

American Government: Laws and Institutions

PSCI 1040

Section 002



Course Overview

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, and the institutions that comprise the three branches of government.

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1

COME TO CLASS.

2

PAY ATTENTION TO
DEADLINES AND
INSTRUCTIONS.

3

ASK FOR HELP IF
YOU NEED IT.

Your Instructor

Professor Bethany Blackstone

Contact via Piazza

Your Teaching Assistants

Mr. Mahdi Amirisefat

Ms. Hope Dewell Gentry

Mr. Sebastian Graham

Mr. Mustafa Kirisci

Mr. Jinrui Xi

Contact via Piazza

Class Meetings

Tuesdays and Thursdays

9:30 am - 10:50 am

Auditorium 100

Web-Based Textbook

Central Ideas in American Government with PSCI 1040 Workbook. 2016. Soomo Publishing.

Access to the web-text can be purchased in Blackboard for \$58.75.

ISBN: 9780991135578

Course Resources

Blackboard

A Blackboard conference for this course is maintained at <https://learn.unt.edu>. Assignments will be submitted in Blackboard and student grades will be posted in Blackboard.

Piazza

We will use Piazza rather than email for all class-related electronic communications. Piazza is designed to get you help fast and efficiently from classmates and from the instructional staff. Create an account using the link in Blackboard.

REEF Polling

Create a REEF account in Blackboard and then use REEF polling to respond to questions in class using a personal electronic device. REEF is free for all UNT students.

Remind

If you would like to receive course-related reminders via email or text, text @bstone1040 to 81010 or sign up using this link: <https://www.remind.com/join/bstone1040>

Office Hours

The Teaching Assistants and I hold regular office hours for your benefit. If you If none of these times are convenient for you, please post a message to all instructors in Piazza requesting an alternative meeting time.

Mondays

12:30 pm-2:30 pm, Wooten 359 (Mr. Kirisci)

3:00 pm-5:00 pm, Wooten 171 (Mr. Xi)

Tuesdays

11:00 am-12:00 pm, Wooten 360 (Ms. Dewell Gentry)

3:30-5:00 pm, Rawlins Hall Lobby (Dr. Blackstone)

Wednesdays

12:00-2:00 pm, Wooten 354 (Mr. Graham)

2:00-4:00 pm, Wooten 161 (Mr. Amirisefat)

Thursdays

11:00 am-12:00 pm, (Ms. Dewell Gentry)

3:30-5:00 pm, Rawlins Hall Lobby (Dr. Blackstone)

SUPPLEMENTAL INSTRUCTION

SI Leader: Jennifer Silva (JenniferSilva2@my.unt.edu)

SI Leader: Taylor Volesky (TaylorVolesky@my.unt.edu)

The UNT Learning Center provides Supplemental Instruction for this course. SI Leaders are UNT students that have taken this course before and performed well. Your SI Leaders will hold weekly group study sessions. All students are encouraged to attend. On average, students who regularly participate in SI will earn one half letter grade higher than students who do not participate.

SI Sessions will be added to the course calendar in Blackboard once the schedule is finalized.



What You'll Do in PSCI 1040

1

EXAMS

There will be 3 unit exams and a cumulative final. Exams will include questions that require students to remember, understand, and apply course material. Question types will include multiple choice, true/false, and matching.

Unit 1 Exam: Feb. 16

Unit 2 Exam: March 30

Unit 3: Exam: May 4

Cumulative Final Exam: May 11 @ 8:00 am

2

GET THE GIST QUESTIONS (GTG)

Nine chapters in your web-text include "Get the Gist" questions at the end of each page. These questions are designed to help you check your comprehension of the reading.

If you miss GTG questions, you can clear your answers and attempt them again!

Late submissions for GTG questions are not accepted.

3

WORKBOOK ASSIGNMENTS (WB)

Eight chapters in your web-text are workbook chapters. Each WB chapter is organized around four learning objectives: (1) critical thinking skills, (2) social responsibility, (3) communication skills, and (4) personal responsibility. WB chapters provide an opportunity to apply the material covered in the textbook chapters and in lecture.

Late submissions for WB assignments are not accepted.

4

REFLECTIONS

Reflective writing assignments will ask you to think about course concepts and the ways in which they apply to your life and/or to contemporary political debates.

Reflection prompts and rubrics are posted in Blackboard.

