

**American Politics**  
**Spring 2023**  
**PSPS 1010, CRN 24431, 3 credit hours**

**Section 1: All the required stuff I must tell you.**

**Instructor:** Dr. Liz Norell – you may call me Dr. Norell, Dr. Liz, Ms. Norell, Ms. Liz, or Liz— whatever makes you most comfortable. All are acceptable to me.

**Office Hours and Location:** Wednesdays 5:00-5:30 pm @ 540 McCallie lobby/classroom, or as needed by appointment via calendly (link in Canvas)

**Course Meeting Days, Times, and Location:** Wednesdays 5:30-8:00 pm @ 540 McCallie room 104

**Course Catalog Description:** The foundations, institutions, processes and policies of American national government with attention to the Constitution and such topics as elections, political and civil rights and liberties, federalism, public policy, public opinion, political culture, interest groups, and the role of citizens in governance.

**Course Pre/Co Requisites:** None

**Course Student Learning Outcomes:** 1) Students will be able to define, recognize, and understand the significance of key structural elements within United States Government, specifically including: federalism, separation of powers, checks and balances, and the relationship of the individual to the state through the protections of civil rights and liberties. 2) Students will be familiar with the key institutions of government and the current social science research surrounding the Congress, presidency, and federal judiciary. 3) Students will be exposed to political science scholarship analyzing key elements of political behavior and processes, including: public opinion and polling; elections and campaigns, the electoral college; political parties and interest groups; political culture and socialization; and the contemporary impact of media and technology on politics.

**General Education Student Learning Outcomes:** 1) Communicate effectively according to purpose using written, oral, and/or audio-visual methods. 2) Critique and evaluate information, concepts, theories, and claims. 3) Cultivate inclusion by recognizing, examining, and reflecting on the diversity of cultural and individual experiences.

**Required Course Materials:** *Just Mercy* book by Bryan Stevenson. See information in Canvas for acquiring the book.

**Technology Requirements for Course:** If you do not have your own computer or stable internet connection, I would normally ask you to utilize any one of the computer labs on this campus. However, given the circumstances and the possibility that you may not be on campus, please let me know as soon as possible if you do not have computer/tablet/equivalent of your own or a secure internet connect to access from where you reside. The university and the PSPS department are committed to making sure that all students have the resources you may need. If you have technology needs to access your

courses and complete course requirements in Canvas, submit a request (<https://new.utc.edu/information-technology/learning-from-home>) with Information Technology.

**Technology/Digital Literacy Skills Required for Course:** Because of the nature of this course and course assignments, you need to be familiar with utilizing the internet, Microsoft Office Suite or the equivalent software, and the University's Canvas system.

**Student Accommodations:** If you have accessibility and accommodation requests, contact the Disability Resource Center (<https://www.utc.edu/disability-resource-center/index.php>) at 423-425-4006 or email [DRC@utc.edu](mailto:DRC@utc.edu).

## Section 2: All the stuff you're most stressed about.

**Course Assessments and Requirements:** There are no quizzes or tests in this class. (Cue a sigh of relief, yes?!) Your course work will be largely a series of learning activity reflections... unless we decide to swerve onto something else as a class, which could absolutely happen.



### Course Grading



**Course Grading Policy:** In this class, you will assign yourself a midterm and final grade, along with providing a written explanation of why that grade makes sense given the quality and quantity of your work. The instructor will not change that grade unless you have assigned yourself a lower grade than your work merits. (Note: This almost never happens.)

This is a practice known as **ungrading**, and it's taking education by storm. I'm proud to endorse the practice of ungrading, and I have lots and lots of thoughts about why it's the right thing to do. I'll share those with you in class and literally any time you want to derail a class convo by listening to me rant. (Which I'm happy to do, if that's what you want out of our time together.)

In assigning yourself a grade, you'll be reflecting on your completion of the following three clusters of assignments/course work (subject to adjustment as a class):

1. **A semester project**

I'll explain more about this in a separate document, but this is NOT lengthy, NOT busy work, and NOT hard.

2. **A series of learning activity reflections. In general, you should aim to complete:**

- a. About 25 learning activities for an A
- b. About 20 learning activities for a B
- c. About 15 learning activities for a C

3. **An impact statement at the end of the semester**

I'll explain this more after midterms. It's NOT hard, NOT busy work, and will serve as your "final exam" for the course.

**Instructor Grading and Feedback Response Time:** I will provide written feedback on your learning activities within 10 calendar days—usually much faster.

