

American Government 310L

Klara Fredriksson

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E-mail: fredriksson@utexas.edu

Office Hours: MW 11.30-12.30, F 9-10

Office:

Class Hours: MTWThF 10-11.30

Class Room: WAG 201

Course Description

This course provides an introduction to American politics. The course topics include an introduction to America's constitutional foundations, the relationship between the mass public and politics (public opinion and participation), the role of intermediary organizations (interest groups, media, parties), and the function of institutions (Congress, Presidency, Courts). In addition to mastering a set of basic facts about American government, students will learn theories addressing "big questions" in American politics, and will explore critical assessments of the evidence brought to bear on these questions. Some of these topics will also be examined in the context of Texas politics.

There are four primary objectives in this course. First, to cover basic descriptive information about the American and Texas political systems by examining important political institutions, actors, and processes. Second, to develop analytical skills by which to understand complex political relationships and phenomena. Third, to introduce the work of the political scientist by concentrating on the paradigms and techniques of the discipline. Fourth, to empower the students to appreciate their role in a properly functioning democracy.

Required Materials

- American Government in Black and White, 4th Edition, by Paula D. McClain and Steven C. Tauber. Select sections, available on Canvas.
- Supplementary readings, available on Canvas or linked on the syllabus.

Grading policy

Your grade will be based on six quizzes, a group project, and in-class assignments and participation, weighted as follows:

- 60% Quizzes (6 quizzes, 10% each)
- 20% In-class assignments and participation
- 20% Group project

Quizzes. Quizzes will be given every Friday at the start of class. They will be a mix between multiple choice and short answers, and will cover both lectures and readings. Quiz material will NOT be cumulative. Each quiz will be worth 10 points. In the case of a conflict, please notify me ahead of time so that we can make alternative arrangements. The make-up for a missed quiz will be a short essay.

In-class assignments and participation. I will give intermittent short assignments in class that will be graded for participation. You will also be graded on participation in class discussion. Everyone is expected to have done the readings ahead of time so as to be able to participate in these discussions.

Group project. In the first week of class you will be assigned to a group and to one class topic. In these groups you will do your own research on the given topic as it pertains to Texas politics, specifically, and give a short presentation in the last week of class. More details will follow in class.

Without prior notification and proper documentation, missed quizzes and assignments cannot be made up, no exceptions. I will not round final grades.

Grading

A 93-100
A- 90-92
B+ 87-89
B 83-86
B- 80-82
C+ 77-79
C 73-76
C- 70-72
D+ 67-69
D 63-66
D- 60-62
F 0-59

Course Policies

Electronic Devices During Class

Electronic devices may be used during class only for academic purposes. Students disrupting the class because of their use of electronic devices for non-academic purposes will be asked to leave class. Under NO circumstances may electronic devices be used during a quiz. Students using electronic devices during a quiz will be given a zero grade for that assignment.

Academic Dishonesty

Honor system for quizzes and writing assignments: By taking this class, the student agrees to abide by the University of Texas regulations concerning cheating. According to the Institutional Rules, scholastic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, and falsifying academic records. In the event that a student violates the University policy on scholastic dishonesty, he or she will be subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Student Conduct and Academic Integrity web site at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/conduct/academicintegrity.php>.

University of Texas Honor Code

"The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community."

Student Honor Code

"As a student of The University of Texas at Austin, I shall abide by the core values of the University and uphold academic integrity."

Attendance policy

Although attendance is not mandatory, it is expected. Therefore, I do not formally take attendance. Nevertheless, missing class will greatly affect your grade. First, I give in-class assignments and grade on participation. Second, quizzes are based on a combination of the course readings and class lectures. Thus, missing class will greatly affect your grade.

Excused Absences

An absence from class will only be excused if proper documentation is presented. In the case of an illness you will need to produce a note from the doctor stating that you could not attend class that day. Generic UHS slips will not be accepted. In all other cases you will need to provide documentation from Student Emergency Services. In the case of planned activities, the documentation must be presented to me at least a week before your scheduled absence. I will not accept a planned activity as a valid excuse for an absence after the fact. In the case of unexpected circumstances, the documentation must be turned in within a week of your return.

Procedures for Dealing with Grade/Evaluation Concerns

Grade/evaluation concerns will only be considered if the following procedure is followed: All grade complaints must be TYPED and must clearly express the student's specific concerns. These written statements must be accompanied by citations of support from course materials, i.e. readings, textbook, and/or lecture notes, in order to ensure accuracy. Written statements will not be considered until 48 hours AFTER the assignment is returned to students. This allows the student time to reread their answers and think carefully about what improvements could have been made. Grievances will not be considered once one week has passed. For example, if I return a graded assignment on Monday, the student must submit a complaint BEFORE the Monday of the following week. Once class is over on that Monday,

no complaints will be considered for that assignment. Since class time is limited, I will only deal with questions or concerns during scheduled office hours. Finally, submitting a grade grievance will result in a complete re-grade of the assignment.

Communication

I will not respond to Canvas messages, only emails to the email address listed on this syllabus. I regularly check my e-mail, but sometimes I am unable to respond quickly. Please allow 24 hours for an e-mail response. In addition, please limit your e-mails to questions about class topics. Any grievances involving the class must be handled during my office hours. Finally, make sure to check the syllabus or Canvas first before sending an e-mail. In many cases they will answer your question.