5

REEF POLLING

REEF is a student response system. Create an account (or link an existing account) in Blackboard and then use REEF polling to respond to questions in class using a personal electronic device. If you do not have a personal electronic device that you can use in class (smartphone, tablet, or computer) and wish to earn credit for REEF participation, please contact Mr. Xi right away.

How You'll Be Evaluated

All assignments and exams in the course will be assessed as Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory, with the specifications for Satisfactory articulated on each assignment. In general, Satisfactory should not be viewed as “minimally competent,” but rather as a mark of having achieved the assignment’s learning goals and specifications. An assignment meets the goals, or it does not—there is no partial credit. The only letter grade that you will receive in the course will be your final letter grade and it will reflect the “bundles” of assignments and requirements that you have satisfactorily accomplished in the class. The final letter grade is not an assessment of your intelligence, your abilities, or your value as a person. Rather, the grade reflects what you demonstrated that you learned in the course—no more, no less.

Built into this system is a good deal of choice as to how much you wish to learn and how hard you want to work to demonstrate and apply that learning. You might choose that passing the course with a C is sufficient for your goals—it is perfectly appropriate and worthy of respect for you to make that choice, especially if it allows you to proactively allocate your time to other endeavors. If you strive to get an A in the course, you should recognize that you are taking on that work and challenge and you should make sure you are in a personal and academic situation to achieve that level of engagement.

What counts as “satisfactory?”

For exams, Satisfactory performance requires a minimum score of 70%. For Workbook Assignments and Get the Gist assignments, Satisfactory performance requires that an assignment be submitted on time and that 80% of questions be answered correctly. For reflections, Satisfactory performance requires that the reflection (1) be submitted in Blackboard as a Word or PDF document on time, (2) address all components of the prompt, (3) be a minimum of 375 words, and (4) include no more than 3 grammatical or spelling errors per page (250 words).

Tokens. Since every element of the course is assessed on an all-or-nothing basis, it might be stressful to strive for Satisfactory, given that the stakes for not meeting that threshold may be significant. To ease the stress and build in a consistent measure of flexibility—and to maximize opportunities for learning—you will start the course with 2 virtual tokens that can be “redeemed” for some leniency or opportunities for revision. You can earn an additional token by answering all questions on the Syllabus Quiz correctly by January 31. Using a token will allow you to do one of the following:

- Submit a reflection up to 48 hours late.
- Revise and resubmit an Unsatisfactory reflection.
- Be awarded all REEF points for 1 missed day of class.
- Be awarded credit for 1 skipped or unsatisfactory Workbook Assignment or set of Get the Gist questions.

Unused tokens cannot be redeemed for anything other than the items above at the end of the semester—use them or lose them.

There are many advantages to this grading system.

We can track how you’re doing without weighted averages and can more clearly see your strengths and weaknesses.

This system provides a mechanism for improving unsatisfactory work.

This system rewards mastery instead of a “hunt for partial credit” strategy.

You will know how much work the letter grade you wish to achieve demands from the first day of class.

To earn
this
grade:

Accomplish the following

A	Satisfactorily complete 3 Unit Exams (or the cumulative final exam) Satisfactorily complete 7 Workbook Assignments Satisfactorily complete 8 sets of Get the Gist Questions Satisfactorily complete 5 reflections. Earn 80% of available REEF points.
B	Satisfactorily complete 3 Unit Exams (or the cumulative final exam) Satisfactorily complete 5 Workbook Assignments Satisfactorily complete 6 sets of Get the Gist Questions Satisfactorily complete 3 reflections. Earn 80% of available REEF points.
C	Satisfactorily complete 2 Unit Exams (or the cumulative final exam) Satisfactorily complete 3 Workbook Assignments. Satisfactorily complete 4 sets of Get the Gist Questions.
D	Satisfactorily complete 2 Unit Exams (or the cumulative final exam)

Other Policies

Americans with Disabilities Act Compliance

The University of North Texas makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking reasonable accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide you with a reasonable accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding your specific needs in a course. You may request reasonable accommodation at any time, however ODA notices of reasonable accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of reasonable accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. Students are strongly encouraged to deliver letters of reasonable accommodation during faculty office hours or by appointment. Faculty members have the authority to ask students to discuss letters during their designated office hours to protect the privacy of the student. For additional information see the ODA website at [http:// www.unt.edu/oda](http://www.unt.edu/oda). You may also contact them by phone at 940.565.4323.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is defined in the UNT Policy on Student Standards for Academic Integrity. Any suspected case of academic dishonesty will be handled in accordance with the University Policy and procedures. Possible academic penalties range from a verbal or written admonition to a grade of F in the course. Further sanctions may apply to incidents involving major violations. You will find the policy and procedures at [http:// faculty.success.unt.edu/academic-integrity](http://faculty.success.unt.edu/academic-integrity).