Whew! This is a lot of text. Let's break it up so I can take a moment to say: I'm super glad you decided to take this class. It would be less fun if you weren't a part of our group this semester. How can I know this when I haven't even met you yet?! Well, because I have it on good authority that you're the only one of you ... are you ready for this?! ... *in the WORLD*. And I get to meet you! How is that anything other than incredible?!

**General course policies... or, where you find out whether I'm a jerk.  
(Spoiler: I'm not.)**

**Late/Missing Work Policy:** Late work may be submitted without penalty in the current week's assignment dropbox. You may not go back and submit work into prior week's assignment dropboxes, but you can always submit multiple reflections in a single week.

**Course Attendance Policy:** You had the option to register for a fully online, asynchronous version of this course and—for whatever reason—did not. Our in-person, once-weekly class time will be used to accomplish things not easily accomplished online. That means we'll be interacting with one another, hosting guest speakers, and engaging in conversations/discussions that aren't as easily replicated online. I pledge never to waste your time with busy work or endless lectures. The content of our weekly class meetings will largely be determined by our collective needs and curiosities. Above all, I pledge to create an inclusive, welcoming, non-threatening, and engaging learning space. However, I will need your help to ensure it remains that way.

**Course Participation/Contribution:** I fundamentally believe that assigning a grade for participation or engagement should only occur in a class where that is one of the measurable student learning outcomes. As it is not in this course, you will not be graded / assessed on the quantity or quality of your contributions. **HAVING SAID THAT**, this class will be far less engaging and interesting if everyone sits and stares at me, waiting for me to talk. It will also be unbearable if only two or three people talk all the time. Please let me know how I can help craft a learning space that invites your voice in a way that feels comfortable and enjoyable.

**Things may change:** I reserve the right to modify the course requirements and other related policies at any point in the semester. All announcements about this class be posted to Canvas/UTC Learn. It is your responsibility to stay up to date with the readings.

know when things are due and be prepared. See Canvas for the most current materials including syllabus, announcements, assignments, notes, and other resources.

**Community agreements:** For this course to work well, we must all pledge to be engaged, prepared, and professional/respectful. I will not tolerate bullying. If you have concerns about anything that happens during our class time or in our course Canvas site, please feel free to reach out to me to discuss.

**Honor code:** The work you'll do in this class is almost entirely based on *your* perspectives, thoughts, and reactions. To substitute someone else's reaction is to cheat yourself out of the opportunity to engage more deeply with the material. However, your life is your own, and I am counting on you to make the right choices to fulfill your goals and needs this semester. Above all else, I want you to know that *I will trust you*. You could abuse that trust, but that's your choice. I'd rather trust someone who doesn't deserve it than take a harsh posture that penalizes someone who needed grace.

THAT SAID, UTC does have an Honor Code that you are expected to follow. For more details, see the student conduct policy at <https://www.utc.edu/student-conduct/honorcode.php>. For a pdf version: <https://new.utc.edu/sites/default/files/2020-11/StudentCodeofConduct-FacultyHandout.pdf>

**Disability support:** As someone with her own disabilities, I recognize that it can be daunting to ask for accommodations—you might even experience some feelings of shame around it. PLEASE DO NOT. Accommodations do not grant you special treatment; they create an equitable learning environment where everyone has the tools they need to succeed in learning and growing. I encourage you to visit with the **Disability Resource Center** to arrange for appropriate accommodations. If you're uncomfortable doing so, or don't have an official diagnosis in hand, please know you're welcome to talk to me. The course is designed such that accommodations shouldn't be needed for anyone, but if you need something? Just ask. I will say yes to almost any conceivable request. Feel free to refer to the Disability Resource Center website at <https://www.utc.edu/disability-resource-center/index.php>

**Don't go it alone:** Your student fees cover usage of the **Tutoring Center** (their web address is <https://www.utc.edu/college-business/resources/tutoring.php> ) and **University Writing Center** (their web address is <https://www.utc.edu/library/services/writing-and-communication-center/index.php> ). These centers support your classroom learning; it is your responsibility to take advantage of their services. The two centers are equipped with the ability to have virtual appointments. There is no shame and no judgment in using these services—after all, you've pre-paid for them! Use them! 😊

**Honor confidentiality:** To cultivate a learning community, this course needs to be a space where the professor and students can feel free to make mistakes, play devil's advocate, admit gaps in our knowledge, and give candid feedback without fear that it will

be shared outside our community. Please respect the privacy and safety of your colleagues by keeping what happens here within our class community. If something feels unfair, unsafe, or unwarranted, I encourage you to reach out to me or to the PSPS Department Head Dr. Michelle Deardorff, rather than taking screen shots and sharing with the world via your social media of choice.

