

UPDATED 12 August 2010

PSCI 1040.007: American Government—Laws and Institutions
Fall 2010
TR, 8:00–9:20 am, Eagle Student Services Center 255

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Office: Wooten Hall 154

Office Hours: Wednesdays, 8:30–11:30 am and by appointment

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the roles of the United States and Texas governments in the American political system. We will consider the institutions, processes, and decisions of political actors that define American and Texas government. We focus particular attention on the United States and Texas constitutions, civil rights and liberties, federalism as well as the institutions that comprise the three branches of government.

Blackboard

A Blackboard conference is maintained for this course at <https://ecampus.unt.edu>. Students are responsible for checking Blackboard for assignments and notices. You should check Blackboard at least every 48 hours to ensure that you are up to date on all class-related information. Workbook assignments (discussed in more detail below) will be submitted on Blackboard and student grades will be posted on Blackboard.

Communication and E-Mail

When e-mailing me or your Teaching Assistant (TA), please include the course number (PSCI 1040) in the subject line of your messages. A note on etiquette: please sign your e-mails with your first and last name, and include an appropriate salutation. (Hint: you can't go wrong with "Hi Professor Blackstone.") Please articulate the content of your message clearly—do not use text message or instant message speak. Finally, before you e-mail me or your TA, you should review the syllabus and the course's Blackboard page—it is very likely that you can find an answer to your question(s) by examining the course materials.

If I need to contact you by e-mail, I will send e-mail to your official UNT EagleConnect account. If you do not normally use this account, you should set up e-mail forwarding so messages will be forwarded to your preferred account. Please consult <http://eagleconnect.unt.edu/> for instructions on e-mail forwarding and other questions related to your EagleConnect email account.

Readings

The following texts are required and are available at the UNT bookstore.

- *The New American Democracy with Texas Chapters, Volume I*, Custom Edition. New York: Longman.
- Gloria C. Cox and Richard S. Ruderman, eds. 2009. *Perspectives on American and Texas Politics: A Workbook for Political Science 1040*. Eighth edition. Denton: University of North Texas Press. (Hereinafter Cox.)

Grading

Grades will be assigned on the following basis:

90–100% = A

80–89% = B

70–79% = C

60–69% = D

<60% = F

- Exams (75% of course grade)

There will be four exams in the course. You may miss one exam without penalty. If you take all four exams, your lowest exam score will be dropped. Exams 1, 2, and 3 are not cumulative. The final exam (Exam 4) is cumulative. Each of your three highest exam scores will be worth 25% of your course grade. Missed exams can not be made up. If you miss one of the first three exams, you must take the cumulative final or receive a 0 for the missed exam.

All exams are closed book. Exams will utilize a multiple choice format. Scantrons will be provided, but you must bring a pencil with you to each examination. In addition, you must bring your student identification card with you to the examinations. For the examinations, you are responsible for material from all lectures, textbook and workbook readings.

If you arrive to an exam after the first exam has been turned in, you will not be able to take the exam.

I will make review sheets for each exam available to students on the course's Blackboard page approximately one week prior to each exam.

- Workbook Assignments (25% of course grade)

You must complete five of six workbook assignments; one may be skipped without penalty. Each of the five workbook assignments will contribute 5% of your course grade. Workbook assignments must be submitted online through the course Blackboard page.

The due dates for the workbook assignments are delineated in the course schedule section below. Assignments are due by 8:00 AM (the beginning of class) on the listed due date. Late assignments will be penalized 5 points for each calendar day they are late, starting at 8:01 AM on the day the assignment is due.

- Extra Credit

If you complete all six workbook assignments, your lowest grade will be counted as extra credit, up to 2.0% of your final grade. If your lowest workbook assignment grade is 75%, for example, you will earn an extra 1.50% ($0.75 * 2.0$) that will be added to your final grade.

At various points during the semester, you will be able to earn extra credit by participating in in-class activities. These activities will not be announced beforehand and can not be made up if they are missed. You can earn up to 1% point to be added to your final grade for participation in each activity.

- Grade Disputes

A significant amount of time is invested in grading student assignments. If you wish to dispute a grade, you must do so in writing within two weeks of the date that grades are made available to the class. When requesting reconsideration of a grade, you should provide a clear explanation as to why a different grade is in order. You should also indicate what grade you believe is appropriate for your work. Please be advised that grades will not be adjusted simply because someone “wants” or “needs” a higher grade. Also, when work is reviewed for a grade dispute, the grade may be left unchanged, raised or lowered. All grade disputes are due in hard copy (along with the original assignment) to your Teaching Assistant within two weeks of the date that grades are initially made available to students. Grade disputes will not be considered if submitted past the two-week statute of limitations.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prohibits the Professor and Teaching Assistants from discussing grades via email. Accordingly, grade disputes should be handled during office hours.

Two Final and Important Notes About Grading

1. If you do not receive a grade in Blackboard for any workbook assignment or exam you must see your TA within two weeks of the assignment or exam being returned to the class. If you do not do so, you will receive a 0 for that assignment or exam.
2. Take your education into your own hands. If you do poorly on the assignments and exams, you need to see me or a TA as soon as possible to ensure that you understand what you can do to improve your grade. Begging for a higher grade after you complete all the assignments will not do you any good. I will not give you a special opportunity for extra credit simply because you are not doing as well in the class as you hoped. The only way to get the grade you want is to pay attention to the lectures, read the book, complete the workbook assignments and study for the exams.

Attendance

Your attendance and participation are expected. Because I will cover material in class that is not discussed in the texts, I strongly encourage you to attend each class session. If you are absent from a class session, it is your responsibility to obtain lecture notes from a classmate. I will not make the PowerPoint presentations or notes available to students under any circumstances, nor will the Teaching Assistants.

Classroom Decorum

A university classroom is a fertile ground for the exchange of ideas. I encourage students to express their thoughts relevant to the class so long as they do so in a respectful manner. Cell phone use is prohibited during class—this includes calling and text messaging. Cell phones should be stowed away at all times in the classroom.

Students are free to use laptop computers to take notes during class. If you intend to use a laptop during class, you must sit in one of the back two rows of the classroom so that you do not distract your student colleagues.

If a student is unable to conduct him or herself in a means that is conducive to a learning atmosphere, that student will be removed from class.

Academic Integrity

The Political Science Department adheres to and enforces UNT's policy on academic integrity (cheating, plagiarism, forgery, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty and sabotage). Students in this class should review the policy (UNT Policy Manual Section 18.1.16) which may be located at http://policy.unt.edu/sites/default/files/untpolicy/pdf/7-Student_Affairs-Academic-Integrity.pdf. Violations of academic integrity in this course will be addressed in compliance with the penalties and procedures laid out in this policy.

Accommodations

The University of North Texas is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112—The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of new federal legislation entitled Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens.

The Political Science Department cooperates with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA). The ODA makes formal recommendations regarding necessary and appropriate accommodations based on specifically diagnosed disabilities. If you are a student with a disability and wish to request accommodations, you should contact the ODA as soon as possible at 940.565.4323. Please present your written accommodation request to me on or before September 9. Information regarding disabilities is treated in a confidential matter.

Course Outline

The following represents an approximate calendar of class discussions. Every attempt will be made to adhere to this schedule. However, departures from the schedule may occasionally occur. Exam dates should be considered firm, and you should arrange your personal schedule to be present at the appointed times.

- **Course Introduction** (August 26)
- **American Government and Politics** (August 31)
 - New American Democracy, Chapter 1
- **The United States Constitution** (September 2, September 7)
 - New American Democracy, Chapter 2
 - Cox, Chapters 1 and 3
- **Federalism** (September 9, September 14)
 - New American Democracy, Chapter 3
 - Cox, Chapter 4
 - Federalist 10 and 51 in New American Democracy (pages 620–627)

Workbook Assignment #1 Due Tuesday, September 14 by 8:00 AM.

Exercises 4-1, 4-2, 4-3, and 4-6

- **Texas Origins and Constitution** (September 16)
 - New American Democracy, Chapters TX-1 and TX-2
- **Review for Exam 1** (September 21)

EXAM 1

Thursday, September 23 (in class)

- **The United States Congress** (September 28, September 30, October 5)
 - New American Democracy, Chapter 12
 - Cox, Chapter 5

Workbook Assignment #2 Due Tuesday, October 5 by 8:00 AM.

Exercises 5-1, 5-4, 5-5 and 5-6

- **The Texas Legislature** (October 7)
 - New American Democracy, Chapter TX-3
- **The Presidency** (October 12, October 14)
 - New American Democracy, Chapter 13
 - Cox, Chapter 6

Workbook Assignment #3 Due Thursday, October 14 by 8:00 AM.

Exercises 6-1, 6-3, 6-5, and 6-6

- **The Federal Bureaucracy** (October 19)
 - New American Democracy, Chapter 14
 - Cox, Chapter 7
- **Texas Executive and Bureaucracy** (October 21)
 - New American Democracy, Chapter TX-4

Workbook Assignment #4 Due Thursday, October 21 by 8:00 AM.

Exercises 7-1, 7-2, 7-3, and 7-4

- **Review for Exam 2** (October 26)

EXAM 2
Thursday, October 28 (in class)

- **The Federal Courts** (November 2, November 4)
 - New American Democracy, Chapter 15
 - Cox, Chapter 8
- **The Texas Judiciary** (November 9)
 - New American Democracy, Chapter TX-5
- **Civil Liberties** (November 11, November 16, November 18)
 - New American Democracy, Chapter 16
 - Cox, Chapter 9

Workbook Assignment #5 Due Thursday, November 18 by 8:00 AM.
Exercises 9-1, 9-2, 9-3, and 9-4

- **Civil Rights** (November 23, November 30)
 - New American Democracy, Chapter 17
 - Cox, Chapter 10
- **Civil Rights and Liberties in Texas** (December 2)

Workbook Assignment #6 Due Thursday, December 2 by 8:00 AM.
Exercises 10-1, 10-3, 10-4, and 10-5

- **Review for Exam 3** (December 7)

EXAM 3
Thursday, December 9 (in class)

EXAM 4
(cumulative final/optional)
Thursday, December 16, 8:00 AM–10:00 AM
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