

PSCI 1040.001: American Government—Laws and Institutions
Maymester 2014
MTWR 10:00 am–1:50 pm, Wooten 222

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.

Instructor

Professor Bethany Blackstone

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- Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:00 am–9:45 am, and by appointment

Teaching Assistant

Mr. Elliot Montagano

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 - Office: Wooten Hall 131
 - Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:00 am–9:45 am, and by appointment
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Blackboard

A Blackboard conference is maintained for this course at <https://learn.unt.edu/>. Students are responsible for checking Blackboard for announcements and messages. You should check Blackboard every day to ensure that you are up to date on all class-related information. Some course assignments will be submitted in Blackboard and student grades will be posted in Blackboard.

Office Hours

Office hours are listed above. You may stop by our offices without an appointment during these hours; come with questions, concerns, or a desire for further discussion. We hold office hours for your benefit. If none of these times are convenient for you, please email to arrange an alternative meeting time.

Being in Touch

My office hours are listed above, but I am usually around. Feel free to stop by any time, but understand that on occasion I will be unavailable. If you write me M–F, I should get back to you within 24 hours. If I don't, please feel free to send me a reminder! If you write over the weekend, you may have to wait until Monday for a reply. A note on etiquette: 1) please sign your emails with your name, 2) please include an appropriate salutation, and 3) please ask a specific question if you need a response.

Course Materials

Textbook. John G. Geer, Wendy J. Schiller, Jeffrey A. Segal, and Dana K. Glencross. 2014. *Gateways to American Democracy: The Essentials*, 2nd edition. Boston: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Assignments & Grading

Your course grade will be based on the following components.

Component	Percent of Course Grade
Midterm Exam	35
Final Exam	35
Group Project	30
Total	100

Course grades will be rounded to the nearest percent and assigned according to the scale below:

90–100%	A
80–89%	B
70–79%	C
60–69%	D
<60%	F

Exams

Two exams will be given—a midterm and a final. The final is not cumulative. Exams will cover material from all lectures and required readings. The exams are closed book and closed notes. The exams will include a combination of multiple choice, multiple answer, true/false, and matching questions. The exams will be administered through Blackboard. You will need to take the exam in the UNT computer testing center (330 Sage Hall) at the designated time. The exams are password protected, so you will not be able to access them from other sites.

No make-up exams will be given unless you have a university-excused absence or a family or medical emergency which is documented and verifiable. If you will miss an exam because of a university-approved absence, you should make arrangements to take the exam early if you know about your absence ahead of time. Students that will miss an exam due to travel with UNT athletic teams or performance groups, or for observance of a religious holiday, for example, should make arrangements to take their exams prior to their absences.

Group Project: *After the Apocalypse*

You will be working in groups to draft a Constitution for the New U.S.A. (the United States as it is being rebuilt following the zombie apocalypse—see below for more details). We will devote regular class time to this project, though you will be expected to work independently outside of class. This is an involved course-long simulation. Information about the simulation, the components of your grade, and the work product that I expect from you are provided at the end of this document.

Attendance

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. There will be regular opportunities to work on your group assignment in class; if you are

not present, you will miss those opportunities. During group work periods, attendance will be taken so that there is a record of each student's participation.

Extra Credit

Students should not expect or ask for extra credit. *If* extra credit is offered, it will be offered to the entire class. Note the grading criteria, and plan accordingly for your success. If you need a particular grade to graduate, keep a scholarship, etc., then exert the effort necessary to earn such a grade. If problems arise, address them early before they become unresolvable: in the summer, you have only *a few days*.

Other Class Policies

ADA Statement. 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 of 1990 (ADA) as amended, pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens.

As a faculty member, I am required by law to provide “reasonable accommodations” to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Student responsibility primarily rests with informing faculty of their need for accommodation and in providing authorized documentation through designated administrative channels. Information regarding specific diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining academic accommodations can be found at www.unt.edu/oda. Also, you may visit the Office of Disability Accommodation in the University Union (room 321) or call (940) 565-4323.