**When life happens:** If you're facing an emergency or overwhelming life situation, know that you have access to a student advocate in the **Office of Student Outreach**. This is especially helpful in emergencies as they will coordinate with all of your classes. They can be reached at (423) 425-2299 or (423) 425 – CARE.

**Get the other details:** Please see the UTC Campus Syllabus for detailed information regarding institutional policies and resources. A link to the Campus Syllabus can be found on our course UTC Learn page.

I can't believe it – you're still here! Here's a true story: Over Labor Day weekend 2017, I went to visit my friend Amanda in Philadelphia. It was my first time in the city, and she took me to Independence Hall and the Constitution Center, where I nerded out to my heart's content. I took a series of selfies with the life-sized bronze statues of the Founding Fathers at the Constitution Center. Ask me, and I'll totally embarrass myself by showing them to you. (This is not a joke.)

**Course calendar/schedule:** This is going to change. I've accepted it, and you might as well, too. We're going to chase our curiosities and let ourselves make this class what we need it to be. BUT, roughly speaking, this is my goal (more or less):

### **Week 1: January 11**

- Introductions (hopefully not cringe-worthy)
- Why Liz thinks grades are stupid and refuses to assign them anymore
- Expectations, goals, dreams (for the course)
- Brainstorming activity
- What the heck happened in Congress last week?!

### **Week 2: January 18**

No formal class meeting (Liz out of town). Instructions are in Canvas on what to do instead.

- The Constitutional Convention, the Constitution, and the ratification debates

### **Week 3: January 25**

- So, how about that Convention? Debriefing last week's materials.
- A quick tour through the Constitution. (You might want to have a digital or printed copy, though this is not necessary.)
  - Stops at the sticky bits—you know, the things that we're still fighting about in 2023.
- You won't BELIEVE what Washington said in his Farewell Address. (In case you're wondering, this syllabus is not an audition piece for BuzzFeed. That's just #facts.)

#### **Week 4: February 1**

- Federalism and its impacts—and why it's a big deal at the Supreme Court right now.
- Civil rights, civil liberties, and an in-class activity you'll hate-and-then-love.

#### **Week 5: February 8**

- All things Congress.
  - Can they do THAT?!

#### **Week 6: February 15**

- All things Executive Branch.
  - Can he do THAT?!

#### **Week 7: February 22**

- All things Judicial Branch.
  - Seriously, WHAT IS EVEN HAPPENING AT THE SUPREME COURT?!?!

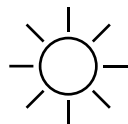
#### **Week 8: March 1**

- *Just Mercy* discussion #1, chapters 1-8 ← you should have read to here by 3/1

#### **Week 9: March 9**

*Bad news:* No formal class meeting; Liz out of town.

*Good news:* Use this week to catch up on this or other classes



**SPRING BREAK WOO WOO!**  
**No class March 15**



**Week 10: March 22**

- Public opinion:
  - What opinions? Whose? About what?
  - Where they come from and why we should care.
  - Polarization—is it merely bad, or actually apocalyptically bad?

**Week 11: March 29**

- ELECTIONS, BABY!
  - Primaries and caucuses and the weird ways we choose candidates
  - The Electoral College and why we hate it
  - Alternatives to the Electoral College and why they suck, too
  - Voting and why you should definitely do it

**Week 12: April 5**

- Parties & interest groups: the ways we organize politics in a very large society

**Week 13: April 12**

- *Just Mercy* discussion #2, chapters 8-16 ← you should have read to here by 4/12

**Week 14: April 19**

We are done covering new topics in this course. This class time will be an end-of-semester celebration and time to work. Possibly a field trip over to the UTC Studio (@ the library.) Food will almost certainly be involved.

**All work due by 8:00 pm on Wednesday, April 26. (That's our final exam slot.)**



**You made it! Congrats!** To show off your absolutely incredible tenacity and courage, please take a moment to pat yourself on the back. Then, send a selfie to me via text at 972-965-9293 and identify yourself by the name you want me to call you.

I'm not joking. I really want you to do this. When I get your selfie, I'll text you back a picture of my adorable basset hound, Ginger, as a thank you.