be subject to academic review.

### **Course Requirements and Grading**

Performance in this course will be evaluated based on quizzes, two exams, a comprehensive final exam, and class attendance. Points will be distributed as follows:

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Possible Points</b>
Quizzes (10 at 20 points each)	200 (total)
Exam 1	100
Exam 2	100
Final Exam	200
Attendance	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>700</b>

Letter grades will be based on the earned percentage of possible points. The grading scale:

<b>Earned %</b>	<b>Letter Grade</b>
90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
0-59	F

Students are expected to track their performance throughout the semester, which [Canvas](#) facilitates, and seek guidance from available sources, including the instructor, if their performance drops below satisfactory levels. Refer to the Student Support Services section below.

### **Assignments**

*Quizzes:* There will be 11 multiple-choice quizzes given on [Canvas](#). *I will drop your lowest quiz grade.* Each quiz will consist of 10 questions, each worth 2 points for a total of 20 points. *The quizzes are timed, and you will have five minutes to complete each quiz once you begin.* The quizzes will be available on Monday mornings, and they must be completed by Friday at 11:59 PM each week they are due. *Quizzes cannot be made up.* The quiz questions will cover material from the readings and/or class discussion.

*Exam 1:* The first exam will be given on **Wednesday, February 18, and will be taken in class during the regular class period.** All material from the readings, lectures, and in-class discussions is fair game for the exam. The exam will consist of 25 multiple-choice and true/false questions, and will be taken on a scantron.

*Exam 2:* The second exam will be given on **Wednesday, April 8, and will be taken in class during the regular class period.** All material *since the first exam*, from the readings, lectures, and in-class discussions, is fair game for the exam. The exam will consist of 25 multiple-choice and true/false questions, and will be taken on a scantron.

*Final Exam:* **The final exam period is Monday, May 4, from 2:00 PM to 4:30 PM.** The final WILL BE comprehensive and all material from the readings, lectures, and in-class discussions throughout the semester is fair game. The exam will consist of 50 multiple-choice and true/false questions, and will be taken on a scantron.

**Make-up exams are only allowed in cases of emergencies. Please note that travel plans are not considered emergencies.**

*Attendance:* Attendance will be taken for each class session using aPlus+ attendance in [Canvas](#). *Each class session is worth four points.* Attendance will be taken at different times during class, and you must be present when attendance is taken to receive the points.

## **University Policies**

### **Institutional Policies**

UTA students should review the [University Catalog](#) and the [Syllabus Institutional Policies](#) page for institutional policies and contact the specific office with any questions. The institutional information includes the following policies, among others:

- Drop Policy
- Disability Accommodations
- Academic Integrity
- Electronic Communication

### **UTA Honor Code**

UTA students are expected to adhere to and observe standards of conduct compatible with the University's functions as an educational institution and live by the [University of Texas at Arlington's Honor Code](#). It is the policy of The University of Texas at Arlington to uphold and support standards of personal honesty and integrity for all students consistent with the goals of a community of scholars and students seeking knowledge and responsibility.

### **Student Support Services**

The [Student Services page](#) provides links to many resources available to UTA students, including:

- Academic Success
- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
- Health Services
- Students with Disabilities
- Veteran Services

Students are also encouraged to check out [Career Center](#) resources to enhance their career readiness, find student employment, search for internships, and more. We encourage [Major](#)

[Exploration](#) and the use of [Experiential Major Maps](#) to keep students on track for graduation. Refer to the [Graduation Help Desk](#) for more details.

## Course Schedule

Dates	Topic	Assignments Due
Week 1: Jan 12-14	Course Introduction/ Forms of Government	
Week 2: Jan 21	The Constitution	Quiz 1; <b>MLK Day Jan 19, no class</b>
Week 3: Jan 26-28	Federalism	Quiz 2
Week 4: Feb 2-4	Civil Liberties	Quiz 3
Week 5: Feb 9-11	Civil Rights	Quiz 4
Week 6: Feb 16-18	Public Opinion	<b>Exam 1 Feb 18</b>
Week 7: Feb 23-25	Voting and Elections	Quiz 5
Week 8: March 2-4	The Media	Quiz 6
Week 9: March 9-11	SPRING BREAK	
Week 10: March 16-18	Political Parties	Quiz 7
Week 11: March 23-25	Interest Groups	Quiz 8
Week 12: March 30-April 1	Congress	Quiz 9; <b>Last day to drop is Friday, April 3 by 4:00 PM</b>
Week 13: April 6-8	The Presidency	<b>Exam 2 April 8</b>
Week 14: April 13-15	The Bureaucracy	Quiz 10
Week 15: April 20-22	The Courts	Quiz 11
Week 16: April 27	The Federal Budget	
<b>FINAL EXAM: May 4</b>	<b>2:00 PM - 4:30 PM</b>	

## Readings

### Part I: The Constitutional Order

#### Week 1: Course Introduction and Forms of Government

- *Readings:*
  - Chapter 1: American Government and Civic Engagement

#### Week 2: The Constitution

- *Readings:*
  - Chapter 2: The Constitution and Its Origins
  - [The Declaration of Independence](#)
  - [The Constitution](#)
  - [Hamilton: Federalist 1](#)
  - [Madison: Federalist 10](#)
  - [Madison: Federalist 51](#)

#### Week 3: Federalism

- *Readings:*
  - Chapter 3: American Federalism

## **Part II: Individual Agency**

### **Week 4: Civil Liberties**

- *Readings:*
  - Chapter 4: Civil Liberties

### **Week 5: Civil Rights**

- *Readings:*
  - Chapter 5: Civil Rights

### **Week 6: Public Opinion**

- *Readings:*
  - Chapter 6: The Politics of Public Opinion
- **EXAM 1: Wed., Feb. 18**

### **Week 7: Voting and Elections**

- *Readings:*
  - Chapter 7: Voting and Elections

## **Part III: Mediating Institutions**

### **Week 8: The Media**

- *Readings:*
  - Chapter 8: The Media

### **Week 9: SPRING BREAK**

### **Week 10: Political Parties**

- *Readings:*
  - Chapter 9: Political Parties

### **Week 11: Interest Groups**

- *Readings:*
  - Chapter 10: Interest Groups and Lobbying

## **Part IV: Formal Institutions**

### **Week 12: Congress**

- *Readings:*
  - Chapter 11: Congress
  - [The Constitution Article I](#)
  - [Madison: Federalist 55](#)
  - [Madison: Federalist 62](#)

### **Week 13: The Presidency**

- *Readings:*
  - Chapter 12: The Presidency
  - [The Constitution Article II](#)
  - [Hamilton: Federalist 68, 70, 72](#)
- **EXAM 2: Wed., Apr. 8**

### **Week 14: The Bureaucracy**

- *Readings:*
  - Chapter 15: The Bureaucracy

### **Week 15: The Courts**

- *Readings:*
  - Chapter 13: The Courts
  - [The Constitution Article III](#)
  - [Hamilton: Federalist 78](#)

### **Week 16: The Federal Budget**

- *Readings:*
  - [Introduction to the Federal Budget Process](#)