

Course Introduction

Instructor: Venkatesh Subramanian

Course: American National Government (GOVT 2305)

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Welcome!

- To all the freshmen, Welcome to UTD! You have made a good choice in life!
- To all returning students, Welcome back! Wishing you the most successful semester!
- I am Venkatesh Subramanian (he/him), your instructor.
 - Name is pronounced: Venn-Cut-Tay-sh
 - You can call me “Venkatesh” / “Professor”.
 - When you write to me, you can say “Dear Mr. Subramanian”.
- This is Maitreyi Pillai (she/her), your Teaching Assistant for this course.
 - Name is pronounced My-Threy-ee.
 - You can call her “Maitreyi” / “Professor”.
 - When you write to her, you can say “Dear Ms. Pillai”.

3 key questions for today's class

- What will you need to do for completing this course?
- What will I do to help us all complete this course?
- Why do you need to do this course? How to do it?

Getting started in LMS (Learning Management System)

Class activity - 10 minutes.

1. Introduce yourself to the person on your right, if there is one.
2. Introduce yourself to the person on your left, if there is one.
3. Log into Canvas. (<https://utdallas.elearning.edu>)
4. Setup notifications so that you will not miss any announcements made on Canvas.
5. Download the syllabus.
6. Open the syllabus, and read it. Note down any questions you have for me.
7. Answer these questions:
 - Which page number is the schedule in?
 - Is Canvas the primary digital platform in this course?

Ask your neighbor for help if you are stuck. If you are still stuck, raise your hand.

TopHat vs Canvas

Material	Which Digital Platform?	
	TopHat	Canvas
Required Textbook	✓	✗
HW	✓	✗
Exams	✓	✗
Attendance	✓	✗
Syllabus	✗	✓
Class Announcements	✗	✓
Lecture slides	✗	✓
Supplemental materials	✗	✓
Check Grades	✗	✓

Getting started in TopHat

- TopHat requires payment (\$83 w/ tax) to access the platform. This is a **required** purchase for this course.
- At home, tonight, please follow these steps and purchase it:
 - Go to <https://app.tophat.com/e/180415>
 - Follow the on-screen instructions to purchase the course and the book.
 - If required you can use the join code: 180415
- Once you are logged in, you should be able to do an ungraded HW before Sunday (Aug 29 11:59 PM).
- We will have TopHat troubleshooting session at the end of next class.

Grading components in this course

Component	Weightage
Class Attendance & Participation	10%
Weekly Top Hat chapter homework	30%
Open book/note exams (3 total, lowest score dropped)	50%
Closed-book, open-note, in-class final exam	10%
Excessive absences penalty (<i>after 4th absence</i>)	-3.5% / absence

- Getting an A/A+ requires 93% or more. So, you can't afford to miss any component fully, and you must avoid penalties!
- We will talk about each component now...

Class Attendance & Participation; Excessive absences penalty

- You *must* attend every single class on Monday and Wednesday 8:30-9:45AM in this room (JO 3.516).
- You are allowed up to 4 absences without informing me.
 - Such absences will result in loss of participation points, unless you inform me and provide valid documentation.
 - You are responsible for any materials covered in class during your absences.
- Beyond 4 absences each unexcused absence will result in a 3.5% penalty in your final grades.
 - I might excuse emergencies if you provide me documentation (eg. a doctor's note).
- Do NOT attend class if you have a fever! Send me a doctor's note, and I will excuse it.

Attendance logistics

- Only for today: Manual roll call
 - Today's attendance is ungraded. It is for validation.
- From Wednesday: Attendance will be done via TopHat
 - *Here is a demo.*
 - From Wednesday you will get graded.
 - So, purchase TopHat ASAP!

Weekly Chapter Homework in TopHat

- Every week you are required to do HW in TopHat.
- These are worth 30% of your grade.
- *Here is a quick demo of what this will look like once you purchase TopHat:* URL
 - As you can see these HWs are meant to be simple. Please do it without fail!
- There are 14 HWs (i.e.) one for each of the 14 chapters. Lowest score dropped.
- Check the schedule in the syllabus for due dates.
- No options for late submission.

Open book/note exams

- 3 open-book/note exams in this course per the dates provided in the syllabus schedule
- Each exam is worth 25%. Lowest score will be dropped.
- All these 3 exams will be held online in the Top Hat Pro platform.
 - It will be open within a 24-hour window (12:00 AM to 11:59 PM) on the scheduled exam date.
 - You will have 75 minutes once you start the exam.
 - *I am planning a demo of the exam a week before the first exam.*
- Each exam will cover a set of non-cumulative chapters. Check the schedule for chapters covered in each exam.
- Make-up opportunities for missed exams are generally NOT available.

Closed-book, open-note, in-class final exam

- Final exam on Dec 16 will be in-class during class hours.
- You will bring your laptop to take this exam via the TopHat.
 - Are those chargers on your desk working properly?
- This will be a “Monitored Test” which means you can NOT access anything on your laptop other than the exam window.
- Instead, you can bring a summary of all your notes in a single sheet of A4-size paper (both front & back).
- This final exam will be cumulative of all content covered in the course.
- This exam will be worth 10% of the final grade.
- Make-up opportunities for this final exam will NOT be available.
 - If you believe you will not be able to take the exam on the assigned date and time contact the instructor at least 2 weeks before the exam.

Follow the schedule!

Week	Class Dates	Topics	Deadlines
1	08/24	Introduction	Ungraded HW due 09/13
	08/26	Ch 1: American National Government	
2	08/31	Ch 1: American National Government	Ch 1 HW due 09/13
	09/02	Ch 2: US Constitution	
3	09/07	Labor Day	Ch 2 HW due 09/13
	09/09	Ch 2: US Constitution [Census Day]	
4	09/14 and 09/16	Ch 3: Federalism	Ch 3 HW due 09/20
5	09/21 and 09/23	Ch 4: Congress	Ch 4 HW due 09/27
6	09/28 and 09/30	Ch 5: The Presidency	<i>Open book/note exam 1 (Ch 1-4) on 10/01; Ch 5 HW due 10/04</i>

Follow the schedule! (ctd.)

Week	Class Dates	Topics	Deadlines
7	10/05 and 10/07	Ch 6: The Federal Courts	Ch 6 HW due 10/11
8	10/12 and 10/14	Ch 7: Civil Rights	Ch 7 HW due 10/18
9	10/19 and 10/21	Ch 8: Civil Liberties	<i>Open book/note exam 2 (Ch 5-7) on 10/22; Ch 8 HW due 10/25</i>
10	10/26 and 10/28	Ch 9: Political Parties	Ch 9 HW due 11/01
11	11/02 and 11/04	Ch 10: Interest Groups	Ch 10 HW due 11/08
12	11/09 and 11/11	Ch 11: Campaigns and Elections	Ch 11 HW due 11/15

Follow the schedule! (ctd.)

Week	Class Dates	Topics	Deadlines
13	11/16 and 11/18	Ch 12: Media and Politics	<i>Open book/note exam 3 (Ch 8-11) on 11/19; Ch 12 HW due 11/22</i>
14	-	Fall Break and Thanksgiving	
15	11/30 and 12/02	Ch 13: Public Opinions	Ch 13 HW due 12/06
16	12/07 and 12/09	Ch 14 and 15	Ch 14 HW due 12/13
17	12/16	<i>Closed-book, open-note, in-class final exam</i>	

My role in this course

- Communicate with you.
 - Respond (mostly via Maitreyi, the TA) to your emails.
 - Speak with you during Office Hours.
- Arrange reasonable accommodations for those I get a letter from ARC.
- Discourage improper usage of technology in class.
- Add my flavor to the course content during classroom discussions.

I have delegated most communications to the TA

- For queries about course logistics *not covered in this syllabus*, students should email the TA.
 - In emails refer to the TA as "Dear Ms. Pillai".
 - The TA can CC me in responses and/or ask the student to meet during office hours, if necessary.
- For queries about course content and subject matter, the instructor can be emailed directly.
 - In emails refer to me as "Dear Mr. Subramanian".
 - I might delegate to TA if its within TA's purview.

TA and I will only provide replies to *well-written emails*

- We can only reply if you write to us from your 'utdallas.edu' address.
- We can only afford to reply to 'Legitimate queries.'
 - Legitimate queries are those that can't be answered by reading the syllabus.
- We will respond in 1-2 business days.
 - Business days are Monday through Friday with the exception of government holidays.
- What are *well-written emails*?
 - "GOVT 2305" in the subject line
 - Give sufficient information: What is the actionable? What is the information?
 - Include a signature with your name, year (freshman, sophomore, etc.), major

I will arrange for reasonable ARC accommodations.

- If you need accommodations for disability, please contact ARC, at the earliest.
- Once you do so, you can setup a call with me during office hours, so that I can understand your needs.
- I repeat, *do this early!*

I will discourage improper usage of technology.

- Please put your devices on silent/DND.
- Please do not use your computing device for anything other than notetaking. Penalties will be awarded if you are caught misusing your device.
- Don't do anything that will distract your neighbor - No TV or Games please.

A maxim to remember

*Help can be provided to only those
who help themselves.*

- You must advocate for yourself.
- You must also be respectful to those you are asking for help.



I will add my flavor to the course content during classroom discussions.