Classroom Conduct

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 classrooms, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at [https:// deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct](https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct).

Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, and Assault

UNT is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these acts of aggression, please know that you are not alone. The federal Title IX law makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses. UNT has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more.

UNT's Dean of Students' website offers a range of on-campus and off-campus resources to help support survivors, depending on their unique needs: http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources_0. Renee LeClaire McNamara is UNT's Student Advocate and she can be reached through e-mail at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students' office at 940-565-2648. You are not alone. We are here to help.

Schedule

Unless otherwise noted, assignments and readings are due by 9:30 am on the listed date.

Topic	Date	Reading	Assignments Due
Introduction to the Course	Tuesday, January 17	Syllabus	Create your REEF and Piazza accounts in Blackboard
American Political Culture & the Constitution	Thursday, January 19		
	Tuesday, January 24	Chapter 1: The Founding and the Constitution	Chapter 1 GTG Questions
	Thursday, January 26	Chapter 2: The Texas Constitution	Chapter 2 GTG Questions
	Friday, January 27		Reflection 1 due by 11:59 pm
	Tuesday, January 31	Chapter 3: The Constitution (WB)	Chapter 3 WB Questions
Federalism	Thursday, February 2	Chapter 4: Federalism	Chapter 4 GTG Questions
	Tuesday, February 7	Chapter 5: Federalism (WB)	Chapter 5 WB Questions
	Thursday, February 9		
	Friday, February 10		Reflection 2 due by 11:59 pm
Unit 1 Wrap-Up & Review	Tuesday, February 14		
Unit 1 Exam	Thursday, February 16		
Congress	Tuesday, February 21	Chapter 6: Congress	Chapter 6 GTG Questions
	Thursday, February 23	Chapter 7: The Legislative Branch (WB)	Chapter 7 WB Questions
	Friday, February 24		Reflection 3 due by 11:59 pm
	Tuesday, February 28		
Presidency	Thursday, March 2	Chapter 8: The Presidency	Chapter 8 GTG Questions
	Tuesday, March 7	Chapter 9: The Presidency (WB)	Chapter 9 WB Questions
Bureaucracy	Thursday, March 9	Chapter 10: Bureaucracy	Chapter 10 GTG Questions
	Friday, March 10		Reflection 4 due by 11:59 pm
Spring Break	Tuesday, March 14		
	Thursday, March 16		
Bureaucracy	Tuesday, March 21	Chapter 11: Bureaucracy (WB)	Chapter 11 WB Questions

Topic	Date	Reading	Assignments Due
Texas Legislative & Executive Branches	Thursday, March 23		
	Friday, March 24		Reflection 5 due by 11:59 pm
Unit 2 Wrap-Up & Review	Tuesday, March 28		
Unit 2 Exam	Thursday, March 30		
Courts	Tuesday, April 4	Chapter 12: The Judiciary	Chapter 12 GTG Questions
	Thursday, April 6	Chapter 13: The Courts (WB)	Chapter 13 WB Questions
	Tuesday, April 11		
Civil Liberties & Civil Rights	Thursday, April 13	Chapter 14: Civil Liberties	Chapter 14 GTG Questions
	Friday, April 14		Reflection 6 due by 11:59 pm
	Tuesday, April 18	Chapter 15: Civil Liberties (WB)	Chapter 15 WB Questions
	Thursday, April 20		
	Tuesday, April 25	Chapter 16: Civil Rights	Chapter 16 GTG Questions
	Thursday, April 27	Chapter 17: Civil Rights (WB)	Chapter 17 WB Questions
	Friday, April 28		Reflection 7 due by 11:59 pm
Unit 3 Wrap-Up & Review	Tuesday, May 2		
Unit 3 Exam	Thursday, May 4		
Cumulative Final Exam	Thursday, May 11 at 8:00 am		