Pronoun and Name Preference

Class rosters at UT are provided to the instructor with students' legal names. I will gladly honor any request to address students by a different name. Please inform me of any preferred names, nicknames, or gender pronouns as early as possible so I can adopt them for the entirety of the semester and onward. If there are further accommodations that will make you feel more comfortable in class, please come to office hours so we can discuss them.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259, <http://diversity.utexas.edu/disability/>.

Religious Holy Day Observance

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Campus Safety

Please note the following recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security, 512-471-5767, <http://www.utexas.edu/safety>:

- Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.
- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- Students requiring assistance in evacuation should inform the instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors.
- Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.
- Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL): 512-232-5050.
- Further information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: <http://www.utexas.edu/emergency>.

Schedule

Week 1, 05/30 - 06/03: Introduction

- 6/2: **Course Introduction, What is Politics?**
 - Syllabus
 - McClain ch. 1
- 6/3: **The Founding**
 - McClain ch. 2

Week 2, 06/06 - 06/10: The Structure of American Government

- 6/6: **The Constitution**
 - No readings!
- 6/7: **Federalism**
 - McClain ch. 3
- 6/8: **Civil Rights**
 - McClain ch. 5
- 6/9: **Civil Liberties**
 - McClain ch. 4
- 6/10: **The Legislative Branch**
 - McClain ch. 6

Week 3, 06/13 - 06/17: The Structure of American Government, cont.

- 6/13: **The Executive Branch**
 - McClain ch. 7
- 6/14: **The Bureaucracy**
 - McClain ch. 8
- 6/15: **The Judicial Branch**
 - McClain ch. 9
 - Lepore, Jill. To Have and to Hold. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/05/25/to-have-and-to-hold>
- 6/16: **Interest Groups**
 - McClain ch. 13
- 6/17: **Political Parties**
 - McClain ch. 14

Week 4, 06/20 - 06/24: Doing Democracy

- 6/20: **The Media**
 - McClain ch. 11
- 6/21: **Campaigns and Elections**
 - McClain ch. 15
- 6/22: **Voting and Elections**
 - Galston, William. Telling Americans to Vote, or Else. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/06/opinion/sunday/telling-americans-to-vote-or-else.html>
- 6/23: **Social Movements**
 - McClain ch. 12
 - Frymer, Paul and Jake Grumbach. The NBA strike is a big moment for athlete activism — and the labor movement in America. *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/first-person/2020/9/4/21420033/jacob-blake-nba-strike-2020-black-lives-matter>
- 6/24: **Access to the Vote**
 - Martin Luther King, Letter from Birmingham Jail: https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html
 - Walker, Hannah. Voter Suppression In A Post-Shelby World. *HuffPost Latino Decisions*. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/voter-suppression-in-a-po_b_13288426
 - LaFrance, Adrienne. The "Undesirable Militants" Behind the Nineteenth Amendment. *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/06/most-dangerous-women-american-politics/590959/>

Week 5, 06/27 - 07/01: Doing Democracy, cont.

- 6/27: **The Carceral State**
 - Stevenson, Bryan. Why American Prisons Owe Their Cruelty to Slavery. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/prison-industrial-complex-slavery-racism.html>
 - Shannon, Sarah and Christopher Uggen. Restoring the vote to those convicted of a felony sentence is not just the right thing to do, it's good social science. *LSE United States Politics and Policy Blog*. <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/usappblog/2018/02/19/restoring-the-vote-to-convicted-felons-is-not-just-the-right-thing-to-do/>
- 6/28: **Representation**
 - Adler, William T. and Ella Koeze. One Way To Spot A Partisan Gerrymander. *Fivethirtyeight*. <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/partisan-gerrymandering-north-carolina/>
 - Badger, Emily. As American as Apple Pie? The Rural Vote's Disproportionate Slice of Power. *The New York Times' The Upshot*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/21/upshot/as-american-as-apple-pie-the-rural-votes-disproportionate-slice-of-power.html>
 - Rakich, Nathaniel. How This Redistricting Cycle Failed To Increase Representation For People Of Color — And Could Even Set It Back. *Fivethirtyeight*. <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-this-redistricting-cycle-failed-to-increase-representation-for-people-of-color/>
- 6/29: **Public Opinion and Power**
 - McClain ch. 10
 - Jardina, Ashley. White identity politics is about more than racism. *Vox*. <https://www.vox.com/2019/4/26/18306125/white-identity-politics-trump-racism-ashley-jardina>
- 6/30: **Attitudes and How to Measure Them**

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- VIDEO: Can we still trust polls? *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/14/can-we-still-trust-polls/>
 - Cox, Kiana. Most U.S. adults feel what happens to their own racial or ethnic group affects them personally. *Pew Research Center*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/11/linked-fate-connectedness-americans/>
 - Mullainathan, Sendhil. Racial Bias, Even When We Have Good Intentions. *The New York Times' Upshot*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/04/upshot/the-measuring-sticks-of-racial-bias-.html>
 - 7/1: **Political Participation**
 - Walker, Hannah and Michael Leo Owens. What gets ex-prisoners politically and civically involved? *MonkeyCage*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2018/09/21/what-gets-ex-prisoners-politically/>
 - Johnson, Theodore. Can the Democratic Party Retain Its Hold on Black Voters? *The Atlantic*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/09/the-changing-outlook-for-black-voters/403975/>

Week 6, 07/04 - 07/08:

- 7/4: **Fourth of July** - no class!
- 7/5: Class presentations
- 7/6: Class presentations
- 7/7: Final class day! No readings.