Cheating and Plagiarism. Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will receive a “0” for that particular assignment or exam. Additionally, the incident will be reported to the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities, which may impose a further penalty. According to the UNT catalog, the term “cheating” includes, but is not limited to: a. use of any unauthorized assistance in taking quizzes, tests, or examinations; b. dependence upon the aid of sources beyond those authorized by the instructor in writing papers, preparing reports, solving problems, or carrying out other assignments; c. the acquisition, without permission, of tests or other academic material belonging to a faculty or staff member of the university; d. dual submission of a paper or project, or resubmission of a paper or project to a different class without express permission from the instructor(s); or e. any other act designed to give a student an unfair advantage. The term “plagiarism” includes, but is not limited to: a. the knowing or negligent use by paraphrase or direct quotation of the published or unpublished work of another person without full and clear acknowledgment; and b. the knowing or negligent unacknowledged use of materials prepared by another person or agency engaged in the selling of term papers or other academic materials.

Acceptable Student Behavior. Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The university's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including university and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at www.unt.edu/csrr.

Daily Schedule

A portion of each class meeting will be dedicated to group meeting time. All groups should convene in Wooten 222 and retrieve their attendance sheet from Mr. Montagano. Groups should work on their projects in or near Wooten 222 so that Mr. Montagano and I can check in with you. All group members should be present for all group meetings until the group's final project is completed and their presentation is planned.

When group meetings are scheduled from 10:00 am to 11:00 am, lecture will begin at 11:10.

Date	Topic	Readings	Group Meeting Time
Monday, May 12	Course Introduction & American Political Culture	Syllabus & Chapter 1	After lecture
Tuesday, May 13	Constitutions	Chapter 2	10:00 am–11:00 am
Wednesday, May 14	Federalism	Chapter 3	10:00 am–11:00 am
Thursday, May 15	Civil Liberties	Chapter 4	10:00 am–11:00 am
Monday, May 19	Civil Rights	Chapter 5	10:00 am–11:00 am
Tuesday, May 20	Midterm in Sage 330 from 10:00 am–11:15 am; Lecture will begin at 12:00 pm in Wooten 222		After lecture
Wednesday, May 21	Legislative Branch	Chapter 12	10:00 am–11:00 am
Thursday, May 22	Executive Branch	Chapters 13 and 14	10:00 am–11:00 am
Monday, May 26	<i>Memorial Day. No class meeting.</i>		
Tuesday, May 27	Judicial Branch	Chapter 15	10:00 am–11:00 am
Wednesday, May 28	Group Presentations		
Thursday, May 29	Final Exam		

After the Apocalypse: A Simulation

The year is 2114. A **zombie apocalypse** has wiped out a considerable portion of the population of the United States and led to the disintegration of our national political institutions. While the apocalypse took a heavy social toll, it left many economic resources intact, as communication, transportation, and manufacturing facilities are uninteresting to infected humans. The remaining humans have adequate food, water, and power; but, like today, we know these resources are finite.



The zombies themselves are still around, though their number has diminished and they are no longer a “horde.” The virus that caused the outbreak, a mutation of the bat-borne **Duvenhage virus**, has mutated during the outbreak. Infected persons with the “Type II” virus exhibit distinct characteristics (a shuffling gait, extreme pallor, slurred speech due to partial paralysis of the vocal cords, intense cravings for iron-rich foods). However, cognitive impairment and uncontrollable cravings for **human brains** exhibit in only about 10% of the infected population (those with the “Type I” virus). Despite the possibility of reintegration of the zombie population into the uninfected human population, many uninfected humans consider the zombies to be no longer human and show an intense distrust and dislike of the population. The zombie virus can be transmitted through saliva and blood. Pregnant women pass the virus (type I or II) on to their children. All zombies retain their human metabolism, more or less, and can be killed like any human can be killed (thus these zombies are unlike *World War Z* and *Walking Dead* zombies and more similar to *28 Days [Weeks] Later* zombies in this regard). Approach the zombie question—especially those of civil liberties and rights—from this perspective.