- Who am I?
 - I was a STEM major (Physics) like many of you!
 - I was a data analyst (almost 3 years).
 - I am writing a PhD dissertation on what the US federal government can do about antibiotic resistance by studying the NIH and the CMS.
 - I have worked in DC at a think tank as an Archer Fellow (Summer 23).
 - I have taken grad-level courses in Philosophy and Political Science (Public Policy major).
- You can expect some of these things to seep into the classroom discussion even though it is not in your textbook.

Why is this fair?

- That was everything I will do for you if you do what you need to do for this class. But, *why is that fair?*
- I can already hear you complaining:
 - “This is a core class. Why force everyone to come in-person?”
 - “Why have a closed-book exam in a core class? Just give me an easy A/A+!”
 - “I have decided I am a STEM major. This is all useless to me. Why am I being forced to sit through all this politics stuff?”
- Lets take sometime to critically consider these complaints...

The unwritten objective of all your core courses: Metacognition

- The cliché reason: 'Metacognition'.
- Metacognition means 'thinking about thinking'.
- So, *in theory*, people claim: Core Curriculum engagement → Metacognition

In *practice*, does Core Curriculum engagement → Metacognition?

- Is it true *in practice*? Have we measured it?
- **Class activity - 5 minutes:** *Discuss with your neighbor(s) and write down 2 ways you'd go about measuring 'Metacognition'/Critical thinking among student participants in an experimental setting.*
- It is difficult to agree on what is this thing one calls 'critical thinking'!
 - See Schoute and Alexander (2026) for a discussion on the salience of this trouble.
- So, in practice, this claim is harder to back up, conclusively.

What about a simpler claim: Core Curriculum engagement → Money? I



- What about materialistic gains from engaging more in your core curriculum?

What about a simpler claim: Core Curriculum engagement → Money? II

- Seah, Pan, and Tan (2025) study a natural experiment in Singapore where curriculum changed to be narrower for a subset of students. They conclude: “... *taking a more specialized curriculum does not initially affect labor earnings shortly after graduation, its effect becomes negative and increases with work experience.*”
 - Question to you: *What does that quote mean?*
 - *Pro*: Highly interpretable results with data from tax payments and using a representative control group.
 - *Con*: Evidence from Singapore may not generalize to the US or anywhere else.

But is Money the point of an education?

- We have more interpretable evidence about the effects of Money than Metacognition. So, what?
- Consider the obvious action one would take with such evidence: Fryer (2011) gave money to school students in New York, Dallas, and Chicago to incentivize academic performance, in a randomized control trial setting.
 - He reports, “the impact of financial incentives on student achievement is statistically 0, in each city.” So, it seemingly didn’t work. *But is that the point?*
 - Say it did work. Then what?
- Something feels morally ‘wrong’.
 - See Sandel (2012) for more on moral limits of markets, and more references to the Fryer (2011) experiments.

So why should you engage in this class?

- Core Curriculum → Metacognition: Good objective; Not interpretable evidence
- Core Curriculum → Money: Interpretable evidence; Not the best objective
- What is one to do then?
- *Stop over-intellectualizing and just do it for doing's sake!*

Don't knock it before you try it!

- Give it the old *college try*! Come at this with your mind open!
- Instead of ruminating about the purpose of this course, it might help your mental health to *just do it*. After all, you've already chosen to be here.
 - As you do it, you might discover its purpose... or not.
- Wake up and sleep on time; Attend classes; Make friends; Read some books: It might give you some happiness - at least for now.
- After all, why do you care about Metacognition or Money or anything? Is it for the sake of these things unto themselves? Or is it ultimately for *the pursuit of happiness? The good life?*

A more useful question: How to do it?

- How does one sleep/wake up on time?
 - Plan your calendar. Put sleeping and eating in it first before you put other stuff in it. Let your calendar revolve around you getting a good night's rest.
 - Develop morning/night 'rituals'.
- How does one make good notes?
 - Pick a tool - computer or tab or a plain old notebook.
 - Learn the difference between linear and non-linear notemaking strategies. Pick what you think works for you.
 - Try it. If doesn't work, change it.

Acting on these questions is more fruitful. We will talk about it more as we proceed in this course.

Summary of today's class

- What will you need to do for completing this course?
 - This week: Read the syllabus; Do ungraded HW in TopHat; Get slides from Canvas
 - Every week: Do HWs & readings; Participate in the classroom; Make good notes
 - Finish the 3 open-book/note exams on scheduled due dates.
 - Schedule for attending the closed book exam with 1 sheet of notes on Dec 16.
- What will I do to help us all complete this course?
 - I will communicate on email, and make reasonable accommodations for those who ask for it via ARC.
 - I can tell you more about:
 - my experience as a STEM major, and how it relates to PoliSci.
 - my summer in DC, and how you can contribute to the federal government.
- Why do you need to do it? How to do it?
 - Develop an open mind. Don't avoid doing prematurely. Just do it for now.
 - Develop your morning/night rituals.
 - Decide on your preferred note-taking system.

References I



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