On the political front, individual states have survived the outbreak, and are now seeking to join forces for protection against the growing threat of a Canadian invasion. Moreover, the states desire the greater bargaining power (with respect to both trade and diplomatic relations) they will have if united. In short, the time has come to rebuild the United States and that means drafting a new governing document. . . a new constitution.

You will, over the course of the three-week summer session, develop a governing document for this new, modern U.S.A. You may use concepts and elements from our original constitution, but you should update them by putting them into language that a typical citizen could understand. You are also free, of course, to change features of the constitution. Perhaps your group believes that a unicameral legislature would be better than a bicameral legislature. Or perhaps you don’t believe a legislature makes sense at all. Use the wiki to explain the rationale behind your decisions.

While you are free to add to the constitution, your constitution **must** address:

1. the key principles guiding the creation of your constitution (in the form of a preamble)
2. the mechanism for adopting and modifying the constitution
3. the role of the state governments
4. the structure, powers, and selection mechanism for the institution(s) that will exercise legislative power
5. the structure, powers, and selection mechanism for the institution(s) that will exercise executive power

6. the structure, powers, and selection mechanism for the institution(s) that will exercise judicial power
7. limitations on the powers and decisions of the national government (both internal and external: how much power do individual states maintain?)
8. fundamental rights of citizens (including defining who is a citizen)

You should organize your constitution around “articles” (parts), with each article getting a separate wiki page. Your “main page” of your wiki should include the preamble for your constitution (the set of guiding principles). Bring laptops to class regularly, as there will be in-class opportunities to work on this project.

In addition to the written wiki-based constitution, your group will be expected to present your constitution to the class on Wednesday, May 28. You will have 10 minutes to present the most critical elements of your constitution in a clear, professional manner. Your presentation must include some visual component (a video, a powerpoint or prezi presentation, a poster... something), and you must provide members of the entire class with a single, one-sided sheet summarizing your presentation. Your presentation will be evaluated on the basis of its clarity, its effectiveness in “selling” your proposed constitution, and on the usefulness of your one-sheet handout. (Remember that usefulness includes readability, so don’t just try to shove as much information as you can onto the sheet of paper. Be thoughtful with what you include and how you present it.)

Your grade for this project

This is a long and complicated simulation, but it is a valuable tool for thinking about how our government is structured, the flaws in its structure, and the importance of both rules and compromise.

Your grade will be based on both your group grade and your group members evaluations of your contributions to the group effort:

Component	Points
Written Constitution	40 points
Presentation Components	
Verbal Presentation	15 points
Visual Component	10 points
Handout	10 points
Peer Evaluations	25 points
Total	100 points

What will I be looking for in the written constitutions? I will be looking to see whether you have provided an adequate structure for a government to operate (addressing the 8 points enumerated above); whether you have taken into consideration the general concerns of the post-apocalyptic world; whether you have allowed adequate flexibility (by omission, vague wording, etc.) to allow your constitution to endure; and whether you have explained your decisions in a thoughtful and thorough manner.

Be creative and have fun!

Peer Evaluation of Teamwork Rubric

This is the rubric (scoresheet) you will use to evaluate the members of your group. You will receive a packet with scoresheets for your whole group; fill them out and turn the packet in to Dr. Blackstone either in class on May 28 or at the final on May 29.

You will indicate the degree to which you agree with each statement.

- 1. This student attended meetings regularly, was on time and prepared, and provided timely notice when he/she could not attend.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

- 2. In meetings, this student stayed on track, facilitating a productive learning environment.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

- 3. In meetings, this student listened attentively to other students' input and encouraged contributions from other students.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

- 4. This student made positive contributions both in and out of meetings in terms of ideas and research.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

- 5. This student made a substantial contribution to the group presentation and/or group wiki, pursuant to the group's pre-determined division of labor.

1 2 3 4 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree